

Antigone's Excessive Relationship to Fetishism: The Performative Politics and Rebirth of Eros and Philia from ancient Greece to modern South Africa

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O Eros unconquered in battle, Eros you who destroy men's resources, Eros you who keep night watch on the soft cheek of a maiden, you make your way over the deep sea and into wild beasts' lairs. No immortal can escape you nor can ephemeral man. And whoever possesses you is maddened. You lure even the just to injustice—to their own destruction. It is you too who have stirred up this strife among kinsmen. The love glance that shines from the eyes of the fair bride is victorious. That love is enthroned equally alongside the great laws. For the unconquerable goddess Aphrodite deceives her victims (*Antigone*, 781–99).¹

If the death of tragedy can be asserted with confidence from the perspective of German idealism, for which art tends to remain in the service of the stability and preservation of the state, not everybody was invited to the funeral: Antigone, for instance. Antigone has taken on a life of her own. Or rather, she has taken on multiple lives in multiple epochs, political contexts, and performative conditions. Having died so many deaths, Antigone seems to refuse to die definitively. As many times as she dies, she comes alive, reborn time and again, born anew each time she enters the theatrical stage, inserting herself into a new political history, providing a commentary on the history of a people, embodying the hopes for the rebirth of a nation. In one performance, for example, she constitutes a means of negotiating the constraints under which a group of homeless people live and die in a New York Manhattan Park, while in another—one that I shall take up towards the end of this paper—she negotiates the oppression under apartheid in the townships of South Africa (see Glowacki 1997 and Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona 1974). The energy of the play would seem to be conducted through the figure of Antigone, transmitting itself from age to age, from continent to continent, from one political struggle to another. What accounts for this incessant rebirth of Antigone in widely divergent, international, political contexts, and how might it inflect the Western philosophical tendency to

imagine tragedy as dead, superseded, relegated to a past that bequeaths us only tragi-comedy?

Patchen Markell's reading of *Antigone* serves as a useful counterpoint to my interrogation of that which continues to inspire political appropriations and performances of the play, and how this legacy might require a rethinking of the conclusions reached by German idealism and certain strands of phenomenology about the death of tragedy. In a nuanced and compelling, but ultimately, I shall argue, problematic, reading of *Antigone*, Markell suggests that interpreters of *Antigone* have gone astray in emphasizing the characters of Antigone and Creon at the expense of the plot of the play. For Aristotle, character is subordinate to action; tragedy is essentially the imitation of action, and characters are subordinate to the plot, which is driven by the ways in which characters are moved—not only the ways in which they move themselves, but also the ways in which they are moved by unforeseen developments. Enlisting Aristotle's *Poetics* in support of his argument, and influenced by the important role that the unpredictability of human action plays for Hannah Arendt, Markell suggests that those who ground their readings of Sophocles's play in the identities of protagonists—in who Antigone and Creon are—fail to reap the benefits of the Aristotelian view that plot is more important than character in tragedy. The salient point for Markell is that Antigone and Creon turn out to hold mistaken beliefs about who they are.

The impropriety of our actions is what Markell emphasizes above all. Both Hegel and Aristotle agree that Antigone and Creon take themselves to be capable of acting in the world in a way that is illustrative of who they are, yet their insights founder. They turn out to be impotent in precisely the ways in which they took themselves to be potent. Markell's claim resonates with readings such as those by Heidegger and Lacan, which have emphasized the split, uncanny way in which to be human is to be *deinos*, both monstrous and wonderful; the very quality that gives humans power is also that which undermines them. We come unstuck. Neither Antigone nor Creon succeeds in effecting what they want to effect, or what they think they have within their power. They overreach themselves. They are not in control of their destiny in important ways, in ways that are not incidental, but are rather endemic to the human condition. The famous ode to man, so central to Heidegger's influential interpretation of *Antigone*, emphasizes that while humans have managed wonderful accomplishments, having sailed the seas and cultivated the land, having tamed wild beasts and invented language, death marks a limit to their inventiveness. Less recognized by standard interpretations of the play, but no less central to its meaning, I would argue, is the ode to eros, which, like death, is also unconquerable, and to which reason

also offers no resistance.² I will suggest that the power of eros, though somewhat neglected by Sophocles's exegetes, many of whom have been influenced by Heidegger's reading, is crucial to a thorough understanding of *Antigone*. As a corollary argument, I will also suggest that Antigone's concern to extricate eros from *philia*, where Oedipus had confounded them, is directed towards her broader concern to renew the principles according to which the *polis* is to be guided. Antigone acts upon the principle of *philia*, which she sees as fundamental for the health of the polis.

Markell's fundamental point—and it is one with which I agree, at least in a qualified way—is that the tragedy of *Antigone* reveals that the aspiration for sovereign mastery not only reaches for an untenable ideal, but that the illusion that one could ever be completely in control of the meaning of one's actions amounts to a fundamental misconception. Not only does the ineluctable plurality of actors on the human stage preclude one from being the author of how one's own actions will come to signify (for Arendt, of course, it is not me but others who come after me who are able to discern and narrate the meaning of my actions), tragedy also reveals that the aspiration of sovereignty in and of itself is misguided, since the (illusory) sovereignty of some subjects is necessarily purchased at the expense of the sovereignty of others.³ Suffering is, as Markell puts it, "ineliminable ... the attempt to become master of our own deeds and identity is not only doomed to fail, but risks intensifying that suffering unnecessarily, even demanding that we give our lives for what will turn out to be an illusion of control.... [T]he pursuit of recognition ... involves potentially catastrophic failures of acknowledgment" (Markell 2003, 65–6). This is consonant with my reading of *Antigone* in terms of abjection, where certain subjects are abjected, in a way that fails to acknowledge their necessity to other subjects who abject them—although my emphasis is on how this excluded yet constitutive otherness is taken up even in apparently progressive discourses that recycle old terms in new ways, thereby creating a cyclical production of dejects.

That Oedipus and Creon are unwitting heroes, while Antigone knowingly does what she does, is crucial to whether and in what way Antigone and Creon might aspire to sovereignty, as is the salient fact that Oedipus and Antigone can assume a relationship to sovereignty from which Antigone is barred by the accident of her birth. Yet the distinction is one that Markell makes unavailable to himself when he subsumes the question of what makes *Antigone* such a great tragedy under the question of what is the mark of great tragedy in general. In doing so he deprives himself of considering not only the possibility that *Antigone* might run counter to Aristotle's privileging of Oedipus, but also the possibility that Sophocles's play might have achieved greatness in a way that escaped

both Aristotle's philosophical reflections on the genre of tragedy and Sophocles's own aspirations. Markell altogether eschews the rather awkward fact that for Aristotle *Oedipus Rex*, not *Antigone*, is the exemplary tragedy. In doing so he opens his reading up to several elisions. He subsumes *Antigone's* significance to that of tragedy in general, and elides the question of whether *Antigone* challenges, rather than confirms, the Aristotelian model of tragedy, precisely insofar as Oedipus, not Antigone, is Aristotle's exemplary hero.

Unlike Oedipus, it seems to me, Antigone knows only too well who she is. She is intimately familiar with the disastrous legacy bequeathed her: she has lived in its shadow from birth, she has suffered her mother's suicide, she and her sister have been the eyes for her father, blinded by his own hand, she has seen her two brothers's resolution of the tangled mess that constitutes her family issue in their mutual murder. If Oedipus had mingled *philia* and *eros*, remaking, redoubling, perverting familial bonds, Eteocles and Polynices resort to the other extreme. They cannot abide one another. They are too close. It is as if they are doing everything in their power to avert a proximity that is already overly inscribed. Power sharing will not work for them, it would seem; perhaps it would repeat at the political level the incestuous familial bonds instituted by their father.

