

2010

Antigone's Nature

William Robert
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/rel>



Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

William Robert. "Antigone's Nature" *Hypatia* 25.2 (2010): 412-436. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/william_robert/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Antigone's Nature

WILLIAM ROBERT

Antigone fascinates G. W. F. Hegel and Luce Irigaray, both of whom turn to her in their explorations and articulations of ethics. Hegel and Irigaray make these re-turns to Antigone through the double and related lenses of nature and sexual difference. This essay investigates these figures of Antigone and the accompanying ethical accounts of nature and sexual difference as a way of examining Irigaray's complex relation to and creative uses of Hegel's thought.

Tragedy is excessive; that is what makes it tragic. Tragic excess can lead a human subject across his or her mortal limits, beyond the possible and into the terrain of the impossible. In this way, Jacques Derrida's aporetic question "what, then, is it to cross the ultimate border?" becomes the question of tragedy, to which only someone excessive, someone who has crossed the limit, can reply (Derrida 1993, 8).

Antigone might be best positioned to respond to Derrida's question. If tragedy is a matter of excess, of pushing on and even through ultimate limits, then Antigone stands as its representative figure, for Antigone is excessive. Moreover, she has become a central trope of tragedy in philosophical, religious, aesthetic, ethical, and political discourses of occidental thought since Sophocles' play that bears her name was first performed in 442 BCE. But this tropic identification has not tamed her, for Antigone still amazes; she still dazzles, as George Steiner notes: "between c. 1790 and c. 1905, it was widely held by European poets, philosophers, scholars that Sophocles' *Antigone* was not only the finest of Greek tragedies but a work of art nearer to perfection than any other produced by the human spirit" (Steiner 1996, 1).¹ The pinnacle of such assessments comes in G. W. F. Hegel's pronouncement that "among all the fine creations of the ancient and the modern world—and I am acquainted with pretty nearly everything in such a class—the *Antigone* of Sophocles is . . . in my judgment the most excellent and satisfying work of art" (Hegel 2001a, 74). But as Jacques Lacan points out, though *Antigone* represents "a turning point in . . . ethics" and reveals "the line of sight that defines desire," it

is “Antigone herself who fascinates us, Antigone in her unbearable splendor” (Lacan 1997, 243, 247).²

Why is she so fascinating? For Luce Irigaray, it is in part because she continues to resonate, to remain relevant for women, since it is as a woman that Antigone struggles and suffers. Irigaray repeatedly returns to Antigone in her writings, noting that Antigone’s example “is always worth reflecting upon as a historical figure [*figure de l’Histoire*] and as an identity or identification for many girls and women living today”—hence “her relevance to our present situation [*à cause de son actualité*]” (Irigaray 1989, 84, 81; 1994, 70, 67).³ The “present situation,” as Irigaray sees it, calls for means of navigating and negotiating ways of being in religious, ethical, social, and political registers. These are the directions in which her extended engagements with Antigone move.

Why does Antigone continue to fascinate? She resists. She resists domination or incorporation, categorization or explanation. She resists, for example, civil law by disregarding Creon’s edict forbidding Polyneices’ burial. She also resists traditional lines of genealogy as a child of incest. In these and other ways, Antigone resists description in the traditional terms of occidental philosophy, religion, aesthetics, ethics, and politics—in her own time and in contemporary settings.

ENCRYPTION

Antigone remains cryptic, speaking and acting from the other side.

This other side is the side of an other of difference—an other rather than another. This other is not what Irigaray calls the other of the same, namely, an other whose otherness is already factored into a broader system, which reduces the other of the same to a systematic function. Such a system—philosophical, religious, ethical, political, sexual, cultural, or otherwise—gives license only to an otherness that (in Irigaray’s words) is “measured in terms of *sameness*,” so that this otherness reveals itself to be a mirror of sameness (Irigaray 1974, 306; 1985a, 247). This otherness of the same, as part of the system all along, is ultimately reincorporated by the system since it exists on the system’s own terms. According to Irigaray, this consuming movement takes place through “one last reversal” in which the other is re-enveloped, as “the ‘*interior*’ now circles back around the ‘*exterior*’ . . . ever moving in circles in the direction of the same” (1974, 400–01; 1985a, 320; see also Irigaray 1974, 419, 425, 452; 1985a, 335, 340, 361). Instead, the other side from which Antigone speaks and acts is the side of a robust alterity: not the other of the same but the other of the other, an *other* other. She enacts an otherness that the system (Creon and the civil law of Thebes, among others) cannot account for or incorporate. In this way, the other of the other introduces an irreducible alterity that threatens to disrupt or even rupture the system that cannot digest it. It

introduces an otherness that can be systematically fatal, and it is from this space of real and vital otherness, as the other of the other, that Antigone speaks and acts.

