

Introduction

The Shadowy Others of *Antigone's* Legacy

The Sophoclean tragic cycle stands as exemplary for Western culture in so many diverse ways, the exemplarity of which has been expounded by various philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary figures, some of whom have themselves founded schools of thought (Aristotle, Hegel, Freud). Yet all too rarely have the exponents of Sophocles' Oedipus or Antigone been willing or able to take on and think through the paradox that these literary, philosophical, psychoanalytic heroes were penned by an aristocratic author whose "leisure" time to conceive, write, and perform his exemplary tragedies was bought at the expense of a system of chattel slavery that in some circles is considered in bad taste even to mention. In other circles the historical fact of Athenian slavery tends to be minimized, peremptorily dismissed, or excused on the pretext that if the suffering of some enabled the genius of others, if Athens was built on a system of slavery, and if that is what it took to produce the literary heroes who have become heroes of more than one empire, then so be it.¹ The achievements of ancient Athenian society are glorified in a manner that encourages a certain evasion of our own implication in empires built on slavery and colonialism. In the following I suggest that slavery is very much at issue, even in tragedies, such as *Antigone*, whose interpretive legacy might imply otherwise.

Sophocles' *Oedipal Cycle* can be read as negotiating, reflecting, and differentiating between two different models of marriage: an archaic model based upon exogamy, and the newly emergent one that was more characteristic of the limited democracy of the city of Athens in the fifth century BCE, which tended toward endogamy. Central to the question of whether to marry outside or inside a group is how that group is constituted: who qualifies as someone outside the group, and how are such identities distinguishable from those inside the group? How are the boundaries of the group delineated? What constitutes heterogeneity, and what homogeneity? What is the role of birth, lineage, culture, politics, language, or rationality? What does it mean to be an outsider or

a foreigner? What does it mean to be an insider? What is the province of law, what is that of convention, and how does one inform the other?

Since the issue of how to constitute a group is at stake, so too is the issue of how one's membership of a particular group is determined, and how group identity is passed on. Questions of purity or impurity, recognition and misrecognition, and the possibility of contamination figure writ large. The need to forge or enforce certain distinctions, to stipulate legality, conventions of rule and governance, and the determination of political rights—all these issues are fairly obviously at play in Greek tragedy. Thrown into the mix, but often subordinated to the concerns that most interpretive legacies have treated as self-evident, is the paradox that the Oedipal cycle, and the tragic dramas more or less cotemporaneous with it, is written during a period when aristocratic, archaic rule is giving way to democratic rule in Athens, and yet the democracy that was emerging based itself upon a slave society.

My observation about the paradox between democracy and slavery is not, of course, unprecedented. According to Yvon Garlan, “Considered theoretically indispensable to the fulfillment of free men, servile labor . . . does appear to have played a determining role . . . in places where we can form the clearest picture, that is, in classical Athens . . . it is . . . undeniable that chattel slavery in classical Athens and communal servitude of one type or another elsewhere did constitute the ‘basis’ of Greek society or—to put it another way—the necessary element for it to affirm its identity.”² In an article originally published in 1941, Gregory Vlastos comments on “the real contradiction in Athenian society: a free political community that rested on a slave economy” and goes on to say “that a consistent democratic philosophy would repudiate slavery altogether.”³ As Page du Bois observes however, Vlastos distanced himself from his earlier arguments in a 1959 postscript, “undoubtedly affected by the postwar climate of the United States in the Eisenhower fifties.”⁴ My focus here is on how slavery and related themes play out in Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

Written over a period of time that has come to be differentiated from the earlier, archaic, mythical time that it narrates, Sophocles’ Oedipal cycle both enacts and interrogates the transition from archaic to classical culture. Self-consciously looking over his shoulder, Sophocles begins at the end of his narrative drama, as it were, with *Antigone*, returns to its beginning, with *Oedipus Rex*, and ends in the middle of the action, with *Oedipus at Colonus*. Moving back in time, in order to move forward, going back to the beginning, with a retroactive gesture that approaches the present with a newly informed perspective, Sophocles spirals back to an originating moment that has always already been put in question as originary. The literary construction of the Oedipal cycle thereby refuses any straightforward causal approach to history, introducing a model of temporality that might be interpreted in a traumatic vein, one that requires a working through of certain impasses, ruptures, and repetitions.

Sophocles presents his audience with an Antigone whose array of symptoms requires interpretation. Yet hermeneutic authority has, perhaps inevitably, been granted to those who have proven themselves invested in taking on some of the textual impasses that arise in a reading of *Antigone* at the expense of others, thereby participating in and inventing a history and politics of interpretation that perpetuates and reinvigorates certain blind spots, even as others come to be creatively and provocatively alleviated and recast. Institutional, theoretical, and disciplinary legacies intersect with one another in ways that predispose critics to position themselves within this politics of interpretation in more or less defensive ways. When entrenched positions are questioned, their proponents are liable to respond in ways that rearticulate old hegemonic patterns, while those who have issued challenges, having absorbed to a certain extent the theoretical assumptions of the interlocutors they set out to engage, are susceptible to a measure of complacency about the critical purchase of their own inherited discourses.

Antigone has thus been endowed with a death wish, with an unnatural attachment to her dead brother—an attachment that has been read in Oedipal terms, one that she elevates above all other familial connections, including Haemon and Ismene. She has been read as if she exhibited an abnormal aversion to marriage, to femininity, and to her reproductive destiny. Yet what such readings leave aside is the profound confusion into which Oedipus's parricide and incest throws his family and his city, a confusion that is reflected by the order in which the plays are written, and which is both generational and conceptual. In *Antigone*, everything appears to be in disarray, not least conventional roles.

Given the expectation that women married young and perpetuated the family line, Antigone's refusal of marriage, her substitution of Polynices for Haemon, and her subsequent symbolic marriage to death, are seen as calling into question the economy of exchange, or what Gayle Rubin has called the "traffic in women."⁵ According to this system, the exchange of women from their birth family to the family into which they marry was orchestrated by the male guardian or *kurios*. In Antigone's case, Creon has become, by default, both the *kurios*, the one who expects to give away the bride, and the father of the one who expects to receive her—a doubling of identity that echoes all the other doubled identities that structure the Oedipal myth.