Against this background, with the inscrutable patience of Penelope unpicking the strands woven into her tapestry by day, Antigone works to sort through the kinship lines that have come to define who she is, parsing them out in a new way, conferring upon them a new order, assembling them in a new configuration. Her work is restorative: she tries to rectify the lines of kinship that Oedipus had thrown together, untangling the threads. Yet her work is also regenerative: she brings to life new possibilities, not for herself—she embraces her own finitude—but for those who outlive her, for her sister, and also for new generations to come. The work she accomplishes as a tragic hero inspires the reflection of multiple new generations in numerous polities across the epochs, and in this way her legacy lives on, helping to weave the fabric that constitutes our reflective political life.

In my reading, Antigone does not refuse the "vocabulary of politics" (Markell 2003, 80), only Creon's narrow, authoritarian understanding of the political. Antigone engages the political in a way that challenges Creon's view of the political, and she does so by insisting upon thinking through the relationship between *philia* and *eros*, in a way that acknowledges the importance of friendship and community for the political stability of the state. The bonds that unite loved ones play a grounding role in political community, the significance of which Creon, ultimately to his own detriment as a political ruler, fails to see, having taken them for

granted. While a plethora of interpreters have focused on the structuring role that the contrast between *philos* and *echthros* plays in *Antigone*, far fewer have honed in on the important relationship between *philia* and eros.

The conflict between Creon and Antigone would appear to have been framed fairly decisively within a disagreement about the relative importance and meaning of *philia* (friendship or love) and enmity. The consensus about the importance of the dispute as to which constitutes the correct description of Polynices, whether he is *philos* or *echthros*, is no doubt, in no small measure, due to Aristotle's famous pronouncement in the *Poetics* that "Recognition [*anagnôrisis*] ... is a change [*metabolē*] from ignorance or knowledge, leading to friendship [*philian*] or enmity [*echthran*]" (1995, 1452a). So long as we are in the business of quoting Aristotle as an authority, we might do well to remember that Aristotle regards friendship as a key aspect of ethical conduct. "For friendship is a virtue, or involves virtue; and also it is one of the most indispensable requirements of life."⁴ Creon too might have done well to remember the importance of friendship (*philia*) in relation to virtue, and to acknowledge the sense in which Antigone redirects eros in order to safeguard the importance of both *philia* and eros.

For Creon, Polynices is an enemy (*echthros*), but for Antigone he is a *philos*.⁵ When Creon tells Antigone "The enemy (*echthros*) is not a loved one (*philos*), not even when he is dead," Antigone replies "I was born [*ephun*] to share in love, not in hate" (523). Bernard Knox translates *ephun* not to mean that it is in Antigone's nature to love, as do some translations, but in order to bring out its "literal force" (1992, 81), to show that it is "not citizenship but birth that determines one's allegiance" (81–2). Arguing that this line should be understood as "I was born not to join in their political hatred for each other but in their love for each other as blood brothers" (1992, 82), Knox understands Antigone's claim in terms of his more general argument that Sophocles "brilliantly" exploits the word *philos*, which could mean either "close relative" or "friend" (80).⁶ Knox explains, "For with the meaning 'relative' it describes a situation not only arbitrarily imposed by birth (not dependent on choice, as is the case with 'friends') but also unchangeable ('friends' may turn into enemies but no matter what a relative does the relationship remains the same). For Antigone, Polynices, who is *philos*, her own brother, can never be an enemy, *echthros*, but Creon cannot admit that Polynices, an enemy, *echthros*, should be treated as *philos*, a 'friend'" (80).

Yet there is evidence that far from simply understanding *philos* to mean a blood relative, indicating an unchanging relationship, by recognizing Polynices as a brother, and only as a brother, Antigone is precisely effecting a change in his status. As we shall see further, when Antigone

buries him as brother and nothing else, she disambiguates the role of brother (as son of Oedipus) from that of uncle (as brother of Jocasta) that Oedipus had conflated in the person of Polynices. The difficulty that has plagued many commentators—if Antigone is so committed to *philia*, how can she act with such apparent cruelty to her sister, also a *philos*?—recedes once we take seriously that Antigone is determined to disentangle *philia* from *eros*, and that in doing so she understands a *philos* as one who not only stands by one's word, but who also acts appropriately towards loved ones. This is what Ismene manifestly fails to do, in Antigone's view. Antigone will not tolerate Ismene as a *philos*, because she shows *philia* only in words and not in deeds. Antigone demands of her sister an integrity, consistency, and courage that Ismene learns too late to be considered *philos* by her sister.⁷

In the context of her incestuous birth, Antigone's claim that she was born—or that it is her nature—to join in loving and not in hating takes on a dual resonance. For the "nature" of her family and the conditions of her birth are highly "unnatural," at least according to the "natural" order dictated by the incest prohibition Oedipus has violated. This "natural" order is of course anything but natural—it is in fact an order based upon a law (*nomos*) established to protect the conventional order of the city-state. Some might have claimed that it derives from religious authority (see O'Brien, 1978, 64), but it is nonetheless a political instrument, designed to perpetuate political power. When Antigone claims as her nature, or as the condition of her birth, the imperative of joining together on the principle of *philia*, she might well be understood to be articulating a principle that repudiates the possibility of being the kind of lover that joins together those she loves through erotic bonds, refraining from redoubling, as Oedipus had done, the bonds of *philia* with the bonds of *eros*, remaking or reduplicating those bonds, mingling them with *eros*. In that case, she is not appealing to feminine instincts, or affirming a natural order, but rather she is distinguishing one kind of love from another, and in doing so, she is not only making a distinction that Oedipus had failed to make, but she is also articulating the need for politics to take account of filial bonds in a way that Creon refuses. She is in effect calling for a polity that is based on the bonds established through *philia*, not on those established through *eros*. Since *philia* means friend, and not only those who are closest according to familial bloodlines, Antigone can be understood to be calling for a polity based on bonds of friendship, not one in which the family (understood in terms of kinship through blood) serves unproblematically as a metaphor for the *polis*.⁸ When Antigone insists on calling Polynices a friend rather than an enemy, she might be said to be refuting any principle of political inclusion based simply on the inheritance of a certain identity, whether

this be understood in terms of autochthony or race. She demands a loyalty to the good of the *polis* that goes beyond the contingent rules that happen to be articulated by a leader such as Creon, acts of law that derive from his fear of losing authority rather than any true insight into the political good of the polity.

