

REWRITING *ANTIGONE*, RETHINKING THE POLITICAL SUBJECT

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REWRITING *ANTIGONE*, RETHINKING THE POLITICAL SUBJECT

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Ekin Bodur, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

### Rewriting *Antigone*, Rethinking the Political Subject

Taking Sophocles' *Antigone* as its focal point, this dissertation aims to analyse how the tragedy is interpreted in modern philosophy and psychoanalytical theory. Through close reading of the works of G.W.F. Hegel, Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler, the dissertation addresses how Hegelian and post-Hegelian thought rewrites *Antigone* for modernity and how this affects the conceptualization of Antigone as a political subject in the modern adaptations of the play. The main argument is that philosophical works on Antigone not only read the play in a particular way, but in their interpretation, they also reproduce, and in this sense, rewrite the play to respond to the philosophical questions of their time. These rewritings of Antigone not only shape the modern reception of the play, but also raise theoretical issues that contribute to our understanding of the modern subject situated at the crossroads of ethics and politics. I argue that the Hegelian and Lacanian ethical readings of Antigone presuppose political subjecthood without openly acknowledging it, whereas feminist interpretations offered by Irigaray and Butler propose to read the play from the sphere of politics making space for Antigone to emerge as a political subject. Finally, I turn to theories of sovereignty to discuss the political implications of Antigone's subjecthood. Consequently, through an analysis of the modern rewritings of Antigone, the dissertation intends to provide insight into the notion of the modern political subject.

## ÖZET

### *Antigone*'yi Yeniden Yazmak, Politik Özneyi Yeniden Düşünmek

Sophocles'in *Antigone*'sini merkezine alan bu tez, eserin modern felsefe ve psikanalitik teori alanlarında nasıl yorumlandığını analiz etmektedir. G.W.F. Hegel, Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray ve Judith Butler'ın çalışmalarının yakın okuması yapılarak Hegel ve Hegel-sonrası teorinin *Antigone*'yi modernite açısından nasıl yeniden yazdığı ve bu durumun oyunun modern uyarlamalarında Antigone'yi politik özne olarak nasıl kavramsallaştırdığı incelenmiştir. Bu tezin temel argümanı, *Antigone* üzerine felsefi çalışmaların oyunu yalnızca belli bir biçimde yorumlamakla kalmadığı, yorumlarken bir yandan da oyunu yeniden ürettiği ve bu anlamda, oyunu aslında zamanın felsefi sorunlarına cevap verecek bir biçimde yeniden yazdığı yönündedir. *Antigone*'nin söz konusu yeniden yazımları, oyunun günümüzdeki alımlanmasını belirlemekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda etik ve politikanın kesişim noktasında konumlanan modern özneyi kavrayışımıza dair de önemli teorik meseleleri gündeme getirmiştir. Bu tez ile, Hegel ve Lacan'ın etik temelli *Antigone* okumalarının, açıkça adını koymadan politik bir öznenin varlığı önkabulüne dayandığı; ancak Irigaray ve Butler'ın feminist yorumlarının, Antigone'yi, konumu tartışmalı da olsa politik bir özne olarak öne çıkardığı iddia edilmektedir. Sonuç olarak, Antigone'nin özne olma halinin politik izdüşümlerini tartışmak üzere egemenlik teorileri ele alınmış ve *Antigone*'nin yeniden yazımlarının analizi üzerinden modern anlamda politik özne kavramına açıklık getirilmeye çalışılmıştır.

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*In memory of my beloved, Ulaş Bayraktaroğlu...*

(16.02.1976—09.05.2017)

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Believe me, the day when the martyrs are victorious  
will be the day of universal conflagration.

Jacques Lacan

*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In his 1853 Preface to his *Poems*, Matthew Arnolds (1977) comments that the ancients can no longer be models for the moderns with their comparatively narrow range of experience and widely different circumstances, and that the moderns can no longer sympathize or be interested in a figure like Sophocles' Antigone:

An action like the action of the Antigone of Sophocles which turns upon the conflict between the heroine's duty to her brother's corpse and that to the laws of her country is no longer one in which it is possible that we should feel a deep interest. (Arnolds, 1977, p.12)

Yet, Antigone is said to be perhaps one of the most staged plays around the globe (Mee & Foley, 2011, p. 1) since the time of Arnold in addition to being one of the paradigmatic Greek tragedies for modern philosophy since German Idealism (Billings, 2014, p. 11). It is obvious from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) that Hegel would strongly disagree with Arnold's ideas on Antigone.

Many critics (Mee & Foley, 2011, p. 2; Wilmer & Zukaiskaite, 2010, p. 16; Foley & Howard, 2014, p. 619; Chanter & Kirkland, 2014, p. 1) note that there has been a growing worldwide interest in the reinterpretations of *Antigone* in performance and critical thought within the last decades. This interest is also posterior to a period succeeding the discussions of the death of tragedy in modernity, such as the view George Steiner adopts in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) where he argues that tragedy as a genre can no longer be relevant for modernity as it is an art form that requires "the intolerable burden of God's presence", and that tragedy cannot coexist with modernity for the latter lacks hope or a controlling myth (Steiner, 1961, p. 354). It might seem like a contradiction that we still have a proliferation of Antigones under the same conditions that cause critics like Steiner to think tragic heroes like Antigone would be obsolete in modernity. At the time of a global scale

crisis, shrinking democratic structures, political and economic depression, the recent interest in Antigone might be linked to, what one might call the tragic condition of the contemporary world. Indeed, the figure of Antigone, as she appears in Sophocles' original work, provides a means to question and rethink politics of resistance for the modern subject in the face of state sovereignty. Such a subject, as exemplified in the figure of Antigone, is caught up in the clashes between freedom and necessity, death and life, and will and law. In my dissertation, my aim is to discuss the central position of Hegel in the re-appropriation of *Antigone* and highlight the implications of the Hegelian reading for rethinking such a political subjectivity. In so far as the figure of Antigone still provides a ground for exploring the conditions of possibility of a politics of resistance, it is essential to engage with the Hegelian resignification of Antigone as a non-political figure. Hence, I outline some of the implications that are offered by a critical reading of Antigone along with critics, who question the denial of political subjectivity that Hegel bestows upon Antigone.

The historical moment that brings about the modern philosophical interest in tragedy—and more particularly Antigone—is brought about by two revolutions: The Kantian Revolution in philosophy and the French Revolution in politics. Kant's "Copernican revolution" in philosophy is the displacement of the human subject from being the centre of the universe in a similar gesture to what Copernicus did in astronomy. Kant questions the limits of pure reason and the possibility of objective knowledge concluding that human beings can only know things as they appear, as we are bound by forms of intuition, i.e., space and time<sup>1</sup>. As Sebastian Gardner puts it:

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, regarding space not as an external reality but as a form of intuition, Kant wrote: "Space is not an empirical concept which has been derived from outer experiences. For in order that certain sensations be referred to something outside me (that is, to something in another region of space from that in which I find myself), and similarly in order that I may be able to represent them as outside and alongside one another, and accordingly as not only different but as in different places, the representation of space must already underlie them. Therefore, the representation of space

“What pre-Copernican philosophy treats as two distinct matters –objecthood and knowability– are thus treated as one” (Gardner, 1999, p. 39). Philosophy after Kant, more specifically German Idealism and Hegel, set out to respond to the Kantian notion of the subject, which is also shaped in the post-revolutionary period after 1789. The rupture with Kant in philosophy is almost simultaneous with the French Revolution, the foremost political rupture in modern history. In *Futures Past* (2004), Reinhart Koselleck describes the connection between the French revolution and the modern subject and her suffering, in the following words:

It made possible the attribution to history of the latent power of human events and suffering, a power that connected and motivated everything in accordance with a secret or evident plan to which one could feel responsible, or in whose name one could believe oneself to be acting. This philological event occurred in a context of epochal significance: that of the great period of singularization and simplification which was directed socially and politically against a society of estates. Here, Freedom took the place of freedoms, Justice that of rights and servitudes, Progress that of progressions (*les progrès*, the plural) and from the diversity of revolutions, “The Revolution” emerged. And with respect to France, one might add that the central place the Revolution in its singularity occupies in Western thought is, in the German language, assigned to *Geschichte*. (p. 35)

Hence, the ideals of revolution gave rise to a new understanding of the human subject, who is self-conscious and the actor of history as well as the author of her own fate. The French Revolution reinvigorated the thinking of tragedy both as a genre and as an idea. Raymond Williams notes that, “[s]ince the French Revolution, the idea of tragedy has been a response to a culture in conscious change and movement” (Williams, 1966, p. 62). Consequently, we see that tragedy takes on a new meaning and a new idea of the tragic emerges in the post-revolutionary period around 1800 when Hegel, Hölderlin, Schelling, and others start thinking and writing

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cannot be obtained through experience from the relations of outer appearance; this outer experience is itself possible at all only through that representation” (p. 38).

about ancient Greek tragedy in a new philosophical perspective. This new engagement with tragedy is communicated by Peter Szondi (2002) with the following words: “[s]ince Aristotle, there has been a poetics of tragedy. Only since Schelling has there been a philosophy of the tragic” (p.1). Therefore, it is in this particular moment in history that “tragedy became an integral element in thinking about history and the suffering of humankind” (Goldhill, 2012, p. 140). Simon Goldhill (2012) writes that,

The power of the response of German Idealism to Kant is that tragedy and the tragic becomes a way of exploring central questions of human freedom, political autonomy, self-consciousness and ethical action, which repeatedly integrates the tragic into a philosophical regime. Generalizing about the tragic takes tragedy from the sphere of literary genre and establishes it as a means to comprehend the self as political, psychological and religious subject. Tragedy is a route to the self-definition of modernity. (p. 149)

In this respect, Goldhill also underlines that with this new meaning given to tragedy, we witness the privileging of one form of human suffering over others, which is “a suffering that sets man against the otherness of the world” (2012, p. 141), and this is also constitutive of modernity as such. By focusing on the *Sittlichkeit*, the ethical order in which the individual gains meaning, the German Idealists, and especially Hegel formed a narrative of the individual consciousness by borrowing its vocabulary from ancient Greek tragedy, and more particularly *Antigone*.

Another striking aspect of the modernist resignification of tragedy is that the individual becomes the central site of conflict in tragedy, which marks it as radically different from the ancient understanding of the poetics of tragedy. In *Poetics*, Aristotle emphasized that it was action, not character that is central to tragedy. In Aristotle’s definition, tragedy is primarily “the imitation of action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude”, and character comes only secondary to action



(1896, p.18). However, by the time of German Idealism (which is also the time of German Romanticism in literature, and literary figures such as Schelling, Hölderlin, and Schiller can be counted for both currents), the individual becomes the central site of conflict in the discussions of tragedy and the tragic. Goldhill (2015) underlines that by generalizing about the tragic and locating the crisis of *Sittlichkeit* in the suffering individual hero, the German Idealists conceptualized the ancient Greek tragedies for modernity (p. 235). This is also the first time in the unprecedented interest in Antigone in philosophy. In forming a genealogical perspective in understanding the conceptualization of the tragic, Joshua Billings (2014) writes that Antigone is rarely mentioned before 1800, and it belonged to the second tier of extant Greek tragedies. However, from around 1800 to the present, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* have been touchstones of tragedy. He notes that *Antigone* “seems to emerge from almost nowhere in the writings of Hölderlin and Hegel in 1804 and 1807, respectively, and is canonized by Hegel’s posthumously edited and published *Lectures on Aesthetics*” (p. 11). This dawn of interest in *Antigone* that starts from German Idealism and continues today places the modern subject as a historical and political agent at the heart of its discussion of tragedy and the condition of modernity. In the following pages, I trace this strand of thinking starting with German Idealism, and more particularly with Hegel as a systematized philosophy and one that effects post-Hegelian discussions of the tragedy and the modern political subject.

In this dissertation, my aim is to analyze how philosophy and psychoanalysis rewrite Sophocles’ *Antigone* for modernity and how this affects the modern conceptualization and discussion of Antigone as a modern, political subject (including the impossibility of such a subject) in the works of G. W. F. Hegel,

Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler. I argue that the reason why *Antigone* keeps on being modeled as a modern issue in theory and performance in modernity starting from German Idealism is the preoccupation with the notion of the subject who is, after the French revolution, always a political subject. I intend the thesis to be a work in the field of literary theory that is primarily based on the close reading of philosophical works on *Antigone*, which I am reading as always already rewritings of *Antigone*, as pieces of literature, and not just criticism of it. Secondly, I also read modern interpretations/adaptations of *Antigone* and their reception history, which is, to some extent, informed, influenced, and / or has an intertextual relationship with the philosophical works analyzed. This dissertation is part of a larger project in which I aim to analyze the modern philosophical significance of *Antigone* in connection with the modern adaptations of the play. In this larger project, I am interested in how performance and theory influence, interact with, and underwrite each other. As the first step of this project, this dissertation focuses on modern theory on *Antigone* and discusses how the theoretical work on *Antigone* shapes the modern appreciation and interpretation of the tragedy. The dissertation is made up of five chapters:

In the second chapter following the Introduction, I begin by Hegel's seminal reading of *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/1977), which I argue has a determinant role in all modern readings of *Antigone* that come historically posterior to it. Hegel's interpretation of *Spirit* informed by his reading of *Antigone* as divided within itself and characterized by the clash of a divine law and a human law has been emblematic in terms of laying the ground rules for modernity in the philosophical appreciation of the figure of *Antigone*. Thus, I am primarily dealing with *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter abbreviated *Phenomenology*), and more

particularly, with the chapter “Spirit” where Hegel openly or implicitly deals with *Antigone*. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel not only uses Antigone as a model to rethink the Kantian notion of the subject, subjectivity, consciousness or self-consciousness, but his reading of *Antigone* is already a rewriting of the tragedy, which is at the same time a constitutive discourse for modernity. This is two-fold: First, by placing *Antigone* at the heart of *Phenomenology*, Hegel’s philosophy takes on a tragic character by internalizing the structure of tragedy. Hence, the German Idealist conceptualization of modernity is informed by the idea and structure of tragedy. Placing conflict at the heart of the modern subject, Antigone, for Hegel, is the means to rethink the modern subject. Second, Hegel’s reading of *Antigone* reproduces *Antigone* for modernity in a way that is different from the preceding ideas of poetics. He rewrites *Antigone* in such a way that he changes its signification for the philosophy and literary criticism that comes after it. Thus, I think, reading the criticism on *Antigone* today, is always already a post-Hegelian reading, not only being posterior to it, but also being a product of the history of literary criticism that prioritized this particular reading of it.

I read Tom Paulin’s 1984 play, *The Riot Act*, which is one of the modern rewritings of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, based on a discussion informed by the Hegelian reading of *Antigone*. Fiona Macintosh names *Antigone* as “the exemplary Irish tragedy”, putting the play in the position of a national allegory (2011, p. 90). Paulin’s play was, among other things, a response to a national debate. An Irish diplomat and writer, Connor Cruise O’Brien, had written two articles in 1968 and 1973, in which he opted for a Hegelian reading of Antigone as a national allegory and referred to Creon and Antigone as two rash but legitimate sides of the national conflict. He came up with the conclusion that if the inevitable outcome of protest is violence,

then the idea of protest is useless (as cited in Macintosh, 2011, p. 93-94). Paulin's rewriting is a response to a Hegelian reading of *Antigone* that privileges Creon over Antigone and writing Antigone as "rebel par excellence" (p. 95). Moreover, he also responds to the political conflicts of his day, 1980 IRA hunger strikes and the woman civil right activist Bernadette Devlin on stage. It would be too reductionist to read Paulin's theatre play as a mere political tool in response to his time; however, what I intend to do is to analyse how a certain reading of history rewrites tragedy in dialogue with philosophy.

In the third chapter, I discuss Jacques Lacan's reading of *Antigone* in his *Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1959-60)*. Positioning Sophocles' *Antigone* as a turning point in the field of ethics, Lacan underlines the common tendency to "evoke Antigone whenever there is a question of law that causes conflict in us" (1997, p. 249). Even though he is generally referred to be a Hegelian himself, in discussing *Antigone*, Lacan is critical of the Hegelian reading of the play in which there is a conflict of discourses which move toward some form of reconciliation. Lacan claims that there is no reconciliation in *Antigone* either at the end of the play or in the character of Antigone. For Lacan, what goes on in *Antigone* is not a clash of two rights, but a wrong represented by a human, namely Creon, opposed by a passion which is beyond the limits of the human, represented by Antigone. Lacan thinks that Antigone follows the family misfortune; *Atè*, which situates her in the field of the Other beyond the symbolic realm. In terms of Antigone's insistence on marching toward her death and refusing compromise, Lacan contends that Antigone incarnates the desire for death and he associates Antigone with the death drive and the real. Lacan concludes his reading of *Antigone* with the comment that in a community that refuses compromise, a figure like Antigone is compelled to sacrifice

her being in order to maintain the family *Atè* (p. 249). Hence, for Lacan, Antigone, as a figure beyond the limits of the human, is at the same time demonstrative of the meaning of limits and excess in the instigation of the human subject. After a reading of Lacan, I turn to Slavoj Žižek's reading of *Antigone* in *the Sublime Object of Ideology* (2008) and other works, which I take to be a rewriting of Lacan as well as a rewriting of Sophocles' *Antigone*. I argue that Žižek diverges from Lacan's reading of Antigone because in contradistinction to Lacan, Žižek asserts that Antigone represents the monstrous, the Thing / *das Ding* at the core of the real. Associating Antigone with the Thing has further connotations for Žižek's reading because he differs from Lacan's position of reading Antigone as the ethical figure par excellence in her relation to her desire, not giving way relative to her desire. What Žižek sees in the figure of Antigone is not an ethical subject, but a proto-totalitarian figure that sticks to a headstrong "No!" without compromise, explanation or argument for her motives. I contend that Žižek ends up with a politically reactionary reading of the figure of Antigone, which can be traced in his own version of *Antigone: The Three Lives of Antigone* (2016). Žižek calls his version of *Antigone* an ethico-political exercise (Žižek, 2016, p. xxv) in which he imagines how a modern or post-modern Antigone would be like, given the *Zeitgeist* of the contemporary world. He concludes that in such a case, we would lose our sympathy and compassion for the play's heroine, and she would seem as part of the problem (pp. xxiv-xxv).

In the fourth chapter, I consider Luce Irigaray's critique of Hegelian philosophy based on the difference between Hegel's and her own reading of *Antigone* in her two main articles on the tragedy: "The Eternal Irony of the Community" (1985) and "Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone" (2010). Irigaray positions her dialectics in contrast to Hegel's. She is critical of

Hegelian philosophy for reducing two opposing terms to one with a mind to resolve, cancel, or overcome their difference (Irigaray, 2010, p. 210). Moreover, Irigaray criticizes Hegel for denying political subjecthood and self-consciousness to Antigone in associating her with the divine law and domestic sphere. In this respect, Chanter is also critical of Hegel's dichotomy of state versus family in *Antigone*, and his association of Antigone with the private, domestic, religious sphere and Creon with the public, political, and civic sphere, and thus rendering invisible the political quality of Antigone's act and resistance (1995, p.92). For Irigaray, the problem with Hegelian dialectics is the negation of difference and valorisation of one term over the other (Irigaray, 2010, p. 199). Instead, she proposes to prioritise the difference between two irreducible identities and their world constituting power in themselves, and finally elaborating a third world through their relations of difference. Hence, in Irigaray's system, Antigone and Creon correspond to two different sexuate identities irreducible to one another, and it is only through dialogue between two different universal absolutes and the mutual acknowledgement of their coexistence and absolute difference that a third term can be arrived at, which is relational culture (Irigaray, 2010, p. 210). In taking Antigone and Creon as representative of qualities or laws, I think Irigaray remains a Hegelian to the last, and even though she puts forth a strong feminist critique of Hegel, she ends up essentializing masculine and feminine positions.

After Irigaray, I am reading Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* (2000) in particular and making reference to her overall work where relevant, especially *Precarious Life* (2006). In *Antigone's Claim*, Butler's criticism invites a reading of Antigone as a political figure. However, Butler underlines that Antigone cannot be representative of any politics because she is embedded in relations of an incestuous

lineage, and thus her identity itself is in crisis; but in her liminal position, she points to a beyond of a politics of representation. Moreover, Butler's association of resistance with the mobilization of vulnerability both by the state and the resisting subjects themselves relates to Antigone's resistance in contrast with the Hegelian tendency to view Antigone as representative of certain principles. Thus, Butler's reading of Antigone brings forth the idea that Antigone can actually be read as a political figure, but additionally, in Chanter's words "she must be read as calling for a renewal of the political itself" (2011, p. xxxviii). Following her critical approaches to Hegelian and Lacanian rewritings of Antigone, Butler offers her own reading resulting in a rewriting of Antigone at the limits of the human, as a subversive figure in terms of gender and kinship normativity. Butler's Antigone simultaneously disrupts the sovereign's discourse, and also in a chiasmic relation to the sovereign, speaks in the language of sovereignty that she refuses (2000, p. 11). I trace the notion of sovereignty as opened up in Butler's discussion of Antigone to the discussion of sovereignty in the works of Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, and Butler in her other writings. Departing from the definition of the sovereign as the one deciding on the state of exception, I read Sophocles' *Antigone* in the light of a discussion of the state of exception, Creon's embodiment of the sovereign position, and Antigone's consequent role in this narrative.

I argue that the philosophical and psychoanalytic rewritings of Antigone border on the gap between ethics and politics. I aim to traverse this gap via the discussion of subjectivity in Levinas, Lacan, and Derrida. In thinking of the subject in the hiatus of ethics of politics, my intention is to point at the feminist appropriations of the tragedy and figure of Antigone, such as offered by Tina Chanter, Bonnie Honig, Miriam Leonard, Cecilia Sjöholm, and Mary Beth Mader,

and join in their effort to rethink the political subject in the figure of Antigone. In my own rereading / rewriting of *Antigone*, I hope to be able to respond to the new horizons opened up by the proliferation of Antigones in theory and performance today.



## CHAPTER 2

### HEGEL'S ANTIGONE

#### 2.1. The phenomenology of *Antigone*

Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) is more than once referred as a tragic text, showing Spirit in conflict with its forms of realization (De Bestegui, 2000, p.33; Eagleton, 2003, p.41). In addition to this, it is also referred as a text modelled on Greek tragedies, and more particularly, Sophocles' *Antigone* (Schmidt, 2001, p.94). Even though a direct reference to the tragedy is rarely made in the text itself, the chapter entitled "Spirit" is not only the narrative of the life of Spirit modelled on *Antigone*, but also an elaboration on the tragedy itself. As a seminal text in modern philosophy in terms of the appreciation of the modern modes of coming into being, *Phenomenology*, at the same time, lays the ground rules for modernity in the philosophical appreciation of *Antigone*, the reading of which has been dramatically altered after its resignification in Hegelian philosophy.

In the *Phenomenology* (1977), Hegel defines Spirit as the condition of Reason in its self-consciousness and the actuality of ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*). The living ethical world is Spirit in its truth; yet, the Spirit comes to actuality as divided within itself (p.265). This division of the Spirit is realized in two modes of its consciousness that corresponds to two laws: the Human Law and the Divine Law. The Human Law, represented by the state; the actual, self-conscious existence of the ethical order, is the principle of universality. The human law is the known law, and it is enacted by the free citizens of the state. Citizenship is a gendered category according to Hegel and it belongs to men. In contrast, the Divine Law, represented by the family; the immediate, unconscious, inner notion of the ethical order, is the

principle of individuality and it is enacted by those who are not citizens, namely, women. The Divine Law, as the unconscious site of Spirit, is defined as the condition of existence of the Human Law, yet as its anti-thesis, it is lacking the self-consciousness of the Human Law. In this dichotomy, the living citizen does not belong to the family. Only in death, and in his universal being, can he belong to the family, which means that he is not just a decomposing corpse wholly determined by the laws of nature, but rather will gain meaning through the Divine law of the family (1977, pp. 267-270). Hence comes the obvious implication of these two laws for Hegel in his reading of *Antigone*; Creon represents the Human Law, and Antigone, the Divine Law, while the unburied corpse of Polynices belongs to the forces of the Divine Law, the family, as represented by Antigone.

Although Hegel claims to acknowledge equal validity for each law, the vocabulary he employs clearly privileges the human law over the divine law: it is universal, self-conscious, and male whereas the divine law is particular and immediate, lacks self-consciousness, and is female (1977, p. 268). Tina Chanter underlines that Hegel denies self-consciousness to the representative of the divine law, i.e., Antigone. According to Chanter, this is only because she is a woman:

She can act ethically. But she cannot know what she is doing. She cannot understand the rational and universal implications of her divinely inspired, sisterly act on behalf of her brother. She acts on the basis of blood kinship, on the basis of an intuitive sense of her duty. She knows what is right. What she does not know is why it is right. . . . For an act to be ethical, the subject has to be in full possession of his faculties, and he must be able to account for his action. He must be able to explain himself verbally, conceptually, ethically. According to Hegel, this requires, in short, that he must be male. He must have grasped the essence of his act and have understood its rationale (1995, p. 82).

In following a detailed analysis of the *Phenomenology*, Chanter points out that nowhere Hegel gives an explanation of his denial of self-consciousness to Antigone

other than his definition of sexual difference. By differentiating between human and divine law and by associating these laws with the male and the female respectively, Hegel denies self-consciousness and true ethical action to the woman. This implies that Antigone is denied both the knowledge of the true meaning of her actions and the access to the political sphere. Reading through the *Phenomenology*, Chanter's analysis demonstrates that it is only because of Antigone's gender that she is presumed not to achieve full ethicality of her action.