(1) She speaks and acts from the other side of sexual difference. She is a woman who speaks and acts out of place. As a woman, her “proper” place in her ancient Greek context is the *oikos* (οἶκος): home, hearth, household. But Antigone steps out of place and improperly speaks and acts in the *polis* (πόλις), the public and political sphere: first to bury her brother Polyneices (twice) and then to defend her acts when she appears on trial before Creon. The ancient Greek *polis* was a masculine world, with only native men who owned property eligible for citizenship and political participation. Women, slaves, foreigners, and other “others” were excluded from the *polis*, from the possibility of and therefore the rights of citizenship. Their exclusion formed the constitutive outside that made possible the *polis*’s self-delimitation. Antigone transgresses this exclusion by crossing the threshold separating *oikos* and *polis* and by speaking and acting in the political sphere. She does so, moreover, as a woman. She does not suppress or renounce her sexual difference, her feminine being, by adopting the characteristics of or trying to become a man. She does not masculinize herself or try to neutralize the difference between men and women. To do so would be impossible for her, as the motivation for her speech and action depends upon her sexual difference, in terms of her position as Polyneices’ sister. Antigone speaks and acts in the *polis* as a sister, and therefore as a woman, who does not renounce her allegiance to the *oikos*, the female domain of blood relations.

In this way, Antigone maintains her substantial difference from Creon—a difference whose resistance to neutralization threatens to destabilize the sexual economy upon which the *polis*, and hence Creon’s authority, rests. Creon feels this threat palpably, seeing in it his own potential emasculation, which would, in psychoanalytic terms, dispossess him of the phallus and would consequently exclude him from the *polis*. He articulates this potential in announcing that “it’s clear enough that I’m no man, but she’s the man, / if she can get away with holding power like this” (Sophocles 1998, 484–85).⁴ Though Antigone does not attempt to and has no interest in becoming a man, Creon voices the threat she poses in sexual terms: the threat of destabilizing his own male sexuality and, with it, the masculine order of the *polis*, which cannot incorporate irreducible sexual difference within its bounds. He underscores that Antigone’s femininity, her sexual difference from him and from the *polis* “properly” envisaged, is what he finds most disruptive when he offers his heated condemnation of her: “Go to Hades, then, and if you have to love, love someone dead. / As long as I live, I will not be ruled by a woman” (Sophocles 2001, 524–25; see also 678–80). Thus it is Antigone’s sustained sexual difference, as much as her violations of Creon’s civil law, that consigns

her to the crypt (though her sexual difference and her actions are inextricable).

Because she speaks and acts from the other side of sexual difference, she remains cryptic in the literal sense of a crypt, such as the one in which she is entombed alive. This encryption is doubly bound to her sexual difference as a woman given the linguistic kinship of *oikos* (home) to *oikēsis* (tomb), since it is Antigone's insistence on maintaining her sexual difference as an unassimilable alterity in and through her fidelity to *oikos* that finally forces her to make a tomb her home. In this way, *oikos* is from the start aligned with death, as a place of the dead, so that insofar as Antigone maintains her fidelity to the *oikos*, she maintains her fidelity to the dead—another mode of difference. As the other of the other, she remains encrypted, buried, as one who fundamentally threatens the patriarchal, phallocratic order that Creon represents. This order walls up her rocky tomb and leaves her there in an effort to keep her and her disruptive potential underground, thereby keeping itself uncontaminated.