There is no doubt that the conflict between Creon's and Antigone's assessments of the identity of Polynices—is he *philos* or *echthos*?—is crucial to the play, that the question of defining friends and enemies ramifies throughout, but by shifting the focus of interpretation to the neglected relationship between *philia* and *eros*, I want to suggest that it is this relationship with which Antigone is definitively concerned. This is not to deny that *Antigone* can be productively read, up to a point, in terms of the important conflict that is set up between Creon's description of Polynices as enemy and traitor, and Antigone's description of him as a friend and loved one; to deny the salience of this opposition would be futile, since this language infuses the play. My point is rather that to focus on the different accounts that Antigone and Creon develop of who Polynices is—and therefore at the same time on who they are in relation to him—while it certainly captures certain significant elements of the play's conflict, also partakes of a subordination of *Antigone* to the model of tragedy in general. In doing so, it retains the Aristotelian impulse that recognizes Oedipus, not Antigone, as the exemplary tragic hero, subordinating the *Antigone* to a model that is importantly informed by a reading of *Oedipus Rex*, and obfuscating the specificity of the dynamic Antigone brings to light. Not incidentally, the Aristotelian model is one that puts an emphasis on action rather than speech, and so presupposes subjects who are capable of having their actions understood, rather than those who have to work to establish the right to have their actions and words taken seriously, to have their explanations and justifications heard in ways that matter. Antigone's actions leave a trace that is harder to discern, one that is unfolded through the multiple inscriptions of her character, in her rebirth each time she enters the stage. Whether Aristotle and Markell like it or not, Antigone would appear to have escaped time and again any subordination to the plot of tragedy. If Antigone will not die a definitive death, perhaps her incessant rebirth is less a symptom of a melancholic culture that refuses to let her die than of her restless, chthonic spirit, whose defiance of injustice is reborn when an unjust politics emerges as the order of the day.

Antigone makes an intervention into the definition of the political, demanding its renewal, retrospectively rectifying the relations between *philia* and *eros* that Oedipus has put askance, posing the question of whether the *polis* can reconstitute itself. By focusing upon the relationship between *philia* and *eros* I explore the sense in which Antigone

calls for a rethinking of a polis that functions only by excluding from proper symbolic, political representation certain subjects on whom it nevertheless depends in ways that it systematically fails to acknowledge.

Antigone and Creon stand in very different relationships to the contingency of the world.⁹ Antigone is open to the fact that her deed is opposed by Creon, and that Creon has the power to punish her for it, while Creon insists upon his absolute sovereignty, come what may—until his denouement.¹⁰ To what extent Antigone's willingness to accept the limitations inherent in her control of the effects of her own action is a function of her structurally subordinate political position, how far it might be due to her character, and how far her character might have been shaped by her situation must remain an open question.

Perhaps Antigone's "excessive" character, her excess of love for her brother, her refusal to be circumscribed by Creon's law, subsists less in the appeal that Antigone makes to unchanging, eternal laws than in her strategic political re-emergence at times of political crises, which tells a different story. If so, it is precisely the contingency of the lines demarcating Antigone's exclusion that marks out her story, a contingency that becomes all the more pronounced with each rebirth of the play, as each new political context continues to plot out a history of the unstable content of excluded yet constitutive others, a history that proves to be variable over time and across cultures. If there is a sense in which Antigone exceeds any attempt to reduce her to the politics and ideology of an era in which it would have been enough to be a woman to suffer a politics of exclusion, I also want to resist the abstract gesture that is content to construe Antigone as a figure of excess, as if she merely marked the limits of the articulate, serving as a placeholder to designate that which is outside discourse (see Lacan 1992), as if her multiple dramatic rebirths did not itself etch out a political genealogy of multiple occupancy, a continual renaissance of that which is said to be excessive for each new political staging of Antigone's rebirth.

We should not imagine that the significance and meaning of the original production of *Antigone* is easily deciphered. Although we are dealing with a play penned by a male dramatist, acted by an all-male cast for what was almost certainly an all-male audience, in a society in which women occupied a marginal role, we cannot assume that a performance of *Antigone* would have operated solely in the service of patriarchal ideals, simply through the suppression of women. Politically women were confined to the private realm and excluded from the public—yet the play itself concerns how to negotiate the boundary between public and private, of where and how to draw the line.¹¹ Any interpretation of the impact of tragic theatrical performance in fifth century BCE Athens will depend both on what we take to be the political

function of tragedy—the subject matter of which in this case includes contesting the confinement of women to the private realm—and on how the performance itself enacts, even as it disavows, its own critique, re-creating the very conditions of exclusion it scrutinizes.

If, contra Aristotle, tragedy itself partakes in a process of meaningful political critique, we cannot assume that tragic drama merely confirms the socio-political privileges that dictate male privilege.¹² While J. Peter Euben's claim that "Tragedy called into question the dominance of *polis* over household, the enforced silence of women, the traditional masculine drive for glory and power, and the division of public and private in terms of rigid gender distinctions" (1986, 37) is borne out by *Antigone*, it is also clear that the material conditions of its performance re-enacted the very disavowal that it theoretically put into question. If women are confined to the *oikos*, excluded from political participation and also from the theater of Dionysus, it was their exclusion that made possible the process of critical reflection enabled by the performance of tragic drama. Without the contributions of women and slaves, without their work behind the scenes—a phrase that can be read here more literally than usual—men would not have been free to pursue political debate, including that in which dramatic performances were implicated. Structurally the freedom of free citizens was dependent upon housework, in the same way that "[c]itizenship was dependent on family lines" (Case 1985, 319). David Halperin suggests that

the silence of actual women in Greek public life and the volubility of fictional 'women' (invented by male authors) in Greek cultural expression do not represent opposed, contradictory, or paradoxical features of classical Greek society but, on the contrary, are connected to one another by a strict logical necessity. Greek men effectively silenced women by speaking for them on those occasions when men chose to address significant words to one another in public, and they required the silence of women in public in order to be able to employ this mode of displaced speech—in order to impersonate women—without impediment (1990, 290).

If the silence of women was required, so too was their physical seclusion; they occupied separate living quarters, a separation that was at least in part a function of the need to assert control over lines of inheritance (see Pomeroy 1995, 78).

The political and legal inferiority of women in fifth century BCE Athens is well established. Since religion, as Sarah Pomeroy points out, "was subordinate to and an integral part of the state, and the state... was in the hands of men," even women's religious role was circumscribed

(1995, 75). Women were not citizens and yet were strictly necessary in their reproductive status. As Nicole Loraux says, "As progenitor of male children, woman provided her husband with sons, perpetuating his family, and the polis with citizens, for its own posterity. Without this other, this woman, there was no polis.... And yet in the Greek imaginary she was still an extra" (2000, 23).

A principal reason for requiring that women's speech and movement be curtailed was the need for the polity of fifth-century BCE Athens to control what was deemed to be women's otherwise uncontrollable eros. For the Greeks, Carson suggests, women are associated with

formlessness and the unbounded in their alliance with the wet, the wild, and raw nature. They are, as individuals, comparatively formless themselves, without firm control of personal boundaries. They are, as social entities, units of danger, moving across boundaries of family and *oikos*, in marriage, prostitution, or adultery. They are, as psychological entities, unstable compounds of deceit and desire, prone to leakage. In sum, the female body, the female psyche, the female social life, and the female moral life are penetrable, porous, mutable, and subject to defilement all the time.... It is in her erotic life that woman most vividly lacks completion.... This porous sexuality is a floodgate of social pollution, for it is the gate of entry to *oikos* and *polis* (Carson 1990, 158–9).

The demand for the policing of women's sexuality resided in the importance of establishing clear lines of inheritance, which could only be achieved through the surveillance of women's reproductive power.

If this was an era in which "[c]lear lines of reproduction were vital to the *polis*" (Case 1985, 319), it was also an era in which the nature and clarity of those lines was put on trial in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and in Sophocles's Oedipal cycle. Yet we should not imagine that the capacity of tragedy to constitute critique had uniform effects for all its subjects, any more than we should assume that women's silence was absolute. As Euben says, "By putting recognizable actions on stage and so on trial before the citizenry who had decided upon them but were now reconstituted as an audience reflecting on what they had done, tragedy contributed to the democratic tradition of self-critique" (1997, 143).¹³ Of course, what needs to be emphasized is that in so far as this citizenry was exclusive of the active political participation of women and slaves the scope and implications of self-critique were always already susceptible to compromise. At the same time, just as sanctioned forms of the public expression of women's voices, such as ritualized mourning, were subject to both delimitation and transgression, so the officially sanc-

tioned public representations of femininity that theater constituted could not control the meanings performances might take on.