In a world where women are silenced and marginalized, confined indoors for the most part, seen as unfit for politics, excluded from decision making, in need of constant male guardianship, incapable of acting as legal subjects, ostensibly given to the pleasures of Eros, and therefore subject to close scrutiny to ensure the legitimacy of male heirs, Antigone's character breaks all the rules.⁶ She flouts the authority of Creon, her *kurios*, or familial guardian, and her king, she refuses marriage and childbearing altogether, she insists on the superiority of her beliefs, and she threatens the established balance of power between male and female, king and subject.⁷ She will not be governed by Creon's rule

at any level.⁸ She will be mastered by no one but herself, preferring death to compromise, preferring death to life.

No sooner is this said than the full complexity of the symbolic challenge, definitive of the kinship relations that situate Antigone, begins to impose itself. For, as Derrida has observed so appositely, and with such devastating irony, hers is no ordinary family.⁹ Creon is both king and uncle to Antigone, whose relationship to Oedipus and Polynices suffers from a profound generational confusion. If Oedipus is both son and husband to Jocasta, both father and brother to Antigone, Antigone is both sister and aunt to Polynices. As the daughter of Oedipus, Antigone is sister to Polynices and Eteocles, and as the half sister of Oedipus, she is aunt to her brothers. She is the daughter of a previous king (Oedipus), but she is also (via Jocasta) his half sister. She is the sister/aunt of previous kings, who mutually contest one another's right to be king (Polynices and Eteocles), and the wife-to-be of King Creon's son (Haemon). Creon has inherited the throne as a function of the unwavering refusal of Athenian inheritance law to recognize women as legal subjects, and of Athenian culture to view women as subjects capable of competent decision making or of political leadership. Antigone's violation of Creon's edict is as much a marking out of the structure that ensures the exchange of women as it is a refusal to obey Creon's edict, or to marry Haemon. For how can Antigone be exchanged from one *oikos* to another, when she is already included in the *oikos* to which she is destined? Acting as her legal guardian, her *kurios*, in the wake of the death of Oedipus, Creon would have to give his niece Antigone away to his own son. The generational distinction between father and son is precisely that which Oedipus has conflated; in Antigone's case, the distinction between the function of the father, in this case Creon, as the one who, according to convention, should give Antigone away, and his son, in this case Haemon, the one who should receive her, is obscured.¹⁰ Oedipus's act of incest has rendered the distinction between the father as donor and recipient as son inoperative. Unless this distinction is clarified, the *oikos* into which Antigone would be received is the very same as that which cedes her—an impressive blockage indeed!

Antigone's refusal to be the object of exchange between Creon and Haemon, her refusal to make the transition from virgin to wife, marks a breakdown of her passage from one household to another, a breakdown that is inscribed not merely in her obstinacy, but in the logic of her excessively compounded identity—for which, true to Hegel's reading of tragedy—Antigone takes responsibility. In refusing to follow through on her proposed marriage to Haemon, Antigone draws attention to and renders problematic the endogamous trend of marriage practices that are ascendant in Athens, the difficulty within the Oedipal family of separating the father from the son, and the status of women in the exchange that is expected of them in marriage. In this particular family, the logic of gift-giving is exposed as aporetic; some might say that aporetic relations are at

the heart of such a logic at the best of times. In this sense Antigone's refusal to be the object of exchange points out a more general problematic within the logic of the exchange system, in which women must pass from one guardian to another. Antigone raises the question of the nature of the gift as such to which Marcel Mauss and Derrida, among others, have drawn attention. Antigone's blocked passage metonymically evinces not merely her refusal to be exchanged by Creon, but rather the impossibility of this exchange in her particular case, an impossibility predicated on the failure of the Oedipal family to maintain a distinction between the symbolic role of the father and that of the son. More importantly it points out the impossibility of a system that looks exclusively inward, threatening to become ever more incestuous, ever more exclusionary, ever more allergic to outsiders, ever more protective of its borders—a system that is in danger, we might say, of autoimmunity.¹¹

So concerned is Athens to patrol its borders, so concerned is it to protect its wealth from foreign interlopers, and so concerned is Creon to consolidate wealth, that—Sophocles' hyperbolic representation of this incestuous family suggests—both polis and oikos are in danger of undermining their own systems of exchange, of administering their own poison to precisely the body politic on which there is such a premium to protect from outside corruption. Measures adopted to ensure the stability of the polis are liable to stagnate it. Athens is in danger of an infection that spreads not from without, but from within, and it is Creon, as much as Oedipus, who constitutes the threat. Ignorant of who he is and what he has done, Oedipus dramatically figures a contamination of Thebes. He poses a danger to the security of the polis, threatening its stability, and passing on the confusion of his identity to his children, who do not fail to follow out the ramifications of Oedipal ignorance about the meaning of his identity and the significance of his deeds. Killing each other in mutual combat, Polynices and Eteocles bequeath their familial confusion to Antigone, who confronts it, abruptly arresting the logic of the apparently inevitable familial curse, opting out, refusing to play any of the roles that might have been expected of her. Faced first with the consequences of the multiple familial identities of Oedipus, and then with the threat of impurity that Polynices' exposed corpse represents, Antigone puts a stop to the logic of misplaced identity and morality gone awry, blocking the impulse to turn ever more inward, challenging the need to consolidate boundaries by keeping it all within the family. To say that Antigone is acting out, that she is too stubborn, is to miss the point: she is what she is, but in becoming so resolutely that which she is, by adhering obstinately to the extremely limited role allotted to her as a woman, she also disrupts what it means to be a woman. By insisting upon inhabiting so vigorously the role of outsider that her accompaniment of her blind father through wild terrain had already (and not yet) made of her, by insisting upon the performance of religious burial ritual that constituted the one remaining public sphere of

women's influence, Antigone does not so much enact as become woman in her own way.¹² She becomes other than the obedient, passive woman that Creon and his ilk wants her to be.