(2) Antigone speaks and acts from the other side of law. In and through her sexual difference, Antigone resists Creon's male economy of hierarchical and violent political power. As Irigaray writes, Antigone as a woman "says no to men's power struggles, men's conflicts over who will be king, the endless escalation over who will be superior, and at any cost . . . She says that the law has a substance and that this substance must be respected" (Irigaray 1989, 84; 1994, 70). This legal substance that deserves respect is double: divine and embodied. Antigone refuses Creon's subtraction of divine substance from civil law. It is not that Antigone "sides" with the divine law of Hades against the civil law that Creon proclaims but that she resists Creon's disjunction of divine and human legal substances. This becomes clear when, on trial before Creon, she testifies that Creon's edict forbidding Polyneices' burial ("none may shroud him in a tomb or wail for him; / he must be left unwept, unburied, treasure sweet/for watching birds to feed on at their pleasure" [Sophocles 1998, 28–30]) both deviates from the law of Hades and lacks the backing of Zeus, with whom Creon aligns himself: "It was not Zeus who made this proclamation; / nor was it Justice dwelling with the gods below/who set in place such laws as these for humankind; / nor did I think your proclamations had such strength/that, mortal as you are, you could outrun those laws/that are the gods', unwritten and unshakeable" (Sophocles 1998, 450–55).⁵ Along these lines, Antigone points to the way in which the Sophoclean drama that bears her name serves as an inaugural moment for occidental religion. This is not to suggest that *Antigone* marks the emergence of myth or ritual or belief in gods or any other traditional elements of religion. Rather, Creon's forceful disjoining of religious and civil law distinguishes religion as a domain of human experience separated and separable from other domains, including art, culture, politics, and so on. Hence Antigone, albeit reactively (and in spite of

herself), becomes perhaps a founding occidental practitioner of religion as such.

For her, law has an embodied as well as a divine substance, referring directly to the fleshly corporeality of human bodies. Indeed, *Antigone* is a text that, in one sense, turns about bodies. Polyneices' body, dead and unburied, initiates the tragic drama and its players' subsequent words and actions. Antigone resists Creon's disjunctive legal edict because in one stroke, it severs civil and divine as well as formal and substantial elements. It thereby transforms law into an abstract concept followed simply for its own sake—because it is the law—making it akin to the disembodied categorical imperative that Immanuel Kant will articulate centuries later (see Kant 1998, §2). Instead, Antigone insists on a substantial law that has a material referent, such as the divine law of filial piety according to which a sister is obligated to bury her dead brother. For her, the law remains embodied in this way. It also remains directed toward an other as an other, not simply as a legal functionary, so that her obligation to Polyneices is to her brother as her brother—and to a human being (living or dead) as such. Furthermore, Antigone's upholding of this substantialized law, dictated by divine ethics, bears consequences for her own body—its entombment and death—that in turn lead to two more dead bodies: those of Haemon and Eurydice.

Because she speaks and acts from the other side of civil law (and hence as an outlaw), Antigone remains figuratively cryptic by remaining unreadable to Creon and his (male) civil legal order. This is due in large part to the unwritten status of the divine law to which she maintains allegiance. (This perhaps contributes to the chorus's description of her as *autonomos*, since they, too, are unable to read the law to which Antigone remains faithful (see Sophocles 1998, 821). Her other law is unreadable because, as unwritten, it does not present itself, make itself present, as a visual or visible text that a scopophilic Creon can read.

(3) Antigone speaks and acts from the other side of kinship. The incest taboo stands as the founding prohibition that organizes kinship systems, so as a child produced from an incestuous marriage, Antigone embodies its transgression. Furthermore, because she bears an incestuous desire for her (dead) brother Polyneices, she again transgresses this taboo—a taboo ultimately based on blood. But Antigone's otherness with respect to kinship is more significant than a crossing or even a double crossing of this prohibition can represent. The prohibition itself depends upon the distinction of nature and culture, which Claude Lévi-Strauss articulates in terms of a structural anthropology that identifies nature with universality and culture with contingency and social norms. The incest taboo represents a scandal for Lévi-Strauss's scheme since it is both universal and dictated by social norms, leading him to identify the prohibition of incest as “the fundamental step [*démarche*]” by which

“the transition [*passage*] from nature to culture is accomplished” (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 24). As a gap, incest marks a hole that neither nature nor culture can account for, which means that incest breaks down this rigid distinction and the structural system based on its prohibition. Incest and its prohibition reveal themselves as a duo that, in Derrida’s words, “escapes these concepts and certainly precedes them—probably as their condition of possibility” (Derrida 1978, 283).