Even as the plot of Sophocles's *Antigone* condones the need for women to be controlled for the good of the social whole, endorsing the sacrificial imperative, I suggest the character of Antigone performs a redirection of eros, which is channeled towards a reconception of the conventionally upheld relationship between sexuality and politics in Sophocles's Athens.¹⁴ Women's erotic activity, which typically would have been subordinated to the reproductive imperative of ensuring the continuation of the family line, is rewritten in the figure of Antigone, whose performance contests, even as in another way it underwrites, political attempts to contain women within the *oikos*. While the authorial intention of Sophocles might well have been to demonstrate the need to curb Antigone's excess, this has not prevented the character of Antigone from having captured the imagination of political dramatists around the world, creating a legacy that has proved impossible to contain—even in the face of sometimes successful attempts to re-inscribe that excess in the name of dominant narratives.

In remarking on the fact that dramatic performances both exceed and are subject to re-inscription by authoritative convention, it is worth reminding ourselves—and it does seem to be necessary to keep bringing it up, such is the frequency with which it disappears from view—that as far as we know the character of Antigone would have been acted by a male for an all-male audience.¹⁵ What is usually dismissed as Ismene's conventional feminine obedience, or heralded as Antigone's courageous stand against such conventionality would have been presented by a male actor to what we assume to have been an all-male audience (although there is still some controversy about this).¹⁶ The fact that a male actor would have performed Antigone's part means that a play that examines as a major theme the political exclusion of women re-enacts this exclusion as a condition of staging its interrogation. A politics of exclusion thus redoubles itself, even as it creates a space in which the performance of *Antigone* exceeds the political requirement that dictates women's silence in the public sphere.

The set of conventional corporeal codes intended to mark a character as a woman would have operated in such a way as to bracket the presence of a male body on stage, allowing the audience to read the performance of the character as a woman. Women's confinement within the house was such a mainstay of Athenian life that one of the performance features indicating to the audience that a character was female rather than male was a lighter skin color (since women would not have been tanned, given their confinement indoors), an effect that could be produced, if necessary, by the use of white lead.¹⁷ Other indicators

included tunics that were shorter than those worn by male characters, masks with long hair (Case 1985, 321) and "body padding ... if the evidence of vase painting" is to be taken at face value (Ormond 2003, 1). These performance codes operated in a manner that, rather than being disruptive of gendered roles, kept them safely in their place. As Kirk Ormond says, "Such conventions—body padding being the most obvious example—serve a double function: they allow the audience to suspend judgment on the sex of the actor, and they allow the actor to portray the female sex without fully taking the risk of adopting the other gender" (2003, 23). Accordingly, in contrast to Sue Ellen Case, Ormond concludes that far from seeing the "theatrical transvestism" of Greek drama as "drag" or "as a kind of flirting with an alternate gender identity," we should read it in terms of a strategy of containment.¹⁸ "The formalized conventions used to portray women on the Athenian stage ... effectively served to insulate the actors from any risk of a conversion that might carry over, dangerously, into real life" (2003, 28). If male actors were insulated from the risk of adopting the other gender, is it also the case that their performance of female gender would fail to jeopardize the clear lines of demarcation requiring women's seclusion, silence, and subordination to an essentially reproductive function? Would the performance codes of Greek tragedy simply re-enforce the silencing of women, even if they sometimes became the subject of contestation within a particular play? Or should we imagine a more complex and conflictual series of dramatic effects?

A masked actor performing a female role produces a performance that on the one hand provides the ancient Athenian audience with the assurance that the conventions demanding the successful containment of women were not being violated, and on the other hand provided for a controlled range of representations of femininity, the terms of which were dictated (but not entirely contained) by those in power. A double condition must be thought through. For the Greeks, tragedy explores and contests the political requirement (among other things) that women remain subordinate, even as it controls the danger women are taken to represent by enacting on stage their transgression of socially condoned limits. It does so in a performance that reproduces women's exclusion from political processes by removing women's bodies from public view, and having men speak their parts. This situation mimics women's actual marginality, and the fact that they were under the guardianship of men, who did their public speaking for them.

In order to follow through two possible ways in which Antigone's performance might have been read (for surely it would have been read in more than one way), let me first present a reading that remains within the confines of the oscillation played out by fetishistic disavowal (I know

that the actor is male, but all the same I agree to read Antigone's character as female), and a second reading that sees Antigone as intervening in the logic of disavowal, pointing to the discarded ground on the basis of which the fetishistic fiction is maintained, namely, the political conditions of exclusion that require that men stand in for women in the first place. This second reading, in which women's political exclusion from a theatrical space in which they are nevertheless represented by male performers suggests that the motif of abjection might be appropriately applied to Antigone's capacity to draw attention to the excluded other, the exclusion of which is accomplished by means of a porous boundary, one that operates to include women in a limited, controlled, and very specific way even as it prohibits their bodily presence.

In the first register, Antigone's act can be read as restorative, as an act that puts women back in their proper place, secures their subordinate roles, and affirms the need for the family to be loyal and answerable to the *polis*. Read in this way, Antigone acts to restore the kinship laws that Oedipus had violated. She becomes a memorial to that loss, a means of bringing back an old order that had been transgressed. In attending to the corpse of Polynices, Antigone's act puts to rest the aberration of a norm, restoring the proper order. Such a reading is consistent with the fact that the dramatic performance of *Antigone* would have taken place at a public festival sanctioned by the state, a celebration that either materially or notionally would have been aimed at a male audience.¹⁹ The life and death of Antigone would have confirmed the need to uphold the incest prohibition, the need for men to control women's reproductive activity with the interests of the state in mind, and the sacrificial imperative—the need to eliminate the threat of disorder that Antigone, the product of incest, constitutes in her very existence.

To read Antigone as positively affirming the established order to such an extent that she is willing to die for it, while it may well have served the purposes of those seeking to perpetuate the structures of power already at work in Athens, is to reduce her to a conduit for Athenian society to produce an image of itself that re-establishes the need for a pre-existing order that would keep women in check. Even if women had the freedom to be heard, the power to think and act for themselves, the message seems to be, they would affirm the order more or less in place. Were women capable of the best kind of political deliberation (something doubted by Aristotle), they would merely invoke the boundaries that they were considered to endanger, re-affirming these boundaries in the face of their violation, and at the same time justifying male authority.²⁰ Similarly, to celebrate Antigone for standing up against Creon, for being able to discern the dependence of the *polis* on the family with greater insight than he can, is merely another way of putting women back in their place.

It is to affirm the political order that Creon tries, and fails, to protect, rather than to follow through the principle to which Antigone draws attention—or rather initiates. In short, such a reading runs the risk of once again fetishizing Antigone, who becomes merely a decorative ornament in a system that attempts to confirm its status as necessary. The tendency to fetishize the figure of Antigone operates within the confines of sanctioning women's seclusion, failing to question the contours by which the political constitutes eros as subordinate to the aims of a polity that benefits from the contributions of women and slaves but in which full political participation is restricted to men.