The most immanent result of Hegel's classification of Antigone is his inability to appreciate the political character of Antigone's act. According to Hegel, Antigone's burial of her brother gains meaning only in terms of the Divine Law that governs family. Antigone can only be meaningful in her position as a sister to her brother, which is seen as the most significant relationship within the family because the brother and the sister are free individualities in regard to each other, free both from the desire that defines the relation between husband and wife and from the emotional charge that defines the relation of parents to their children: "They are the same blood which has, however, in them reached a state of rest and equilibrium. Therefore, they do not desire one another . . . they are free individualities in regard to each other" (Hegel, 1977, p. 274). The confrontation of the brother and the sister makes up the moment of recognition. It is the moment of individual self, recognizing and being recognized in the other. According to Hegel, sexual difference realized in the relationship of the sister and the brother, which mirrors each other and at the same time is free from the dynamics of desire, is constitutive of the dialectical movement of ethical life. He underlines that the movement of the antithesis of the two sexes is its constant becoming (p. 276). In the instigation of sexual difference of the sister and the brother, Hegel repeats the distinction of Divine law without self-

consciousness and self-conscious human law in a way to redefine the ethical nature of both man and woman, and nation and individual. According to Hegel, the woman's role can only be realized in the family where she belongs and where she can have an ethical existence. More particularly, the ethical content of the woman's action is most meaningful in her relationship to her brother in the family. As opposed to the contingent relationship of choice in woman's relationship to her husband, or the emotionally defined relationship to her parents or children, or the same sex relationship to her sister, the woman's relationship to her brother is the most ethically significant relationship in the family where the sister "has the highest intuitive awareness of what is ethical" (p. 274). Schmidt also underlines that the importance that the sister's position suggests in relation to her brother is its being free from inequality or desire, but what differentiates it from the relation of sameness of sister to sister is its being defined by difference (2001, pp. 98-99). As the Divine Law is not self-conscious, Antigone cannot attain to the consciousness of it, so her act must remain "intuitive". Consequently, giving a direct reference to Antigone, Hegel maintains that "The loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest" (Hegel, 1977, p. 275). Thus, for Hegel, Antigone represents the highest ethical form of the feminine in fulfilling her duty to her brother as a sister and facilitating the dialectic in the forward movement of history. Hegel traces this movement in the life of Spirit as reflected in the dichotomies of man and woman, and two laws governing the nation and the family respectively.

The difference between the ethical lives of man and woman are determined by man's entrance into the political realm. By becoming a citizen, the man possesses the self-conscious power of universality. Thus, he also gains access to freedom of choice in the civic sphere, he has a right to desire; yet he preserves his freedom in

regard to it while the woman remains completely determined by the laws of the family (p.275). Given the role of man and woman in the nineteenth century's dichotomy of the private and public spheres, Hegel's portrayal rather reflects the current historical situation; however, he tends to idealize the historical and arrive at a universal understanding of gender roles through its particular manifestation in history. As a result, he arrives at a dichotomy between family life and the life of the community. He claims that neither is absolutely valid by itself. The man, by passing from the family to the community, actualizes the family in the community. On the other hand, the community has its essence in the family. Human law proceeds from the divine, that is, the law valid on earth proceeds from the law in the underworld, the conscious proceeds from the unconscious, the mediation from immediacy; and they equally return to where they came from. And the power of the underworld has its actual existence on earth: through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity. Besides, associating the male principle with the universal and the female principle with the individual, Hegel names the man and the nation as "the substance qua universal" and the woman and the family as "the substance qua an individual consciousness" (p. 276).

In its ideal state, there should be equilibrium of all the parts of Spirit. However, since Spirit is a living entity, the equilibrium of its parts is disrupted by inequality arising in them. The state of inequality is brought back to equilibrium by the Justice, which belongs to the human law (p. 277). The charges against Hegel in terms of privileging the human law over the divine law arise from here. Even though there is an assumed equality between the two laws, what restores Justice can only be the human law, i.e., the government of the nation, the ruling power of the state. For Hegel, the reason for this is obviously the self-consciousness he attributes to the

human law, which makes it superior to the divine law. That is also why, according to him, the human law is what is universal as opposed to the particular and the contingent. In referring to the disruption of the equilibrium of the two ethical powers that give rise to the dialectical movement of Spirit, Hegel makes an indirect allusion to Polynices' unburied body by saying that the individual who has suffered wrong will be what puts the universal principle into motion. It is only through the individual that we witness the movement of the universal principles at work. Hence, the wrong done to the individual will be avenged by the Furies of the underworld and through the family:

[T]he consciousness of [those who share] the blood of the individual repair this wrong in such a way that what has simply *happened* becomes rather a *work deliberately done*, in order that the mere being of the wrong, its ultimate form, may also be something *willed* and thus something agreeable. (p. 278)

Thus, it is the existence of the wrong that renders possible the deed, and thus giving rise to the movement of Spirit back toward equilibrium. The deliberateness for both the wrong suffered by Polynices and the deed of Antigone is what makes them ethical in Hegelian terms. As a result, their necessary relation makes up the necessary dialectic of ethical life. In this respect, the contingency or particularity of individual existence is overcome by the necessity of ethical existence of which Antigone becomes representative.

For Hegel, the division between man and woman facilitates the dialectical movement in the ethical realm of Spirit: Two essences that come into direct contact with each other are opposites, and they authenticate one another. Firstly, the movement of the universal, self-conscious Spirit through the individuality of man results in its union with unconscious Spirit in death. This is called "the downward movement of human law" at the end of which man is confronted with his death.

Secondly, the movement of the individual, unconscious Spirit through woman results in its coming into the realm of conscious Spirit in actuality. This is called “the upward movement of the law of the nether world” through woman into conscious existence (p.278). Consequently, what the union of man and woman come to represent is the dialectical coexistence of the human and divine laws. According to Hegel, this division of ethical consciousness is determined by nature:

Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law; or conversely the two ethical powers themselves give themselves an individual existence and actualize themselves in the two sexes (p. 280).

This means that for Hegel, sexual difference is constitutive of the ethical substance of the life of Spirit. Accordingly, Dennis Schmidt names gender as the principle axis along which the ethical crisis of Spirit spins: “Sexual difference, then, is never fully sublated, never fully resolved as a difference and a source of tension, in the ethical education of spirit” (2001, p. 96). In this regard, Antigone, as the woman per se, has her first dialectical encounter in her duty toward her brother: She confronts the body of her brother, the male element of her family, and fulfils her duty toward it, thereby achieving intuitive ethicality. With this act, Antigone returns the body to where it belongs, the divine law of the underworld. Then, she has her second dialectical encounter with Creon, the representative of the government and the community. By fulfilling her role as the manifestation of the divine law, Antigone, defies the state edict, buries the brother, and rescues the divine law from the denial and the forgetting of the state, Creon, and the human law. Thus, she gains meaning as the arbiter of the dialectical movement in history. She is the first one both to acknowledge the disruption in the balance of the two powers governing the ethical life of the Spirit, and to act a part in the reinstigation of the equilibrium of the two laws accordingly. So, in Hegel’s understanding, Antigone is the key point of the

acknowledgment and resolution of the tragic conflict. However, according to Hegel, this is not due to Antigone's self-conscious act, but this is only due to her position in the family as a woman and as a sister to her brother. This, of course, puts Ismene's position very much in question. If Antigone, as sister to her brother, only fulfils her role bestowed on her by the divine law, why cannot Ismene do the same? Why is it that the same law does not apply to Ismene as well? The existence of the two different attitudes of the two sisters only emphasizes the individual quality of Antigone's position and her agency. Yet, for Hegel, the ethical existence of the woman requires that she act on the universal principle of the family, and not on the particularity of desire, as desire only belongs to the domain of the free male citizen (p. 275). Therefore, Hegel denies woman the freedom to choose. The different stances of the two sisters puts Hegel's claim very much at stake. What Hegel denies Antigone becomes apparent in the same logic in her difference from her likeness. Notwithstanding, Hegel insists that what moves Antigone is her position as a woman in the family, and she cannot be a political subject. By associating Antigone solely with the Divine Law, he refuses to acknowledge her entrance into the political sphere, from where she is already excluded as a woman. Only through her act of burial, does Antigone transgress her gender role and defy the law of the state. Therefore, Hegel, by naturalizing the dichotomy of gender in his analysis of the ethical life of Spirit, essentializes sexual difference not only in his reading of the life of Spirit but also in his reading of Antigone when he denies her the full ethicality of her act as a political subject. Chanter (1995) criticizes Hegel's immediate adherence to the binary oppositions at the core of patriarchal discourse. She thinks that Hegel's treatment of Antigone parallels Creon's confinement of her in a cave:

Hegel's refusal is supported by a systematic bifurcation of male and female that adumbrates male as rational, universal, political, and



actual, while allocating to the female the irrational, the particular, the familial, and the potential (p.15).

Even the difference in the attitudes of the two sisters of Polynices demonstrates the individual quality in Antigone's act and resistance. This is a deliberate and political act even if Hegel in his constrictedness in time and place fails to acknowledge. Yet, in contradistinction to Chanter, I argue that Hegel's reading is not so clear-cut; rather, a tension remains in Hegel's narrative of Antigone in relation to Antigone's lack of self-consciousness. Even though Hegel denies Antigone the full panoply of subjecthood by saying that she can only have intuitive knowledge of her act, there still remains something excessive in the figure of Hegel's heroine: Antigone's guilt.

In talking about Antigone's deed, Hegel (1977) comments that,

[T]he ethical consciousness is more complete, its guilt is 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 Antigone, knowingly commits the crime. (p. 284)

Only by accomplishing her deed can Antigone be an ethical agent. The guilt of Antigone, that she knowingly commits the crime, is the condition that enables the ethical consciousness actual existence and a higher status of completeness. The ethical consciousness, by turning against its essence, commits the deed, and becomes guilty of it. It is at the same time a "crime" because the ethical consciousness turns towards one law, and at the same time, turns its back to the other law, and violates the other law by its deed (1977, p. 282). Thus, for Hegel, the guilty conscience is the necessary condition for the development of the Spirit in history.

Chanter also underlines that Antigone knows the law as she violates it. She criticizes Hegel for missing Antigone's entrance into the political realm in order to defy it on behalf of the family. Chanter stresses that Antigone's act is political (1995, p. 117). It is Hegel's unquestioning adherence to the gender bias of his time that

prevents him from acknowledging Antigone's transgressive position and agency (1995, p.118). By equating Antigone with the family and the representation of the divine law, Hegel restricts the full range of significance of her act to the unconscious and intuitive, thereby denying her the status of a political agent. Yet, the tension is still prominent in Hegel in the figure of Antigone who achieves such a central role in the realization of the ethical life of the spirit. Hegel's acknowledgement of the ethicality of Antigone's action resides in his emphasis on the recognition of her guilt. The fact that she knowingly commits the crime is the fulfilment of her agency in Hegel's eyes. Consequently, there is a contradiction between Hegel's understanding of Antigone both as the intuitive ethical agent without the self-consciousness of her action and as the guilty conscience that never wavers and carries the full weight of her action and its consequences.

The actualization of the deed and the guilty conscience leads to the theme of sacrifice that is imperative in the dialectical movement in Hegel: through the deed, the subject surrenders his own character and his reality, and is ruined. "Only in the downfall of both sides alike is absolute right accomplished, and the ethical substance as the negative power which engulfs both sides, that is, omnipotent and righteous Destiny, steps on the scene" (Hegel, 1977, p. 285). The movement of self-consciousness in history can only be actualized through the "crime", the consequent downfall, and finally, the sacrifice of the self of the ethical agent. Dennis Schmidt underlines that throughout *Phenomenology*, Hegel determines that the life of Spirit is characterized by repeated sacrifice: "From the outset the movement of spirit coming to itself is driven by self-sacrifice . . . The great sacrificial figures, the living images of spirit at its decisive moments –Antigone, Socrates, Christ –all are clearly visible in the text" (2001, p. 94). Yet, in the chapter on Spirit, Hegel assigns the movement

toward death through war and death to man, and the movement toward the preservation of life to woman. Hence, Schmidt (2001) concludes, “in her sacrifice Antigone assumes as well the role of the man” (p.100). Once more, Hegel’s denial to Antigone the full ethicality of her action is put at stake. It is not only that Antigone is referred as in full knowledge of her transgression; but also that in her sacrifice she subverts the position of the masculine as defined by Hegel.

Hegel maintains that in the actual life of Spirit, the clash of the ethical powers is presented as individualized in the form of the conflict between two individuals, such as the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles in *Antigone*. Hegel implicitly alludes to the example of the two brothers in combat without openly naming either them or the play (1977, pp. 285-287). In the ethical life of the government, the duality of the individuality between the two brothers is against the unitary self of the national spirit, and both brothers are destroyed because both are equally wrong. On the one hand, Polynices is wrong in committing the crime of turning against his own community and attacking it. On the other hand, Eteocles is wrong in attacking and banishing an isolated individual from the community. It is the particularity of the brothers that both attack and defend the community, which preserves its own existence, and the brothers are destroyed by each other. As Polynices is guilty of attacking “Spirit’s highest form of consciousness” i.e., the government, he must be stripped of honour. Thus, the government enters into a conflict with the divine law, its very unconscious. Under normal circumstances, the divine law is effective in the underworld, and it succumbs to the human law that is powerful on earth. But as the corpse that belongs to the underworld remains in the upper world, the right of the divine law is denied, and its powers “rise up in hostility and destroy the community which has dishonoured and shattered its own power, the sacred claims of the Family”

(p. 287). Hence, the human law can only be powerful on earth on the condition that it is not forgetful of its own unconscious essence that makes it a single unity in the ethical life of the Spirit. Otherwise, once the equilibrium is disturbed, it can only be restored by utter destruction.

Taken in this form, what was represented as a simple movement of the individualized ‘pathos’ acquires a different look, and the crime and consequent destruction of the community acquire the proper and characteristic form of their existence. Human law in its universal existence is the community, in its activity in general is the manhood of the community, in its real and effective activity is the government.  
(p. 287)

In this passage, Hegel reads the pathos of the tragedy in the action that precedes *Antigone* and makes up the plot of Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* as the individualized representation of the conflict into the ethical life of the Spirit. The universal and male principle of the Spirit being the community, the government assumes the active life of the community, and its destruction is simultaneously the destruction of the community. Thus, what is individual and particular is simultaneously the manifestation of what is communal and universal. And it is always gendered as the male principle or “manhood” of the community is what makes up the powerfulness of the human law.

In this gendered dichotomy, it is not surprising that the female principle arises as the “eternal irony of the community” (p. 288). The unconscious principle in the ethical life of the Spirit is presented as the individualization of the universality, the transformation of government into a private end in the family. In Hegel’s presentation, “womankind is the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community” because it is both the condition of existence for the human law as represented in the ethical life of the community, being its unconscious essence. Yet, at the same time womankind is presented as “the internal enemy of the community” created by the

community because it is what “perverts” the community’s claims to universality into the individual life of the family (p. 288). The life of the community progresses as it suppresses this spirit of individualism, only to be challenged by it and being defeated, returns back to its state of unity with its essence and universality. Hence, the community can only have an actual life existing in constant motion in history. The striking point in Hegel’s representation of conflict as embodied by gendered powers in the society is his denigration of womanhood and the female principle in his eulogy for the human law, no matter how necessary or formative he perceives this conflict to be in the life of the Spirit. First of all, it must be noted that Hegel’s attitude is in full conformity with the patriarchal attitude of his time in which women were seen as internal enemies in the still male civic sphere, considering that even the liberating storm of the French revolution excluded women from universal suffrage and insisted on the brotherhood of men<sup>2</sup>. In this respect, Hegel once more writes in conformity with the patriarchal power that refuses to share its power domain with the other sex. Nevertheless, Hegel’s approach is still somewhat in discrepancy with the way he attached particular importance to the figure of Antigone in his formulation of the ethical life of the Spirit.

The main idea of the chapter on Spirit being the working of self-consciousness in the ethical life of the Spirit, the discussion based on the distinction of the conscious and the unconscious needs further consideration. In this chapter, I have discussed that there is the antithesis of the known (human law) and the

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<sup>2</sup> Seyla Benhabib (2007) unearths Hegel’s hostile attitude toward woman’s emancipation and the early feminist views of his female contemporaries such as Caroline Schlegel, Henriette Herz, Rahel Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim (p. 252). These women extended the ideals of the revolution to the emancipation of women and led their lives more independently and more confidently in the light of these new views. Hegel saw their views and lives as a threat to the family order that underruns his idea of the state. In this respect, Hegel is also clearly on the side of traditional patriarchy as opposed to his revolutionary thinking in other areas. Benhabib writes that “Hegel sur-reptitiously criticizes and denigrates attempts at early women’s emancipation and seeks to imprison women once more within the confines of the monogamous, nuclear family which they threatened to leave” (p. 250).

unknown (divine law) in the consciousness. The divine law is the anti-thesis of self-consciousness and is ignorant of what it does whereas the human law, being in the nature of consciousness, knows what it does. However, the knowledge of the human law is a deceptive knowledge because it takes into consideration only what is knowable, intelligible. What it disregards is the unknown, unconscious dimension of its essence (p. 266): “self-consciousness forgets the significance of its essential being. It has lost its truth, and has become one-sided” (p. 281). The ethical consciousness recognizes only itself, and it does not recognize the essential nature of the other power, sees right only on one side and wrong on the other. According to the divine law, what is at play is only the violence of human caprice in the shape of the human law. On the other hand, the human law does not recognize that there is also a divine law. What it recognizes in the particular instance is “only the self-will and disobedience of the individual”, as seen in Creon’s appreciation of the figure of Antigone. According to Hegel, the reason for this is that the human law, the law of the government, is open and has a universal and public meaning, it is understandable. However, the divine law is outside the known world, it is locked up in the darkness of the underworld, and its outer manifestation is the will of an individual, and it appears as “wanton outrage” (p. 280). In the clash and mutual downfall of the two powers, the ethical consciousness learns through its own act the contradiction and the mutual downfall of the two powers. Hegel calls this the dialectics of “the absolute right of ethical self-consciousness” and “the divine right of essential being” (p. 280). In other words, “[t]he actual world steps in, it sides with the truth against consciousness, and it shows the consciousness its very truth” (p. 281). Consequently, we see that for Hegel, it is impossible for Creon to understand or acknowledge the claim to right of Antigone’s point of view. What is conscious cannot understand

what is beyond its confines because it always thinks within the terms of consciousness. Hence, according to Hegel, only with the tragic downfall can the conscious essence come to know itself as self-consciousness in its dialectical unity with its anti-thesis.

Antigone, here, is almost like the historically posterior Freudian understanding of the return of the repressed for Hegel: She is not an agent on her own. She is the unconscious element of the Spirit. She is the power that opposes the human, that is, Creon. Creon is the true hero of tragedy: the human that forgets that it has an essence beyond its immediate truth. Antigone emerges as this very essence that fights back and reminds Creon its essential truth in all its violence. In the Freudian distinction of the unconscious, the essence of the process of repression lies in preventing an idea that represents an instinct from becoming conscious (Freud 2001a, p. 166). According to Freud, there are two kinds of unconscious ideas representing instincts. The first are capable of becoming conscious, and even though they are latent under normal circumstances, they can become objects of consciousness without any resistance from the unconscious. However, the second type of unconscious ideas meet censorship at the unconscious, and they are not allowed to pass unto the consciousness. They are thus repressed and must remain unconscious (Freud 2001a, p. 173). Freud associates these repressed ideas representing instincts and desires with infantile complexes. As these childhood desires are repressed in the unconscious, they return in disguised forms (Freud 2001b, "The Uncanny", p. 245, 248). Hence, as in Hegel's *Antigone*, it is the conscious self that is forgetful of its unconscious that is all the more under the dictates of unconscious desires. The more repressed an unconscious is, the stronger it comes back to claim what rightfully belongs to it. Or to put in Lacanian terms, the

Real always returns to its original place (Lacan 1998, p. 49). In this respect, Hegel's analysis of Antigone as the unconscious principle that emerges as the anti-thesis to consciousness can even be traced to both Freudian psychoanalysis' understanding of the unconscious and the mechanisms of repression that the ego employs in harnessing the id, and the Lacanian understanding of the Real always claiming its place from the Symbolic realm. Only with the recognition of unconscious processes in psychoanalysis, can the subject overcome the resistances and the repression can be lifted, and then the subject can enter into connection with unconscious memory traces (Freud 2001a, p. 175-176).

If we pursue this conflict between the conscious and the unconscious as constitutive of the self-consciousness of the subject in history in philosophical terms, we will also arrive at the post-Hegelian question: What is an agent? Or who is an agent? Is Antigone the agent per se? For Hegel, apparently, she is not. She just cannot be. On the contrary, she is, in a way, the anti-human. Or is it Creon, the human? But Creon, too, in his downfall, seems to be the negation of the one-sidedness of the human law. Or is it the figure of Ismene, perhaps, in her all-too-human position, in her weakness, her fear, submission, limitedness, and willingness to live? Clearly, her female position would make it impossible for Hegel to think of Ismene in terms of agency or consciousness<sup>3</sup>. Who is the subject? Or is there a subject? Is a subject possible at all? Though Hegel clearly answers in the affirmative by concluding that the clash of the two powers result in their reconciliation in self-conscious Spirit, in his reading of *Antigone*, Hegel leaves the answer to this question open-ended. There is no Fortinbras of *Hamlet* in store for the future of Thebai. What

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<sup>3</sup> However, twentieth century critics from diverse perspectives such as Slavoj Žižek (2009), Simon Goldhill (2012), and Conor Cruise O'Brien (1973) have suggested her position as exemplary of the human agent.



we see in Sophocles' play is the utterly destroyed Creon deprived of family. It is quite debatable to argue that he reunites with the law of the family at the end of the tragedy. As a result, the position of subjecthood being denied to Antigone, it is equally unclear to whom it will be bestowed. Finally, for post-Hegelian philosophy, the question seems to be even more complicated, some of which will be further discussed in the following chapters. And the preoccupation with and return to *Antigone* will provide the question ground once again in the discussion of the possibility of subjecthood which is always already a political problem after the French Revolution as discussed in the Introduction.

To conclude, in *Phenomenology*, as Hegel sketches the ethical life of Spirit based on his illustration of *Antigone*, he also comes up with a particular reading of Antigone in which he associates the tragic protagonists with certain principles representative of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). This is also constitutive of the modern understanding of the tragedy and the figure of Antigone. In my analysis, I tried to show that Hegel rewrites *Antigone* for modern philosophy in such a way that is radically different from the history of the appreciation of the play. The way he does this is that he inscribes *Antigone* at the heart of the political life of the nation. By drawing conclusions from Antigone, Hegel comes up with the idea that the ethical life of the nation is actualized in the dialectical interaction of divine and human laws, which are carried out by woman and man respectively. Consequently, Antigone becomes the embodiment of an unconscious quality in the life of the ethical substance that can only gain meaning in the life of the patriarchal family. In her quality of being unconscious, intuitive, and particular, she is excluded from the political sphere alongside all the representatives of her sex, namely, all her potential sisters. The male principle, represented by Creon, on the other hand, is the

embodiment of self-consciousness in the life of the ethical substance that gains meaning in the life of the community as the government. It is not only the highest form of existence for Hegel, but its self-consciousness is also hailed as the founding factor of the political sphere which is constantly undermined, brought into conflict with itself, and thus forced to transformation by the womankind, the society's enemy. In this respect, Hegel also sets the tone for the patriarchal rule of his age through a reading of *Antigone* that privileges the figure of Creon over Antigone. Nevertheless, a tension remains in Hegel's reading as he appreciates the ethical consciousness of Antigone's deed and the central role it plays in the development of the life of the Spirit in history. The figure of Antigone and her guilt above all seems quite self-conscious when placed in Hegel's overall understanding of self-consciousness in history. Thus, it remains unclear why Antigone cannot arrive at the self-consciousness of her action, which she does with full knowledge of its ethicality. The only thing Hegel clarifies is that she is a woman, therefore she cannot. The centrality of Antigone's deliberate act brings forward a contradiction in Hegel's reading of *Antigone* and his analysis of self-consciousness in the ethical life of the community. Perhaps it is the crack through which the full ethical and political significance of Antigone's act leaks. Even though Hegel puts the idea of sexual difference at the heart of the dialectical movement of history, his ambivalent attitude toward the figure of Antigone and her act points to a moment of tension in his understanding of both Antigone and the woman's role in the community.

## 2.2. A Hegelian debate: *Antigone* in Ireland

The rise of the idea of nation and the nation state after the French revolution and in the revolutionary period of the nineteenth century resulted in the German Idealists'

reading of ancient Greek tragedies and particularly Antigone as a site for grounding their ideas on nation, nation state, and nationalism<sup>4</sup>. As a result, Hölderlin saw the theme of the Fatherland (Vaterland) in the idea of the tragic (Billings, 2014, p. 191). He uses this theme twofold: First, by situating ancient Greece as the cradle of Western civilization and the true ancestors of the German nation that is in the process of forming, he relates his national existence inside that of the ancient Greek, thereby raising the significance of Greek tragedies to the making of a national myth. Secondly, by attributing the idea of nation to ancient Greece, he universalizes the historically constructed, modern concept and ideology, and consequently monumentalizes it so that its authority becomes unquestionable. We can see this taking granted of the idea of nation in many writers of the nineteenth century, and more particularly, in the German Idealist philosophies of Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel.