Because she embodies incest, Antigone occupies this gap *between* nature and culture. In doing so, she spaces and thus displaces the nature–culture distinction that grounds kinship systems, preventing the correlative passage from nature to culture. Antigone stands as an other whose otherness undoes kinship. She remains cryptic by remaining unintelligible to kinship, as its incalculable remainder that it cannot incorporate. Hence Antigone, as a woman and more specifically as a sister, enacts an embodied performance of what Derrida calls a supplement: as he suggestively asks, “isn’t there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system’s space of possibility?” (Derrida 1986, 162).⁶ Antigone *remains*, as this inaugural exclusion, this other of the other whose vital and irreducible alterity prevents closure and frustrates tidy calculation. Antigone, this supplementary, other other, crosses and crisscrosses these dialectical structures of sexual difference, law, and kinship; she is not simply across the line, on the other side of the line, but is the other that challenges, disrupts, even ruptures the possibility of the line as a demarcation. She does so not by neutralizing difference but by maintaining the play of difference that cannot be collapsed or neutralized. In so maintaining, she remains cryptic, which makes her systematically indigestible (though on Irigaray’s account Antigone has herself “digested the masculine. At least partially, at least for a moment” [Irigaray 1974, 274; 1985a, 220]).⁷ She is, according to Derrida’s visceral (and appropriately corporeal) description, “the system’s vomit” (Derrida 1986, 162).

NATURAL SUBLATION

The system whose vomit Antigone represents might well be the philosophical system that Hegel expounds: a monolithic conceptual structure that charts the movement of Spirit (*Geist*) through a dialectical process of sublation (*Aufhebung*) that resolves in Spirit’s achievement of self-conscious self-reconciliation.⁸ Antigone incarnates a resistance to such sublation, which threatens to keep her buried for good. But her resistance does not prevent Hegel from offering a powerful and powerfully influential reading of her along ethical lines. His interpretation’s influence is so extensive that nearly every subsequent reading of *Antigone* engages it in some way.⁹

Hegel places Antigone implicitly (since he names her only twice) at the heart of his account of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This account centers on Spirit, the ethical substance that forms the realm of ethical life, which moves dialectically toward a self-reconciliation that entails the reconciliation of differences through identity-in-difference. By way of two sublations, Spirit comes to see itself (identity) in others (difference), resolving and thus eliding differences. Spirit advances dialectically until it achieves self-conscious presence in what Hegel calls “self-supporting, absolute, real being,” in-itself and for-itself (Hegel 1977, ¶440).¹⁰ To achieve this requires that individuals be sacrificed, since according to Hegel “the good can be accomplished only through the sacrifice of the individual” (¶359). The good to be accomplished is Spirit’s self-actualization as absolute and real.

Spirit realizes this manifestly in the state, the community of citizens, which dialectically reconciles the nation (as abstract concept) and the family (as material particularity). Through this process, the community comes to represent what Hegel calls “the *ethical* essence that has an *actual* existence” (¶475). Opposing these dialectical moments of nation and family sets up a structural reading of *Antigone* according to binary oppositions, with man/light/*polis*/human law/civil relation/activity/life corresponding to the nation, and woman/darkness/*oikos*/divine law/blood relation/passivity/death corresponding to the family. Read in this way, *Antigone* becomes a dialectical struggle between Creon, who embodies the former, and Antigone, who embodies the latter—a struggle whose resolution is preordained by Spirit’s inexorable movement toward absolute being and the fulfillment of ethical life. This reveals the way in which Hegel weaves tragedy into his ethical system: as a necessary step along the way, to be overcome in a resolution that, as such, is ultimately comic. Antigone, the tragic heroine, exemplifies one dialectical step, but she never passes beyond this thanks to her sublation in Spirit’s progression. She, like tragedy, is for Hegel only a means to an end, as he claims that “only in the downfall of both sides alike is absolute right accomplished” (¶472).¹¹ Both Creon and Antigone, as tragic characterizations of dialectic structures, are destined for devastation and destruction.

They are so destined by nature. According to Hegel, “Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law” (¶465).¹² This assertion evinces that Hegel grounds his reading of *Antigone* on his idea of nature: nature dictates that Creon is aligned with human law and the nation and that Antigone is aligned with divine law and the family. Hence the legal difference between Creon and Antigone (as well as the tragic conflict that results from this difference) depends upon the sexual difference between them, as nature assigns each to a law according to his or her sex. Sexual difference, then, lies at the hub of Hegel’s dialectic as manifested in his reading of *Antigone* and in ethical life. He presents the dialectic in sexual

terms: Creon, as a man, represents human law and all that accompanies it, as the first term in the dialectic; Antigone, as a woman, represents divine law and all that accompanies it, as the second term in the dialectic. The movement of Spirit thus becomes a sexual and sexualized encounter that, through a heterosexual matrix, engenders the possibility of procreation. For Hegel, the (sexualized) dialectical terms “come into direct contact with each other” through “their immediate interpenetration,” so that “the union of man and woman constitutes the active middle term of the whole” (§463). Thanks to this penetration, these two dialectical terms, these two syllogisms—human law and divine law, man and woman, father and mother—come together as what Hegel calls “one and the same syllogism . . . one process” (§463).