While there are certainly grounds to suppose that a performance of *Antigone* would have condoned the need to confine women to highly circumscribed and subordinate roles, I am suggesting that such interpretations might coexist with alternative readings of the Sophoclean figure of Antigone, which contest rather than confirm the view that women are in need of confinement, to be restrained by the guardianship of men. In one of its registers the performance of *Antigone* would have thereby confirmed the need for women's containment, even as in another register it interrogated any idea of the *oikos* as a space bounded by pre-political rules, by drawing attention to the politicized character of the boundary separating the *oikos* from the *polis* and the ways in which this boundary operated in the service of attempts to assure the stability of the *polis*, suggesting it could be otherwise.²¹ Read in this second register, Antigone exhibits leadership in her reconceived relationship to eros, calling for a new political order—not one that consists in tyrannical rule and uncompromising orders, but one that calls attention to the excluded other of the *polis*, its necessary remainder. Far from merely corroborating the idea that women were especially susceptible to unruly eros that runs roughshod over boundaries and distinctions, and are therefore in need of the constraint of marriage and the subjugation of a husband, Antigone presents an alternative view of eros. She does not merely subject herself to the kinship strictures of patriarchy; she also points beyond them, disrupting the certainty and self-assurance of its claims.

In attending to this second register, I want to outline the political logic according to which Antigone lends herself to myriad political struggles. By figuring the excluded constitutive ground of the polity, Antigone illuminates the processes according to which any contingent fact (not just gender or sexuality, but also race, class, nationality, religion, or some other contingency) can become a ground for an exclusionary politics. In this sense, it is not a question of Antigone acting as a woman, or in any other specifically gendered way. Rather it is a question of her acting in such a way as to rewrite or transform the grounds on which her exclusion from the system is written off as both inevitable and at the

same time unintelligible to it. Antigone calls herself into intelligibility by challenging the grounds on which the polity writes her as unintelligible, unreadable, unsignifiable within its terms.²² In doing so, she opens up to interrogation the condition that the *polis*, as represented by Creon, has written off as beyond the bounds of interrogation, as beyond the bounds of signification. Were her exclusion to have become capable of representation within the set of significations that requires it, then that system itself must have undergone transformation. Antigone calls for a re-drawing of the lines of the polity, such that it is no longer possible to figure her only as its excluded outside—that is, to refuse her “proper” representation—while at the same time drawing on her resources for its own purposes. In this sense Antigone calls for a future polity that does not rely on the political exclusion of some of its members, and then legislate that exclusion as unthinkable or render it non-negotiable. She draws attention to political gestures that rely on casting as unintelligible those on whom it depends materially and psychically, but whom it systematically excludes from legitimate symbolic representation. Antigone is a figure who can only ever be represented improperly within the terms dictated by the politics of Greek tragedy.

She becomes a site for the reworking of the distinction between improper and proper, between that which is cast outside a system of intelligibility as unimaginable within its current configuration, and that according to which something is cast out as impermissible and unacceptable. She calls into question the very terms that render an order proper by designating something other than it as improper. She insinuates herself into a system that is sealed off from her proper representation. At the same time, she calls attention to the impossibility of her proper representation within the system that excludes her. This is not to say that she makes clear that her representation is impossible per se, only that it is impossible within the terms of representation as currently conceived. She calls, then, for a transformation of the politics that endorses her exclusion as a necessary condition of any proper representation—both the actual representation of those legitimated by it and the potential representation of those excluded by it.

If in one sense Antigone's restoration of the incest prohibition violated by Oedipus also serves as a formal recognition of Creon's right to be king, in another sense it contests that right. To reinstate the claim that Polynices has on her as a brother, and only as a brother, is both to sanction and to undercut the legitimating claim of the kinship ties that prevail. Given the death of Polynices and Eteocles, as brother of Jocasta, Creon is next in line to inherit the throne. Insofar as Creon's claim to be king rests upon his kinship to Jocasta, as her brother, Antigone's act of disambiguating Polynices's relation to herself, clarifying his status as

brother, might seem to sanction Creon's claim to be king. Yet if Creon is the brother of Jocasta, his inheritance also issues from the incestuous union between Oedipus and Jocasta, a union that Antigone's act of burying Polynices renders symbolically illegitimate. In this sense Antigone undercuts Creon's claim to be king. By emphasizing that Polynices shared the same womb as her, that is, that he qualifies as her brother because he shares her maternal lineage, Antigone draws attention to the maternal genealogy that unites her to Polynices.²³ She does so at the expense of the kinship line she shares with Polynices due to their common father, Oedipus. Had Oedipus not married Jocasta, Creon would have no claim to be king. By emphasizing maternal rather than paternal genealogy, Antigone might be said to be severing the legitimacy of Creon's claim to be king while at the same time underlining the fact that the bloodlines that establish Creon's claim to be king are the very same bloodlines that establish her as part of the royal family—bloodlines that proceed from an incestuous union.²⁴ If Antigone's very existence as a child of incest is horrific, so too is the nature of Creon's claim to rule Thebes, since it is based upon the same incestuous union that Antigone seeks to repudiate.

Where Oedipus had mingled eros with *philia* in such a way as to make of Jocasta a loved one in two divergent and incompatible respects, as both mother and wife, redoubling the bonds of *philia*, Antigone disambiguates *philia* from eros, putting not only her blood relationship with Polynices before her erotic bond with Haemon, but in doing so specifying and delimiting the sense in which Polynices is a loved one, *philos*. He is a brother, and must not be a potential lover, but beyond this he is a brother, and not also an uncle (as the half brother of Oedipus via Jocasta, who is not only wife but also mother of Oedipus).

If Antigone insists on clarifying her relation to Polynices, making him a brother and nothing else, what impact does her disambiguating act of burial have on her own kinship status? She becomes nothing but a sister, distinguishing herself from the self-generating mother that her incestuous line had made of her. Symbolically, as a result of Oedipal incest, Antigone is already the next generation. As both daughter and granddaughter of Jocasta, she is, one might say, her own daughter; she is mother to herself. She herself must grieve for her impending death not only because Jocasta is dead, but also because there is a sense in which she herself is the granddaughter Jocasta will never have. Antigone is her own child. She is both the daughter and granddaughter of Jocasta, since Jocasta is not only her mother, but also (as mother of Oedipus) her grandmother. She grieves then for a lost opportunity, for a child who will never be, for a generation that cannot be generated, for a generation that has been generated already. She grieves, one might say, for the child she herself is, as mother and child rolled into one.

The political renews itself in Antigone's reconstitution of *philia* as central to the *polis* in such a way as to confirm the need to oversee the lines of inheritance, even as Antigone contests the very definition of the political as masculine. She thereby gives rise to a new way of conceptualizing women's relationship to eros at the same time as she both broadens the meaning of the political beyond Creon's narrow conception of it, and contests what it might mean to be a woman. Unlike Creon, Antigone does not want order for the sake of order, and neither does she act in such a way as merely to confirm or disrupt the prevailing conventions of femininity. If she works to reinstate distinctions that are vital to both familial and political life, this work does not merely eliminate the disorder that women's association with eros was conventionally taken to embody, nor does it merely introduce disorder into the political order. It opens up to interrogation that which Creon tries to define as civil order by decree. Antigone is said by her sister, Ismene, to be "in love with the impossible," and yet in her insistence on burying Polynices she brings to light a new possibility, the significance of which Ismene ultimately recognizes. That which was said to be impossible according to the limitations of Creon's order proves to be possible in view of the new political order that Antigone could be said to call for.