The democracy that is struggling to emerge in fifth century BCE Athens is burdened with the attempt to reassess its geopolitical boundaries, an effort it takes on in part through the avid formulation and definition of legal discourses, intended to circumscribe and secure the city. What does it mean to belong, politically, linguistically, or culturally? How far does lineage, or birth determine one's status? Interspersed with the formalization of custom as public law, of which Hegel made so much, is the formulation of symbolic, familial law, of which Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis has made so much (and of which Hegel made so little).¹³ What does it mean to recognize a member of one's family as such, and how far is one's identity determined by failures of recognition? Such questions are embedded in Sophocles' preoccupations. So too, I would maintain, however implicitly, is the paradox that not only remained unthinkable for the Greeks—whether because it was invisible, because it was too difficult to confront, or because it was unquestioningly accepted (perhaps all of these for different constituencies)—but also irresolvable for Hegel and his philosophical associates, as well as psychoanalytic devotees, a paradox that has constituted a site of aversion for even the most ingenious of Sophocles' contemporary interpreters.

If Oedipus is the exemplary hero, and if his exemplariness has been traditionally said to inhere in the manner in which he faces up to the dilemma in which he finds himself, are there not perhaps also exemplary evasions that he performs, enigmas that remain to be unraveled? If Oedipus turns out to play the role of both prosecuting judge and criminal, subject and object, investigator and object of investigation, perhaps there is a sense in which his ambiguous duality resonates beyond the particular crimes of which he commits himself. He can also be read as calling attention to the logic according to which free men set themselves up as kings, rulers, and lawgivers, while their freedom—including their freedom to rule free men—is premised upon the subjugation, in the form of slavery, of others. Emphasizing the way in which excessive attempts at control over the city turn into failure not only of the ruler's attempt to govern the city, but also for the sovereign attempt to govern the self, Froma Zeitlin has suggested that central to tragedy are the issues of power over the self, over others, over the city, and over one's own body.¹⁴ The question of self control, and the desire to avoid being associated with slavery at all costs, was crucial for Athenian citizens (all of whom were men, if the term citizen is taken to include full political rights), both in terms of being master of oneself, rather than working for another, and in terms of not being slavishly dependent on bodily appetites or desires.¹⁵ As Fisher says, in Athens "An important part of

what being a citizen meant was not being manhandled by other citizens.” In this context he quotes Demosthenes as follows:

If you (the jury) wished to look into what makes the difference between a slave and a free man, you would find that the greatest distinction was that in the case of slaves it is the body which takes responsibility for all their offences, whereas it is possible for free men, however great their misfortunes, to protect their bodies.¹⁶

Yet in his misfortune, far from protecting his body, Oedipus impales himself, marking himself as infirm forever, becoming other to himself in the process, and thereby differentiating himself from the too close proximity or sameness that has indelibly marked his familial relationships. When Jocasta implores Oedipus to desist from further enquiry after the messenger from Corinth tells him that he was a foundling, Oedipus assumes that Jocasta is worried about the possibility that she will discover that he is of low birth. He is afraid that he might turn out to be the son of a slave.¹⁷ Could it be that, once he discovers the true reason for Jocasta's attempt to dissuade him, Oedipus blinds himself not just because he cannot bear to look upon what he has done, but also because in scarring his body, he inflicts upon himself his fear that he is nothing but a slave? He inscribes upon his own body the scars that double those of his birth, marking him out as doubly defiled, in a world where bodily scarring would usually have been reserved for those who were subject to the control of their masters. The beating of slaves, whose bodies in an important sense were not their own, was commonplace in fifth century BCE Athens. The body of Oedipus had already been marked shortly after his birth, as a result of his feet being bound together.¹⁸ Lacking the fleet-footed movement of Achilles, Oedipus' bodily movement is marred by a deficiency. He is not as itinerant as others, does not move as quickly as others away from his family, at least not by his own locomotion. Or rather he returns home too quickly, unlike Odysseus's slow and circuitous progress. At the foot of his body, his feet are marked, and he himself marks his face, putting out his own eyes and obliterating his vision, mimicking physically the blindness that afflicted him about his own history, origins, and people. From top to bottom he is a marked man. Marked, or tattooed like a slave, at the foot of his body with an emblem of a divine, Dionysiac curse, since Laius had drunk too much and impregnated Jocasta, failing to observe the divine taboo against their generation of children, planting the seed of Oedipus, who himself will reproduce the parental sign that impairs his body, but with a difference.¹⁹ By blinding himself, Oedipus inscribes on his body the blindness that has dogged his self-knowledge, his failure to have known his origins. His violent inscription is perhaps an act of hubris, since he acts in a godlike manner, and

yet it also serves to bring him down to the level of the most humbled men of the city. He is the sovereign exile, the highest and the lowest. Outside the law, above and below, its executor as king, yet at the same time victim of the law that convicts him, Oedipus is the casualty of a familial curse, subject to the law of destiny while subject of the law as king, wielding the law and felled by his own, sovereign hand. In failing to master himself, Oedipus fails to master his kingdom, and in this respect he becomes the mirror image of Creon, who, in failing to master his kingdom, fails to master himself.

Oedipus enters Thebes as if he were a foreigner. It is as a foreigner that he accedes to the throne of Thebes and marries Jocasta, who gives birth to his four children. Yet, his family lineage eventually proves that far from being a foreigner by birth, Oedipus is in fact a member of the royal family into which he has inadvertently married. Having been estranged from his family, put at a distance from them so that he cannot endanger them, he rejoins them, only to unknowingly kill his father and marry his mother, thereby fulfilling the prophecy that Laius and Jocasta had tried to avert, enacting in an extreme, hyperbolic form the recent Athenian turn toward endogamy. Yet, at the same time he enacts, to his knowledge, an exogamous marriage with a woman previously unknown to him, one who is given to him as a gift for his presence of mind (ironically enough) for solving the riddle of the Sphinx. As such, Oedipus comes to stand both for the stranger (*xenos*), the foreigner, the interloper, the other, and at the same time, the familiar, the insider, the one who is not only close by, but intimately related.²⁰ Through the figure of Oedipus, Sophocles confronts the anxiety about how to recognize a member of one's own family, how to know not only that one's son really is one's son, one's father is really one's father, but even that one's mother is really one's mother.²¹ At the same time, he confronts an anxiety about what happens when foreigners (ostensible or otherwise) enter one's homeland, assume rule, and turn out not to be the saviors that they set themselves up to be, or that the citizenry thought or hoped they might be. This is not quite invasion, it is not quite conquering, it is not quite war, but events do unfold as if a foreigner entered the inside of a space and took it over. In this sense, Oedipus is a condensation of the stranger and the blood-relative, the outsider and the insider, the enemy and the friend, all rolled into one, of the dangers inherent in failing to properly distinguish them, yet at the same time of the impossibility and perhaps undesirability of imposing rigid distinctions in law-like ways.²² Oedipus learns from experience, but he learns too late that intellectual prowess is not enough. Knowing the world requires a certain self-understanding that is elusive because one's feelings, affects, intentions are not clearly reflected in the world, because others intervene, helping to construct situations that are constituted by complex, multiple, and not always self-transparent motives, situations that are produced by and produce material effects, which are more or less opaque.