From this procreative interpenetration of nation and family, human law and divine law, man and woman, father and mother, the citizen emerges, by way of a sublation, through a sexed dialectic. This sublation, however, erases the sexual difference of the two terms, collapsing the latter into the former, for the citizen is male. The citizen achieves his Spiritual (that is, self-supporting, absolute, and real) being only in becoming a citizen, because as Hegel notes, “it is only as a citizen that *he* is actual and substantial” (§451, emphasis added). The family plays a crucial dialectical role in his achieving this “actual and substantial” being—so crucial that the production of the citizen becomes the family’s teleological purpose. The family’s task, in Hegel’s words, “consists in expelling the individual from the Family, *subduing the natural aspect* and separateness of his existence, and training him to be virtuous, to a life in and for the universal” (§451, emphasis added). In short, the family teaches the would-be citizen how to overcome the family. The individual-cum-citizen crosses the threshold of the *oikos*, effecting a processual sublation that includes “subduing the natural aspect” that marked his familial existence. In leaving the family behind, he also leaves elemental nature behind, thereby severing the natural ties that bind him (as an individual) to the family and (as a man) to the human law that Creon naturally represents. This enables him to avoid suffering the same dialectical destruction that Creon necessarily experiences as part of Spirit’s movement insofar as the absolute is realized only after both sides, both dialectical terms, suffer equal and intertwined destruction.

FEMININE NATURE

Becoming a citizen thus requires sublating nature, which remains bound to the *oikos*—and to the feminine. In this way, Hegel uses nature as a lens through which to consider not only Antigone but “womankind” (*Weiblichkeit*) in general. The citizen comes to participate in what Hegel calls “the manhood of the community” by “consuming and absorbing into itself the separatism of the Penates, or the separation into independent families presided over by

womankind” (§475).¹³ The Penates refer (albeit anachronistically on Hegel’s part) to female patron divinities of the household—local goddesses of the *oikos*—with whom Hegel associated womankind. Because, Hegel asserts, “the Penates stand opposed to the universal Spirit,” so, too, does womankind thanks to their association, which reinforces their bonds with nature, family, *oikos*—those bonds that the citizen-to-be severs as he is expelled from the family as what Hegel describes as “only an unreal impotent shadow,” enabling him to become a citizen and, as such, achieve “actual and substantial” being (§451). (Only in becoming a citizen can he overcome his impotence and achieve virility. Hence the citizen and the dialectical advance of Spirit more generally are on Hegel’s account not only sexualized but characterized ontologically in terms of sexual potency and the ability to participate in procreation through the penetrating act of heterosexual intercourse. The *oikos*, sexualized as feminine, becomes the space of impotence that represents the threat of emasculation Creon so expressly fears—as does, perhaps by proxy, every citizen-to-be. Failing to cross the threshold of the *oikos* into the community therefore consigns a male individual to a sexual, social, political, and ontological impotency through what, in psychoanalytic terms, might be called symbolic castration.)

The family, with which Hegel associates nature and woman, becomes the constitutive exclusion—the system’s vomit—thanks to which the community is formed. As an “unreal impotent shadow” ontologically, the family does not attain to the “self-supporting, absolute, real” being of Spirit but remains for Hegel immediate, natural, elemental, unconscious. Its immediacy prohibits self-differentiation, a necessary precursor to the self-reconciliation toward which Spirit moves. Its natural, elemental character ties it to the earth, which in the context of *Antigone* relates to burial, so that being natural and elemental (like *Antigone* and, by extension, womankind) implies remaining buried, underground—cryptic. Being elemental also means being bound to materiality, particularly bodily materiality (whose life depends on the circulation of blood), which cannot accede to the spiritual domain. The family’s unconscious quality perhaps most incisively ensures its exclusion from the community, absolute Spirit, and the form of being that this entails, for it bars the family from any real knowledge by confining it to intuition—a natural characteristic.