An erotic fetishization of Antigone's sacrifice fails to think through the ramifications of Antigone's redirection of eros, which acknowledges the dependence of *philia*—and therefore, by extension, the reliance of the ordering of the *polis*—on the control of eros. The incessant rebirth of *Antigone* opens up the possibility of reshaping conventions that have consolidated themselves as political necessities, which might enshrine the need for apartheid, and the dangers of dismantling it, or the need for British imperialism to express itself in a colonial relationship to the Irish, who are figured as otherwise wild and untamable—or the need for numerous other boundaries of containment.²⁵ In order to begin to take seriously not only the politics of exclusion practiced in fifth-century Athens, and its impact on the performance of roles such as that of Antigone, but also *Antigone's* multiple political legacies and the multiple political exclusions about which her performance has come to speak, I will not restrict my interrogation of *Antigone* to fifth-century BCE Athens. Let me turn, then, to *The Island*.

In *The Island*, Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona take up and recast the question of cross-dressing in an intriguing way that both recreates the constraints of Greek tragic performance and radically displaces them, transposing the play into the context of apartheid, in South Africa's notorious Robben Island prison, the inmates of which have included Nelson Mandela. The conditions of performance that would have been formalized conventions for the Greeks become a theme for in-

vestigation in *The Island*. Playwright Athol Fugard tracks the inspirational role *Antigone* has had in the face of the deprivation of basic human rights suffered due to "the monstrous political philosophy which came to be known as apartheid" under which "black and coloured South Africans (to use the racial categories of the old South Africa)," including "free political association, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom to have sex with or marry a partner regardless of race, had been taken away" (2002, 130). He thereby gives substance to the idea that far from simply embodying monstrosity herself, Antigone in fact reveals the monstrosity of unjust interpretations of the law.

In *The Island* two inmates are to put on a performance based on *Antigone*. Since the actor playing Antigone is male, he must give the appearance of being a woman. The play stages the constraints under which this performance takes place, bringing to light in the process the tension it produces for Winston's character, who must perform a woman's role in women's clothes. The perfunctory costume afforded him as a prison inmate includes "false 'titties'" (Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona 1974, 61) and the head of a mop, worn as a wig. John has persuaded Winston to play Antigone, but cannot resist laughing at his expense. Humiliated by his cellmate's laughter, and anticipating further humiliation from a prison audience, Winston retorts that he would rather endure the humiliations of the prison guard than John's: "I am not doing your *Antigone* ! I would rather run the whole day for Hodoshe.²⁶ At least I know where I stand with him. All *he* wants is to make me a 'boy' ... not a bloody woman!" (Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona 1974, 60). Being made into a woman here functions as so undesirable that even the inhumane behavior to which Winston is subjected on a daily basis by his sadistic overseer is seen as preferable. An echo of the untenable, unthinkable position occupied by slaves in Sophocles's *Antigone* is found in the way that women function in *The Island*, where fear of being made into a woman figures in relation to the racist theme of apartheid that informs the text at every level. Winston would prefer to be made into a boy than into a woman. Can his humanity be more easily recuperated in one case than in another, and if so why? How does his preference play out in terms of the effeminizing trope deployed by racist strategies? In what ways is Winston's acute anxiety about impersonating a female exacerbated or shaped by the fact that as a prison inmate he is thrown together with another man in highly confined quarters, forced into an intense and prolonged physical and emotional intimacy? How does this play out in terms of the fact that when a friend of Kani, Ntshona, and Fugard, Sharkie (Sipho Mququlwa), actually performed a version of *Antigone* while they were imprisoned in Robben Island—a performance that served as the inspiration for *The Island*—the performance of Antigone on stage,

complete with mop, failed to raise, in Fugard's words, "even a titter" (2002, 134)?

The Island recasts the performative and gendered questions inherent in the performance of ancient Greek tragedy. Here Antigone is played by a woman not, as in fifth-century BCE Athens, because women in general were not allowed to act female parts, but because blacks in general were subject to unjust and harsh treatment in twentieth-century South Africa, as a result of which Winston is imprisoned. In his desperate attempt to retain his sanity under the brutal conditions of Robben Island, Winston claims to prefer his treatment at the hands of Hodoshe, declaring his preference to be treated as a boy rather than as a woman. What happens, then, when Winston relents, agreeing to play the role of Antigone, agreeing to perform the role of a woman after all?

In the play that was to become *The Island*, Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona based their story on "Sharkie's extraordinary fifteen-minute *Antigone* in the prison concert on Robben Island" (144). Fugard goes on to compare the reception of the play to that of

Anouilh's *Antigone* in Paris during the German occupation. The front row of German army officers had thought they were enjoying French culture, while behind them Parisians received a political message of hope and defiance. So too on Robben Island, the South African warders sat in front of the audience of prisoners, and really admired these Bantus for what they had cooked up for their entertainment (134).

Fugard offers the following comment: "I like to think of that moment of Sharkie's triumph as possibly the greatest fulfillment of this magnificent play's message since Sophocles first staged his *Antigone* in Athens in about 440 BC" (134).

The Robben Island performance of *Antigone* thus provided the context for a play in which the living death Creon plans for Antigone parallels the living hell (see Fugard 2002, 145) faced by incarcerated prison inmates. Antigone's premature entombment in a cave for a crime that is not a crime serves as a metaphor for Winston's incarceration in a prison for a crime that was not a crime. Sophocles's Antigone is imprisoned as much for being a woman who dares to oppose Creon as she is for burying Polynices; in apartheid South Africa it was enough to be black to be treated as a criminal. For all his reluctance, Winston ultimately chooses to risk performing Antigone, and in doing so, paradoxically, there is a sense in which he risks being himself. He takes on the role that he had distanced himself from so vehemently, to the point of preferring the cruelty of a prison guard. The words that John uses in order to

persuade him to take this risk resonate in more than one way. "They will know it's really you." The audience of prison inmates—with whom audiences of *The Island* are required to identify—will recognize that behind the façade of a woman is a man, but they will agree to suspend this recognition, an agreement that might well be informed by a political insight that allows a reading of Antigone's contest with Creon to reflect a black South African's struggle with apartheid. To see in Antigone's plight that of a black South African is to see someone imprisoned for being who she or he is, imprisoned for being born a woman in fifth-century BCE Athens, or for being born black in apartheid South Africa, or for any other contingency of birth, including—to anticipate the context in which Tom Paulin translates *Antigone*, to which I will turn in a later discussion—being Irish in the time of the troubles. The audience will recognize themselves, and the contingency of the political conditions that dictate, or offer relief from, their own imprisonment.

If the performance of drama in Athens constituted an occasion for political critique, crucial for the political consciousness of the audience, such occasions were sanctioned in a way that can hardly be said for performances of *Antigone* in South Africa, where black actors risked arrest. If such performances embodied "one of theatre's major responsibilities in an oppressive society: to break the conspiracy of silence that always attends an unjust social system" (143), we are led to wonder what impact the demand that men—and only men—speak for women might have had on the limitations of Athenian democracy. For the actors themselves, the performance of such plays constituted a matter of survival, rather than a duty to the *polis*. Survival here connotes both *zoē* and *bios*—to survive psychically, not merely biologically, to retain a hope for the future that consists in construing a polity that does not adhere to the regime of apartheid.