The effects of the 451BCE law that Pericles introduced in Athens epitomize in many ways the intersecting set of concerns that I suggest informs Sophocles' Oedipal cycle. As a result of the law, when a dispute arose over the distribution of a gift of grain, given to Athenians by the king of Egypt, the claims of many were disqualified because they were determined to be illegitimate by birth and were subsequently sold into slavery.²³ The law is understood to have merely formalized a practice that was already underway, namely that of marrying within, rather than outside, the city.²⁴ In fact, as Vernant points out, this tendency toward endogamy was taken to an extreme in myth, where we find "many instances . . . of unions within a single family, marriages between close relatives, and exchanges of daughters between brothers."²⁵ In this context, Oedipus—who marries Jocasta on the assumption that he is a foreigner, but who turns out after all to be a member of her own family, indeed her own son—could have been received by an Athenian audience in 429 BCE both as transgressing the relatively recent law preventing exogamy, and as conforming to the relatively new practice of endogamy. At the same time, Sophocles might be read as drawing attention to the contingency of law, both law in general, and this particular law, which related to foreigners, and resulted in the enslavement of many whose claim to be Athenian had remained previously uncontested.²⁶ Read as a historical figure of mythical Thebes, Oedipus the foreigner (as far as he knows) would not have been violating any law in marrying Jocasta, but read in terms of the practices contemporary to Sophocles' Athens, he would have been in violation of the law. As the son of Jocasta, Oedipus would have been violating the archaic practice of exogamy, whereas read against the practice that had become conventional in Athens and was enshrined in law by 451 BCE, he would not have been in such clear violation of the law. Nor should the repercussions the law had for determining who would become slaves be forgotten.

The distinction between citizen and foreigner is not the only one that Oedipus's birth and circumstances appear to put into question. Had the circumstances of his literary birth been slightly different, there is a good chance that Oedipus the King might have been a slave. Had his parents been poor, and had they not resorted to abandoning him on Mount Cithaeron, outside the city of Thebes, the infant Oedipus might have been entrusted to magistrates and sold into slavery. A prohibition existed in Thebes against the exposure of infants, so when Jocasta and Laius exposed Oedipus to die, in their attempt to avert the oracle that foretold of Laius's death at the hands of a child to be born to them, they put themselves outside of the Theban law.²⁷ Transgression of the law and exposure to the elements take on another guise when Oedipus commits incest, and when, in violation of Creon's edict, Antigone buries Polynices. In doing so, of course, Antigone appeals to a higher law, a divine law, and in this sense she does not cast the act of burial as transgression, but rather as an acknowledgment of Polynices' humanity, which, in this context, negatively

determined, means his not being a slave, his being part of a legitimate family. As they are so often in the Oedipal cycle, events are doubled, echoing and calling to one another across and within the plays. Oedipus is not the only character for whom the shadow of slavery casts its specter. In reaction to what he sees as Polynices' attempt to enslave Thebes, Creon responds by acting in a way that could itself be construed as slavish. As H. S. Harris puts it, "To leave the dead unburied is unGreek, barbaric."²⁸ Yet it is his own son, Haemon, whom Creon accuses of being nothing but a woman's slave.²⁹ For her part, Antigone is invested in ensuring that Polynices is not treated as a slave.

When Antigone stipulates that Polynices is not a slave, but her brother, she is contesting Creon's dishonoring of Polynices in death, but she is also appealing to and reinscribing a distinction between the humanity of the aristocracy to which her family belongs and the inferior status of slaves.³⁰ Antigone does not want to leave the corpse of Polynices to the birds, but would have no such qualms had he been a slave, rather than her brother.³¹ By the same token, since marriage conferred respectability upon women, and Antigone refuses marriage, she is refusing to be respectable in the conventional way.³² If Antigone identifies herself with her mother in one way—her relation to Jocasta establishes her aristocratic lineage—she distinguishes herself from Jocasta in another way.³³ The act of differentiation is a complex one, which rejects any form of marriage, in order to avert any possibility of repeating the familial pattern of incest, while it also calls attention to the problems inherent in any understanding of marriage in which women are reduced to mere tokens. Antigone will not marry, and she most certainly will not marry someone who turns out to be her own son.

If we take the 451 BCE law into account—a law that discouraged marrying foreigners, and that led to the enslavement of many who were now judged illegitimate—it would seem that a primary concern in Athens was to keep male outsiders out, or rather (and this is crucial) to keep them from legitimately inheriting Athenian wealth. That is, foreigners could become slaves, but they could not amass wealth, or rather they could only do so on their masters' say so. Manumission—sometimes attained through slave earnings, which could accumulate until a slave was able to buy their own freedom, and sometimes written into a will—was at the master's discretion. From the grave, then, the ghostly power of a master could extend across the divide of the dead and the living to free a slave.

As they worked, slaves were contained within the city as inferiors, as subject to those whose wealth became the basis of the slave's subjection. As we have seen, significant numbers of people were relegated to a slave class as a direct result of a law that ostensibly concerned the requirements for Athenian citizenship. The inclusion of foreign men within the polis for the purposes of slave labor was thereby deemed acceptable, but their inclusion as fully fledged participants of the practices they supported and afforded the polis (foremost among them the

flourishing of the arts, the development of a limited representative democracy, and the concentration of wealth) was unacceptable. Excluded from participatory democracy, foreigners were nevertheless included for the purposes of accruing the benefits of their labor. In controlling the exchange of women, certain boundaries were therefore erected, boundaries which had as much to do with imposing requirements for the acquisition of wealth and selling those whose birth was not deemed pure into slavery, as it did with anything else. In the interests of perpetuating the wealth, culture, and stability of Athens within its city walls, attempts were being made to circumscribe very precisely who could, and who could not enjoy the benefits of fully belonging to the polis, by inheriting its wealth, and by participating in its democratic procedures.