As the embodiment of familial relation and allegiance, Hegel’s *Antigone* exemplifies these qualities: immediate, natural, elemental, unconscious. Her ethical life remains in the darkness of *oikos* (or perhaps buried underground) since, according to Hegel, “the feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is

exempt from an existence in the real world" (§457). In other words, while Antigone has an intuitive ethical awareness, she does not have a conscious understanding of ethics. She is in this sense ethically unconscious since she cannot step into the "daylight of consciousness." Hegel keeps Antigone in the dark, within the *oikos*, bound by nature to the family, to the Penates, to divine law, to blood relations. This threatens to keep her buried, entombed alive, rendering her permanently cryptic.

But even her dialectical encryption cannot absolutely subdue and sublimate her disruptive potential, which shows itself in a line she utters just before she enters the tomb in which she will live (and die): "Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred" (§470, citing Sophocles 1998, 926).¹⁴ This is the only line from Sophocles' tragic drama that Hegel cites, only once, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is a line marked by causality, whose effects are acknowledgment and progress: once Antigone acknowledges her error, which she does because of her suffering, she can move toward some kind of resolution because, Hegel writes, "with this acknowledgment there is no longer any conflict between ethical purpose and actuality;" with this acknowledgment, Antigone "has been ruined" (§471). To make such an acknowledgment requires reflexive consciousness that can perform an ethical self-assessment (in this case, vis-à-vis suffering), which becomes the causal requirement for effecting the subsequent acknowledgment. For Hegel, this ethical consciousness becomes "more complete, its guilt more inexcusable, if it knows *beforehand* the law and the power which it opposes, if it takes them to be violence and wrong, to be ethical merely by accident, and, like Antigone, knowingly commits the crime" (§470). Antigone, then, is more guilty—and more inexcusably so—insofar as she knows and knowingly violates civil law.

How could she be? As a woman, and specifically as a sister, Antigone by nature bears only an intuitive ethical awareness. Her nature consigns and confines her to an immediate, elemental, unconscious existence in the dark, never seeing the "daylight of consciousness." By Hegel's own account, she cannot know, ethically speaking, what she is doing. Now, however, she stands inexcusably guilty thanks to her "more complete" ethical consciousness that depends upon self-conscious ethical knowledge. Now, because Hegel insists on making an example of Antigone as someone who knowingly commits a crime, she achieves an ethical consciousness that, as a sister, is constitutively prohibited according to Hegel's terms. Does this mean that she has ceased to be a sister or a woman? Has her definitive sexual difference been neutralized thanks to an impossible step across the threshold of the *oikos* and into the light of consciousness? Has she breached the bounds of nature via sublation? How else can she not yet have consciousness of what is ethical? Perhaps only ironically, insofar as womankind is what Hegel calls "the eternal irony of the community [*die ewige Ironie des Gemeinwesens*]" (§475, translation modified)?

If, as Hegel claims, Antigone as woman-sister remains immediate and ethically intuitive, never attaining ethical consciousness, she is foreclosed from its self-conscious reflexivity and the knowledge it entails, which are prerequisites for stating that “because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred.” This poses a fundamental challenge to Hegel’s reading of *Antigone* and to the account of ethical life that he articulates through this reading.¹⁵ An additional challenge arises from a close consideration of the line from *Antigone* that Hegel cites. His reading depends upon reading it according to this translation and in isolation, ignoring its context and its speaker’s disposition. To avow that “because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred” would be extraordinarily uncharacteristic for Antigone, whether considered from within Sophocles’ text or on the terms set by Hegel’s own ethical hermeneutic. Hegel discounts the line’s irreducibly contingent quality, heightened by its dramatic context of divine judgment: “If this is viewed as something fine, / I’ll find out, after suffering, that I was wrong” (Sophocles 1998, 925–26) or “If the gods really agree with this, / Then suffering should teach me to repent my sin” (Sophocles 2001, 925–26). Antigone’s is not a causal but a hypothetical statement, an *as if*, in which she does not put much credence. Since she remains faithful to the gods (particularly Hades), acting out of filial piety according to unwritten, divine laws, it seems more likely from her perspective that the gods would reward rather than punish her decisions and actions. Furthermore, her *as if* statement shows no signs of relinquishing her position and acknowledging her “error.” To do so would be to go against her nature.