Concluding Remarks

I have tried to elucidate how the conditions of performativity might have played out in relation to the political impact of tragedy in two different registers. In Athens, in a society in which women played no visible political role, the female as well as the male parts in *Antigone*—a play that brings into question the separation of public and private, and how this lines up with male/female—would have been acted by male actors. In one register Antigone would have been fetishized by readings that disavow the legitimating male bodies that constitute a condition of performing tragic drama: I know that the actor is male, but all the same I read the character as consistently female. On such a reading, a successful performance will consist of a male actor passing as a female, and

will tend to minimize any oscillation between knowledge and belief. An erotic fetishization of Antigone succumbs to the allure of a character in love with the death drive, and dedicated to the preservation of the new laws of the socio-symbolic realm, which exclude women from the political and require the subordination of their erotic drive to the polity. In a second register, Antigone can be read as figuring the excluded, constitutive remainder that is disavowed. Here the challenge she presents to the social convention dictating women's silence is read not as a nostalgic memorial to the past, to the lost/missing/mythical object, but as a call to the future, for an expanded notion of democracy, one that is not premised on the silencing of women. This future democracy brings into question the narrow definition of the political construed by Creon, as order for the sake of order, a political order that would try to eliminate any risk or disorder by fiat. By refiguring the relation between *philia* and eros, Antigone acknowledges the symbolic importance of restoring the distinctions Oedipus had confused. Yet her act is not merely restorative of an order that had been violated. To restrict the meaning of Antigone's insistence upon burying Polynices to the restoration of the incest taboo is to read the tragic effect as a reining in of eros, consistent with the assumption that the political function of tragedy is entirely controlled by its sanctioning as a state performance. Antigone's sacrificial death would be in the service of the ordering of the *polis*; the meaning of her act of burial would be harnessed to the purpose of stabilizing a state that excludes women from full participation. Antigone's erotic aims would be subordinate to order and stability, as if the political meaning of the play could be reduced to the recognition of the importance of the discrimination of various filial relations for the sake of initiating erotic relations appropriate to the preservation of a polity that persists in its subordination of women's erotic desires to its own ends.

I want to emphasize that for all Antigone's efforts to disambiguate eros from *philos*—a task she inherits due to the unique circumstances of her birth—there is no question of distinguishing one as completely distinct from the other. Try as she might, she cannot purify one of all traces of the other. There is no purity here, only instability and contamination, as must be acknowledged if we are even to begin to make sense of Antigone's attempt to contest the perverted status of familial roles that constitutes her clan. We could even go as far as to say that that eros will never be completely free of *philia*, nor will *philia* ever be completely purified of eros, and perhaps that it never should be. Perhaps their difference can only ever be a difference of degree; perhaps each relationship, familial or otherwise, must negotiate that degree.²⁷

To read the character of Antigone as one whose action calls attention to—rather than disavowing—the political conditions that exclude women

from the public sphere, dictating that her role can only be performed by a man, is not to see the political function of tragedy as confined to the subjugation of women to the status quo. It is also to see tragic drama as performing a critique of political exclusion, a critique that calls for a version of democracy that does not survive by disavowing as excluded others members who are constitutive of its preservation. Antigone makes an intervention into the logic of fetishism by drawing attention to that which is disavowed, and accordingly her legacy is taken up beyond the logic of sexual difference. In *The Island*, the dynamic of abjection is explored in a way that does not merely condone a chain of abjection but explores the reiteration of dejects within a play that both takes the risk of showing how racial exclusions can devolve into the abjection of women, while also recuperating that abjection. When Winston overcomes his fear and plays Antigone, replete with his ridiculous wig and false titties—the only costume his incarceration affords him—his audience does not ridicule him, because they see the profundity of the relationship between apartheid and Creon's version of tyranny.

Antigone calls for a polity premised not on excluded but constitutive others, but rather one in which the possibilities of political representation are transformed, so that the polity no longer relies upon stipulating certain subjects as unthinkable within its terms, while continuing to benefit from its appropriation of the material contributions of these non-subjects, contributions that are nonetheless deprived of equal representation by the symbolic systems of signification in place. She calls for a polity that does not insist upon creating its own enemy within the city walls, relegating some of its subjects to a mythical state of nature, as if they were not civilized enough to participate fully in the democracy they nonetheless help to sustain. She calls for a polity in which women are no longer the eternal irony of the community. She calls for a polity in which not only do women vacate this role, but one in which no one is made to take their place.

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Notes

1. For the translation see O'Brien 1977, 60.

2. The usual assumption is that the ode to eros (quoted at the beginning of the paper) refers us to Antigone and Haemon, but in my reading it refers, perhaps primarily, to Oedipus and Jocasta. O'Brien says, for example, "The Chorus is, of course, thinking of Haemon's great passion for Antigone" (1977, 60). While I agree with O'Brien that for Antigone passions are "not enslaving but ennobling" (60), I read the play, following Mader (2005), by understanding Antigone to articulate a principle of disambiguation, and thus I understand the commentary on eros to refer just as much (if not more) to Oedipus and Jocasta as it does to Haemon and Antigone. Antigone's retrospective perspective, designed to rectify the lines of inheritance that Oedipus had mixed up, conflating two orders—that of eros and *philia*—that should have been separated, is directed toward sorting through the familial relationships that have become confused by the incestuous act of Oedipus. At the same time, the rectifying work accomplished by Antigone also creates new possibilities, allowing the principle of Antigone's own act of burial to take on meaning beyond the simple act of burial, conferring on Polynices an identity that goes beyond that of being the son of Oedipus, and conferring on Antigone a meaning that goes beyond her identity as Oedipal daughter. The principle that emerges is one that implicates not just genealogical lines, but also the signification of Antigone's act becoming meaningful in ways that will echo throughout future polities. On this reading, the "bride" referred to is Jocasta, with whom Antigone might well be said to identify—and in this sense the ode to eros can be read as referring to both Jocasta and Antigone. It is Oedipus's acting on his attraction to Jocasta that exhibits the inescapability and destructiveness of eros, and which eventually leads Antigone to her death. The incestuous acts of Oedipus pit his sons against one another, and leads to the tragedy of *Antigone*.

3. Markell says, "tragedy helps us understand both why a perfect regime of recognition is impossible, and, more importantly, why this impossibility is not only a regrettable limitation but itself a condition of the possibility of agency—the flip side, as it were, of freedom. To will truly successful recognition, on this view, is to exchange one sort of social death for

another, sacrificing the uncertainty of the plural, futural world for the final word, the perfect subjection, of the eulogy—an exchange Antigone herself is willing to make" (2003, 88). Alternatively, one could read Antigone's acceptance of her own death as a willingness to take on and think through the plurality of human action, her understanding that she is not the center of the universe, and that the ramifications of her actions have implications for others. In this way, Antigone might be seen to understand the limitations of her own sovereignty—an understanding she might be said to be predisposed towards, given the politically overdetermined asymmetry that circumscribes the meanings any of her actions or words might take on.

4. Aristotle (1975, 451). Markell (2003, 74–9) has a useful discussion on the question of the relationship between Aristotle's *Poetics* and his ethical philosophy, and the merits of looking to one rather than the other to provide an interpretative framework for tragedy. While I might quibble with the specifics of his argument, I shall accept his conclusion that it is legitimate to draw not only on the *Poetics* but also on Aristotle's ethics—which is centrally concerned with the propriety or impropriety of human action, just as tragedy is—in order to illuminate tragic action.