The German Idealists' and more particularly Hegel's insertion of the modern concept of the nation into his reading of Antigone is not a coincidence shaped by the needs of social thought in nineteenth century. This reading of the nation into Antigone is also constitutive of a particular discourse of the nation that is to shape the modern understanding of the idea of the nation state. In this respect, it is again impossible to read Antigone without the meaning created around the ancient play by Hegel and his contemporaries. It is only from then on that Antigone becomes a play embedded in modern politics. In this relation with modernity, the tragedy not only depicts the position of the individual in defiance of the state power of the city state;

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<sup>4</sup> I propose to take Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" as our point of departure (Anderson, 2016, p. 6). In this sense, the idea of the nation is an historically constructed entity and nationalism, as the ideology of this construct, is connected to the historically produced understanding of the idea of the tragic for some of the thinkers of nineteenth century of whom Hegel is a prominent example.

but more particularly, it depicts the position of a certain individual that is denied certain rights within the nation state (such as in the case of Antigone, being a woman, and denied the rights of a citizen), and as such rises up in defiance of the nation state. We can conclude that after Hegel, the discussion of Antigone has already become a ground for a national debate. In the twentieth century, the philosophical appropriation of Antigone in relation to the nation state expands, and we come across instances in various contexts around the globe that reflect this tension of the national question as seen through the prism of Antigone. To name a few, we read the discussion of Antigone as a national allegory in thoroughly different contexts from Argentina, to South Africa, Nigeria, and Turkey. One such instance is the political debate around the national conflict in the North of Ireland, and the striking role the Hegelian reading of Sophocles' Antigone plays in this discussion.

Fiona Macintosh emphasizes that *Antigone* "is rapidly becoming the exemplary Irish tragedy" ever since its varied refigurations appeared from the mid-1980s onwards<sup>5</sup>, thus putting the play in the position of a national allegory (2011, p. 90). Prior to the proliferation of Irish *Antigone* productions for stage, there is a Hegelian debate relating Irish national question to *Antigone*, which also informs some (if not all) of the stage adaptations that Macintosh enlists, such as Tom Paulin's (1985) and Seamus Heaney's (2004a). The debate begins in 1968 when Conor Cruise O'Brien, an Irish writer and diplomat, wrote an article for *The Listener*, on the issue of civil disobedience as a current issue in the North of Ireland, which he reads into *Antigone*. O'Brien opted for a Hegelian reading of Antigone as a national allegory and referred to Creon and Antigone as "two rash but legitimate sides of the national

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<sup>5</sup> She names a number of Irish authors that have modern Antigone adaptations to exemplify her stance: Frank McGuinness, Tom Paulin, Aidan Carl Matthews, Brendan Kennelly, Pat Murphy, Seamus Heaney, Conall Morrison, and Owen McCafferty. (Macintosh 2011, p. 90)

conflict”. He came up with the conclusion that if the inevitable outcome of protest is violence, then the idea of protest is useless (Macintosh, 2011, p. 93-94).

O’Brien quoted this article in a chapter entitled “Civil Rights: the crossroads” of his book *The States of Ireland* (1972), where he once more read Antigone as a figure of civil disobedience, similar to the young protesters in Derry in October 1968. O’Brien gives the gist of his view on the general topic just before he quotes his Antigone article: That the only thing certain to come of civil rights struggle was that much blood would be shed (p. 156). O’Brien refers to Sophocles’ heroine as “the girl who deliberately, without violence, broke the law—by burying her brother Polynices, against King Creon’s command—knowing that death would follow” (p. 156). With this, the reader is introduced to the idea that if death or bloodshed is certain to follow, then the fact that the deed does not carry a violent character is pointless. The bloodshed itself is the violence that ensues, and this is the reason why O’Brien condemns non-violent protest. According to O’Brien the ensuing deaths are “A stiff price for that handful of dust on Polynices” (p. 157). In this sentence, the language he adopts to underestimate Antigone’s act is especially striking. This is not the discourse of Creon who puts so much value on Antigone’s act that he condemns her to a living death. On the contrary, Creon feels disempowered by Antigone’s act. He attributes so much power to Antigone’s deed that he feels unmanned by her action. He comments: “I am not the man, not now: she is the man / if this victory goes to her and she goes free” (Sophocles 1984, p. 83, ll. 541-542). Neither is it the discourse of the chorus of the elders of Thebes who seem to understand Antigone’s motives, yet find her excessive: “Like father, like daughter, / passionate, wild... / she hasn’t learned to bend before adversity (p. 82, ll.525-527). In this respect, the symbolic meaning in terms of the ritualistic character of Antigone’s act is significant

for everyone involved in the original tragedy of Sophocles. Her act can neither be underestimated nor looked upon. Hence, Antigone's is an act of defiance that reaches its target in the play. Therefore, this is not a discourse that finds a parallel in Sophocles. O'Brien's is a modern discourse belonging to the language of the state authorities that refuse to acknowledge that they can be vulnerable or defied by civil protesters. Reducing the symbolic nature of Antigone's act to "a handful of dust" is a modern conceit that would never have occurred to Sophocles' audience. And for the modern audience, it resonates dangerously with the language of sovereign power, which has no interest in assessing the contextual meaning of Antigone's defiance, but uses this only as an allegory to render powerless the rebellion of the civil protesters<sup>6</sup>.

O'Brien (1972) goes on with an apology for the figure of Creon who he sees as representative of British colonial rule and the Unionist government, saying that it is not possible to put all the blame on Creon: the rashness of his decision is no reason to disobey him, and that although many disapproved, no one disobeyed him except Antigone:

Creon's authority, after all, was legitimate, even if he had abused it, and the life of the city would become intolerable if citizens should disobey any law that irked their conscience. . . . It was Antigone's free decision, and that alone, which precipitated the tragedy. Creon's responsibility was the more remote one of having placed this tragic power in the hands of a headstrong child of Oedipus (p. 157).

Once more, O'Brien falls into the discourse of the sovereign state power: What would happen if every citizen disobeyed any law that irked their conscience? In philosophical terms, this is reminiscent of the Kantian distinction between public and private use of reason. According to Kant, it is legitimate to publicly express one's

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<sup>6</sup> I take up a detailed discussion of sovereignty in relation to *Antigone* in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

thoughts about the inappropriateness and even injustice of decrees of the state. However, a citizen must obey the government when it comes to action (Kant, 2009, p. 4-5). If we return to Sophocles here, we will again see that it has no validity. First of all, Antigone is not a citizen. Even Hegel acknowledges that Antigone, being a woman, does not belong to the civic sphere. That is why he associates her with the household gods (Hegel, 1977, p. 268). Antigone acts against the state not as a citizen that has rights in relation to the state, but she draws her rights from the divine. This is also what differentiates her from the figure of Socrates. Marianne McDonald maintains that what Antigone does is the opposite of what Socrates did. She underlines that in *Crito*, “Socrates declared that he would follow the city’s laws even if the decision was unjust (McDonald, 2002, p. 52). On the contrary, Antigone acts in defiance of the city’s laws. The difference is marked by the difference of status between Antigone and Socrates in terms of citizenship, as well. Moreover, Antigone is of royal blood, even more, she is King Oedipus’ daughter; born of incest, and carrying the family *Atè*. Thus, Antigone once more becomes a pretext to condemn civil disobedience regardless of the appropriateness of her example. Seamus Heaney, in his article “Translating a Deed” refers to the Irish debate on Antigone as informed by O’Brien in the following words:

[B]y now the play has been translated and adapted so often, has been co-opted into so many cultural and political arguments, that it has begun to function less as a text from the theatrical repertoire and more as a pretext for debate. And this became even more the case in Ireland after Conor Cruise O’Brien came back to the topic” (Heaney 2004b, p. 419).

For Heaney, this is both the allure and downside of writing another adaptation of Antigone in Ireland. Above all, it is always a response to O’Brien and Irish politics. In this instance, what is interesting in O’Brien is that even though he thinks both Creon and Antigone are rash but legitimate sides of a conflict, and Creon is the

perpetrator of violence, he sides with Creon in terms of the resolution of the conflict. He does this first of all by condemning Antigone's act. So, he puts the legitimacy of Antigone at stake while bolstering up Creon's. Secondly, he openly associates Creon with oppressive state powers in the world: "suppression of communism in Asia, suppression of freedom in Czechoslovakia, white supremacy and every other supremacy of the supreme" (O'Brien, 1972, p. 157). Also, he associates Tiresias with the press that is critical of state violence. Even these parallelisms do not cause him to criticize Creon or the modern state. O'Brien's apology for Creon and his modern parallels is his strategy to condemn dissidence. In this respect, for O'Brien, Ismene is the model citizen with common sense who tries to restrain extremists like Antigone. He underlines that many young people would find Antigone attractive, but few could go to her lengths (p. 157). So, O'Brien settles the symbolism and the national allegory in Antigone. In pointing toward the figure of Ismene, he gives vent to a liberal politics in which it is legitimate *to think* against the state, but *to act* in defiance of sovereign power is forbidden. This also shakes the Hegelian foundations of O'Brien's discourse because for Hegel, Antigone gains complete meaning through the acting out of her deed. Thus, I conclude that even though O'Brien seems to start from the Hegelian reading of the play in which he explains politics and history by the parallelisms he draws between the current day and Sophocles' play, he ends up in a reactionary position in regard to his political views which is farther from Hegel's position both in regard to Antigone or politics and history.

O'Brien starts by adopting a Hegelian standpoint in terms of seeing Antigone and Creon as representative of two powers that make up the ethical consciousness. However, in delving into the current politics, O'Brien goes beyond the Hegelian dialectic. In Hegel, both powers are legitimate in their own right. O'Brien seems to



agree with this but ends up accusing Antigone with attracting violence (1972, p. 157). Nowhere could Hegel think of condemning Antigone for causing violence. On the contrary, Hegel seems to put both self-consciousness and the blame on Creon, for he is supposed to be the one who represents the Justice of the human law. However, Hegel's Creon is guilty of forgetting his essential being that is grounded in the divine law of Antigone and enforcing laws without paying due respect to his essential being. In this way, Hegel thinks Creon disrupts the equilibrium in the ethical consciousness. That Antigone knowingly commits her deed, makes her all the more a fully developed tragic hero in Hegel's eyes: Antigone is always there to remind Creon and the whole nation that the human law's essential being resides in the divine law.

The idea of civil disobedience that gives vent to O'Brien's discussion is of course as alien to Hegel as his own views on the nation would be to the ancient Greeks. What makes Antigone legitimate in Hegel's eyes is not her position as a rebel in regards to the state. On the contrary, only as the representative of the divine law, only with the idea that she stands for the immortal law of the gods, which is also the grounds of existence for the human law, Antigone gains meaning in Hegel's eyes. That is also why only by accomplishing her deed can Antigone be an ethical agent. In putting the matter in these terms in relation to Antigone's act of defiance, Hegel clearly is as far away from O'Brien's position as possible. Yet, O'Brien makes another twist in his discussion of Antigone and Irish Antigones. At the end of the cited 1968 article, even though O'Brien is critical of all the bloodshed that he holds Antigone responsible for, he concludes with a reverent attitude. He contends that Antigone is the uncompromising ethical element in our being, and she is representative of human dignity. In losing the human dignity, "man might gain the

peace at the price of his soul” (p. 158). However, three years later, in his book chapter addition, he resolves that he is no longer in sympathy with the article’s conclusion: After four years of bloodshed and funerals in Northern Ireland, from which he holds Antigone responsible, he has begun to “feel that Ismene’s common sense and feeling for the living may make the more needful, if less spectacular element in ‘human dignity’” (p. 159).

Hence, O’Brien ends his parallelism of Antigone and the civil rights activists to a denigration of the figure of Antigone and the protesters, legitimization of the figure of Creon and the state, and praise of the figure of Ismene and the silent public, who advises submission in the face of oppressive state power, and whom O’Brien hails as the representative of common sense. O’Brien contends that “Peace depends on the acceptance of civil subordination” (1972, p. 158). In this respect, I think he diverges from the Hegelian reading of politics and history as informed from his reading of Antigone, in which Hegel, far from preaching submission, sees conflict as the necessary element in the forward movement of history that brings about change and dynamism. According to Hegel, it is only the disruption in the equilibrium of consciousness that puts the one sidedness of the ethical powers at stake and shakes them to their core. So, in the consciousness, there is the dialectics of “the absolute right of ethical self-consciousness” and “the divine right of essential being” (Hegel, 1977, p. 280). If we read O’Brien’s parallelism from a Hegelian point of view, we can conclude that only with the intrusion of the civil rights movement and acts of civil disobedience, can Ireland be united in its self-consciousness. No simple compromise between warring powers can be arrived at. On the contrary, the clash of these powers and the necessary acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the civil rights movement by the state will bring about their mutual transformation into a substance

that unites with its truth. The equilibrium can only be restored by the resolution of conflict even if it can only come at the price of the mutual downfall of the two powers. This is the lesson Hegel draws from the example of Antigone. He offers no apology for Creon. Far from it, the law that Creon is representative of is bound to arrive at its ethical substance only by going through a transformation in its encounter with its opposite. For Hegel, that is the necessary movement of Spirit, which can only be realized in its actual existence in history.

Like Hegel in *Phenomenology*, O'Brien is not going for a literary analysis of the tragedy of Antigone; instead, what he does is to use the model of Antigone in order to arrive at an authoritative reading of the current political situation. According to Schmidt, Hegel is far from offering a reading of Antigone; instead, what he does "is interpreting the ethical life of the spirit by reading Antigone as the preeminent illustration of how this life must unfold" (Schmidt, 2001, p. 103). I disagree to the first part of Schmidt's argument in my discussion in the previous section in which I argued that what Hegel does is at the same time coming up with a rewriting of Antigone, which to a certain extent determines the future of Antigone in modernity. By reading Antigone in interpreting the ethical life of the community, both Hegel and twentieth century thinkers necessarily associate the figure of Antigone with a certain element in the making of the nation-state. In this respect, the way O'Brien's reading has become influential in shaping the Irish discussion of Antigone and its modern adaptations can also be traced in the play's history in Ireland. Marianne McDonald maintains that four versions of Antigone appeared in the North of Ireland in 1984: by Tom Paulin, Brendan Kennelly, Aidan Carl Mathews, and Pat Murphy (with her film *Anne Devlin*) (2002, p.52). Seamus Heaney's *Burial At Thebes* (2004a) is another adaptation in 2003, which also has O'Brien's perspective in

regard<sup>7</sup>. Even though all readings and rewritings of the Irish is somehow a response to O'Brien's ideas, one of the most open criticisms to O'Brien comes from the poet and playwright Tom Paulin who opposes O'Brien's political ideas and reading of *Antigone*.

Paulin responds to O'Brien in two instances: the first time in an article called "The Making of a Royalist", which he wrote for *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1980<sup>8</sup>, and the second time his own version of *Antigone*, *The Riot Act* in 1984. Thirdly, in 2002, in his article "Antigone" he revisits both. In "Antigone", he underlines the impact of O'Brien by saying that he got to know Sophocles' tragedy through reading O'Brien's *States of Ireland* (p. 166). He criticizes O'Brien for misinterpreting the play and that in doing a version of it, he claims to set out to try and prove him wrong again after he did once in the article (p. 167). Macintosh notes that the play was commissioned by The Field Day Theatre in Derry, "where the Bloody Sunday events had taken place in 1972" and "Paulin's version of Antigone addressed the political situation in the North of Ireland head on" (2011, p. 92). Paulin begins his critique of O'Brien's reading of Antigone in "The Making of A Royalist" with a direct reference to Hegel, and by backing his view from the authority of Hegelian discourse, he goes on to accuse O'Brien by siding with one of the two powers that Hegel defines to be in clash in Antigone. Paulin believes that "O'Brien's loyalties are to the 'daylight gods'" and Creon (p. 28). To begin with, it is interesting to note that not only O'Brien's views are somehow underwritten by Hegelian philosophy, but also the opposition he receives from Paulin is also very much determined by Hegelian discourse. This is important in demonstrating the

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<sup>7</sup> Heaney (2004b) writes about O'Brien's role in his rereading of Antigone in detail in his article "Title Deeds: Translating a Classic".

<sup>8</sup> Paulin republished the article in his book *Ireland and the English Crisis* in 1984, and it is this version which I will be referring to in this chapter.

impact and authority of Hegel's rewriting of *Antigone* on the modern discussions of the play.

In "The Making of a Royalist" (1980), when Paulin turns to Hegel in formulating his critique of O'Brien's reading of the play informed by modern politics, it is to reassert Hegel's authority over the legitimate reading of the tragedy and prove O'Brien wrong. Paulin maintains that according to Hegel, *Antigone* reveres the sacred laws of the instinctive Powers of Feeling, Love, and Kinship, whereas *Creon* abides by the daylight gods of free and self-conscious, social and political life, both of which are given equal rights. It is "the absoluteness of the claim of each" that is denied, and it is in "the clash of these opposing 'rights' that the tragedy resides" (Paulin, 1984, pp. 27-28). According to Paulin, "O'Brien's loyalties are to the 'daylight gods', thus he does not acknowledge the equal authority of both sides. The balance of powers is denied by O'Brien who associates *Creon* with universal values and *Antigone* with personal caprice:

*Creon*, therefore, is both individual and institution, yet he appears to be more an institution, while *Antigone*, like *St Joan*, appears as an individual ahead of her supporters. She is 'headstrong' and therefore more responsible because she can supposedly exercise choice. So *Creon* is rendered almost innocent by his immobile precedence, his simply being there. (Paulin, p. 28)

In saying this, Paulin accuses O'Brien not only for misinterpreting Sophocles, but also of not grasping the Hegelian essence of the dialectics of politics in the play. Paulin is critical that O'Brien holds *Antigone* responsible for all the bloodshed and when O'Brien's reading is translated into the case in the North of Ireland, "the Unionist state is virtually absolved of all responsibility and *Creon's* hands appear to be clean" (p. 27). He notes that O'Brien's sympathies "lay with the status quo" (p. 27) and that "in recommending *Ismene's* common-sense he is really supporting

Creon's rule of law" (p. 28). In "Antigone" (2002), Paulin writes about O'Brien's espousal of Ismene as opting for middle, a classically liberal position, which in the last analysis means to side with the strong, i.e., in this case, the oppressive state power:

Really Ismene and O'Brien side with Creon. To mount a production of Antigone in the North of Ireland all those years ago would be to take on O'Brien's Unionist position and to suggest that the contradictions within the state meant that its politics would always be unstable, violent, tragic, until the border disappeared. (Paulin, 2002, pp. 166-167).

As a result, Paulin engages in a full discussion with O'Brien's reading of *Antigone* to come up with a politically powerful and liberating version of the tragedy that rewrites Sophocles one more time in discussion with not only Hegel, but also contemporaries like O'Brien.

While Paulin claims that O'Brien is in reality sympathetic to Creon's point of view, at the same time, he is critical of Hegel for being too sympathetic towards Antigone. He makes a reference to A. C. Bradley, and agreeing with him, he claims that Hegel's sympathies were a result of his being too much influenced by German nationalism, which made him blind toward the complexities of Creon's character (p. 169). As I tried to show in the previous section, I agree that Hegel has a sympathetic attitude toward the figure of Antigone. However, I disagree that he disregards the figure of Creon. On the contrary, he associates the figure of Creon with the self-conscious human law that restores justice into the system, brings history forward, and with this gesture, he clearly valorises the figure of Creon over Antigone. In this respect, I agree that the sympathy toward Antigone begins with Hegel and his contemporaries' revolutionary views, which extend to more modern adaptations of the play in politically torn contexts and under the influence of revolutionary thoughts. Firstly, it is in such contexts that politically subversive readings of

Antigone emerge to oppose hegemonic state power, colonialism, or imperialism. Secondly, if after the nineteenth century, Antigone is always a political play and is always underwritten by Hegelian philosophy, then it follows that putting Antigone in a modern context will inevitably bring forward the figure of Creon as a modern ruler, and the fact that the modern ruler is a hypocritical and ineffective “cardboard politician” (McDonald 2002, p. 54) necessarily changes the representation of Creon, as the holder of oppressive sovereign power for modernity and the modern audience.

### 2.3. Tom Paulin’s *The Riot Act*

Tom Paulin’s version of *Antigone*, *The Riot Act*, is a play that is both faithful to Sophocles’ text and distinct from it in certain aspects so as to reflect on the Northern Irish reality of its day. First of all, the change in the title of the play is suggestive of the modern political implications of the tragedy. It dwells on the state authority to control its population and prevent rebellion. Thus, from the start, we are introduced to the idea that Antigone will be rewritten as a play that considers the idea of rebellion and the state response to it. Secondly, the stage directions of the play are also suggestive of a modern Northern Ireland setting: “The stage is the grey of bedrock. Triangles, masonic symbols, neo-classical architrave” (Paulin, 1985, p. 9). Paulin writes that he had in mind “an ethnic Irish set” (2002, p. 167), and his inspiration for this set was a neo-classical church in Derry (p. 168). Paulin does not mention time in the play; however, the setting makes it clear that it is a modern Irish one even though the stage directions present it as Oedipus’ royal palace at Thebes. Thirdly, the Hegelian paradigm is introduced from the first page of the text. The opening stage directions of the play start with a short summary of the preceding action to Antigone, which end with a Hegelian note: “It is the law of the gods that

Antigone must bury her brother's body. Ismene, Antigone's sister, though she recognizes the imperative force of divine law, opposes Antigone's decision" (1985, p. 7). Thus, the Hegelian dichotomy of the divine law and human law is taken for granted at the outset of the play. This is important in setting an example of both the implicit and acknowledged impact of Hegelian philosophy on the modern appropriations of the play. Moreover, it once more rewrites the play as the clash of equally right but mutually exclusive powers in dialectical interplay. In an article for *The Independent*, Paulin (2003) underlines that what he intended in the play was to show the conflict of good with good, the end of which is "the denial of both exclusive claims" (para. 4).

In opting for a Hegelian interpretation of the sides of the conflict, Paulin rejects the idea of an evil Creon opposed by a heroic Antigone. Yet, he is critical of the state mechanism in power both in Thebes and North of Ireland alike. So, instead of the straightforward conflict between Unionism and Nationalism in Ireland, Paulin prefers to develop his characters in such a way that they are both representative of the political actors in his time, and also strong individualities with their internal conflicts and passions. In doing this, Paulin tries to find a distinctive voice in Irish vernacular. Paulin makes use of both Irish idiom, words such as "eejit" (Paulin 1985, p. 18, 37), "the bairn" (p. 61) "my own wee man" (p. 60), "mould", "sleaked", and "wick" (Paulin, 2003, para. 7), "wild" with its distinctive usage in Ireland (Paulin, 1984, p. 33), and Irish funeral customs such as referring to Eteocles' burial to be "a full state funeral—reversed arms, carriage and so on" (p. 17). In this respect, the usage of Irish vernacular and customs help create both a local and individualized effect in a particular historical setting.



In building the characters, Paulin turns to current examples. His Creon is a modern politician informed very much from the loyalist Protestant figure of Ian Paisley (McDonald and Walton, 2002, p. 53). In the stage directions, Paulin describes his speech in the following words: “Often he seems to be speaking purely for his own delight, savouring certain juicy vowels, whipping others into fine peaks” (1985, p. 15). Creon’s initial speech where he announces his edict to the public is presented in language very similar to a politician’s press conference:

Mr Chairman, loyal citizens of Thebes, these recent months have indeed been a most distressing time for us all . . . . And in the coming months I shall be doing a very great deal of listening, sounding opinions and so forth. However, let me say this, and say it plainly right at the very outset, that if ever any man should find himself faced with a choice between betraying his country and betraying his friend, then he must swiftly place that friend in the hands of the authorities . . . . Thank you all for coming, and any questions just now? We have one minute. (*Flashes a stonewall smile*) (pp. 15-17).

Paulin describes his intention in his portrayal of Creon in the following words: “I wanted Creon to be a kind of puritan gangster, a megalomaniac who spoke alternately in an English public school voice and a deep menacing Ulster growl. I used the Ulster vernacular as far as I could” (2002, p. 167). Paulin is criticised by McDonald (2002) and himself (2002) for reducing the figure of Creon to the modern politician, and thus overlooking the balance his position posits in regard to Antigone’s. According to McDonald, Paulin’s Creon speaks like a typical Unionist politician in the North of Ireland, and “[b]ecause right is clearly not on the side of this cardboard politician, this reduces Creon’s authority and his position as a valid counterbalance to Antigone” (2002, p. 54). Similarly, Paulin writes that nationalism makes one too sympathetic to the side of Antigone, and unable to take on the complexity of Creon’s actions (p. 169). In rethinking the part of Creon, almost twenty year after *The Riot Act*, he is somehow critical of his own political version

reducing the figure of Creon to a conservative politician, and ultimately siding with Antigone. Paulin sheds doubt on what he sees to be his Hegelian reading of Antigone against O'Brien in the following comment: "I worry sometimes that I inflicted my views of Hegel and O'Brien on the cast" (2002, p. 168).

McDonald cautions: "If you reduce Creon to the representative of an unjust occupying government, this reduces the tragedy. The tragedy returns as we realize the accurate portrayal of 'Creon's' power in the North of Ireland" (2002, p. 54). Hence, according to McDonald, the problem is not the political representation of Creon from the perspective of national allegory. She underlines that there is more to what makes up "Creon" in the North of Ireland than the representatives of the occupying British or the Unionist politicians. She warns against reducing the figure of Creon to only one facet of the bigger problem. Instead, she proposes to read the figure of Creon in its full panoply to better evaluate the scope of the national conflict. Paulin is also suggestive of rethinking the part of Creon in a more complex way. Yet, he still thinks in allegorical symbols as the concluding sentence of the essay in which he is critical of the everyday representations of the figure of Creon in life: "Some people are institutionalized—they aren't Creons, but they are his shadows, his clones" (2002, p. 170).