One question that might have arisen for Sophocles, it seems worth wagering, could have been: where would the protective, inward-looking, endogamous practices such as those symbolized in the 451 BCE law lead? My point here is not to pretend to have access to, in the words of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, “what was going on in Sophocles’ head . . . The playwright left us no personal reflections nor any diary: had he done so they would have represented no more than supplementary sources of evidence that we should have had to submit to critical appraisal like any others.”³⁴ Rather, I am offering a hypothesis, which I offer as having explanatory value for the Oedipal cycle, not necessarily based upon what the author intended, but nevertheless reflecting issues that had social and political salience, whether or not they might have constituted part of the author’s conscious design. David Konstan points out that tragedians “had to submit their plays to the scrutiny of a public official before they were accepted for sponsorship at a public festival.”³⁵ In the light of this, it might be the case that Sophocles preferred to approach contentious issues concerning foreigners and slavery obliquely. Clearly, like any other critic, my reading will be influenced by the questions I bring to Sophocles, which will inevitably help to frame my reading of the aesthetic and performative dimensions of *Antigone*, its religious, legal, social, and political context, and the anxieties out of which it might have originated, and in terms of which it might have been read.

What might be the end result of a system that consisted in progressively narrowing down the choice of male partners through the exclusion of foreigners, to the point where endogamy could perhaps become a matter of fathers marrying their mothers? After all, this would be only at one remove from the already accepted practice of cousins marrying their first cousins—a practice that Sophocles depicts in Haemon’s intention to marry Antigone, for example. In the light of this, one of the crucial issues Antigone poses, though it has not been recognized as such, is the need to formulate, to put into words, to render formal a law that had so far remained unwritten. That law is one that Oedipus’s violation had brought into being in a sense, but it was left to Antigone, in retrospect, to attempt to articulate Oedipus’s act as a transgression for the first

time *in terms of a law*. It is not, as some critics have suggested, that Antigone was recalling, or reinscribing a law, but rather that she was positing it, introducing it, trying to recognize the significance of what Oedipus had done, and in marking it, warning against Oedipal practice becoming accepted practice. One might even say that Sophocles' Antigone is warning against making the Oedipal action exemplary, warning against, perhaps, making Oedipus into the exemplary, literary, and cultural hero that Aristotle made of him, or even making him into the anti-hero that he became for Freud.³⁶

Antigone's refusal to marry Haemon, and her mourning of her brother are at the same time a means of reflecting on, and perhaps an attempt to put to rest, the possibility of an extreme version of a practice—endogamy—that was already a general convention. Ismene's recognition of Antigone's act of burial as significant, her acknowledgment of Antigone's introduction of something like a new principle, constitutes a possible site of the conversion of Antigone's solitary act into something like a law. When Ismene changes her mind, having refused initially to help bury Polynices but subsequently wanting to share Antigone's punishment, she sees the logic of Antigone's act of burial. When she expresses her desire to die along with her sister, she interprets Antigone's act as if it had renewed the possibilities of the world, as if it opened up a novel way of looking at things, as if Antigone's were a creative act, which, far from arising, as certain critics have argued, out of a consuming preoccupation with or passion for death, gives birth to a future in which new possibilities come to light.

Against the now conventional wisdom that as an art form tragedy was more democratic than epic poetry, Mark Griffith argues for "another perspective" that is "intertwined" with it: "even as 'democratic' and 'civic' pride are being reinforced, the unique and irreplaceable value of an international network of elite families is simultaneously affirmed."³⁷ Given that Sophocles is writing at a time when Athenian democracy is still in its nascent state, it would be surprising if the political tensions arising from the gradual shift away from the hegemony of the aristocracy, and toward a more participatory political system were not embedded in his tragedies. As Griffith says, "A contradiction was developing between the new democratic ideology on the one hand, emphasizing equality of all citizens, checks and balances on the exercise of power, and responsibility and loyalty to the *polis* before all else, and, on the other, the old aristocratic ideology of family, entitlement, and competitive display of personal worth and achievement."³⁸ If it is easy enough to associate Creon with the newly developing democratic ideology in some respects—his emphasis on loyalty to the polis before all else, for example—it is also clear that he is certainly not in accord with the idea that his power should be curtailed in any way.³⁹ At the same time, his constant suspicions that the only possible motivations anyone might have to question or challenge his authority must involve corruption, betray his

overweening and ostentatious concern with protecting his own wealth. He is, after all, a member of the aristocratic ruling class.

That Creon would embody certain democratic values of the polity, while at the same time exhibiting a nostalgic longing for the aristocratic entitlements of the past would be in keeping with the fact that this is a time of political transition, and that despite its democratic impulse—or perhaps precisely because of it—tragedy is wrestling with an elitist political legacy. Griffith observes, “If Greek tragedy is intended to instantiate Athenian civic ideology, then we must acknowledge . . . that even this most authentically democratic ideology . . . still comes with a strongly aristocratic spin.”⁴⁰ Perhaps it is less a case of instantiation, and more a matter of negotiation. The contradictory elements of Creon’s character situate him in terms of his aristocratic roots, which come into conflict with the democratic times in which he finds himself in power.⁴¹ Creon’s character embodies the tensions at stake in moving away from the days of aristocratic rule, where powerful families formed alliances with one another across borders through a series of gift-exchanges, culminating in marriage, and the emergence of a more democratic system of law centered on the city of Athens, still dominated by an aristocratic ruling elite, but incorporating to some extent the voices of lower class, free, male citizens. If Creon exhibits the symptoms of a man struggling to come to terms with what it means to be a ruler at a time when the conventions of aristocratic rule are giving way to the emerging institutions of democracy, things are more complex with the character of Antigone.