Nature, then, stands as the way in which Hegel deals with womankind. More specifically, it becomes the way in which he deals with Antigone and, even more specifically, with her constitutive role as a sister. It is as a sister that Antigone has intuitive awareness but not consciousness of ethics. It is as a sister, defined by a blood relation, that Antigone embodies the immediate, natural, elemental, and unconscious traits of the family. It is as a sister that Antigone so fascinates Hegel, who defines the brother–sister relation as the highest and purest familial relation. Brother and sister share the same blood, so (Hegel writes) “therefore they do not desire one another”; they enjoy “a relation devoid of desire,” one that is “pure and unmixed with any natural desire” (§457).¹⁶ Through this desireless blood relation, a sister is constituted by and for her relation to her brother. Consequently, Hegel claims, “the loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest” (§457). Here, Hegel follows Antigone’s own words in her final speech: “I would not do it for a child, were I a mother, / Nor for a husband either” (Sophocles 2001, 905–06), for “My husband dead, I could have had another, and/a child from someone else, if I had lost the first; / but with my mother and my father both concealed/in Hades, no more brothers ever could be born” (Sophocles 1998, 909–12).¹⁷ Only because Polyneices is Antigone’s brother

does she so vigorously adhere to her ethical and religious duty, according to which she buries him (twice).

Furthermore, because she remains unmarried, Antigone remains, in Derrida's words, the "eternal sister" (Derrida 1986, 150). As such, her definitive relation (as a sister to her brother) is natural, not civil. She is defined relationally by nature and, more specifically, by blood, so that she is characterized by a natural, bodily fluid. Hegel uses this characterization to assert that Spirit, in the form of the community of citizens, "is, moves, and maintains itself" by "consuming and absorbing into itself" the intertwined individualisms of the Penates, the family, and womankind and by "keeping them dissolved in the fluid of their own nature" (§475). Womankind is therefore not only characterized by a fluid but is characteristically fluid by nature. This explicitly opposes and precludes her from the territory of Spirit, which Hegel describes as "unmoved solid ground" (§439). Spirit stays stable, firm, grounded, while woman remains fluid, moving, lacking determinate shape and requiring containment to avoid dissipating. She is, moreover, a fluid of her own nature: a feminine fluid, the most obvious being menstrual blood, which ties her to nature (as well as to procreation) and determines her relations to herself and to others. In this fluid, she is and remains dissolved—which is to say, undifferentiated. By identifying woman as "dissolved in the fluid of her own nature," Hegel dissolves woman as well as difference, especially sexual difference. Depicting woman in this way constitutes a refusal or sublation of (sexual) difference, which remains dissolved—and contained—in natural feminine fluid.

THE NATURE OF BLOOD

Blood becomes the fluid medium through which Irigaray examines both Antigone and Hegel. She examines the former through the lens of the latter's phenomenological system, so that the two readings flow into each other. Her reading of Antigone, then, is also a responsive reading of Hegel's Antigone and of Hegel's phenomenology—one that reveals a very complex relationship between Irigaray and Hegel. Hegel is one of Irigaray's most constant and most important conversation partners, as she returns to his work throughout her *oeuvre*, but never to present a wholesale criticism that would discount or discredit it. Instead, her careful analyses offer subtle critiques by working through the cracks, taking components of Hegel's system and refracting them, turning them, altering them by seeing (or showing) them in a different light. Her reading of Hegel in *Speculum*, which is primarily a reading of Hegel's reading of Antigone, demonstrates this from its outset, as she chooses for its title a phrase Hegel uses to characterize womankind: "the eternal irony of the community." (It is also framed by epigraphs from Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*

that discuss blood.)¹⁸ Antigone therefore provides the ground—ironically, since as a woman she is “fluid”—for working out and working through Irigaray’s critical expeditions into Hegel’s thought. Irigaray uses Antigone to put Hegel on trial.

She does so by following Hegel in turning her consideration of Antigone on the matter of nature. Blood represents nature in two operative senses: bodily and relationally. The life of a human body depends upon blood, making blood the physical and conceptual life-force of corporeality. But because this body can exist only as sexuate, sexual difference is just as fundamental to life. Corporeality cannot navigate around either blood or sexual difference. Bodies come to exist and continue to exist in and through blood and sexual difference, so that these become ontological elements that bind human existence to embodiment. In another register, blood also determines relations with others, particularly for Antigone, whose fidelity to familial (“natural”) rather than civil bonds leads directly to her living entombment. For Antigone, blood relations—genealogical relations marked by this bodily fluid—establish religious, ethical, social, and political allegiances, thereby complexly complicating nature and culture. These relations are also definitively marked by sexual difference: Antigone is who she is and does what she does as a sister, thanks to a blood relation that flows through sexual difference.