In the 2003 article, however, Paulin defends his portrayal in the play as one that rejects the stereotypical representations of the bad state versus the good individual (para. 4). As a result, he wanted to show the characters in differing moods, dimensions and in their own dynamism. The devastated Creon at the end of the play is quite apart from the cardboard politician at the beginning. He is very much like the horror-stricken Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as he asks for darkness,

“no light at all”, and is led away by the Chorus. Even his language is radically changed. Creon’s final lines are his speaking to himself thus:

Wicked, cack-handed,  
that's Creon.  
Made a right blood-mess,  
did Creon.  
And where's the end of it?  
Ask Creon. (Paulin, 1984, p. 62)

No longer so sure of his principles or government, Creon can now be seen as a shattered human being who has only himself to blame. Paulin’s *Antigone*, too, can employ harsh political language as Creon, such as when she protests him in modern slang:

Down in the dark earth  
there's no law says,  
'Break with your own kin,  
go lick the state' (p. 27).

Yet, in her final speech, she does not seem so sure of herself. It is even as though she expected to be saved by the gods, and is disappointed to see the case otherwise:

*(Shivers slightly; the guards move in on her)*  
City of my fathers,  
and you gods of ours,  
oh, watch them take me.  
I loved, and feared the gods –  
tell me that wasn't wrong. (p. 48)

Paulin’s *Ismene*, on the other hand, is an O’Brien like figure who thinks, “It’s hardly worth it” (p. 14), and contests *Antigone* in powerful language that has always been influential on the general public:

You burn for them,  
but they're cold things, principles. (p. 13)  
...  
You'll change nothing,  
only make it worse (p. 14)

In giving voice to *Tiresias*, Paulin (2003) states that he had in mind two figures of recent days: “the speech and style of the old Ulster poet John Hewitt were in my

head, but a figure like Harold Macmillan, who spoke out that year in admiration of the miners he'd fought alongside in the trenches, was also with me" (para. 8). Placing his Tiresias somewhere between the leftist Irish poet and British conservative politician, Paulin aims to arrive at a figure who cannot openly oppose Creon, but is against the violence and sympathetic to opposition:

Now so much blood's been spilt  
there's none can call a halt  
to those thrawn and jaggy hates  
deep-rooted in your state (Paulin 1984, p. 53-54)

Tiresias' words are the wisdom to save not only Thebes, but also the North of Ireland. Paulin underlines that the analogy between Sophocles' play and the North of Ireland shows the terrible truth that "neither Ismene, nor even Connor Cruise O'Brien, can prevent a civil war happening" (1986, p. 28). This is the momentum that makes Paulin's play turn around the conflict. The catastrophe is at hand, the powers at play are set in motion, people can foresee the impending doom of civil war; yet, the excessive qualities of both sides are inevitable. A direct allusion to O'Brien comes from the leader of the chorus: "Now Antigone must die. / I ask you is it worth it / for a handful of dust on Polynices?" (Paulin, 1984, p. 35). So, the whole play revolves around this question of O'Brien as to whether it is worth it or not. As the end of the play shows Creon devastated, the curtain falls with the Chorus' final remark:

When men get proud, they hurl hard words, then suffer for it.  
Let them grow old and take no harm yet: they still get punished.  
It teaches them. It teaches us. (p. 63)

Hence, even though the end of a tragedy is not to teach a moral (Paulin 1986, p. 28), Antigone's act is effective in teaching the state, and changing the status quo. Although agreeing in principle with O'Brien in terms of rejecting the one-sided espousal of the figure of Antigone, Paulin points toward a different direction than

him. He thinks that it is worth it. He interprets Sophocles' message in the play to be referring to the figure of Antigone as what saves the majority turning into opportunists and careerists (Paulin, 2002, p. 28). According to Paulin, we owe our freedoms to headstrong people like Antigone:

The idea that there are certain principles, certain ethical positions, that are sacred, and that cannot be shirked, is what Antigone embodies. One of the great English heroes, John Bunyan, who served 17 years in jail under Charles II for refusing to sign an agreement not to preach, is a version of the Antigone story. Free speech and freedom depend on such stubborn people. (Paulin, 2002, p. 29)

## CHAPTER 3

### ANTIGONE AND THE ETHICS OF THE REAL

In the previous chapter, I discussed Hegel's reading of *Antigone* as constitutive of the philosophical discourse on *Antigone* in modernity. I also underlined that from another perspective, Hegel's intention in reading *Antigone* was to trace the journey of Spirit through history in coming to self-consciousness. Hence, as Dennis Schmidt argues, Hegel's intention is not to come up with a literary analysis of the play or the hero, but to demonstrate the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) of Spirit in its self-consciousness throughout history (Schmidt, 2001, p. 103). This inquiry into ethics, which I argued to be in relation to politics, leads to another reading of *Antigone* into the question of ethics from the field of psychoanalysis. In this chapter, I carry out a discussion on Jacques Lacan's reading of *Antigone* in his Seminar VII, entitled *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, in which he takes up Sophocles' *Antigone* to come up with an understanding on the ethical grounds of psychoanalysis and the tragic essence at the root of psychoanalytical experience. At the same time, I argue whether Lacan's ethical reading leads to an apolitical rewriting of *Antigone*. Secondly, in thinking about the interrelatedness between ethics and politics in the discussion of *Antigone*, I take up Slavoj Žižek's reading of Lacan, which I argue is a rewriting of Lacan in itself. Finally, I will discuss Žižek's version of *Antigone* as a parody of the play, which he uses to exemplify his philosophical views on the ethics of the real.

#### 2.1. Lacan's *Antigone* in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*

Lacan's reading of *Antigone* differs extensively from Hegel's, and Lacan criticizes Hegel by saying that "Hegel nowhere appears to me to be weaker than he is in the

sphere of poetics, and this is especially true of what he has to say about Antigone” (Lacan, 1997, p. 249). Lacan is especially critical of Hegel’s reading of *Antigone* as a conflict of discourses that move toward reconciliation. He finds it highly dubitable that one should see any form of reconciliation at the end of the tragedy (pp. 240-50). Simon Critchley also writes that Lacan seeks to distance his dialectic of desire from any Hegelianism (2009, p. 200). Instead, Lacan proposes to read *Antigone* as demonstrative of the ethics of psychoanalysis, in which he puts Antigone in relation to her desire for death and the notion of the real.

Before drawing on the difference of Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* from Hegel’s, I want to emphasize two common points in the overall approach of the two thinkers so as to demonstrate their respective ways in rewriting *Antigone*. The first similarity of Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* to Hegel’s is that he, too, comes up with a distinctive reading of Antigone via psychoanalysis for modernity, in which he reads Antigone as an ethical figure in its particular relationship with the death drive and the real. In a similar move to what Hegel does in philosophy, Lacan also comes up with a rewriting of *Antigone* in his analysis of the figure and the tragedy of Antigone. The second similarity is the way Lacan takes up the discussion on Antigone in the field of ethics similar to Hegel, who in writing about the *Sittlichkeit*, the ethical life of the Spirit, explored the ethicality of the subject in the self-consciousness of his act. Likewise, Lacan questions the validity to speak about the ethics of psychoanalysis, and answering his own open-ended question, he turns to Antigone to explore the making of the ethical subject. Consequently, in reading *Antigone*, we are in the realm of ethics for both thinkers. As I argued in the previous chapter in relation to Hegel, whether the ethical position embodied by the figure of Antigone also qualifies her as a political subject for Lacan will be one of the questions of this chapter in terms of

my discussion of the possibility for the modern political subject in the figure of Antigone.

Lacan dedicated his seminars of 1959-1960 to the development of the concept of ethics in psychoanalysis. According to Terry Eagleton, there is a turn toward ethics in the climate of post-1968 France when “politics gives way to ethics, or if you prefer, Marx and Hegel yield ground to Kant”. Eagleton criticizes French philosophy with charges of elitism concerning what he generalizes as “the ethics of the real” (2010, p. 106). He contends that for Derrida, Lacan, and Levinas the political becomes a sphere of commonplace law and administration whereas the ethical is prioritized as a sexy affair concerning values such as the heroic, the sublime and the absolute (p. 107). Firstly, historically speaking, if we are to speak about a turn to ethics, Lacan’s seminar dates before the 1968 movements in France. Thus, Eagleton is wrong to assume that a decline in the interest in politics was the reason for the turn toward ethics concerning Lacan. Secondly, there does seem to be political reasons for a turn toward ethics in the second half of the twentieth century. The long nineteenth century of revolutions gave rise to significant changes in the social and state structures throughout Europe. Following that period, twentieth century socialist revolutions were unable to fulfil their promises of equality and freedom, and instead ended up being hegemonic state apparatuses for all their claims for liberation from oppression and capitalism. This feeling was heightened in the post-second world war period when the ethical emerged as a central issue after the experience of fascism, Holocaust, and Nazi occupation across Europe. All these definitely turned out to be major sources of pessimism and disillusionment for European intellectuals, whose inclination toward ethics can be thought of as a response to the political impasses of their particular moment in history. Ethics is



taken up philosophically from different areas of social sciences as a critique into the stakes of what conditions the political sphere in terms of not only what ought to be done, but also what will be the grounds for ethical action for the subject, which is simultaneously supposed to condition the overall functioning of the society. In this respect, even though one could agree with Eagleton in thinking that politics loses its allure in the second half of the twentieth century due to the historical developments, I would argue that the turn toward ethics is not a search for another sexy topic at all; on the contrary, it is the result of the need to find a way out of the political disillusionment and a means to formulate the ethical grounds that ought to condition the political.

In thinking about Lacan's conception of and turn to ethics from a historical context, I think that Eagleton has a point in thinking him alongside his contemporaries from continental philosophy, such as Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. I would add Gilles Deleuze, and Maurice Blanchot though the list is not exhaustive. The reason why I propose to think Lacan alongside these philosophers is the common philosophical and political grounds that give rise to their thought that centred on similar themes in addition to the disillusionment brought about by the political climate of the twentieth century: All these thinkers had seen the Nazi occupation in France and suffered its consequences. Yet, in the field of philosophy, they were all somehow in discussion with Nietzsche and Heidegger. I am tempted to think that the affiliation of both with nationalist ideas and especially the Nazi background of Heidegger became a motive in their ethical inquiries. Another important characteristic of these thinkers was their reception of Hegel through Alexandre Kojève's lectures in which notions of dialectics and inter-subjectivity played an important role in the construction of the subject. All these point toward a

convergence in terms of the subject matter of their philosophical approaches. Also, their writings on ethics bear crucial parallelism and offer insight into Lacan's. This might be the reason why Eagleton feels free to group them under the rubric of "the ethics of the real", which is a distinctively Lacanian concept. In thinking about Lacan's discussion of ethics in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* as the subject's relation to the real, the inassimilable core of being that resists symbolization, to desire as determined by the desire of the other, to the extent that it is internalized by the subject, as something that is both inside and outside of the subject, I will also be thinking about the Levinasian concept of radical alterity, the figure of the neighbour as an otherness that is both inside and outside. Levinas' ethics is not only prominent in Lacan's ethical approach to psychoanalysis, but one could also trace it to Deleuze's understanding of ethics of the event and the wound, and Blanchot's idea of death and the mortal wound, up until Derrida's understanding of responsibility and politics of friendship. In this chapter, as a representative relation between the thoughts of these thinkers and the intertextuality as reflected in their work, I will be focusing on the understanding of ethics in Levinas, in linking it with Lacanian understanding of ethics in terms of the psychoanalytical subject, and try to come up with a discussion of ethics that gives ground toward the discussion of politics and the making of the modern political subject.

Even though Kant is the philosopher that Lacan evokes in writing about ethics (Lacan, 1997, p. 315), it is apparent that his is not the Kantian ethics of duty with the categorical imperative at work in the subject, but a certain relationship with the alterity that is within the subject. This approach brings him in line with Levinas, who places traumatism caused by the relation with the neighbour at the heart of the ethical subject. This parallelism is taken up by Simon Critchley in his book, *Ethics*,

*Politics, Subjectivity* (2009), in which he offers a rapprochement of Levinas and Lacan while maintaining their difference of attitude toward philosophy and psychoanalysis. Bringing together the Levinasian conception of the subject with Lacan's account of ethical experience, Critchley aims at both making use of psychoanalytical categories to expand on Levinas' work and opening up to the possibility of emphasizing the ethical dimension to psychoanalytic experience (2009, p. 199). Hence, he begins by drawing a homology between ethical subjectivity in Lacan and Levinas. He underlines that the structure of the Lacanian ethical subject is organized around the Thing, namely the Freudian *das Ding*, and similarly the Levinasian subject is organized around the idea of trauma as a result of one's encounter with the other and symbolized with the idea of "the other within the same" (p. 207). Critchley comments "it is because the ethical moment in Lacan articulates itself in relation to the real that it is *traumatic*. Contact with the real leaves the subject with the affect of trauma", and from a Levinasian point of view "the cause of trauma in the subject is the figure of the neighbour, the fellow human being, namely that being with whom I am in an ethical relation" (p. 199). Critchley revisits the notion of the *Nebenmensch*, the fellow human being in Freud and Lacan, and its relationship to the concept of the neighbour as the other in Levinas: the fellow human being is the object of both love and hate, both similar to me and as something strange to me, as the Thing:

[T]he *Nebenmensch als Ding* is 'the absolute other of the subject' that is simultaneously at the heart of the subject, the other within the self that defines what is most central to the subject, a centrality that is not abstract but is completely bound up, for Lacan, with 'the world of desires' (p. 211)

In both Lacan and Levinas, the encounter with the other, who is both inside and outside the subject, makes up the ethical moment. In Lacan, the other as the Thing

belongs to the order of the real and is situated in the real. In this respect, Critchley emphasizes that the ethical in Lacan is articulated in relation to the order of the real (p. 198).

Elaborating on the question of ethics in the history of philosophy, Lacan goes to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and is critical of the Aristotelian idea of the sovereign good as the ultimate truth that the subject should strive for. He associates this understanding with traditional ethics and with the assumption that "any inquiry into ethics must concern the field of the ideal, if not of the unreal" (Lacan, 1997, p. 11). Finding this assumption superficial, Lacan proposes to go more deeply into the notion of the real in search of a definition of ethics. There is no ideal or sovereign good located outside the subject. The truth that ethics seeks does not exist in a superior law. On the contrary, it is a particular truth hidden within the subject that psychoanalysis looks for in its inquiry into ethics. In situating the ethical within the real, Lacan turns to his own distinction of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real (p. 24). According to this, the imaginary is the order based on the formation of the ego during the mirror stage when the human infant between six and eighteen months of age identifies with her image on the mirror. From a linguistic dimension, it is the site of the signified and signification. Secondly, the symbolic is the linguistic, grammatical, and cultural structure in which the ego can grow into a subject by naming itself as "I". From a linguistic dimension, it is the site of the signifier. The symbolic, by defining the universe in closed systems and binary oppositions of either/or, also causes a split in the formation of the subject. Meanwhile, confronted by the name of the father (both the symbolic "no/*non*", the prohibition, and the "name/*nom*" of the father), the subject learns that it has to obey the laws of the symbolic that exist prior to the subject and into which it enters. Thirdly, the real is

the hard core of reality that cannot be contained by the symbolic. It is pre-linguistic and pre-human. It is what is beyond the symbolic, that which resists symbolization, and all that falls outside language: death, the pre-natal experience of the unborn baby, nature as not appropriated by the human. The real is different from reality in the sense that reality is a dimension of the real that could be symbolized. The real is what lies beyond it. It is conditioned by the primal lack at the heart of the human being (Evans, 1996, pp. 84-85, 162, 203; Žižek, 2005. pp. 228-233).

The encounter with the real is a traumatic encounter for the subject. Yet, it is the only possibly ethical relation, as well. It means to traverse fantasy and confront the split state of one's subjecthood. It is to look into the abyss that is at the heart of one's existence. In this sense, Antigone is the ethical figure par excellence for Lacan because she does not shrink from her encounter with the real. What is more, she desires this encounter, and follows it to the very last, which makes her emerge as the incarnation of ethical as such. Critchley comments that in Lacanian terms "the subject is articulated through a relation to the real, . . . where the original traumatism of the other is the Thing, *das Ding*." (p. 190), and "trauma is the subjective affect of contact with the real. It is the opening up of the ego to an exteriority that shatters its economic unity" (p. 191). According to Lacan, the Thing (*das Ding*) is the prehistoric other that is impossible to forget (Lacan, 1997, p. 71). It is what is beyond the signified, and we can have an idea of the Thing only to the extent that it renders itself to language, that it becomes word. However, at its core, there will always be a portion of the real that cannot be contained within language That is why it will always remain strange, no matter how proximate it is. This element of the real is isolated by the subject in its initial encounter with the fellow human being (*Nebenmensch*). It is the first outside; strange and even hostile on occasion (p. 52).

The subject experiences it as alien; even though it is something close and alike, it is at the same time some otherness that it separates itself from, and in this sense, it is situated outside the subject.

As ethics is defined by one's encounter with the real, it is from this special perspective that Antigone gains a special status as an ethical figure. Antigone is the representative figure of the ethical encounter with the real. According to Terry Eagleton (2010), "the ethical is in the end really nothing to do with anybody but oneself, and one's definitive encounter with death" (p. 107). I partially disagree with Eagleton because while this holds true for Antigone, the scope of the encounter is not limited to one's mortality. Now that the real is that which that resists being contained within language, the human subject may only have instances in which she has a glimpse at this real. The important thing for Lacan is the recognition that there is a real, and one's acceptance and not shirking from a relationship with her existence as shaped by the real. In this respect, an encounter with the real is the ethical act par excellence for Lacan, and Antigone represents an undiluted instance of such an encounter. This is where both her beauty and her splendour arise for Lacan.

Lacan opens his Seminar VII by emphasizing that speaking about the ethics of psychoanalysis means thinking about the experience of psychoanalysis both in and beyond the analytical process. On the one hand, it means to think of the response given by the analyst to the analysand's demand (here, the word demand should be understood rather as a Lacanian term to signify desire as constructed by the relation between need and lack); however, on the other, it means to specify what the collective work that psychoanalysis engages with is in that certain moment in history. Therefore, Lacan constructs his ethics of psychoanalysis not only in relation to the clinical practice, but also in relation to the socio-political reality in which it

operates. In this respect, from the beginning, Lacan builds the ethics of psychoanalysis both from an individual-psychological and social-political perspective, which will be more evident in his discussion on the ends of the analytical practice, not only in the sense of what is to be hoped for in the end of a patient's analysis, but also in the sense of the ethical aims of psychoanalysis as a whole. After following the discussion of Antigone's role as an ethical subject through an exposition of Lacan's basic concepts on this topic such as desire, the death instinct, the real, and *Atè*, I will revisit this argument that brings together the ethical with the social-political. What I aim to show is how the political is ultimately conditioned by one's relation to the ethical in Lacan's thought, and what this tells us about the modern political subject.

Lacan emphasizes that he has a preference for the word ethics instead of morality for a reason. In coming up with a discussion of morality vs. ethics, the first word he evokes is "transgression" (Lacan, 1997, p. 2). The reason why he does this is that the former denotes a sense of what is between the boundaries of good or acceptable conduct, whereas the second denotes the field of its transgression, as well. Drawing from his examples, we can see that the three layers of transgression that is constructive from a psychoanalytical perspective are the analysand's transgression in the analytic practice, the Freudian idea of the murder of the father as constructive of the idea of civilization, and the death instinct that the human being is anchored deep within to the extent of transgressing the limits of what is living and human in life itself (p. 2). Lacan does not claim to lay aside moral experience that refers to sanctions, commands, and obligations. Instead, he sees this dimension of ethics as indispensable; however, he is more interested in the moral and its beyond in different layers of meaning clustered around different theoretical and clinical realities.

Starting from the dichotomy of morality and ethics, Lacan questions whether psychoanalysis is simply another development of ethical reflection that asks questions such as “Given our condition as men, what must we do in order to act in the right way? (1997, p. 19) Lacan does not dismiss this question in an off-handed manner and underlines that it is essential to arrive at the recognition of the moral imperative at work in all our experience. Yet, there is also a beyond of this moral imperative. Historically, Lacan situates this into what he calls the high point of crisis in ethics at the end of the eighteenth century. The effects of scientific developments and the moment of the French revolution pose a central shift in humanity’s making sense of its position in the universe. Lacan thinks that Kantian ethics and especially his idea of the categorical imperative is a manifestation of this crisis in which the human subject assumes responsibility over what is beyond his control or mastery. According to Freud, it is the superego that enforces the moral imperative, and forces the ego to succumb. However, Lacan underlines the moral masochism at work in the paradoxical pleasure we derive from the moral imperative. The moral law, as it is structured by the symbolic, is that through which the real is realized (p. 20). The desire for the real, as represented by the death instinct, makes up the masochistic nature of the human subject’s relation to the moral law, which is realized in its transgression.

Lacan is interested in the idea of law in a dialectical relationship with desire (1997, p. 83-84). There is a law, a categorical imperative that conditions the state of the ideal, or, that shows the ideal rule according to which the subject is supposed to conduct her life. But there is also the beyond of the law, the realm of the Thing in the order of the real, the prohibited, beyond which the subject’s desire is situated. According to Lacan, this desire is the desire of and for the mother. This is the



primordial desire to unite with the mother, who after one's initial separation becomes the first other, the Thing. But this desire for the mother is a criminal desire because of the prohibition of incest (p. 283). The moral law is closely tied to the desire of incest, and in this respect it is always articulated in relation to the real (p. 76). The body of the mother is the site of prohibition, it is what the subject can never reunite; however, it is at the same time what she can never refrain from desiring unification with. Consequently, it is this beyond of the law that desire is situated. That is also why Lacan says that desire belongs to the site of the Other or "desire is always the desire of the Other", it being linked with the mother's desire, as well. In this, Lacan links Antigone's desire to that of her mother, Jocasta and to her criminal status in her incestuous marriage (p. 283). What the subject desires is to be the object of the Other's desire, to fill the unfillable gap at the core of the Other; to be the lack, the missing piece at the centre of the Other. Therefore, there is no sovereign good outside the subject that conditions the moral imperative, but the only sovereign good is *das Ding*, the Thing, as the mother, the object of incest prohibition, as the real (p. 70). To situate oneself at the centre of the Other also means giving up on oneself as a subject, as a separate entity in itself. Hence, it is at the same time to desire death as such, it is part of what Lacan calls the death instinct. Thus, the idea of recognizing one's desire is always the recognition of the desire for death at the heart of the subject.

In relation with this death instinct, the beyond of the law, the transgression of the law is what conditions real action. First of all, it is in the psyche of the subject in the form of the death instinct. Secondly, it is in the core of the society in the form of the primordial transgression of the law as constructive of civilization as such. Thirdly, it is in the working out of the psychoanalytical practice in the form of

transference and counter-transference. As a result, the significance of the idea of transgression at the heart of the subject (ethical and political alike) lies in its founding role in Lacan's understanding of ethics as the beyond of the moral law, the beyond of both the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Desire flares up only in relation with the law "through which it becomes the desire for death" (1997, p. 84). Consequently, in thinking about the paradoxical pleasure one gets from the existence of the moral law, what Lacan calls the question of masochism in relation to the subject's relation to the law, he asks what the treatment to be given to not simply the individual, but also to "civilization and its discontents" (p. 14).

In defining the idea of the moral law as the means for the actualization of the real as far as it is structured by the symbolic, Lacan revisits Freud's opposition between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Lacan does not see an antithetical relationship between these two principles; rather what he proposes is a mutually dependent position where the two principles condition one another. The reality principle is more like a prolongation or an application of the pleasure principle (1997, p. 21). Yet, for Lacan, the interaction between these two dependent principles unveils something that controls the subject's relationship to the world. Drawing on Freud's article, Lacan calls this position as "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". It is this beyond of the pleasure and reality principles that Lacan defines an "opaque surface . . . that is known as the death instinct" (p. 21). If there is a dialectical relation between the pleasure and reality principles, then surely the third term that gives its character to the dialectic is the death instinct situated in the beyond of the pleasure principle. It is both what conditions the subject's desire and what gives its character to the nature of the real. The gateway toward the real is the death instinct situated beyond the pleasure principle. Lacan calls the death instinct

“law beyond all law”, “something which controls in the broadest senses the whole of our relationship to the world” (p. 21). Confrontation with the real and the death instinct at the heart of the subject is what gives the subject its ethicality. It means not accepting the illusion offered by fantasy in the symbolic, and the going beyond of the fantasy until one reaches the limits of her death. At the same time, situating the ethical in the real means a redefinition of the subject’s position in relation to her desire. Lacan maintains that the ultimate ethical act is not to give way relative to one’s desire (p. 319). But the question is: what is this desire and where can we situate the subject’s desire? For Lacan, the subject does not have an unambiguous, direct attitude in relation to her desire. There is an internal truth situated within the subject, which psychoanalysis aims to unveil, and which manifests itself with the character of a *Wunsch*, wish or desire (p. 24).

Crossing the boundaries of the sense of obligation, what Lacan finds is not only the death instinct, but also the notion of desire and the sense of guilt as a result of the transgression of the law. More particularly, in a discussion around Antigone, we can say that Lacan is interested in maintaining the function of desire in its relation to the death instinct of the subject in terms of defining the ethical as such. For Lacan (1997), Antigone does not get her ethical significance from her grief, her mourning or her act of burial. Antigone’s significance lies in her desire for death as representing the death instinct in its pure form. He reads Antigone as an illustration of the death instinct: “Antigone herself has been declaring from the beginning: ‘I am dead and I desire death’” (p. 281); “[Antigone] pushes to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire” (p. 282). Antigone is the incarnation of this desire; she becomes the desire itself, going beyond the limit where one desires her desire, but

instead she becomes the very embodiment of this desire. This transgression into the desire for death is what makes the figure of Antigone peculiarly ethical for Lacan. Ultimately, in her encounter with the real, Antigone is Lacan's ethical subject par excellence.