While both characters are clearly part of the same aristocratic family, the balance of power is equally clearly heavily tipped in Creon’s favor, in a number of different ways.⁴² As the king, as head of the household, and as her uncle, his position of authority over Antigone is not in question. As female subject, and as a niece subject to her uncle’s guardian authority, Antigone has no legitimate political or independent voice. Yet if Creon harbors a certain nostalgia for a political past, where the dominance of aristocratic rule was not yet in question, it is very unclear that Antigone would have had any more say in her fate, had it been possible to unequivocally associate her with the unquestioned privilege and power of the ruling aristocracy to which Creon, despite his allegiance to the limited democracy of the polis, in some ways harks back. Conventionally, women would have been little more than tokens to be passed between one noble family and another, cementing alliances over which they had little control. Thus when the character of Antigone refuses marriage on any terms, whether those of an essentially exogamous or endogamous exchange, hers is a refusal of both the aristocratic system of alliances and the democratic tendency to look inward. Having wandered the countryside for years, guiding her blind father, Antigone is not one to observe convention for convention’s sake. She has been both an outcast and a child of freedom, not bound by the rules of any polis,

bound only by her love for and loyalty to her father. She and her sister, Ismene, are beloved by their father because of their devotion, in sharp contrast to the harsh treatment Oedipus reserves for Polynices and Eteocles, whom he not only spurns, but curses.

The gradual emergence of democracy in Athens arguably coincided with the increased surveillance and containment of women, while the archaic system over which it took precedence nevertheless depended on the exchange of women between one aristocratic family and another, an exchange in which women constituted objects or gifts, rather than constituting subjects responsible for the symbolic meaning or monetary value of those exchanges. In the archaic system, in which women figured as little more than objects of exchange, the value of which was measured both in terms of wealth and in terms of bonds of friendships and alliances, such exchanges were accomplished between the male guardians of the family who bestowed them as gifts, and those who received the bride in exchange for bride-price.⁴³ By contrast, the purpose of legitimate marriage in the Athenian polis was directed toward the reproduction of legitimate, male heirs—indeed the very definition of marriage coincided with the procreation of one's own children, according to Demosthenes.⁴⁴ When Antigone refuses marriage to Haemon, preferring to honor her brother in death, she is refusing the endogamous exchange from her immediate, birth family to a substitute family, and at the same time she is refusing her socially sanctioned role of reproducing legitimate heirs, which would secure the survival of both the *oikos*, and the ruling elite of the polis. In both cases, the expectation is that she be exchanged in order to facilitate a symbolic meaning from which she herself is excluded, whether it is the bonds of alliance her exchange accomplishes between the male guardians of aristocratic families, or the system of male inheritance established in order to pass on political succession, citizenship, and wealth.⁴⁵ In refusing to facilitate either exchange, Antigone is blocking the inheritance of movable goods, and thereby stopping up a system in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to clearly distinguish her own status from that of the herd of cattle that would have been exchanged for the bride in the archaic system, or from the movable chattels that would have constituted her dowry in classical Athens.⁴⁶ Her refusal of any marriage, whether exogamous or endogamous, constitutes a refusal to be merely an object of exchange, in which the terms of that exchange are set in advance and independently of her.

The character of Antigone thus brings into question both the archaic and the classical systems of exchange, while also pointing out that the practice of endogamy, a practice that had not only come to be accepted by Athenian convention, but the legalization of which had reversed the earlier requirements of exogamy, could go too far. Understood as registering the dangers of an excessively endogamous system of exchange, Antigone's distinct lack of interest in her impending marriage to Haemon might be read not simply as a way of protesting

the expectation that she marry a first cousin, but more importantly as signaling the continuity between, or proximity of, the apparent excesses of the mythical Oedipus, and the accepted practice already extant in Athens. Consistent with this practice, Creon, as head of the household, would have expected to give Antigone's hand in marriage to Haemon, that is, to marry his niece to his son, an arrangement that would also serve to conveniently consolidate his wealth, and one which was apparently commonplace in Athens.

Whereas archaic, aristocratic convention dictated the exchange of women between one aristocratic family and another, with the intention of establishing, solidifying, or guaranteeing bonds of *philia* between the male guardians who orchestrated such exchanges, Antigone aligns herself with *philia*. She thereby refuses to be a merely passive participant in an exchange that is premised on construing her as a mere token, an object to be passed from one man to another, rather than a subject capable of forging a relationship for herself, an active participant establishing her own value. In this regard, Hegel's insistence on construing Antigone's action of burying Polynices on the basis of her natural relationship with her brother, rather than as an act motivated by the *philia* she herself cites, is at the same time a refusal to grant her an active role in constructing her relationship to Polynices, a refusal to see her as recognizing the importance of *philia*, and a failure to read Antigone as contesting the idea that she should serve merely as a conduit for circulation among men, rather than as an agent capable of making a natural relationship into a relationship of loyalty. In this context, when Antigone claims that her nature is to love and not to hate, she should be understood as asserting her spiritual capacity, as someone who is making a determination about her right as a subject to recognize other subjects as subjects worthy of love, rather than someone who merely acts unreflectively, and whose act is driven by her status as a blood relative.⁴⁷ Nor does Hegel entertain the significance of Antigone's attitude toward her sister, whom Antigone refuses to recognize as worthy of love, once Ismene has refused to help her bury Polynices. If Antigone's bond to her brother is unreflective, how and why is the ostensibly natural bond to her sister differentiated from it? How is Antigone's familial duty to her brother elevated above any relationship she might develop toward her sister? Perhaps Hegel fails to take this difference into account because he assumes Ismene's actions (or lack of them), and Antigone's relationship to her sister, are of little consequence. Such an assumption would be consonant with ancient Greek assumptions about the incongruous fit between women and politics, and the subordinate role of women to men in all aspects of life.

As is well known, the concept of recognition or *anagnórisis* is central to Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*.⁴⁸ Elizabeth Belfiore stresses that recognition in Aristotle's sense, as leading to *philia* or enmity, is not simply an act of cognition, but is also a matter of acting in such a way as to acknowledge

the bonds of *philia* that tie one family member to another. That is, it is possible for someone who is already known as *philos*, in the sense of being next of kin, to take on the status of *philos* in a way that deepens the preexisting kinship relation: “In the paradigmatic cases, ‘recognition [leading] to a [state of] *philia* or to [a state of] enmity’ is not merely the attainment of cognitive knowledge of the identity of one’s biological kin (‘to recognize *philia*’), it also involves acting as a *philos* or enemy. Since recognition leading ‘to [a state of] *philia*’ is the acknowledgement of another as someone toward whom one has obligations of positive reciprocity, people may ‘become *philoí*’ even when they are already *philoí* in the sense of biological kin.”⁴⁹ In the cases of Creon and Antigone, the former recognizes Polynices not as *philos*, but as *ekthros*, not as a loved one, but as an enemy, while Antigone recognizes him—in the sense of acting toward him in a way that affirms her blood relationship to him (and thereby transforms that relationship into something that goes beyond the merely biological), by burying him—as a *philos*. Antigone’s act constitutes a reversal of Creon’s judgment of Polynices as an enemy, at the same time as affirming and intensifying his status as *philos*.