5. See Segal 1999, 185; Knox 1992, 80–2; Foley 2001, 173; Markell 2003, 71–4; and O'Brien 1978, 5–6.

6. See Knox 1992.

7. See Blundell 1989, 112.

8. On the complexity of *philia* see Benveniste (1973, 273–88). Nicole Loraux points to the pervasive metaphorical service that the family performs for the polis (2002, 30). I owe this reference to Brigitte Weltmann-Aron.

9. In this regard, Hegel's comment to the effect that "when women are in charge of government the state is in danger, for their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion" (Markell 2003, 114, quoting Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, section 166) might take on a very different meaning than the one he confers on it.

10. Of course there is a sense in which Antigone cannot but be open to Creon's contrary views, since he maintains a structural power over her that precludes any power she might have over him. This does not

prevent him being threatened by her insubordination, nor does it prevent the repercussions of her deed—which takes on meanings that escape the authority Creon would impose on her—going beyond what they both might have expected. Even if Antigone is designated as subject to Creon's political authority, or perhaps precisely because she is, there is a sense in which she is required to suffer his point of view in a way that he is not required to suffer his. Not only does she have no choice in the matter, but for her the necessity derives from a structural relationship of power, whereas the sense in which Creon ends up suffering the consequences of Antigone's actions carries no necessity. As it happens, Haemon and Jocasta commit suicide—but it could have been otherwise.

11. Sue-Ellen Case says, "The classical plays and theatrical conventions can ... be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing actual women and replacing them with the masks of patriarchal production" (1985, 318). Yet Mclure is no doubt right to suggest that "Attic drama should not be understood simply as a univocal, hegemonic discourse in service of civic ideology; it is a complex, polyvocal, and polysemous genre that alternately subverts and reinforces the dominant agenda" (1999, 5).

12. See Boal 1998. Greek tragedy is said to specialize in depicting the awful, chaotic, destructive consequences that ensue when women challenge the boundaries of convention, endangering the order of the polis by the very fact that they think and act for themselves, or "move on their own" (Borregaard 2005, 68). Tragedy is thus understood as merely confirming the danger that women represent when they violate the expectation that requires them not to be the authors of their own movement, not to act but to obey. Rather than construe tragedy as reaffirming the stability of the border separating politics from nature, so that if women are positioned "outside of society and its boundaries" they are necessarily "close to nature" (Borregaard 2005, 68), tragedy might itself become a way of contesting how those boundaries are drawn. To question how a society draws its boundaries is at the same time a way of demonstrating the politicized nature of those boundaries, of who is recognized as capable of acting politically, and who is legitimated as moving of their own principle and accord, and who is not.

13. See also Euben's introduction to *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (1986), especially pages 24, 28–9, and 37.

14. See Markell (2003), who exhorts us to return to Aristotle's prioritizing of plot over character, a move that risks reducing the political impact of tragedy to a conservative impulse, and ignores the possibility that Anti-

gone's character might refuse to be contained by the plot Sophocles constructs for her, one in which her death puts to rest her defiance of the king. I am suggesting that Antigone escapes both Sophocles's grasp and any Aristotelian attempt to confine her to the contours of a tragic plot. Her spirit defies the death meted out to her, living on, not merely as a fetish, but in her call for a politic that does not blindly appropriate from those it refuses to recognize even as they remain indispensable to it.

15. Although there has been some controversy over whether women attended performances, Goldhill (1997) reaffirms the traditional view that women were not in attendance. There is general agreement that women did not act in the plays.

16. See Pomeroy 1995, 80 and Winkler 1990, 226.

17. Griffith 1998, 247.

18. Until Sue-Ellen Case took seriously the significance of what she called "Classic Drag: The Greek Creation of Female Parts" (1985), the topic had been signaled only by a dearth in the critical literature on Greek tragedy. Perhaps it is unsurprising that critics have only begun to take seriously the theatrical conventions of ancient Greek theater since the institution of women's and gender studies as a serious academic pursuit.

19. As McClure puts it, it is almost certain that slaves were not allowed to attend, and few women, if any, would have been present; in any case, fifth-century Athenian drama clearly addressed itself to a conceptual audience of male citizens" (1999, 17).

20. On another reading—which, however, ultimately refuses to recognize that Antigone calls for a new political order in such a way as to draw attention to the logic of the excluded other, Antigone's ability to act is acknowledged, but only at the cost of reading her action as a transgression of the properly feminine role, such that she must be punished for her manly action. Death becomes the penalty for daring to challenge the accepted boundaries that require women to conform to "ideals of stillness" (Borregaard 2005, 68).

21. It is worth hypothesizing that those members of the Athenian audience in whose interests it was to control women's allegedly unruly eros might have found the first reading amenable, while those at the receiving end of exclusionary political measures (even if their access to theatrical performances was mediated by the reports of others) might have found

the second reading more amenable. Neither the line separating these two different responses that I am characterizing in an overly schematic way would have been clear, nor would their political impact have been unambiguous. Even if it contests the idea that the nature of the boundary separating the *oikos* from the *polis* is pre-political, a performance of *Antigone* would have reduplicated the conditions that maintained women in their seclusion from active and vocal participation in the political.

22. My formulations here are informed by Butler(2000).

23. Antigone insists on naming Polynices under the description of *autadelphos* (my own brother), and stressing that she shared the same womb (*homosplanchnos*) as him. See Segal 1999, 158, 170, 184; Knox 1992, 79.

24. It is crucial to understand that in emphasizing maternal genealogy, Antigone is not asserting the authority of a natural relationship, but making a symbolic claim. Derrida is right to insist that "a genealogical tie" will always be phantasmatic (1997, 92); "it always implies a symbolic effect of discourse—a 'legal fiction,'" and that "This is also true ... of maternity" (93). As he points out, any appeal to *phusis* is intended to renaturalize what is always in fact a fiction/phantasm (93).

25. Heather Rakes, in an unpublished seminar paper, "Antigone and Idiolect of Abject Anger" (DePaul, 2006), asks "Is it the anger of colonized, occupied, and/or incarcerated subjects [which] is intolerable and unintelligible, or is it the threat of an end to apartheid, segregation, exploitation, the prison industrial complex, by means of exposing their injustices? Is it, perhaps, both?"

26. As Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. notes, "Hodoshe is a Xhosa word meaning 'carrion fly' that was the nickname of the infamous senior guard at Robben Island, well known for his cruelty" (2002, 195). See also Gray, 1991, 49. The concept of being a carrion fly has a special resonance for *Antigone*, given the important role played by Polynices's corpse, left to the carrion birds.

27. Derrida's reflections on the distinction between *echthros* and *polemos* are instructive here. In a discussion that takes its bearings in relation to Carl Schmitt's suggestion of an intrinsic connection between designating enemies and the existence of the political as such, Derrida questions Schmitt's legitimation of the distinction between private and public enemies, suggesting an alternative reading of Plato's *Republic*, in which

Schmitt grounds his distinction. For Derrida, far from treating the distinction between a private enemy and a public enemy as stable or fixed, Plato unsettles the distinction between *polemos* (war) and *stasis* (civil war, internal dissension). Rather than treating such distinctions as if they were given, Derrida conceives of them as "threatened, fragile, porous, contestable" (1997, 88). We might apply Derrida's remarks about the difficulty of ever thoroughly distinguishing *echthros* and *polemos* to the impossibility of ever properly distinguishing eros from philia. See also Derrida's discussion in the same essay of the term *philos* in relation to Benveniste (1973, 98). This discussion will be taken up in the larger project of which this paper is a part.