According to Lacan (1997), Antigone is in a limit zone between life and death (p. 272). Creon's punishment for Antigone is to be buried alive in a tomb. Lacan draws attention to a peculiar condition in the tragedy. On the one hand, although Polynices is dead and needs to be buried, he is denied this access to the other world. Creon condemns him to a second death, the symbolic death of a person after the physical death. As if it is not enough for Creon as a statesman to have Polynices as the traitor killed, he wants to annihilate his symbolic existence as well:

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 right to strike him. He, in fact, wants to inflict on him that second death that he has no right to inflict on him. (p. 254)

On the other hand, Antigone is alive, but due to her transgression of the law, Creon condemns her to a living death. Her symbolic death precedes her physical death. Hence, Lacan says that Antigone is situated at the boundary between life and death. This is the boundary of the living corpse, and the play turns around this image of the limit. It is the desire of Antigone that situates her in a liminal position between life and death, which Lacan also names "between two deaths", in the sense of her in-betweenness of the symbolic death and the physical death: "The limit involved, the limit that it is essential to situate if a certain phenomenon is to emerge through reflection, is something I have called the phenomenon of the beautiful, it is something I have begun to define as the limit of the second death" (p. 260). The phenomenon of the beautiful is this limit of the second death for Lacan, and it is

closely tied to the notion of transgression, the crime of Antigone. Just like Christ's image on the crucifix, in her eternal suffering, Antigone appears indestructible, immune to destruction. Going beyond death, she embodies the desire for death in terms of starting from the zero, creation from the zero, *ex nihilo* (p. 260-62). From Antigone's point of view, life can only be approached, lived or thought about from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side: "Nothing is more moving than . . . the desire that visibly emanates from the eyelids of this admirable girl" (p. 281). Therefore, the glow of beauty is simultaneous with the transgression of Antigone's *Atè*, her going beyond the limits of life and death. According to Lacan, in their relation to desire, Creon and Antigone occupy two contrasting positions that are in a dialectical relationship: Creon is the human character guilty of a wrong, in the sense of *hamartia*, contrasted by Antigone governed by a passion that she pursues to the very end, characterized by her *Atè*. Creon is the figure that goes beyond the limits of what he is entitled to within his human boundaries, and thus he is doomed to catastrophe. Antigone, on the other hand, in her liminal position between two deaths, transgresses the boundaries of the human, into the real, and becomes the ethical figure that will not give way relative to her desire. With her embodiment of the death drive, she is no longer crushed or forced to step back with the violence of the idea of death which she transcends in her being for death.

The discussion of Antigone's *Atè* makes up a large part of Lacan's understanding of her act as an ultimately ethical one. In this respect, Charles Freeland gives the following definition for the word:

More than just a pathos, she was marked by a "doom" (*Atè/ἄτη*, delusion, ruin, a judicial blindness sent by the gods), as horrifying in its unfolding as it was compelling, the darkness and density of a doom

(Atè) that was the other side of her singularly radiant splendour.  
(Freeland, 2013, p. 275)

Lacan defines *Atè* as concerning the field of the other where Antigone is (Lacan, 1997, p. 277). Antigone crosses over to the beyond of the *Atè* where her desire is situated. Antigone's *Atè* arises from her family history; it belongs to the family of Labdacides. As the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, and the outcome of their incestuous union, Antigone is marked by this misfortune. What is compelling about her is that she does not deny this misfortune or tries to stay away from it the way her sister Ismene does. Instead, she desires her *Atè*, and she walks to her doom. When seen from this perspective, her action is reminiscent of Schelling's dramatization of tragic action in which the tragic hero wills his fate, takes responsibility for it, and by doing this, claims freedom over his fate, becomes, in a sense, a subject<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, Lacan emphasizes that *Atè* is distinct from *hamartia*. It has nothing similar to an error or a mistake (p. 277). *Hamartia* is what designates Creon's action; Antigone is not mistaken the way Creon is. She is in perfect knowledge of her action and acts in perfect conformity with her desire. She is "the one who violates the limits of *Atè* through her desire" (p. 277).

According to Lacan, Antigone's *Atè* designates the limit that human life only briefly can cross. Yet, Antigone wants to go beyond this *Atè*; her desire aims at beyond the *Atè* and what is beyond the limits of the human. Consequently, Lacan asserts that "she is inhuman". Nonetheless, he is cautious to warn his audience not to "situate her at the level of the monstrous" (1997, p. 263). To paraphrase, Lacan

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<sup>9</sup> In his *Tenth Letter on Dogmatism and Criticism*, which is like a nineteenth century manifesto on the idea of the tragic, Schelling hails the championing of the notion of freedom over fate in the downfall of the tragic hero: "It was a *great* idea to have man willingly accept punishment even for an *inevitable* crime; in this way he was able to demonstrate his freedom precisely through the loss of his freedom" (Schmidt, 2001, p. 86).

suggests that by going beyond the limits of life and death, and beyond family *Atè*, Antigone also transgresses the limits of the human, and becomes inhuman. One should note here that for Lacan being “human” is not necessarily equated with something positive. On the contrary, he is highly suspicious of the limits of the human and the humanist discourse. Yet, his warning not to situate her at the level of the monstrous has a meaning that cautions to safeguard her from becoming directly the Thing, *das Ding*. Antigone herself is not the figure of the Thing that is situated beyond the symbolic and in the real; however, she is the figure of the subject that transgresses into the realm of the Thing, of death, and the order of the real. It is with this gesture that she also goes beyond the limits of the human in the pursuit of her desire, in its purest form i.e., for death. Yet, it should be noted that this inhuman position is the way that Antigone achieves her ethicality for Lacan. She becomes inhuman, she transgresses the human law, she realizes her desire, and she becomes the ethical figure par excellence. As a foil to Antigone, Creon is defined as “like all tyrants, at bottom, a human character”. Lacan underlines that the only character that knows neither pity nor fear to the end is Antigone. Creon, on the other hand, is caught in the grip of his fear after his scene with Tiresias and is no longer so sure of his action. This is what marks him as “human”: limited, oscillating, taken over by pity and fear, unable to follow his desire to the end. Antigone represents the figure of the martyr who goes beyond death in the pursuit of their passion: “Only the martyrs know neither pity nor fear. Believe me, the day when the martyrs are victorious will be the day of universal conflagration. The play is calculated to demonstrate that fact” (1997, p. 267).

Lacan reads the theme of transgression in Antigone in two layers. In the first layer, we find the figure of Antigone as reflected in Sophocles’ tragedy. Antigone

goes beyond the limit of death, toward and beyond her family *Atè*, and thus achieves an ethical status, which is also beyond the limits of the human for Lacan. According to Critchley (2010), Antigone embodies the excess of the ethical over the aesthetic, and that is how as a result of her excess, she emerges as a figure for the beautiful. In the second layer, we have the tragedy of Antigone as a work of art that transgresses the field of the symbolic into the real. Offering a reading of Freud's idea of sublimation, Lacan proposes that by transgressing its own limits, the aesthetic becomes a vehicle to attain a safe access into the real. The formula for sublimation offered by Lacan is such: "Sublimation is the satisfaction of the drive with a change of object, that is, without repression" (293). Critchley makes the following summary:

Sublimation is the satisfaction of a drive in so far as the drive is, through the work of sublimation, deflected from its aim (*Ziel*). . . . In Lacanian terms, sublimation is the realization of one's desire, where one realizes that one's desire will not be realized, where one realizes the lack of being that one is. So, in the absence of the possibility of happiness—that is, in the awareness of the tragic dimension of human experience (a tragedy confronted on the couch in the form of symptoms)—only sublimation can save us. (2009, pp. 201-202)

For Lacan, the drive in question is primarily the death drive. The deflection of the death drive in the form of sublimation is traced both in the work of analysis and in the art of tragedy, which Antigone is a prominent example of. As we watch the movement of Antigone's death drive, we gain access to the domain of the real, as well. In this respect, sublimation in the work of art is the method to facilitate a safe access into the real. Lacan argues that the effect of catharsis offered by the tragedy of Antigone is a way to experience the real while remaining in the symbolic. As the real is the impossible, that which resists all symbolization and cannot be contained in language as such, the only way we can have a glimpse at the real is through the sublimation in art. In this sense, Critchley points out that the aesthetic becomes a veil to unveil the truth of the real: "The aesthetic is a veil which permits an unveiling, *une*



*voile* which allows *un dévoilement*, recalling the double structure of truth as *aletheia* in Heidegger, as the bivalence of concealment and unconcealment” (p. 204). It is only through its sublimation in the tragedy that we have an idea of the Thing (*das Ding*) that Antigone’s desire is representative of. Critchley underlines that this is what makes Antigone and the experience of the tragic so important for Seminar VII (Critchley, 2009, p. 203). The notion of sublimation is at the heart of the aesthetic experience. Lacan, reading Freud, comments that the only happiness available for the subject is through sublimation. The sublimation offered by the work of art, and especially the work of tragedy, of which Antigone is an outstanding example, is the only means for the subject to achieve a relation to her desire, her death, and the Thing.

According to Critchley (2009), the aesthetic intimates the excess of the ethical over the aesthetic. The real, as the ethical, exceeds the symbolic, but it is only through the symbolic that we have access to the real. In this sense, the tragedy of *Antigone* becomes the aesthetic means to traverse the symbolic within the symbolic. In Critchley’s phrasing, it is “the transgression of the aesthetic through the aesthetic” (p. 203). In Antigone’s act, we witness the transgression into the real, yet remaining in a safe distance as regards to the real through the work of sublimation involved in the art of tragedy. In terms of its relationship with the process of sublimation, tragedy creates an effect of beauty that enables an appreciation of the real through the symbolic. In this respect, Critchley assesses the importance of Antigone for Lacan in her being the figure par excellence for the beautiful. Antigone embodies the excess of the ethical over the aesthetic (p. 203). He comments that the effect of her beauty is to trace the sublime movement of the ethical within the aesthetic. Lacan’s point is that the effect of Antigone in the zone between life and death, the two symbolically

differentiated fields, is the effect of beauty on desire (Lacan, 1997, p. 248).

Therefore, with the effect of beauty created by the figure of Antigone, the audience is provided with a medium to access the zone of pure desire from a safe distance. The beauty effect derives from Antigone's *Atè*; the relationship of the hero to the limit, which she transgresses into the real, into death. This is a limit beyond which there is a blinding effect. But the aesthetic side of Antigone forms a relation to the beyond of the symbolic, to the real. Her beauty screens us from the nature of the real, from the blinding effect of the death instinct.

Lacan's notion of the beautiful is not related to an understanding of ideal beauty. Rather, it borders on the Kantian distinction of the sublime in relation to the beautiful. Lacan comments that "It is only on the basis of the apprehension of the beautiful at the very point of the transition between life and death that we can try to reinstate ideal beauty" (p. 297). If any notion of ideal beauty is to develop, it has to be rooted in an understanding of the beautiful in its relation to the lack of being, to the death instinct, and to the real as Antigone is an example of. The splendour and beauty of Antigone springs from the way it puts us in a confrontation in relation to our death. The sublimation offered by the aesthetic, the figure of Antigone as the beautiful shields us from the traumatic effects of the real, yet, at the same time facilitating a safe access to the real. Critchley writes that "the shadow of *das Ding* falls across the aesthetic object" (2009, p. 203). Eagleton (2003) also writes of this effect of tragedy in terms of helping us to come to terms with our own mortality: "Tragedy can be among other things a symbolic coming to terms with out finitude and fragility, without which any political project is likely to founder" (p. xv).

In order to illustrate the conditions under which Antigone, as the representative of the death instinct, gives the effect of the beautiful, Lacan uses the

metaphor of anamorphosis. When we look at an anamorphosis from a direct angle, we are confronted with a shapeless ugliness, which Lacan likens to our exposure to the real. However, only when looked from a certain angle “a marvellous illusion in the form of a beautiful passion appears” (Critchley, 2009, p. 273). The surface that allows the image of Antigone to rise up as an image of passion is art in the form of tragedy. We cannot bear to look directly into the real, the abyss at the core of our being. We need a certain aesthetic screen that will give shape to the distorted image in front of us. For Lacan, art in the form of tragedy is such a form that enables a glimpse into the real. That is why Antigone in her terrible splendour, as a representative of the death instinct, as a figure that crosses the limits of life into death, can appear to the viewer as the beautiful as such. Only in perceiving her as beautiful, we have access to her desire, which is a desire for death. Hence, Critchley underlines that the effect of Antigone’s beauty is both to reveal the sublime movement into the real, and to protect us from it.

After carrying out a discussion of the tragedy of Antigone as representative of the only possible ethical relation of the subject to her “being for death”, Lacan concludes his Seminar VII (1997) by elaborating on “The Tragic Dimension of Psychoanalytic Experience”. Turning to the analytical experience from an ethical perspective, he questions the moral goals of psychoanalysis. In this respect, the first thing Lacan is critical of is what he calls “the service of goods” (p. 313). He takes this service of goods as an umbrella term that covers all the utilitarian or material benefit one gets from life from “private goods, family goods, domestic goods, other goods that solicit us, the goods of our trade or our profession, the goods of the city, etc.”; it is “well-founded and legitimate function” that is bound up with “a situation of individual comfort (p. 303). According to him, psychoanalysis has nothing to do

with this service of the goods, which brings him to the question of the demand for happiness in therapy and what analysis can promise the subject.

In talking about happiness, Lacan directly points toward the field of politics: “Happiness has become a political matter,” he contends, “There is no satisfaction for the individual outside of the satisfaction of all” (p. 292). In the given system of the service of goods, analysis can never promise happiness. Happiness is not exclusively related to the psyche of the individual, but it is related to the social functioning of the human community. As a result, Lacan warns analysts against becoming the guarantors of the bourgeois illusion of happiness: “To make oneself the guarantor of the possibility that a subject will in some way be able to find happiness even in analysis is a form of fraud.” And he adds that “There is absolutely no reason why we should make ourselves the guarantors of the bourgeois dream” (p. 303). In this respect, the goal at the end of analysis is to call for a confrontation with “the human condition” and put the analysand in a relationship to her own death, which is always already defined by desire as such (pp. 303-304). Simon Critchley comments on this point by saying that “the moral goal of psychoanalysis consists in putting the subject in a relation to its desire, of confronting the lack of being that one is, which is always bound up with the relation to death” (2009, p. 202).

This brings Lacan to the problem of how to recognize the nature of desire in the ethical question: “Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?” (Lacan, 1997, p. 314). Up till now, I have discussed that this desire is totally apart from and even opposed to the traditional understanding of desire in the sense of getting what the subject explicitly wants, which Lacan criticizes under the rubric of the service of the goods. This is prominent in his discussion of *Antigone*, in which *Antigone* is the figure in an ethical relation respective of her desire, whereas *Creon* is

the ruler who is in the service of the goods. Ethically speaking, this puts him in a position that valorises the ideal understanding of the good discussed above. Creon supposedly seeks the good of all. As a result, he claims that he cannot treat the corpses of the hero and the traitor the same way. Lacan underlines that from a Kantian perspective, this puts Creon in a position of acting in conformity with the categorical imperative. However, Lacan also draws attention to the fact that by condemning Polynices to a second death, Creon forgets his own status as a human being, as being for death, and in a sense, tries to overpower death (p. 254). This also puts him in a problematic relation in regard to his desire. Instead of acknowledging the “triumph of being for death” (p. 313), the way Antigone does and attains the status of an ethical hero that will not give way relative to her desire, Creon is crushed by the death that he is anxious to disclaim. For Lacan, this emerges as a political problem as well as an ethical one. There is a social and political dimension that cuts across the ethical positioning of the figure of Antigone:

Things could have been resolved if the social body had been willing to pardon, to forget and cover over everything with the same funeral rites. It is because the community refuses this that Antigone is required to sacrifice her own being in order to maintain that essential being which is the family Atè. Antigone perpetuates, eternalizes, immortalizes that Atè. (p. 283)

The first political emphasis here is the fact that things could have been different in a different political situation. In a society based on recognition for the other and forgiveness instead of hatred and exclusion, things could have been different. This view is also the reminiscent of demands for various truth and reconciliation commissions throughout the second half of the twentieth century in countries torn by political conflict and violations of human rights. Not only the ethical but also the political problem is the conditions that necessitate the figure of Antigone to emerge.

The problem of the denial of basic rights and of the recognition of the appropriation of one's relationship to death is the underlying source of the tragedy in terms of politics. Antigone is the figure that rises up in rebellion as an ethical figure, refuses to yield to the power mechanism that denies her the pursuit of her desire as such. In this respect, it can be argued that Antigone emerges as a political figure as well as the ethical figure that she is for Lacan.

At the same time, Lacan is also critical of traditional ethics based on the service of the goods and the infinite postponement of desire. One of the figures he evokes in this sense is Hitler when he arrived in Paris. Lacan maintains that the essential point of their emphasis is that work must go on, which for Lacan means "this is on no account the moment to express the least surge of desire" (p. 315). Hence, Lacan reads the demand of fascist ideology as the continuation of the service of goods and denial of the access to desire where desire is "the metonymy of our being" (p. 321). Thus, fascism demands us to give up on our desire and deny the essence of being. A figure of rebellion like Antigone is the one who necessarily is ready to pay the price for access to desire, for the realization of one's truth of existence. From an analytical point of view, Lacan writes that "the only thing which one can be guilty of is having given ground relative to one's desire" (p. 319). The hold of desire takes the form of the return of the repressed, the return of the real to its original place, being based on the family history, the *Atè* of the individual that becomes manifest during the analytical practice and makes a demand on the subject in terms of acting in conformity of one's desire. In this respect, the figure of Antigone, in her *Atè*, also becomes the paradigm of the subject in psychoanalysis. Hence, Lacan makes the point:

If analysis has a meaning, desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of that which

roots us in a particular destiny, and that destiny demands insistently that the debt be paid, and desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business. (p. 319)

In one's relation to her desire, Lacan makes a distinction between the ordinary man and the hero. According to Lacan, the hero is the ordinary person who follows the path to her desire to the very end (319). In the hero, desire is pure, purified as in the experience of catharsis in the Lacanian sense, and she is free from the triple structure of hatred, guilt, and fear that defines the ordinary man. Secondly, the hero is someone who may be betrayed by impunity. A wrong done goes unpunished. If the person confronted by this situation succumbs and gives way on her desire, as in the figure of Ismene, she is forever in the service of the gods, and ends up as "the ordinary man" (p. 319). Antigone, as the hero, not only does not give way on her desire, but also "frees his adversary too" (p. 320) in the act of dragging Creon to the same doom that befalls her. To come back to the problem of the psychoanalytical experience, the heroic status reached at the end of the analysis is nothing other than to encounter the limit in which the problematic of desire is raised: What the subject achieves in analysis is not just that access to desire, but "the acceptance of something that began to be articulated before him in previous generations, and which is strictly speaking *Atè*. Although this *Atè* does not always reach the tragic level of Antigone's *Atè*, it is nevertheless closely related to misfortune" (p. 300). Just like Antigone, the analysand is put in direct contact with her desire, encounters the *Atè* as the misfortune that has defined her until now, and does not shrink from this encounter in the protective environment of analysis. This is the tragic dimension of the analytic experience: it puts the subject in a relation to her desire as a being for death; the analysand traverses through the realm of fantasy in pursuit of her desire, which brings her a heroic status in her relation to her death as such. No promise of

happiness, but a glimpse into the real, and an encounter with one's inner truth is what is given at the end of the analysis. In this respect, the practice of psychoanalysis is similar to the experience of the aesthetic in the form of the tragic catharsis that facilitates an ethical encounter with the real through the protective shield of sublimation. What analysis offers is another instance of sublimation similar to the sublimation in art.

In trying to understand the sublimation offered by analysis, I propose to adapt Simon Critchley's comments on the aesthetic experience as sublimation to the analytic experience: "the ever-inadequate symbolization of that Thing that resists symbolization. This inadequate symbolization both allows the subject contact with the real (which leaves the affect of trauma in the subject) and protects the subject from the direct glare of *das Ding*" (Critchley, 2009, p. 204). In the experience of analysis, we are put in a relation with the real in the form of the Thing and as the location of our desire, but in a way to protect the subject from the trauma created by the direct encounter with the real, that is, through the sublimation that takes place within the confines of the symbolic order. In this sense, again to put in a parallel with Critchley's discussion of the aesthetic, it is the traversing of the symbolic through the symbolic into the real.

The analytic process develops into a redefinition of the subject's desire throughout analysis via the processes of transference and counter-transference. In this respect, it is the bringing together of a new narrative, of constructing a new symbolic dimension to the experience of desire. This is nothing less than providing the subject with a screen located in the symbolic order from which to look into the order of the real where her desire is situated. The real can only be experienced through the symbolic without being overwhelmed by the nauseating effect and the



monstrosity of the Thing. Henceforth, psychoanalysis is described as an experience of sublimation, which offers the subject a safe encounter with the real that is inside her. Consequently, Lacan notes that the only satisfaction of an instinct is through sublimation (1997, p. 293), and analysis provides another instance to sublimation, which is, in a way, similar to the one offered by the tragedy as a work of art.

Returning to the definition of sublimation as the satisfaction of a drive with a change of object, Lacan says that the change of object offered by analysis is nothing other than the analyst herself. Instead of the place where one's primary objects of desire, such as the figure of the mother and the father, real, imaginary or symbolic likewise, are located, the place of the analyst in the analytical practice is replaced. Lacan underlines that what allows the change of object is the fact that "it is already deeply marked by the articulation of the signifier"; therefore, the unconscious articulation of a series of significations are replaced in the analysis so as to let the analysand have access to the processes that made up the constitution of her desire as such. Now that the mechanisms of repression do not hold for the new object, Lacan says that it is another instance of sublimation, where desire is defined by the metonymy of one signifier to another. Yet, the realization of one's desire is not such a direct matter. Now that desire always articulates itself in language through the signifier, it always demands something else that is a substitute for its real desire; hence "the satisfaction formulated spreads out and conforms to this gap; that desire is formed as something supporting this metonymy, namely, as something the demand means beyond whatever it is able to formulate" (p. 294). Analysis is the experience in which we see the mechanisms of substitution in relation to one's desire, and consequently traverses all the way of fantasy that sustains a notion of reality to the extent of confronting the desire for death and the lack of being at the centre of the subject. Sublimation in the

form of a symbolic relation has the effect of putting the subject in such a relation relative to her desire.

In the discussion of the notion of desire, Lacan also brings forward his controversial claim that Antigone “pushes to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire” (p. 282). Hence the purity of Antigone’s desire. Lacan continues in pursuit of Antigone’s desire and resolves that it links to the criminal, incestuous desire of her mother, Jocasta:

The text alludes to the fact that the desire of the mother is the origin of everything. 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 . . . (Lacan, 1997, p. 283)

According to Bracha Ettinger, desire as taking root from the mother’s should be understood as “the infliction of death or incest by one’s ancestors, by someone else on someone else, played at the horizon of the subject’s existence and thus being a part of what allowed the subject’s coming into life” (2010, p. 201). However, Miriam Leonard is highly critical of Lacan’s marking of the mother as such:

In a swift gesture then, Lacan manages to exile all that is impure in Antigone’s incestuous resolve to the crimes of the mother. The mother as the origin of both creation and destruction. The mother who gives birth inevitably also gives death to her children. In the process, Oedipus becomes innocent, excused of his responsibility for his own incest. The whole weight of the crime rests on Jocasta’s shoulders. (Zajko and Leonard, 2008, p. 131).