In her opening speech to Ismene, Antigone implicitly identifies Polynices as a friend, but one whom Creon’s proclamation designates an enemy. In burying Polynices, in contrast to Ismene, Antigone acts not just in word, but in deed. One could say that she thereby acts in a way that is consonant with Aristotle’s later insistence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* against Plato’s celebration of intellectual virtue that it is not enough to know the right thing to do, one must also develop the character to be able to act appropriately, when action is called for. One might add that Ismene recognizes the appropriateness of Antigone’s action only after the fact, and in this sense, she reverses her earlier forbearance, now expressing the desire to recognize Antigone’s affirmation of Polynices’ status as *philos*. The trouble is that once again a gap opens up between her words and her deeds. Whereas before Ismene did not agree to help Antigone, now she wants to claim responsibility for doing so in order to show solidarity with Antigone—and also because she does not want to live a life without her sister—but Antigone taunts her by claiming that not she, but Creon is her friend.⁵⁰

Of course, Aristotle wouldn’t have endorsed Antigone’s action as significant—which is perhaps why he doesn’t comment on it—because he didn’t think it was appropriate for women to act courageously, believing rather in women’s “inferior class,” and regarding slaves as “wholly paltry.”⁵¹ Perhaps because he does not construe women as moral agents in the full sense, and because he takes Oedipus, the unwitting actor, as his paradigmatic tragic hero, Aristotle mentions *Antigone* only once in the *Poetics*, and then only to point out that its plot is of the worst type.⁵² In accord with this, Belfiore does not consider Antigone’s action with regard to Polynices, only Haemon’s with regard to Creon.

As a character Antigone exemplifies a moment of transition between conflicting historical, ideological, and identificatory forces. On the one hand (under normal circumstances), as a member of an aristocratic, Theban family, a woman such as Antigone would have been subject to the expectations of the archaic system of the exchange of women, whereby her exogamous marriage might have cemented an alliance between aristocratic families. As such, she would have been married to a foreigner.⁵³ In this system, the circulation of women was predicated on their exchange for *hedna*, or for its substitutes.⁵⁴ On the other hand, with the emergence of the city of Athens with its democratic leanings, a female character such as Antigone would have been read as subject to the practice of consolidating wealth within the family, to the expectation that she perpetuate the family line, and stabilize the security of the city. (After all, the city's existence and stability depended upon its success in war, which in turn depended on the reproduction of loyal, male citizens to protect the city's interests in war.) The expectation that Antigone marry Haemon, the son of her uncle Creon, is clearly in keeping with the idea that the city's permanence be assured by ensuring the continuation of its wealth. As Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz says, "If a man died leaving a daughter but no sons, the daughter would be married 'with her portion,' *epi-klēros* to her nearest male relative, thereby keeping the wealth in the family."⁵⁵ In this context, when Creon sentences Antigone to death, he refuses to hand her over in marriage to his son, Haemon, marrying her instead to death, a marriage which he understands to be her wish, rather than his. At the same time, Creon's refusal to bury Polynices on the basis of his construal of Polynices not as a member of his family, but as a traitor to the city, is a function of the importance Creon attaches to the value of political loyalty, construed as loyalty to the polis, rather than loyalty to an aristocratic network of alliances that stretched beyond the polis.

Against this background, Antigone's privileging of *philia* constitutes an elevation and a transformation of the aristocratic network of alliances established through the exchange of women in marriage, while Creon's concerns about corruption constitute a privileging of the monetary benefits of such exchanges, without the corollary ties that bind.⁵⁶ Antigone privileges *philia*, but in a way that departs from convention in that she construes herself as a subject capable of symbolically recognizing the importance of her tie to Polynices—of making him into a brother—rather than being content to occupy the passive position of an object of exchange. She reserves the bonds of *philia* for her own family, substituting the bond with her father for a bond with her brother, but consecrating this bond only in death. In doing so, Antigone takes up her brother as a loved one, and contests Creon's account of him as enemy and traitor. Yet she does so at the cost of re-inscribing the inferior—and unquestioned—status of slaves.

Thus Antigone can be read as singling out—and, crucially, as claiming it for herself, thereby contesting its restriction to men, and resignifying it—one aspect of the aristocratic system of exchange, namely the way in which it creates friendship across boundaries and forges alliances between foreigners, while Creon can be read as isolating an aspect of the newer, and more endogamous marriage practices, namely the consolidation of wealth within his own family and domain. Of course, Polynices is no foreigner to Antigone, but since he has raised a foreign army against Thebes, attacking the city of his birth, Creon sees him as a foreigner. He is, in a sense, like Oedipus, both insider and outsider. As Griffiths says of the archaic system, “Such networks of friendship and alliance may often outweigh loyalties felt towards, and benefits deriving from, the particular local community (*polis*) to which one’s family belonged (especially if that community was governed, as Attika was, by a democracy that aimed to minimize opportunities for any one family to accumulate excessive credit and dominate perennially).”⁵⁷ It is precisely the issue of conflicting loyalties upon which Creon and Antigone disagree so vehemently. For Creon, Polynices is a traitor, while for Antigone, he is privileged above a potential husband or son—and above a slave. He therefore symbolically usurps the place of a husband or son, at the same time as her loyalty toward him prevents her marriage to Haemon and forecloses the possibility of her giving birth to a legitimate son, an eventuality that brings Creon’s *oikos* to a dead end, since the other son of Creon and Eurydice has already died, and Haemon’s suicide results from Antigone’s, and in its turn causes the suicide of Eurydice.⁵⁸

The consolidation of wealth that went along with the transition from exogamy to endogamy is accompanied by a tendency to formalize the status of marriage, to purify the circumstances of legitimate birth, and to exclude foreigners, or at least to include them within the confines of the *polis* only by conferring upon them the status of slaves or *metics*. Clarifying the legal basis for marriage was not merely a matter of controlling the movement of wealth, it was also a matter of excluding foreigners from the benefits of accumulated wealth. One might say that the restriction of wealth—which had been acquired in part through the acquisition of *hedna*—to Athenians ensured both the concentration of wealth within the boundary of the polity and the relegation of foreigners to apolitical positions. Having acquired wealth from foreigners, the Athenians proceeded to change the rules of the exchange game, with the result that they reserved for themselves the assets procured from foreigners, keeping them (along with their women) within the family, behind closed doors. The clarification of legal distinctions, particularly those that solidified the stratification of social levels, would have had several effects, including warding off the unpredictable outcome of war, amongst which would have figured prominently the possibility of enslavement.⁵⁹ If laws, rather than wars, became responsible for the legitimization of citizenship, they also portended a system of legalized

slavery, divorcing the outcome of war and its attendant spoils from determining the fate of captives vis-à-vis slavery. The more that Athens could secure its wealth, prestige, and cultural hegemony, the more it could assure its continued prominence, and the more effectively it could patrol its borders, the better it could secure itself. Part and parcel of establishing its prominence was the enhanced classification of social roles, backed up by a legal system. Integral to the requirements of citizenship, the status of foreigners, the role of slaves, and gender expectations were discriminations concerning parental rights, obligations to children, and the rights of owners over slaves. Differentiating various roles from one another could not fail to have implications for the level of homogeneity or heterogeneity within the polity. It is within this context that the historical shift from exogamous to endogamous practices of marriage, Antigone's appeal to *philia*, and her differentiation of Polynices from a slave should be seen. It is also against this context that Aristotle's attempts to distinguish between "natural" and conventional slavery should be seen, particularly his attempt to justify the slavery of barbarians through characterizing them as inferior to Athenians in various ways, while simultaneously emphasizing the contingency of the enslavement of Athenians.⁶⁰

Family, kinship, and sexual difference have constituted the prevailing terms in which Sophocles' *Antigone* has been taken up by a Western philosophical and psychoanalytic tradition that has been heavily overdetermined by Hegel. Derrida, for example, tackles Antigone's place in the Hegelian corpus by situating it within a meditation on the family. Irigaray and Butler, while providing crucial challenges to orthodox Hegelian interpretations from the perspectives of feminist and queer theory, at the same time emphasize the importance of kinship and sexuality, thereby rejoining the Hegelian tradition even as they undermine it in other ways. While Irigaray reads Antigone as symptomatic of a crisis that implicates not only the family and the state, but philosophical thinking itself, Butler inflects this insight in a way that exposes the heteronormative bias not only of Hegel and Lacan, but also of Irigaray. Both Irigaray and Butler, albeit in different ways, read Antigone as an excluded but facilitating other, thereby following up Derrida's discourse in more than one way. Both develop Derrida's reflections in terms of that which is remaindered in Hegel's thought, or the abject in Jean Genet's language, and both make good on Derrida's insertion of a psychoanalytic strand of thinking into his narrative, even as they differentiate themselves, respectively, from its masculinist and heterosexist assumptions.

Antigone makes her first appearance in Irigaray's *Speculum* in her discussion of Freud's fetishism, a critique of which sets up the terms of Irigaray's engagement with Hegel's Antigone. Butler stages her investigation into "kinship trouble" as a debate with Hegel and Lacan, a debate that retains kinship as its central focus, even as it reads Antigone as troubling Hegelian and Lacanian tenets.⁶¹ By the same token, the Eurocentric assumptions in which not only

Hegel and Lacan are embedded, but also the tradition of white feminist theory that this tradition has spawned, remain largely untroubled.

Page DuBois calls for us to understand what she designates the “structuring ubiquity of slaves in ancient society.”⁶² Arguing that the “invisibility and ubiquity” of slavery and slaves are “mutually constitutive” of one another, DuBois suggests that we engage in various strategies of avoidance and deflection in order to purify our own past. Either we overlook, deny, or disavow the presence or significance of slavery in order to sustain our idealized vision of ancient Greece, to which we trace our own cultural and democratic origins, or we vilify the ancients, projecting onto them our own anxiety about new world slavery.⁶³ Acknowledging that the “fetishizing of antiquity as a site of origin for Western culture may require the simultaneous recognition and disavowal of such a problematic feature of ancient societies as slavery,” DuBois makes a sustained argument for interpreting the “internal logic” of slavery, and for acknowledging it as an “inextricable part of the fabric of everyday life in classical Athens.”⁶⁴ Given the permanence of war, and the way in which discourse on slavery versus freedom “saturates the political discourse of historians” such as Herodotus, Plutarch, and Thucydides it would be surprising if it did not also infuse the texts of the tragic poets.⁶⁵ Thus, Euripides “presents through women characters anxiety about defeat in war, and about the declining political power of the elite.”⁶⁶ While conventionally the overt concerns of Sophocles might not have been as readily identified with political issues as those of Euripides or Aeschylus, this might well be due to the political and genre assumptions in the disciplinary construction of classical studies, rather than to any inherent characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy, and the Oedipal cycle in particular. If slaves populate the pages of Euripides’ plays much more regularly than they do those of Sophocles, and if Aeschylus confronts more directly the status and function of juridical institutions, such as the Aeropogaus in the *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ exploration of endogamous family relationships opens up pressing questions about the mutual implications of gender, class, and chattel slavery.

To speak of the mutual implication of these categories in and by one another is to put the point in modern terms. My overarching approach is to situate the issues raised by Sophocles in terms of a discourse in which questions of citizenship, marriage as the gift-exchange of women between differentiated units, and slavery would have been bound up with one another. It is precisely the carving up of gender, race, class, and sexuality into differentiated and separable identity categories that has, perhaps, discouraged feminist theory from taking up the issue of slavery as implicated in Antigone’s struggle—and as implicating it. At the same time, it is the insistence with which contemporary feminist theory has interrogated the independence of these categories that makes it possible to look at the reception of *Antigone* and ask, not so much whether we can infer exactly how marriage, citizenship, slavery, and the roles of women might have