There seems to be a discrepancy between the signifying systems involved in the interpretations of Lacan and Leonard. To begin with, Lacan’s marking of the mother is not peculiar to Jocasta’s incestuous position. As I discussed above, for Lacan, the mother is the first other that the subject constructs her being as a lack of and in relation to. In general discourse on the Oedipus myth, the responsibility is generally

put on the figure of Oedipus for killing the father, marrying the mother, and begetting children by her. Lacan claims that Oedipus is free from an Oedipus complex, in the sense that he never knew his true parents, and therefore did not develop a relation of desire in regard to them. However, he points to the desire of the mother as the founding principle. Yet, although Lacan calls it criminal, he does not think of the notion of desire by passing on value judgements on it. Crime is also the founding principle for civilization as argued above. Thus, it does not connote impurity, or the criminalization of Jocasta as Leonard takes it to be. Yet, the question put forward by Leonard as regards the desire of the father is well worth the attention in thinking about the gender bias involved in Lacan's thinking, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

Aside from this, Lacan, in the final page of his Seminar XI, writes that "[t]he analyst's desire is not a pure desire" (1998, p. 276). This distinction made by Lacan in terms of desire pure and impure gives rise to the same controversy as the mother's desire. Again, Miriam Leonard revisits this comment in criticism for political consequences of Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis, in which she finds a regressive ideology of a male centred world: "The pure desire of Antigone, then, turns out to have a surprisingly literal meaning. Despite his efforts to escape Hegel's Christianizing reading, Lacan posits a virginal martyr at the centre of his construction of an ethics of psychoanalysis" (Leonard, 2005, p. 129). In the two quotations above, we see Leonard associating the purity of Antigone's desire by Lacan's exile of all that is impure to the mother's desire, and thereby coming up with a pure, in the sense of being a virgin heroine for his ethics. Moreover, if the analyst's desire is not pure, then it follows that the pure desire of Antigone does not connote a positive thing, either. Contrary to Leonard, I think the gist of Lacan's discussion of

pure desire lies elsewhere. We should note that desire in its pure form for Lacan is always a desire for death. Russell Grigg reminds that in Lacan, there is no such thing as a pure desire that is not a desire for death (Grigg, 2001, p.122). This desire for death in its pure form can only be experienced in the example of Antigone because of her status as a tragic hero. Only in the aesthetic work in which sublimation plays a major role can we come across desire in its pure form, undiluted, as a desire for death. It is not a matter of the purity of Antigone as a virgin; on the contrary, it is the purification arrived at the end of the work of catharsis as Lacan gives meaning to the concept. The catharsis involved in the tragic representation of the subject allows its desire to appear before our eyes as pure. And as such, it is always already the desire for death. When Lacan writes that the desire of the analyst is not pure, what he means is that the analyst's desire is positioned in relation to the analysand, and in this sense, it is not the pure desire of the subject for death. According to Alenka Zupančič (2000), the moment of pure desire arises in relation to the death drive:

Pure desire is the moment when desire, in its metonymy, comes across itself, encounters its cause among other objects. At the same time, pure desire coincides with an act. This act is accomplished in the frame of the subject's fundamental fantasy; but because what is at stake is nothing other than this very frame, it ends up 'outside' the fantasy, in another field: that of drive. (pp. 244-245)

Returning to Antigone's desire, we come back to Lacan's claim that what qualifies Antigone as an ethical figure is her status of not giving way relative to her desire for death, the way she embodies her desire. Zupančič adds that what qualifies Antigone as an ethical figure is not only her status as not giving way on her desire, but also her realization of her desire: "to realize one's desire means to realize, to 'measure' the infinite, the infinite measure" (2010, p. 251). So, in her desire, what Antigone does is no less than to aim at the infinite, the impossible that is the real.

In relation to the discussion on catharsis, Lacan speculates on the practice of analysis in terms of tragedy. He asks the question of what is to be achieved once analysis is over and the return of the meaning of an action has been accomplished, its deep meaning is liberated. What the seminar shows in its entirety is that the outcome of the analysis is neither a state of ideal goodness nor happiness; however, what is achieved is the experience of the subject's desire in its pure state. This is similar to Antigone's case in the tragedy: "a catharsis that is a purification, a decantation or isolation of levels" (Lacan 1997, p. 312). Once the human being has access to the unconscious meaning of one's action, and through the processes of transference and counter-transference, what is achieved is nothing less than catharsis in analysis. Lacan comments that he had recourse to tragedy because in a similar gesture to Freud, one is obliged to make use of tragedy:

The ethics of psychoanalysis has nothing to do with prescriptions for, or the regulation of, what I have called the service of goods. Properly speaking, that ethics implies the dimension that is expressed in what we call the tragic sense of life.

Actions are inscribed in the space of tragedy, and it is with relation to this space, too, that we are led to take our bearings in the sphere of values. (1997, p. 313)

In the space of tragedy, the relationship between action and the desire that is in it results in "a triumph of being-for-death" (1997, p. 313). This means that the tragic action is always already underwritten by one's status of being-for-death, desire for death, or death drive in its pure form, and it is in this sense that the subject achieves a tragic sense of life. As seen in the discussions of sublimation and catharsis both in the work of art, which Antigone is an example of, and in the work of psychoanalysis, Lacan adopts a tragic outlook in his appreciation of human existence. He speaks of a tragic sense of life in relation to the ethics of psychoanalysis. As a result, he finds tragedy at the root of our experience (p. 244), he turns to tragedy in an effort to

understand the human condition, and in his Seminar VII seeks to understand “the essence of tragedy” (p. 247) in his reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

This tragic sense of life offered by Lacan is read by Simon Critchley as the effect of German Idealism on Lacan (2010). Critchley finds a privileging of tragedy in Lacan’s discourse, and the discussion of psychoanalysis as a tragic experience (2009, p. 219). From where Lacan constructs his ethics of psychoanalysis, human condition appears essentially tragic and the human is a tragic being in the sense that one is always defined by a primary lack, which is impossible to fulfil and one needs to traverse all the way through desire in the analytic experience to arrive at one’s being-for-death, the lack of being that one is. As the human condition is tragic, the way out of this condition is another tragic experience in the form of art and in the form of analysis, both of which are read within ethics, which also provides an access into politics. I tried to point toward this in Lacan’s discussion of the ethics of psychoanalysis as part of a social problem. It is from this perspective that I read Lacan’s claim that Antigone as a figure forms part of our morality regardless of our awareness of it, or better situated in the unconscious (Lacan, 1997, p. 284). The ethics offered by Lacan in the figure of Antigone, in the sense of transgressing the boundaries of what is given as human, in the attempt to lay bare one’s relation to her desire is the means of our gaining access to our own tragic experience as human beings. For Lacan, Antigone is the very model of our experience as such.

### 3.2. Žižek’s rewriting of Lacan

Slavoj Žižek revisits Lacan’s reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone* throughout his oeuvre. In his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2008), Slavoj Žižek offers a detailed reading of both *Antigone* and Lacan’s Seminar VII. After this, *Antigone* becomes

one of the motifs he recurrently goes back to. Some examples can be found in *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (1992), “From ‘Passionate Attachments’ to Dis-Identification” (1998), “Melancholy and the Act” (2000), *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (2001) and *Interrogating the Real* (2005). Finally, in 2016, Žižek published his own version of Antigone, *The Three Lives of Antigone*, to give vent to his understanding of the ethical role that the play has on modernity, in search for “a true Antigone for our times” (Žižek, 2016, p. xxiv), and he explains his project as not “pretend[ing] to be a work of art but an ethico-political exercise (p. xxv). In trying to understand the way Žižek rewrites Antigone while simultaneously rewriting Lacan, I will mainly discuss his article “Che Vuoi?” in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2008), which sums up his recurring thoughts on Antigone and refer to other works where relevant. Finally, I will turn to his version of Antigone, not as an artwork, but as “an ethico-political exercise” in his own phrasing (Žižek, 2016, p. xxv).

My discussion of Lacan’s *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* inevitably introduced the concept of the end of analysis in the sense of both the termination of analysis and in terms of what is to be achieved in analysis. Similarly, Žižek turns to the same problematic and states that the end of the psychoanalysis is when the analysand gets rid of the question of the Other in the form of “Che Vuoi?” / “What do you desire?”, and “accepts his being as non-justified by the big Other” (Žižek 2008, p. 126). If desire is to become the object of the desire of the Other, which we can never know, this moment of ‘Che Vuoi?’ provokes an unbearable anxiety in the subject because there is always a gap, a void in the unknowability of the Other. The subject replaces anxiety with love by offering herself to the Other as the object of its desire, by trying to fill the gap, the opening of the Other’s desire (p. 129). In this sense, Žižek comments that love is “an interpretation of the desire of the Other: the answer of love

is ‘I am what is lacking in you; with my devotion to you, with my sacrifice for you, I will fill you out, I will complete you’ (p. 130).

Starting from Žižek’s definition offers a reading of the desire of Antigone as the desire of the Other. It is noteworthy to remember Antigone’s self-description as someone born for love, which is emphasized in the lines “I was born to join in love, not hate—that is my nature” (Sophocles, 1984, p. 86, ll. 590-1). What does it mean to be born to join in love from a Lacanian-Žižekian perspective? It means that Antigone emerges as a figure who fills her own lack by offering herself to the other as the object filling out the lack in the other (Žižek 2008, p. 130). In this sense, she is offering herself as the object of love to not only Polynices to whom her duty is directed, but also to her family and more particularly her mother in whom Lacan situates her desire, her ultimate other. Considering the emphasis on love proposed by Žižek, it is interesting that Žižek does not take up the figure of Antigone as filling out the lack of being in her mother as her other.

Instead, Žižek takes up the figure of Antigone in relation to the big Other, as the figure of the saint in offering herself to the Other as the object of its desire. In this role of occupying the role of the pure object, objet petit a, she “undergoes radical subjective destitution” (Žižek, 2008, p. 130). I think this is the moment where Žižek diverts from Lacan’s reading even though he is offering an interpretation of him. It is important to remember that Lacan, too, associated Antigone with the inhuman; but he also warned not to situate her at the level of the monstrous (Lacan, 1997, 263). For Lacan, Antigone is not the Thing. She is the subject who goes beyond her *Atè*, beyond the limits of the human, and this beyond of the limits is the realm of the Thing. It is important to note that in Lacan, Antigone’s position is not identification with the Thing, but a relation of desire in relation to the Thing. However, this is what



Žižek makes of her. He calls her exactly in this name: the monstrous, the Thing, das Ding, objet petit a. For Žižek, Antigone becomes the Thing, the real itself (Žižek, 2002, p. 163).

Associating Antigone with the Thing situated in the real has further connotations for Žižek. As Antigone is the monstrous, it becomes impossible to identify with her, and instead Žižek proposes another identification with the sister, Ismene who is the human figure for him:

In Sophocles' Antigone, the figure with which we can identify is her sister Ismene –kind, considerate, sensitive, prepared to give way and compromise, pathetic, 'human', in contrast to Antigone, who goes to the limit, who 'doesn't give way on her desire' (Lacan) and becomes, in this persistence in the 'death drive', in the being-towards-death, frighteningly ruthless, exempted from the circle of everyday feelings and considerations, passions and fears. In other words, it is Antigone herself who necessarily evokes in us, pathetic everyday compassionate creatures, the question 'What does she really want?', the question which precludes any identification with her. (Žižek 2008 p. 131)

With this reading offered by Žižek, one wonders what happened to Lacan's understanding of Antigone as an ultimately ethical figure. Contra Žižek, what Lacan analysed in his Seminar was particularly the purity of the object of Antigone's desire in the form of the death instinct, which makes her emerge as an ethical figure for Lacan. Žižek is unable to respond to the purity of desire as such, and it gives vent to a fear of the figure of Antigone. Žižek calls her "ruthless" for some reason that is not specified. Although Antigone goes beyond death and in her insistence for death, she emerges as a figure of passion. In addition to this, calling her ruthless suggests a radical transformation of the meaning of the figure. Moreover, shifting the figure of ruthlessness in the play from the tyrant Creon to Antigone also has political overtones. Apparently, for many of the twentieth century adaptations of the play and their audiences, Antigone was a figure of identification in terms of her rebellion and

defiance of oppressive state power. Irish adaptations in criticism of British rule such as Tom Paulin's, which I discussed in the previous chapter, and Heaney's, Griselda Gambaro's *Antigona Furiosa* after the Dirty War of Argentina, Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone* written against the tide of fascism in Europe are very strong examples in which Antigone is taken as a figure of resistance. This is also supported by the reception history of the performances of the plays. In contradistinction to these political readings of the figure of Antigone as a subversive figure, Žižek finds monstrosity and the Freudian feminine mystique epitomized in the famous question posed by Freud "What does a woman want?" in her figure.

The monstrous reading of Antigone results in a search for a human figure that will act as a foil: Ismene. For Žižek, Ismene is the human figure in her frailty, second thoughts, and inclination to compromise. Hence, what Žižek ends up offering is the liberal position of the middle way to seek compromise with the tyrant. According to Žižek, the majority of which he feels to be a part of, what he calls "we" feels closer to Ismene's position, and are terrified by the unbending figure of Antigone. Žižek, here, has a claim to represent the popular tendency to marginalize the figure of the revolutionary: in her insistence to fight with what is invincible, namely, the state, the figure of the revolutionary emerges as an irrational creature that seeks nothing but her own doom, is in love with the idea of death. I think this brings us to a similar point as the famous saying by Malcolm X (1964), which cautions against the role of ideological apparatuses as formative of one's perception: "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing" (Quotes section, para. 10). Likewise, Žižek ends up dismissing Antigone as a proto-totalitarian figure while reducing Creon to the role of the pragmatic politician (Žižek 2002, 157). He asks: "is not Antigone the

anti-Habermas par excellence? No dialogue, no attempt to convince Creon of the good reasons for her acts through rational argumentation, but just the blind insistence on her right” (Žižek 2002, p. 158). Actually, Antigone engages in a number of dialogues with Creon, Ismene, and the Chorus. It is interesting that Žižek is insistent on not analyzing the very discourse Antigone adopts.

Tina Chanter remarks that “Despite Žižek’s disavowal, not only does Antigone in fact appeal to an argument, one that, although some commentators have dismissed it as spurious, follows a specific logic, she also stipulates that it is a ‘rule of life’. In doing so, she identifies herself with the future possibility for her community that she engenders through her death” (Wilmer and Zukauskaitė, 2010, p. 31). With this comment, Chanter emphasizes that Žižek not only occludes the political character of Antigone’s action, but he also pardons the figure of the dictator by reducing him to the ordinary politician. Critical of Žižek’s reversal of totalitarianism, Aviezer Tucker makes the following ironic remark:

If dissidents were totalitarian and tyrants were civic leaders, . . . then there is no more good and evil in politics because everything is like everything else and political action becomes directionless and pointless. Better to leave the late-totalitarian elite in power, then, as pragmatic tyrants are better than totalitarian dissidents, or was it the other way around? (Tucker, 2015, p. 226)

Žižek takes his reading of Antigone into totalitarianism further to assert that the very gesture of sublimation itself is totalitarian. According to him, this totalitarianism arises from the character of sublimation to elevate an object to the dignity of the Thing: “In sublimation, something - an object which is part of our ordinary reality - is elevated into the unconditional object that the subject values more than life itself” (Žižek 2011, 158). Žižek thinks that the problem with Antigone is not the purity of her desire for death, but “that the monstrosity of her act is covered up by its aestheticization” (2016, p. xv). Žižek apparently does not agree with a reading of the

aesthetic in its relation to the real. This contrasts radically from Lacan's (and also Freud's) understanding of sublimation and the aesthetic, which I discussed in the previous section as the only possible achievement of happiness within the borders of social reality.

According to Tina Chanter, Žižek's reading of Antigone is politically reactive: "Antigone is reduced to a representative for the human propensity for destruction, while humanity's creativity is apportioned elsewhere –to the political realm of which Creon is understood to be representative" (Wilmer and Zukauskaite, 2010, p. 21). The problem with Žižek seems to be that at some point, he does not show interest in any motive, ethical or political, for Antigone's action. It is almost as if the unburied corpse of Polynices is only an empty signifier for him without any relevance other than being a pretext for Antigone's realization of her pure desire. In this too, Žižek differs from Lacan's reading of Antigone as the ultimately ethical figure who desires death to the extent that she is determined by her family *Atè*. Žižek, on the other hand, sees in the figure of Antigone, a blind will at work, which incessantly refuses without rationalization or explication of her case. This can also be traced in Žižek's own handling of the figure of Antigone in "The Three Lives of Antigone", in which he reads the figure in the terms of "our times" when we can no longer sympathize with her, but see her as part of the problem, something that is altogether dispensable with.

Tina Chanter argues that the monstrous reading of Antigone can be traced in Lacan, as well. Reading between Lacan's lines, Chanter comments that even though Lacan refrains from calling Antigone monstrous, he still situates her at the level of the monstrous. This prevents him from seeing the full panoply of Antigone's act, which Chanter interprets as bringing an end to the incestuous, bloody history of the

house of Laius. According to Chanter, Antigone corrects the aberration that the incest of Oedipus, her father, represents, in two gestures. First, she covers the body of Polynices with dust; therefore, she hides it from view as a monstrosity and obscenity. Second, she takes her own life by hanging herself with her wedding veil by which she symbolically ends her continuation of the family blood. Chanter underlines that Antigone enunciates a law with her act, which is concatenated in the modern political translation of the play. In this respect, she is critical of Lacan and Lacanians for blurring the political dimension of Antigone's act (Wilmer and Zukauskaite 2010, pp. 30-31). She then criticizes Žižek's association of Antigone with the monstrous, the terrorist, and the totalitarian figure, and calls for an alternatively political appreciation of the figure:

Contra Žižek, Antigone's cultural memory is kept alive, not, to be sure, in the name of the dominant order, but in the name of those who fight the injustice of such orders. . . . Antigone's . . . is at the same time a call for a new political order, not an anarchist or terrorist or monstrous celebration. (Wilmer and Zukauskaite 2010, p. 43)

Nonetheless, Žižek returns to the ethicality of Antigone's act. It is worthy of notice that in the previous section, while discussing Lacan's understanding of ethics, we were introduced to Lacan's idea that there is no Superior Good for moral action, but the ethical action is rooted in the real, which is both inside and outside the subject. Starting from Lacan's understanding, Žižek contends that the ethical act not only is beyond the Good, but also redefines what counts as Good. Žižek writes of Antigone's act as such: "Antigone's gesture of civil disobedience is much more radically 'performative': through her insistence on giving her dead brother a proper funeral, she defies the predominant notion of 'Good'" (2011, p. 168), and now that her act is rooted in the real, outside the symbolic, she changes the very co-ordinates of what is perceived as the possible in the social reality, namely, the reality principle

(p. 167). In going through the various readings offered by Žižek, which culminate in his own version of *Antigone*, a movement from the ethicality of Sophocles' hero, to the monstrosity of a politically reactionary figure marked with a loss of compassion seems to be the way Žižek reads the modern condition into the tragedy.

### 3.3. Žižek's *The Three Lives of Antigone*

In the Introduction to his version of *Antigone*, Žižek begins with underlining his idea of "opportunistic" rewriting of a traditional story as a readiness to adapt the story to the day's specific needs. In other words, he writes "the only way to keep a classical work alive is to treat it as 'open', pointing towards the future" (Žižek, 2016, p. xii). First, he thinks of the classical heroine in two extremes. On the one hand, *Antigone* is an uncanny figure, who in her excess, disturbs the harmony of the polis. On the other, she is seen as a proto-modern emancipatory heroine who speaks for all those excluded from the public domain, the way Agamben's *homo sacer* shows (pp. xx-xxi). Asking which *Antigone* would fit the contemporary condition (p. xxiv), he imagines how a modern or modernist, or even a post-modern *Antigone* "with a Stalinist twist" would be (pp. xiii-xiv). At the end, he concludes that the *Antigone* of our times would be "ruthlessly abandoning our sympathy and compassion for the play's heroine, making her part of the problem, and proposing a way out which shatters us in our humanitarian complacency" (pp. xxiv-xxv). Consequently, he comes up with a version of *Antigone* with three alternative endings. In the first part, which remains the same for all three versions, Žižek freely borrows from a variety of sources from Sophocles' *Antigone* to works of Brecht, Hegel, Benjamin, to Talmud, and ends up with a collage or bricolage of sorts. Since Žižek has no aesthetic concerns, I will not read his work in terms of poetics or try to locate his allusions and

sources. Rather, I will try to trace his philosophy on *Antigone* in his rewriting of the play.

Instead of Sophocles' beginning with the dialogue of the sisters, Žižek opens the play with the Chorus' commentary on what may be described as a figurative expression of the Lacanian Real:

A lean rock stands proudly alone in deep grass.  
But when strong man's hands raise it, worms, insects,  
roaches, all the swarming and disgusting murmur of life  
confronts the eye, a chaos even gods can't master.  
Such is our ultimate reality. Some heroic men  
attempt to introduce some harmony and order  
into this chaos, but they miserably fail their acts  
only destabilizing further the cosmic order. (Žižek, 2016, p. 2)

Thus, we see that for Žižek the order of the universe unfolds as chaos and a nauseating reality. There is no hope for heroism or the introduction of harmony into this chaos. So, from the beginning, Žižek rejects the idea of emancipation. Then, we are introduced into the dialogue of the two sisters. What is striking in this dialogue is the denial of loving kindness on Antigone's part, such as her opening address "my own flesh and blood –dear sister, dear Ismene" (*Sophocles*, 1984, p. 59, l. 1).

Immediately, she is accused by Ismene for having no compassion in her love (Žižek, 2016, p. 3), yet this view is not supported by any arguments on Ismene's side. The only reason why Antigone is accused of being cold in her love is the burial of her brother. Meanwhile, Creon is represented as a rather secular politician who opposes Antigone on the grounds that he cannot see the laws of the gods which Antigone espouses. Antigone replies: "you have to believe in them to see them" (p. 8). Thus, responding to a post-religious age in which belief becomes synonymous with self-deceit, Žižek's heroine is immediately presented as the irrational figure that is not at all representative of the claim to scientific rationality of post-Enlightenment thinking characteristic of modern times, in other words, the *Zeitgeist*. Consequently, the

Chorus, contrary to Sophocles', is not sympathetic toward her, but thinks that there is something wrong with her that she enters the male public space as a woman. Here, the *Zeitgeist* is mixed. It is still a time when women are denied from the public sphere, and the antagonism between Creon and Antigone is given as one between the male king and the young woman who is denied a public status.

In the first ending of the play, Žižek is more or less faithful to Sophocles' plot. However, Eurydice does not take part in the plot; so the only thing that shatters Creon is the death of his son. In the second ending, Antigone is reminiscent of Connor Cruise O'Brien's representation of civil disobedience, in which the only outcome is violence even if the action itself is not violent. Creon takes pity, and the three of them go to bury Polynices. However, the people, enraged at Creon and Haemon for burying a traitor, lynch the two men. Antigone remains perplexed at the violence that she gives rise to, as the chorus, referring to the Jewish prayer, Kol Nidre, comments "Those in power / can afford to obey honour and rigid principles, / while ordinary people pay the price of it," and turning to Antigone marks "In sacrificing everything / for your law, you lost this law itself" (p. 23). This clearly echoes with the discussion on the Irish national debate concerning Antigone. In parallel with the reactionary politics of O'Brien, Žižek gives voice to the idea that there is an order in the chaos of our reality. The one who claims to have a hold on "immemorial laws" only disturbs this chaotic order, and results in more violence. In the third and final ending of the play, "the suffering people of Thebes", the ones excluded from the public domain, as introduced in the figure of Agamben's *homo sacer* take over power (p. 25). Establishing a people's court, they condemn both Creon and Antigone to death for disturbing the welfare of the city. However, in Žižek's version of a "revolutionary" ending, it is still not a question of opening up



space for the unrepresented. On the contrary, the Chorus praises the idea of a good master: “A really good master / doesn’t just limit the freedom of his subjects, he gives freedom.” (p. 26). Therefore, in this version, too, the problem is not one of establishing a just society. Even though he is completely free to imagine a vast range of possibilities in searching for the *Zeitgeist* of Antigone, Žižek refuses to change the paradigms of the ruler and the ruled, and the only possible outcome he can propose is more violence refusal of meaning. He takes the ethics of the real to a re-glorification and sovereignty of the irrepresentability of the real.

The only aspect in which Žižek is reminiscent of Lacan is his prominent interest in the figure of Antigone rather than Sophocles’ play as a whole. He excludes Eurydice, reduces the figure of Tiresias to a father figure that advises Creon rather too well, and takes out the parts which introduce the figure of Creon unsympathetic such as when he accuses Tiresias with bribery. There is an Antigone gone-astray. In her insistence on burial, she loses sight of the conditions that govern the public reality. Once more, Antigone loses self-consciousness in a vein that parallels Hegelian discourse. Yet, for Hegel, Antigone’s representative status of the divine balances her lack of self-consciousness concerning the public sphere. In Žižek, both are missing, and Antigone emerges as a figure that has lost all contact with actuality. In striving to represent the real, she loses the reality principle. The final question of the play is who was right: Antigone, Creon, or the Chorus. The final lines claim to lay the burden of answer on the audience (p. 30-31). However, one wonders, after a very particularized version of Antigone how just it would be to claim that the decision lies with the audience. When the subject position is so much manipulated, who is the proto-totalitarian figure is very much at stake: Is it

Antigone? Or is it Creon, the Chorus, or even better, Žižek, as the one who authors the whole plot?

## CHAPTER 4

### IRIGARAY AND BUTLER: ANTIGONE REPOLITICISED

Following a discussion of Hegel and Lacan's rewriting of the tragedy and the figure of Antigone in their philosophical and psychoanalytical projects respectively, I will now turn to feminist philosophy that seeks a return to the political meanings of the play. I argued that Hegel, in modelling Antigone to structure the ethical life of Spirit in coming to self-consciousness in its movement through history, rewrote Antigone in a way to change its meaning for modernity. I also suggested that the second figure with a similar gesture was Lacan who modelled Antigone to structure an ethics of psychoanalysis that defined ethos with a confrontation with the real. As Lacan's thought exceeded the boundaries of analytical practice and the impact of psychoanalytical theory extended to critical thought and literary theory, Lacan becomes the second thinker that comes up with a certain reading and in this sense, rewriting of Antigone. In this chapter, two feminist thinkers revisit Hegel's and Lacan's rewriting of the figure and the tragedy of Antigone in a way to reconsider not only the ethical implications of the discussions, but also to reinstate the political significance of the play. In this respect, the feminist political agenda of these thinkers seem to underwrite their own rewriting of the play to the extent that they return to the figure of Antigone to make sense of the contemporary problems at the heart of the modern human society. Closing the gap between ethics and politics, both Irigaray and Butler open up new discussions as to the representative status of the figure of Antigone and its afterlife in modernity. In this sense, Irigaray's criticism of Hegel is exemplary in its status as within the Hegelian paradigm, yet in feminist critique of it. Butler's approach, on the other hand, not only discusses the

perspectives of Hegel and Lacan in their reading of Antigone, but also Irigaray in discussing the performativity of gender relations and kinship and the direction to which Antigone's liminal position points. Both Irigaray and Butler take up in their own way, Antigone's entrance into the political sphere and how this goes unacknowledged by her former critics, and rethink new methods to make sense of the modern political subject through the discussion opened by the rewritings of the figure of Antigone.

#### 4.1. Irigaray's critique of Hegel's *Antigone*

"The Eternal Irony of the Community" (1985) is Luce Irigaray's first detailed critique of Hegel's reading of Antigone. The essay begins with a quotation from Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* (1830) where he writes on the biological differences between man and woman from a highly ideological standpoint representing the patriarchal discourse of his time. In the quotation, Hegel associates man with the active principle in nature and woman with passivity and underdevelopment. Thereby he arrives at the conclusion that it is the natural division between man and woman that results in woman's exclusion from the political sphere and civic life, for she is undeveloped, unconscious, and passive. With regard to this point, Chanter draws attention to Irigaray's foresight into Hegel in basing his dichotomy of human and divine law in his gender biased understanding of human biology. Chanter writes,

Reading the sexual body, we are already embedded in a response to Hegel's examination of the tensions that prevail within the city-state, and, before we know it, Irigaray has taken a definitive stance toward the "true spirit of the ethical order" for which Hegel looks to his Antigone. (1995, p. 85)

Likewise, Miriam Leonard (2006) maintains that "Irigaray shows up the naturalizing discourse of Hegel's ethico-political thinking" (p. 135). In "Eternal Irony of the

Community,” Irigaray (1985) questions the very grounds of Hegelian philosophy in associating the woman with the unconscious, and thus denying her political action even though holding her responsible for her actions emanating from the ethical laws.

In her critique of Hegel, Irigaray is indubitably a precursor in the feminist criticism of Hegelian philosophy. Analysing the power of Irigaray’s critique of Hegel in *The Ethics of Eros*, Chanter (1995) emphasizes that “Irigaray retrieves Antigone from the role in which she is cast by Hegel in his reading of Sophocles’ play, as the other of reason, ethics, and knowledge” (p. 81). However, Chanter carefully notes the Hegelian side to Irigaray’s philosophy:

Irigaray resists a head-on confrontation with Hegel, accepting in general terms, the reading of Sophocles’ Antigone that Hegel advances. She works within his terms of reference, reproducing the structured oppositions that lead Antigone along the narrow and constricting passage that begins with her decision to perform the burial of her brother, and ends in her death. (1995, p. 115)

Chanter warns against criticizing Irigaray offhandedly for repeating the same Hegelian logic in her own feminist criticism. Instead, she looks for instances in which Irigaray questions, subverts, and challenges Hegelian philosophy. In doing this, Chanter refuses any reading of Hegel or Irigaray that falls into reductionist conclusions. While agreeing with Chanter in terms of paying attention to the intricacies of Irigaray’s thought, I am more inclined to follow Chanter’s first criticism of Irigaray, which suggests that she remains within the Hegelian paradigm. Throughout her work, even though Irigaray is critical of the Hegelian appropriation of Antigone, which she finds to have shaped the modern discourse on the topic, I argue that she nonetheless remains a Hegelian in the last analysis, and she falls back on Hegelian dialectics in spite of her critical stance. Therefore, I will be reading Irigaray’s most recent work on Antigone, “Between Myth and History: The Tragedy

of Antigone” (2010) where she positions herself as an Antigone figure and claims to develop her criticism of Hegel in the reading of *Antigone*.

Irigaray builds her reading of *Antigone* on Hegelian premises. To begin with, like the Hegelian dichotomy of divine law represented by Antigone vs. human law represented by Creon, Irigaray associates Antigone with the cosmic order, the law of life in the universe, and Creon with the patriarchal order, man’s desire to overpower nature and its resources, including human beings. According to Irigaray, the cosmic order for the humans represented by Antigone is founded upon sexuete difference, which is Irigaray’s rephrasing of sexual difference in contrast to Hegel in order to emphasize that it is not sexuality (as Hegel took for granted), but the difference of sex that determines the difference (Irigaray, 2010, p. 200). Irigaray claims that in the previous belief systems before patriarchy, human identity was not identified with the single figure of “man”; on the contrary, it was founded upon the sexuete difference between man and woman and required mutual respect for the differentiation of the sexes. Irigaray emphasizes that Antigone’s insistence on the burial of Polynices signifies her recognition of sexuete difference. Now that Polynices is her brother, the son of Antigone’s mother, he is at the same time her absolute Other with the inclusion of whom she can construct her identity. What privileges the status of the brother is neither the mere kinship status in the matrilineal family relations nor anything to do with sexuality, but the fact that the recognition of the difference of sexuete identity is constitutive of one’s own identity and its place in the cosmic order of beings. That is why Antigone says that she would not have transgressed Creon’s law for a son or a husband, but she does it only because Polynices is her brother. Irigaray’s interpretation makes a very strong point in coming to terms with one of the most controversial points of Sophocles’ play, and her understanding of radical

alterity between brother and sister as constitutive of identity brings new light on the debate. Yet, in opposition to critics like Judith Butler (2000, p. 24, 36) who draw heavily on the incestuous family relations of Antigone, Irigaray here thinks similar to Hegel who underlines that the relationship between brother and sister is free from the dynamics of desire, and in this regard, is a true and defining relationship in which “the loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest” (Hegel, 1977, 275).

According to Irigaray, in burying Polynices, Antigone shows respect for sexuate differentiation. With her act, she preserves a transcendental world, which is the world of an identity different from her own, namely her brother's, that is, her Other's. Irigaray extends this view by saying that this world of the Other is totally inaccessible to Antigone because she is a woman and she does not belong to that sexuate identity of the Other. Here, again, the denial of entrance into the realm of the Other for Antigone is reminiscent of Hegel's denial of woman the entrance of the human law, the political sphere, the domain of man. According to Irigaray, Antigone can never fully grasp the subjectivity of the Other, and it has to remain alien to her. Moreover, in Irigaray's words, “it remains transcendent to her” (Irigaray, 2010, p. 209). In saying this, Irigaray aims at rejecting the patriarchal view of undifferentiation that melts difference into sameness, by reducing difference into the common denominator of “the male”; however, she ends up essentializing sex and sexuate difference as impenetrable entities that are mutually exclusive of each other. One wonders, at this stage, what to make of queer sexual identities that refuse to be defined within the singular confines of the male or the female as well as the understanding of sex as a spectrum rather than the binary opposition of the male and the female. If we are to accept that patriarchy was historically constructed, then it

necessarily follows that sexuate identities or different subjectivities based on sexuate identity are also historically constructed and they are neither universal nor fixed, unchanging. On the contrary, these identities are prone to a constant change given the historical moment that calls for their reproduction. The whole sexual economy that is founded on the premises of patriarchal culture is naturalized with Irigaray's construction of absolute difference between the sexes. It is my contention that the premise cannot be built on the total inaccessibility of one sexuate identity for the other, but one has to rethink the historical conditions under which sexuate identity is constructed, solidifies, and is prone to change.

In solidifying the difference between the sexes, Irigaray maintains that the realization by one sex of the radical alterity of the world of the other makes one see the limits of its own world, and henceforth make space for the construction of a world of relational cultivation and culture. Irigaray, by drawing heavily on the intransitivity of sexuate identities, i.e., the denial of permeability and constructedness of sexual identity, erases the power dynamics at work in the construction and maintenance of these identities, and their necessary status in relation to the maintenance of patriarchal power that is by and large a historical construct itself. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (2007) is critical of Irigaray's turn to biological essentialism in her analysis of feminine sexuality. Even though this discussion is on sexuality and not on sexuate identity, I think the logic that shapes the basis of the argument, i.e., biological essentialism, is the same. Butler underlines this point in Irigaray, which also holds for her discussion of sexuate difference in relation to Antigone:

Irigaray's occasional efforts to derive a specific feminine sexuality from a specific female anatomy have been the focus of anti-essentialist arguments for some time. The return to biology as the ground of a specific feminine sexuality or meaning seems to defeat



the feminist premise that biology is not destiny. But whether feminine sexuality is articulated here through a discourse of biology for purely strategic reasons, or whether it is, in fact, a feminist return to biological essentialism, the characterization of female sexuality as radically distinct from a phallic organization of sexuality remains problematic. (Butler, 2007, p. 41)

Irigaray builds the idea of difference as a constitutive dynamic based on sexuate difference. In doing this, she not only essentializes sex, thus ending up in biological essentialism; but also bases her philosophy on an insurmountable difference between the sexes, thus creating a binary opposition as a founder of the cosmic order, which was initially supposed to go beyond the patriarchal reduction of being in the universe into a single determinant. To replace the monistic patriarchal view with a dualistic view based on binaries does not seem to suffice in terms of embracing the multi-dimensional scope of the cosmos that Irigaray calls forth. In the end, even though she claims to differ from Hegelian philosophy, Irigaray falls back on Hegelian dialectics through the clash of two terms to be sublated in a third term. In writing that masculine and feminine identities correspond to two different worlds irreducible to one another, she suggests that it is only with this difference that a third world becomes possible, which will engender a relational culture. “Relational culture” is Irigaray’s formula to overcome the clash of two different sexuate identities (Irigaray, 2010, p. 209). She writes that only by engendering “a third world” starting from the two irreducible, different worlds of man and woman, in which the two worlds can coexist in the recognition of each other’s otherness, a resolution can be possible (p. 210). According to Irigaray, this arrival at the third term, i.e., “relational culture” is different from the Hegelian idea of sublation. Moreover, Irigaray writes that this move is the way she distances herself more from Hegel more than she did in the *Speculum of the Other Woman*. She explains her distancing move in the following lines:

Thus, in Hegel's system the negative serves to overcome a subjective and an objective scission in two with a view to oneness. To my way of thinking, the negative has become insuperable and serves to maintain the existence of the duality of subjects and of their worlds, between whom the question is now one of constructing a culture without abolishing either the one or the other. This implies that we relinquish our logic based on pairs of opposites at the service of oneness, and enter a logic of coexistence and dialogue between two different subjects and worlds. I could add that this demands that we invent another dramatic play through which we can relate to each other as different. (Irigaray, 2010, p. 199)

Irigaray claims to position her dialectics in contrast to Hegel's. She is critical of Hegelian philosophy for reducing two opposing terms to one with a mind to resolve, cancel, or overcome their difference (Irigaray, 2010, p. 210). For Irigaray, the problem with Hegelian dialectics is the negation of difference and valorisation of one term over the other. Instead, she proposes to prioritize the difference between two irreducible identities and their world constituting power in themselves, and finally elaborating a third world through their relations of difference. Hence, in Irigaray's system, masculine and feminine identities correspond to two different sexuate identities irreducible to one another, existing in perfect contrast in terms of one another, and have no intersecting qualities. I suspect that what Irigaray does to Hegelian dialectics is once again Hegelian at its core. Firstly, her tripartite movement toward relational culture is still within the confines of Hegelian dialectics, which it is critical of. In Hegelian dialectics, one term is not simply negated, or annihilated, or overpowered by a second only to arrive at a much better third as the sublation. This would be a very reductive understanding of Hegel. Instead, two terms stand in collision in their relation to one another in History, and the dialectical movement is arrived at by the sublation, both the inclusion and transcendence of the two terms in interaction, and thus arriving at the forward movement of History. Irigaray's difference from Hegel is not her refusal to reduce two terms to one, as she claims.

Rather, her insistence on the absolute difference of the two terms, their infinite exclusion of one another and her valorisation of difference as the founding term of world constitution is different from Hegelian dialectics, which put two colliding yet inclusive terms of difference into a dialectical interaction to arrive at a third term of sublation. I think Irigaray's dialectics is still Hegelian with a more exclusionist twist to it.

Secondly, from another aspect of Irigaray's philosophy, another criticism of Hegelian dialectics might have been developed; however, she does not elaborate on this point. In her section "Respect for Generational Order" in "Between Myth and History", Irigaray also develops a historical perspective in which she contrasts maternal genealogy and patriarchy (2010, pp. 205-7). Irigaray's definition of maternal genealogy is based on a natural or cosmic order in a time before humanity was alienated from the nature, and before patriarchy, as a form of male sexual dominance enforced arbitrary power over all beings (p. 205). From Irigaray's perspective, the replacement of cosmic order by patriarchy is symbolized by Creon's perspective being privileged over Antigone's in Hegel. Here, Irigaray accepts Hegel's legitimization of patriarchy over the cosmic order in history, by acknowledging the dominant status of Creon's perspective. Moreover, by replacing Antigone in opposition to and in defiance of Creon's law, she acknowledges Hegelian clash of opposite forces as constitutive of history.

From a feminist standpoint, it is also possible to reframe Irigaray's criticism of Hegelian dialectics from a different angle. If I were to reformulate Irigaray's criticism and continue from where Irigaray leaves off, I would say that one problem with Hegelian dialectics is the unidirectional, always forward movement of History, which is also the reason why it ends up in the valorisation of one term over the other.

However, each of these terms is an active, dynamic force in constant movement and change in history, so there is no stiff, impermeable term as such. To extend this argument, I could add that Irigaray's sexuate identities, too, as soon as they come into being in history are in constant change and interaction. Hence, what their dialectical interaction does is not only to sublate the terms into a third in dialectical movement, but also to constantly change the two terms irretrievably, thus forming a dynamic understanding of change in which none of the terms can ever stay the same or absolute as well as the history in which they move can never be static or absolute. In this respect, the movement of sexuate difference can only be multidirectional, multidimensional, and porous. As there is no given masculine and feminine as constants in history, but only the continual shifts of meaning created by the terms around sex and gender, shaping our understanding of sexuate identities and difference; hence, the dialectical move regarding these two terms can only function in constant change. Sexuate difference is not naturally given in social life, but always already culturally created and prone to change.

Irigaray writes that locating this dual sexuate truth in History is a tragic gesture because "our sexuate desire longs for the infinite and the absolute while History is limited and human" (p. 210). This underlines that the sexuate identity is not particular in history, but in a way, it is absolute, and its positioning in history is a reductive gesture. It is tragic because it shows us our limitedness in history as human beings. By saying this, I think Irigaray cannot see beyond Hegelian idealism. If she were to transcend the Hegelian framework that shapes the very discourse from which she speaks, she could reposition her idea of sexuate difference in history as a more porous concept similar to Butler's idea of performativity of gender. As opposed to Irigaray, I would say that sexual identity and difference as historical constructs are

open to change as well as the history in which they thrive does, and they can only sublate toward a third term as the proliferation of the dual structure from which they emerge. The third term as sublation necessarily transforms the first two terms that are in dialectical opposition and are dynamic in this respect. Sexuate difference is not an essential absolute, but it is the realization of the principle of binary opposition on which the patriarchal order has been founded upon. In this respect, I find it fruitful to think in Irigaray's path in which Antigone describes her duty toward the burial of her brother's corpse as the only meaningful act for her, and that it comes before her duty toward her fiancé or Creon's law. However, I suggest that to further Antigone's act of self-realization into a founding rule for the cosmos and solidifying sexuate difference as a universal principle is an ahistorical and essentialist gesture that repeats Hegelian idealist dialectics. Finally, to reconstruct a dialectics founded upon absolute binaries does not serve the purpose of revolutionizing dialectics. Instead, what is needed is to rethink about the terms involved in dialectical opposition in a dynamic movement, as well.

The first move of the feminist project inherent in Irigaray's critique of Hegel's reading of Antigone is the rejection of the Hegelian notion that Antigone's burial of her brother cannot be self-conscious, or political, or in full ethical significance. Hegel is criticized for situating the woman in the divine law; thus situating the woman (Antigone) only in the pre-political condition of existence and denying her the political significance of her action. Irigaray calls for a renewal of "the line of feminine genealogy in order to render possible a new ethics of sexual difference" (Chanter, 1995, p. 124). She opposes the dominant patriarchal understanding of Antigone as a transgressor of the human law, as an anarchist. Leonard comments on this in the following words:

Irigaray wants to repoliticize Antigone's choice by bringing it precisely back into the realm of the conscious, of the civic. . . . In Irigaray's analysis, Hegel removes Antigone from the symbolic order and thus denies her the possibility of significance in the political world. (Leonard, 2006, p. 136-137)

Yet, I argue that the stance taken by Irigaray also appropriates the basic premises of Hegel's philosophy; thereby reproducing the very terms that result in Antigone's exclusion from the political. Therefore, I conclude that it is equally important to question the Hegelian premises that Irigaray's thought is built upon in order to arrive at a political reading of Antigone.

The second move that feminist criticism of Irigaray brings forward is thus the repolitization of the figure of Antigone for modernity in post-Hegelian philosophy. In this respect, the question of the ethical, political subject and how the figure of Antigone relates to such a position of subjecthood, its very possibility or impossibility deserves further analysis. Chanter emphasizes that

Antigone brings into question the narrowly authoritarian terms in which Creon construes the interests of the polis, interrogating the vision of the political that such a view presupposes, and the naturalized hierarchies that support it. (Chanter, 2011, xxxviii)

Likewise, it is important to bring into question the authoritarian terms in which Hegel reproduces the interests of patriarchy in his reading of Antigone. Only then is it possible to come to a reading of Antigone that goes beyond the championing of her as a sort of feminist heroine. Only such a reading makes visible the tensions and ambiguities in the construction of not only sexuate identity as framed by Irigaray, but also any subjecthood or political agency.

#### 4.2. Butler's *Antigone* beyond the politics of representation

Since its publication in 2000, Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* has become one of the seminal texts for the philosophical and political appreciation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In the opening of the book, Butler emphasizes that what drew her to the subject was her inquiry into "what happened to those feminist efforts to confront and defy the state" (Butler, 2000, p. 1). In her criticism, she highlights the regression of feminist politics from defiance of statism as a patriarchal category to legal plaint and lobbying that sees the state as a legitimate body in itself. Butler writes that she turned to the figure of Antigone in her search for a feminist example; however, her search resulted in her coming across other possibilities in the figure that made her rethink Antigone beyond the politics of representation. At the same time, she undertook a thorough critique of Hegel and Lacan who are the cornerstones of the modern resignification or rewriting of the tragedy and the figure of Antigone. In her reading, Butler thinks of Antigone beyond both Hegel's categories of divine law and family/kinship values, and Lacan's ethics of the real. Instead, Butler points toward a political possibility beyond ethics, and beyond any representative status that Antigone might be attributed, which Butler shows to be very problematic in the first case.

Butler starts by putting at stake the representative function of Antigone. First of all, she is fiction. Her fictionality is the primary obstacle before her representative status. Secondly, Hegel's thinking of Antigone as representative of kinship relations is problematic because Antigone's family line is incestuous. This means that kinship relations are quite complicated in her example to the extent that it is debatable who is who, such as mother as grandmother, father as brother etc. Even when she claims herself loyal to her brother, the relation can denote many people, starting from her

brother/father Oedipus, all the way to Polynices and Eteocles. Thus, she can hardly be seen as representative of normative kinship relations. Thirdly, she is also sceptical of Irigaray who hails Antigone as a representative of feminist politics and who calls for an attitude to listen what Antigone has to say. The question for Butler is whether Antigone can stand for some feminist politics when her “representative function is itself in crisis” (p. 2). Instead, for Butler, the significance of Antigone lies at the beyond of the politics of representation: “as a figure for politics, she points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed” (p. 2).

Starting from this point, I would like to draw a parallelism in terms of Antigone’s journey for Lacan and Butler. Whereas for Lacan, Antigone points toward the beyond of the pleasure principle, for Butler, she points toward the beyond of the politics of representation. While for Lacan, she transgresses the limits of life and death, for Butler, she transgresses the normative values of kinship, state, and representation. For both, Antigone embodies a liberating and ethical status in which normativity itself is put at stake by pointing and going beyond it. What Antigone does is not to be representative of certain politics or ethos, but exactly to manifest the conditions of impossibility for such politics or ethos. By embodying the impossible as a possibility in her example, Antigone gains meaning as a figure that goes beyond normativity as such. Therefore, if for Lacan, Antigone is beyond the pleasure principle; for Butler, she is clearly beyond the politics of representation and normativity. Nonetheless, in taking her to the beyond of representation, Butler also has a claim on Antigone’s limits. She broadens the scope of Antigone from the ethics



of philosophy and psychoanalysis to the sphere of politics that is feminist, queer, and beyond discourses of humanism.

In thinking about the political status of the figure of Antigone, Butler is initially critical of the way she has been taken up by Hegel, Lacan, and Irigaray “not as a political figure, one whose defiant speech has political implications, but rather as one who articulates a pre-political opposition to politics, representing kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it” (Butler, 2000, p. 2). Hegel does this by associating Antigone with kinship versus the ethical order (*Sittlichkeit*) represented by Creon. For Hegel, Antigone as a woman is the “eternal irony of the community”; she is outside the terms of the polis, but she is an outside that is constitutive of the polis (p. 4). In this sense, she is the conditions of existence for the polis. She can never enter the political domain, nor gain self-consciousness as discussed in Chapter 2. Even though Irigaray is critical of Hegel, as I have also tried to demonstrate above, she takes over Hegel’s reading of Antigone in the dichotomies of male/female and kinship/communal bonds, and concludes that Antigone represents the excluded, dominated maternal, matrilineal relations of the female. It from this position that Antigone gains meaning as a representative of the feminine. Irigaray glorifies the feminine and the maternal as the other of the masculine and the patriarchal; thereby not only essentializing sex/gender, but also ending up in creating taxonomies in defining areas of freedom.

Lacan, on the other hand, is not interested in kinship relations as such; however, Butler criticizes him for regarding kinship as enabling the subject’s entrance into language in the family by the Name of the Father, and thus putting kinship before the symbolic order. Butler claims that Lacan positions Antigone between the imaginary and the symbolic, and as facilitating the symbolic. In this

respect, he repeats the Hegelian gesture “by separating the idealized sphere of kinship, the symbolic, from the sphere of the social” (p. 3). This is one point Butler leaves unclear since for Lacan, there is nothing outside the symbolic that is social; if one thing is for sure, it is that social relations are in the symbolic order, and not beyond. The symbolic is the very order that facilitates the social relations, that renders them meaningful. The symbolic is where meaning is created in language. Dylan Evans, in his *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, underlines that Lacan’s concept of the symbolic order owes much to the anthropological work of Claude Lévi-Strauss whose idea that the social world is structured by certain laws which regulate kinship relations also makes up Lacan’s understanding of the symbolic (Evans, 1996, p. 203). For Lacan, the symbolic is the linguistic universe of signifiers (p. 204) that structure human society, and define the law including kinship relations. In this respect, Butler’s criticism of Lacan seems to depart from the Lacanian understanding of kinship and the symbolic. At this point, Butler’s basic premise is that “a social norm is not quite the same as a ‘symbolic position’ in the Lacanian sense”, and in this respect she is critical of Lacan for privileging the social over the symbolic (Butler, 2000, p.20). However, in the second chapter, she revisits Lacan’s symbolic, and offers some revisions to her previous reading (p. 41). She no longer claims that Lacan prioritizes the social. Now, she maintains that Lacan formulates “kinship on the basis of linguistic structures, the totality of which is called the symbolic” (p. 41). This time she criticizes Lacan for universalizing these kinship relations, which he takes to be contingent relations into the symbolic functioning of language and society (p. 44). Here, Butler calls into question the universal validity of contingent norms of kinship based on role of the incest taboo. Instead of taking these norms as universal laws, she proposes to particularize them, and be open to the idea

that they might change along with history. As in the example of Antigone, the interchangeability of kinship positions introduces aberrant situations from the norm in which family structures and kinship relations are open to change along with the history that produces them. Butler underlines the performativity of kinship and the speech acts involved in the signification of kinship relations. Therefore, she points to the role alternative family structures of gay couples or adopted parents in rethinking kinship and family law (p. 70-71). Consequently, her final criticism arises from Lacan's representation of contingent and symbolic kinship relations as unchanging patriarchal structures of social life. In contradistinction to Lacan, Butler underlines the fragility of the contingency of the law that conditions the Lacanian symbolic.

Also critical of the idea of separability of kinship and the state, Butler maintains that the tragedy of Antigone questions whether there can be any kinship relations without the mediation of the state, and whether there can be any state without the support of family (Butler, 2000, p. 5). Rather, there is interdependence between state and family. This relation between state and family complicates the reading of the figures of Creon and Antigone. Butler, opposing the association of Creon with the state and Antigone with the family, points at the moments that blur the distinction and the transgression between the two spheres which condition the action of the play. Her prominent example in this respect is Antigone's language. According to Butler, when Antigone steps outside the household into the public sphere, she "absorbs the very language of the state against which she rebels" (p. 5), her language "most closely approximates Creon's, the language of sovereign authority and action" (p. 6). Thus, by appropriating the discourse of the sovereign, and by becoming "manly" in the instance of leaving household and entering the public domain, she "transgresses both gender and kinship norms" (p. 6). According

to Butler, contrary to Hegel, this does not show that Antigone's attempt is doomed to fail, but "she exposes the socially contingent character of kinship" (p. 6). Likewise, Butler demonstrates that Creon's position is also determined by not only the state, but also kinship. His sovereignty is based on his kinship lines, and he feels unmanned for being opposed by a woman, showing the fragility of his gender power.

A very important issue that arises from Butler's reading of Antigone is the discussion of Antigone's relation to the idea of sovereignty. Butler's association of Antigone with "the language of sovereign authority and action" (p. 6) is repeated many times throughout her text. In an endnote, Butler refers to an article by Jean Bethke Ehlstain where Ehlstain suggests that Antigone represents the civil society, and that her voice is neither that of kinship nor of the state. Butler does not try to refute this claim; however, she differentiates her own stance by underlining that according to her, there is no uncontaminated voice with which Antigone speaks, which means that she can neither represent the feminine over and against the state, or kinship in its distinction from state power (n1, p. 88). At the beginning of the second chapter, she repeats her claim: "[Antigone] attempts to speak in the political sphere in the language of sovereignty that is the instrument of political power" (p. 27), and she paraphrases her claim in the following way:

Her language is not that of a survivable political agency. Her words, understood as deeds, are chiasmically related to the vernacular of sovereign power, speaking in and against it, delivering and defying imperatives at the same time, inhabiting the language of sovereignty at the very moment in which she opposes sovereign power and is excluded from its terms. What this suggests is that she cannot make her claim outside the language of the state, but neither can the claim she wants to make be fully assimilated by the state. (p. 28)

Butler's claim raises more questions than it answers: In what sense, exactly, Butler claims that Antigone adopts the language of sovereignty? What is the

language of the sovereign? Or how does a sovereign speak? What does Antigone say that she becomes the verbal accomplice of the state? In the quotation above, Butler refers to Antigone's speech acts. Even without considering at length the content of Antigone's speech, the fact that she speaks publicly and against Creon, and that she puts forth speech acts, such as "I did it. I don't deny a thing" (Sophocles, 1984, p. 81, l. 492), marks her in a chiasmic relation in regard to her opponent Creon. In addition to this, she is found "manly" on account of giving public speeches like a man, and what is more, she speaks in imperatives like Creon. In this sense, she emerges like the reverse image of Creon. In such a gesture, she not only defies him, but in reflecting him, also embodies his position even if only from the reverse. Thus, according to Butler, she assumes the language of the sovereign; she appropriates the language of the state to open space for her act as a speech act. However, Antigone, unlike the sovereign, does not dominate or establish power relations over others. Her speech acts bind no one other than herself. Unlike Creon, who with his speech acts, determine the right to live, to die, to be buried, or to be left unburied, Antigone claims no power over others. In this respect, I find it debatable that Antigone, only by speaking up against the state, and in a powerful language, speaks within the discourse of the sovereign. Even though she does transcend gender roles in appearing "manly" or masculine to the Chorus and to Creon (but definitely—and interestingly—not to Haemon) in her stepping up to the public sphere, I find it debatable whether she is engaged in a masculine and sovereign act. This brings about the question whether Butler here conflates speech act with sovereignty. In order to explicate what I mean, I will first try to clarify what is to be understood by the language of the sovereign both in the tragedy of Antigone and in critical theory.

My first question is: how does a sovereign speak? I will try to answer this question by looking at examples of two sovereign powers' speeches in Sophocles, namely, Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* and Creon in *Antigone*. I propose to consider two instances where they publicly proclaim their sovereignty respectively. The first is the instance in *Oedipus Rex*, where Oedipus announces that he will punish the murderer of Laius:

I'll start again –I'll bring it all to light myself! . . .  
Now you have me to fight for you, you'll see:  
I'm the land's avenger by all rights,  
and Apollo's champion too.  
But not to assist some distant kinsman, no,  
for my own sake I'll rid us of this corruption.  
Whoever killed the king may decide to kill me too,  
with the same violent hand –by avenging Laius  
I defend myself. . . .

One of you summon the city before us,  
tell them I'll do everything. God help us,  
we will see our triumph –or our fall. (Sophocles, 1984, p. 167, ll.150-164)

The striking point of Oedipus' speech is that he addresses his own position as the one who rights a wrong, as an "avenger by all rights", as the defender of the city, as the one who fights for all. He decides over the fate of the city as the king, and in his sovereignty, he is responsible for the triumph or fall of the whole city. The second is the instance when Creon makes public his decree about the burials of Eteocles and Polynices:

I could never stand by silent, watching destruction  
March against our city, putting safety to rout,  
nor could I ever make that man a friend of mine  
who menaces our country. Remember this:  
our country *is* our safety. . . .

Closely akin to them I have proclaimed,  
Just now, the following decree to our people  
Concerning the two sons of Oedipus.  
Eteocles, who died fighting for Thebes,  
Excelling all in arms: he shall be buried, . . .

But as for his blood brother Polynices, . . .  
No, he must be left unburied, his corpse  
Carrion for the birds and dogs to tear,  
An obscenity for the citizens to behold!

These are my principles. Never at my hands  
Will the traitor be honoured above the patriot.  
But whoever proves his loyalty to the state—  
I'll prize that man in death as well as in life. (Sophocles, 1984, p. 68,  
ll. 206-235)

Here, Creon, again by himself, decides on the fate of the bodies of the two royal people of Thebes. This is again a decision the sovereign undertakes for the professed “good of all”. On the one hand, he is punishing his enemy, Polynices even after his death; on the other, he is setting an example for the whole city to teach them a lesson. He is the king; he passes decrees; he decides over life and death situations that will have effects on everyone alike. Can we say the same for Antigone? Her actions bind only herself, and her close kin. With her speech acts, unlike Oedipus and Creon, she never claims to have a say over the lives or deaths of others. Even after his fall from sovereignty, Oedipus continues to shower curses on his sons in the very same language of the sovereign in *Oedipus at Colonus* (Sophocles, 1984, pp. 364-365, ll. 1531-1584). However, Antigone takes responsibility for her own actions, and does not even let Ismene be part of it after she is unable to help her bury Polynices. She says to Ismene, “Never share my dying”, “My death will be enough” (Sophocles, 1984, p. 87, ll. 615- 617); and once more in the presence of Creon to Ismene, “I chose to die” (p. 88, l. 626), “I gave myself to death” (p. 88, l. 630). Antigone’s speech acts have no claim over others even if her actions have consequences beyond what is foreseeable for her. In this respect, she diverges greatly from the discourses of sovereignty that determine the words and speech acts of both Oedipus and Creon.

Butler's understanding of the idea of sovereignty can be traced back to the writings of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault. In *Homo Sacer* (1998), Agamben starts from Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty as "Sovereign is who decides on the state of exception" (p. 11). For him, sovereignty borders on the limits of law and the state on the sphere of life. Agamben underlines the historical shift in the idea of sovereignty, which is also relevant if we are to talk about Sophocles' polis. He situates the state of emergency essentially in modernity and argues that in modernity the idea of sovereignty at the threshold of political order is fully called into question. Before modernity, he thinks that the state formed the fundamental horizon of communal life, and "[t]he problem of sovereignty was reduced to the question of who within the political order was invested with certain powers" (p. 12). Even so, in the example of Sophocles' *Antigone*, we can retrace the idea of the sovereign in the figure of Creon. Agamben defines the sovereign as "at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order" (p. 15). Since he has the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, he legally places himself outside the law. The opening of *Antigone* is Creon's state of exception. We understand that under normal circumstances, the law is the burial of the dead, especially when the dead share royal blood, and that it is a sacrilege to leave unburied someone of royal blood. This is the law. This is not only the law of the Gods to which Antigone refers, but also the law of the city. However, Creon, as the sovereign, declares a state of exception, and based on the suspension of the former law, he enforces the decree of the state of exception, and he demands submission to his law.

In her analysis of *Antigone*, Butler arrives at the conclusion that given her ambiguous status within relations of kinship and state, Antigone can hardly be representative of any kinship or politics. Likewise, the notion of sovereignty



introduced by Butler into the tragedy puts the representative function of Creon very much at stake, as well. Reading Creon as the figure of the sovereign who decides on the state of exception, I conclude that Creon, too, given his claim to sovereignty, can hardly be representative of the law of the city. Instead, he lays claim on the aberration from the normative law in the position that he embodies. In this respect, he does not represent the law in the normative sense of the term, but he only embodies the sovereignty deciding on the state of exception from the law.

Butler, in *Prekarious Life* (2006) refers to Foucault's "Governmentality" where he writes that the end of sovereignty is the submission to sovereignty: "[S]overeignty's aim is the positing of its own power. Sovereignty's highest aim is to maintain that very positing power as authoritative and effective" (p. 93). This is exactly what Creon is after: submission to his decree. He says to the Chorus, "Follow my order closely then / be on your guard" and "See that you never side with those who break my orders" (Sophocles, 1984, p. 69, ll. 240-41, 245). His aim is to posit his sovereignty by maintaining submission to it. His sovereignty consists in his enforcement of the state of exception, which he facilitates through speech acts. Butler writes that "The exercise of sovereign power is bound-up with extra-legal status of these official acts of speech. These acts become the means by which sovereign power extends itself" (2006, p. 80), and that "the speech acts make use of the law only to twist and suspend the law in the end" (p. 82). Similarly, when Haemon says "It's no city at all, owned by one man alone", he refers to the body of law according to which a king should rule; however, Creon responds to him as "What? The city is the king's—that's the law!" (Sophocles, 1984, p. 97, ll. 824-825), thus placing his sovereignty over the good of the city.

Butler, while elaborating on Foucault's distinction between governmentality and sovereignty in terms of contemporary US state politics, maintains that law is grounded in sovereignty, but sovereignty is not grounded in law (2006, p. 94); therefore, "it exploits the extra-legal dimension of governmentality to assert a lawless sovereign power over life and death" (p. 95). Keeping the historical dimension in mind, I think we can still draw a parallelism between this conception of sovereignty as power over life and death, which is not grounded in law and the example set by Creon's sovereignty. His aim is to posit power over life and death. I have also discussed that according to Lacan, he also has a claim beyond death, in the sense of condemning Polynices to a second, a symbolic death. In this respect, Creon's position is unique. Antigone does not share in his sovereignty even in her defiance of his sovereignty. Nor can she rise up in a chiasmic relation to his speech act by hers because she has no claim to power over others, let alone having power over life and death. She only refers to the law of the Gods. She does not suggest a state of exception to the law. On the contrary, she stands for the law, both divine and the city's law. What she is against is the state of exception commanded by the sovereign figure of Creon. In this sense, she cannot parallel Creon as she does not introduce another state of exception that overpowers situations of life and death. The only life over which she has any command is only her own. She buries her brother that is already dead, so with her deed, she only confirms his status as dead.

To return to my question, what does Antigone say so that she is thought to embody the language of the sovereign? In this respect, Antigone's speech act is what Butler points at: "I did it. I don't deny a thing" (Sophocles, 1984, p. 81, l. 492). Butler refers to the exclusion of women from the public sphere, and the gesture of Antigone is exceptional in her stepping on the public sphere as one of "those who

were not permitted into the interlocutory scene of the public sphere where the human is constituted through words and deeds and most forcefully constituted when its word becomes its deed” (Butler, 2000, p. 81). It is striking that Butler here highlights the denial of humanity to the feminine, to the woman, in the sense of being a political subject. The inhuman status of Antigone is doubled with her upsetting of normative kinship values and the vocabulary belonging to it (p. 82). Yet, Antigone speaks up, according to the Chorus and Creon—but not to Haemon—*like a man*: “She speaks within the language of entitlement from which she is excluded” (Butler, 2000, p. 82). Furthermore, she insists on the public grieving of her loss even though as a woman she belongs to the private sphere, which according to Butler, “moves her away from feminine gender into hubris, into that distinctively manly excess that makes the guards, the Chorus, and Creon wonder: Who is the man here?” (p. 80)

The question remains: What happens to the excluded other of the public sphere when she steps in and assumes speech, which has always been associated with man and the masculine? Will we repeat the gesture of associating of the public enunciation with masculinity? Is a sense of entitlement exclusive to the male? In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben writes about language as the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and language is always beyond itself: “It expresses the bond of inclusive exclusion to which a thing is subject because of the fact of being in language, of being named. To speak [*dire*] is, in this sense, always to ‘speak the law’, *ius dicere*” (Agamben 1998, p. 21). So, in this case, is Antigone guilty of another crime of stepping into language publicly, and in her entitlement, not only displacing gender, but also becoming male? In the last lines of her book, Butler writes,

If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political

catagchresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founds on its own founding laws. She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future. (Butler, 2000, p. 82)

Elsewhere, Butler writes that Antigone draws into crisis the representative function itself, the very horizon of intelligibility (p. 22), and that her reading of Antigone suggests a productive crisis, which points at the aberration of the norm (p. 29). In this moment of crisis in what may be termed in general as the politics of representation, the figure of Antigone unveils the ways in which kinship norms, gender, the male-defined boundaries of the political are displaced. With this gesture, she does not speak within the discourse of the sovereign, and in this respect, she does not become an accomplice of the state power. On the contrary, she destabilizes the very discourses that sustain state power, by embodying them as a woman, and blasting them from the inside by showing the performativity and fragility of such positions of power.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

George Steiner's inquiry in *Antigones* has been a major preoccupation for feminist critics including Judith Butler, Miriam Leonard, Cecilia Sjöholm: "What would have happened if psychoanalysis had taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?" (Butler, 2000, p.57; Zajko and Leonard, 2008, p. 121; Sjöholm, 2004, p. xi). Miriam Leonard provides a very straightforward answer:

If psychoanalysis had taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure it would have given rise to a more explicitly politicised understanding of the psychoanalytic sexual subject. The confrontation over the *Antigone* not only marked a crucial turning-point in the history of psychoanalysis and its relationship to feminist thought, it also raises important questions about the relationship between ethics and politics in feminist theory more generally. (Leonard, 2010, 122)

Cecilia Sjöholm even refers to an "Antigone complex" as an alternative not to the clinical practice the way Oedipus complex is used, but to describe "the complexity introduced in any discussion of desire where the feminine is concerned" (2004, p. xii). She emphasizes the importance of Antigone in introducing the notion of desire into ethics, politics, and the law rather than isolating it as an aspect of symbolic castration (p. xi).

The crossroads of ethics and politics in *Antigone* that various feminist critics of Antigone have responded to provides the backbone of my argument in this dissertation, as well. In opting for an argument for the modern political subject as a problematic but revolutionary presence in the figure of Antigone, this dissertation looks for the invention of new horizons to traverse the hiatus between ethics and politics. In *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* (2009), Simon Critchley, reading Levinas and Derrida along with Blanchot, defines ethics as the infinite responsibility of

unconditional hospitality (p. 275), and politics as the art of response to the singular demand of the other, which is a demand that calls for an invention (p. 276). To deduce a politics from ethics, it is necessary to go across the gap or hiatus in between. In articulating Derrida's idea of "democracy to come", Critchley writes that politics is the task of political invention responding to the other's decision in me (p. 277). Therefore, he formulates democracy to come as an ethical injunction, a prepolitical source for the political (p. 279). Opening up to the other's decision in me, as the sphere of the real within, as the fellow human being that is at once inside and outside provides a radical entrance into the political via the ethical. For Levinas and Derrida, the ethical becomes what conditions the political. In this sense, Antigone's ethical decision to bury her brother is at once what conditions her political action and her speaking up for it. She insists on the symbolic representation and social recognition of her action. She did it, and she will not deny it. At the same time, the tragedy of Antigone calls for another dimension to the relation between ethics and politics. From the other way around, does not politics condition ethics as well? It is the political situation prior to the action of the play that enforces in Antigone such ethical decision. Therefore, I tend to think the relation as twofold and in a dialectical relationship. Antigone testifies to both the political conditioning of the ethical and the ethical conditioning of the political.

Starting from Hegelian philosophy, I argued that the German Idealist, and more particularly Hegelian reading of Antigone into the ethical life of the Spirit in its movement in history has been influential in shaping the modern appropriation of the figure and the play to the extent that it is still the authoritative reading of the play as the clash of two equally legitimate powers of social life. The binaries at work in Hegel's dialectic such as the male vs. female, divine law vs. human law, state vs. the

family, continues to shape the modern interpretations of the play, an example of which I tried to trace in the Irish debate over the national question vis-à-vis the tragedy of Antigone. As I tried to show it, Hegel's discussion of Antigone is not only concerned with ethics, but more than that its main preoccupation is the political and social relations in which the dialectic functions in shaping the ethical life of the community. I argued that after the French revolution, any claim to subjecthood always already assumes a political subject. In this sense, Hegel's ethico-political subject has to come to the point of self-consciousness through his deeds, transgressions, crime, clash with other powers at work so as to emerge in civic society as a political agent that is recognized and is responsible for the welfare of not only his own individual being, but also for the community he is a part of. Antigone is the very model for Hegel to develop his idea of the movement of the ethico-political subject's self-consciousness in history. In my reading of Hegel, I also tried to show how in his rewriting of Antigone, at the same time, his understanding of self-consciousness is based on the exclusion of the feminine from the public space. Hegel's positioning of the female as the eternal irony of the community, not only betrays his assumption of patriarchy as the natural functioning of the society, but it also gives rise to the dominant philosophical and political discourse that founds the normative as such.

I mentioned that Hegel takes Antigone from the field of poetics into philosophy, which has consequences in the afterlife of Antigone in modernity. Another prominent figure who repeats a similar gesture in the twentieth century is Lacan, who rewrites Antigone to come up with an ethics of psychoanalysis. We have seen that Lacan is determined to limit his inquiry into Antigone to the domain of ethics. This results in criticisms against him for depoliticising the play and refusing

to see the political implications of Antigone's actions. It is true that Lacan is not interested in the political ends of Antigone's act, and he reads the play rather from the instrumental point of view of an analyst to explicate the paths desire takes and the possibility of an ethical relation regarding one's desire. I tried to show that even so there are points when Lacan points at the field of politics in his conceptualization of an ethical way of life such as we have seen in his discussion of happiness as the happiness of all and how there are social and political conditions that necessitate and bring forth the figure of Antigone. Lacan sees the figure of Antigone as an indispensable figure for the functioning of ethics and politics alike. In this, I read Lacan as rewriting Antigone from the field of psychoanalytical theory. Žižek, on the other hand, as a Lacanian philosopher, takes up his reading of Antigone, and I conclude that rewrites not only Antigone, but also Lacan's reading of it. In the end, Žižek cannot restrain himself from coming up with a politically reactionary version of Antigone, which is quite different from Lacan's signification of the play.

I discussed that Hegel and Lacan's reading in the sense of rewriting of Antigone find the most intense criticism from a political perspective from feminist critics such as Irigaray and Butler. Irigaray strikes the reader as an interesting figure for being both Hegelian and Lacanian, yet in criticism of both. Her writings on Antigone involve a very strong and outspoken criticism of Hegel especially, however, she still remains within the confines of Hegel's philosophical universe. Yet, Irigaray's basic move is to criticize Hegel and Lacan for disregarding what Antigone, as a woman, has to say about herself, and she proposes to concentrate on the political significance of the feminine action. On the other hand, Butler reads the play in a way to put at stake the dominant readings of the play whose most prominent examples for her are Hegel and Lacan, and she transforms the whole philosophical



and psychoanalytic vocabulary around the figure of Antigone to open up for new horizons to rethink the political subject. Other feminist critics of Antigone such as Tina Chanter, Bonnie Honig, Miriam Leonard, and Mary Beth Mader also included, the discussion around the figure of Antigone shifts from philosophical or psychoanalytic readings and starts to find a centre of gravity on the political horizons opened up by various readings of the play.

I finished my last chapter with an analysis of the idea of sovereignty introduced by Agamben, Foucault, and Butler. I tried to bring together Butler's discussion of the language and the role of sovereignty in Antigone with a general discussion of sovereignty into the play, which brings me to a very fruitful political discussion concerning the contemporary political implications that the figure of Antigone might put forth for us.

For Butler, one significantly political act of Antigone is not only her burial of her brother, but also her public mourning over her loss: "She is one for whom open grieving itself is a crime (Butler, 2000, p. 79). In *Precarious Life* (2006), Butler revisits the discussion she carried out in *Antigone's Claim* (2000) in terms of the grievability of loss, and asks: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, What makes for a grievable life?" (p. 20) Butler's answer is that "we", in terms of everybody, for having suffered loss can relate: "if we have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and loved". However, some losses are not seen as publicly grievable losses by certain hegemonic discourses in the United States such as those that died due to AIDS, sexual minorities, Palestinians, Afghans and so on. In Antigone's case, her ungrievable loss that she insists on public grieving is her brother as a traitor to the city. Yet, the politicality of Antigone's action arises from her insistence on grieving what is proclaimed to be an ungrievable loss. She

politicizes her grief and mobilizes her vulnerability. This becomes her mode of resistance. According to Butler, “Once we understand the way vulnerability enters into agency, then our understanding of both terms can change, and the binary opposition between [vulnerability and resistance] can become undone. I consider the undoing of this binary a feminist task” (Butler, 2016, p. 25). So, for Antigone her vulnerability is not something she must or can overcome in order to resist. It is as a vulnerable body that Antigone resists, and what she puts at stake is nothing less than this vulnerability. In her example, we see how vulnerability and political agency coexist.

As the ultimately excluded, as reduced to the inhuman, as “*homo sacer*”, as “bare life” Antigone resists. Agamben writes, “To show law in its nonrelation to life and life in its nonrelation to law means to open a space between them for human action, which once claimed for itself the name of ‘politics’” (Agamben, p. 2005, p. 88). According to Agamben, politics suffered a lasting eclipse because law imposed itself as its substitution. Yet, true political action arises in the nexus between violence and law (p. 88). This is also where Antigone is: between violence and the law. Between the law that is suspended in the state of exception and the violence she suffers, her resistance to sovereignty as political action is situated. In this sense, there is no simple inclusion into the public sphere. Speaking up and being well versed do not and should not necessarily mean to remain within the sovereign’s discourse or assuming the male role. Antigone’s act, as Butler emphasizes, destabilizes gender, disrupts the laws of kinship, and becomes an aberration from the norm. Consequently, she opens up new horizons for coming to existence, and she speaks up to a future to come. However, I do not agree that her speech acts are representative or chiasmic images of the sovereign’s discourse. Rather, it seems essential that we

make a distinction between two forms of sovereignty. If we are to take sovereignty in the sense of having autonomy and agency concerning one's actions, then it follows that Antigone, in her vulnerability in resistance, claims sovereignty. But if we are in the domain of the sovereignty of the sovereign, as the arbiter of the life and death of others, then Antigone's act clearly differs from and posits the alternative of the discourse of the sovereign. The first claim of sovereignty is advocated by Bonnie Honig in *Antigone Interrupted* (2013), where she calls for a new reading—in the sense of rewriting—of Antigone that is an alternative to reading her radical politics limited to dissidence or lamentation: “This new Antigone does not only protest and mourn sovereignty's excesses. She also plots and conspires; she quests for power and seeks to infiltrate and claim sovereignty” (p. 194).

In her vulnerability, what Antigone mobilizes becomes her insistence on marching to her doom, her death. The psychoanalytic tradition has read her as the representative of the death drive and the Lacanian real. However, risking a paradox, I think this is in no way an obstacle to reading her as revealing a strong will to live, as an advocate, a defender, or a champion of life. For Irigaray, who contrasts the principle of life with mere survival, Antigone ultimately represents the principle of life in the universe. Where mere survival, which is not life i.e., the realization of the full potential of a human's inner and social resources, is the only option to continue one's existence, existence itself becomes a problematic issue. Antigone, buried alive in an underground cave and forced to the bare minimum of survival, refuses being denied life in its full potential. According to Irigaray, this is what Western patriarchal system is about: killing without openly committing a murder, little by little depriving the individual of the environment that allow one to live. In the face of this deprivation, Antigone values life so much that she will not substitute anything for it.

The phrase “She cannot accept survival instead of living” (Irigaray, 2008, p. 204) is Antigone’s rebellious championing of life over Creon’s edict. As a result, she chooses to march to her death instead of submitting to the restriction of the human law. What Antigone’s choice signifies is that death is also a course in the life of the cosmic order. What is not a part of the cosmic order is neither death nor life; but it is the alienation of the life cycle, the denial of existence on the part of the subject. That is why Antigone is determined to walk to her death instead of accepting any compromise. What she refuses is not her chances of living, but the acceptance of the alienation of life imposed by an arbitrary human law.

Even if the path of Antigone necessarily leads to her death, even if she walks to her death voluntarily and insistently, Antigone is still exemplary in her defiance of hegemonic state power. Her act is the conditions of possibility of resistance even when there is no hope of survival. If there is still Antigone, there is still hope. It means that there is always one that stands up against power where it feels sovereign. There is always one to resist. There is always one to resist even if it means to desire death. This is what makes Antigone so crucial in our understanding of resistance today. The more we feel that we are trapped in the power mechanisms of imperialism and totalitarian, fundamentalist structures whose alternatives we fall short of engendering, and the more we feel that we are approaching the death sentence bestowed upon us by hegemonic powers, the more we feel like walking toward not only our death but also the death of our planet altogether. Antigone keeps reminding us that we can stand up against what seems to be an invincible, oppressive power. Hence, we turn to Antigone in an effort to understand the human position in defiance. Tina Chanter and Sean Kirkland, reading modern reappropriations of Antigone around the globe call for the generation of new Antigones, Antigones to

come (2014, p. 19). They note that “her voice is activated in precise political configurations that call forth her demise, bringing her to life whenever a political crisis emerges that is premised upon the articulation of some form of exclusion that the very form of a state renders inarticulable” (p. 6)

In the discussion of Antigone as a political subject in all her problematic, if not paradoxical existence, I turned to Agamben’s understanding of state of exception as a paradigm of government; not as a special kind of law, but as the suspension of the law, as the law’s limit situation (2005, p. 4). Living in an age in which, as Benjamin famously put it, the state of emergency has become not an exception but the rule (2007, p. 256), how are we to read, and in this sense, rewrite Antigone so that we also in a way respond to how tragedy speaks to our present urgencies? Antigone’s ghost has been haunting the various parts of the globe, not least the Middle East, where she claims her speech acts, claims visibility and recognition of her loss, her grief, her suffering, and finally her act, her defiance. As Chanter and Kirkland’s final words inspire a multiplication, a proliferation of Antigones: “Other Antigones. Other plays. Other performances and artistic transpositions. Other interpretations. Other politics. Antigone will always rise again” (2014, p. 20).

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