Nature, too, flows through sexual difference. This is Irigaray’s implicit claim, which mimetically disrupts Hegel’s systematic discourse on this point. Hegel erects his reading of *Antigone* and its implications for ethical life around his assertion that nature “assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law” (§465). For him, sexual difference is natural, so that it becomes a function of nature. Irigaray, however, reverses the flow by ironically echoing his suggestion inside out: “nature . . . always has a sex”; “*nature has a sex*, always and everywhere” (Irigaray 1987, 121, 122; 1993b, 107, 108).¹⁹ Nature is sexed; it is sexuate; it manifests and therefore flows through sexual difference. It is not that sexual difference is a matter of nature but that nature is a matter of sexual difference. (This assertion also responds to charges of biological essentialism, which would require reducing sexual difference to a question of empirical science and genital anatomy. By asserting the inverse, Irigaray displaces these charges along with Hegel.) Nature itself emerges through the matrix of sexual difference. This critical assertion means that nature never exists in a “pure,” “virginal,” unmarked state prior to or opposed to culture, further confounding the nature–culture distinction so essential to Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology and to Hegel’s philosophy. Irigaray effects this rupturing force not by simply reversing the nature–culture priority but by fundamentally challenging the oppositional terms “nature” and “culture” that make such a binary possible.

Nature, then, is a *matter* of sexual difference. The *matter* of sexual difference stands at the heart of Irigaray’s work. In her words, sexual difference “constitutes

the most basic human reality” (Irigaray 1989, 9; 1994, ix) as “the most radical difference and the one most necessary to the life and culture of the human species” (Irigaray 1992b, 3). Sexual difference is real, inescapable, and insurmountable. It can be neither resolved nor dissolved, for as Irigaray affirms, “one sex is not entirely consumable by the other. There is always a *remainder* [reste]” (Irigaray 1984, 20; 1993a, 14). This remainder resists consumption and incorporation; like Antigone, herself a remainder, it is unconsumed and unconsumable. It also resists being neutralized or sublated, as in the mediating third term of “humanity,” for humanity is thoroughly and fundamentally sexed. Human beings do not exist simply as “human beings” but as embodied men and women. Human being is sexed all the way down; it is permeated and saturated by sexual difference (and therefore by difference). Hence neither sexual difference nor embodiment can be dialecticized away. Sexual difference remains, with emphasis on both words.

To remain different requires that a space lie between sexes. Sexual difference means that difference exists within and across sexes. This unclosable space *between* Irigaray calls an interval—and, she maintains, “the interval can never be done away with” (Irigaray 1984, 54; 1993a, 49; see also Irigaray 1974, 282–98; 1985a, 227–40). Difference, sexual or otherwise, depends upon this interval, this space *between*. An interval can be spatial or temporal or (even better) spatiotemporal, thereby calling for a revaluation of perception.²⁰ Sexual difference calls for such a revaluation, which would mean, as Irigaray writes, that “to make it possible to think through, and live, this difference, we must reconsider the whole problematic of *space* and *time*” (Irigaray 1984, 15; 1993a, 7). Hence sexual difference is not only a conceptual problem to be thought through but a personal and interpersonal reality that embodied human beings live, in religious, ethical, social, and political registers. Sexual difference names a network of ideas and practices, whose implications are so elemental that they require reimagining space and time: in themselves, in relation to one another, in relation to sexual difference, and in terms of the ways in which different sexes experience them. In short, sexual difference calls for human beings to rethink and reinvent relational possibilities of every kind at every level. (This would include rethinking and reinventing a human subject’s relation with himself or herself, with others of his or her sex, with others of the other sex, with animals, with the natural world and its elements, with the dead, with gods, with the cosmos, and so on.) To do so entails not simply a revaluation but a revolution, as Irigaray suggests: “a revolution in thought and ethics is needed [il faut une révolution de pensée, et d’éthique] if the work [oeuvre] of sexual difference is to take place. We need to reinterpret everything concerning the relations between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. Everything, beginning with the way in which the subject has always been written in the

masculine form, as a *man*, even when it claimed to be universal or neutral” (Irigaray 1984, 14; 1993a, 6).

AN OTHER REVOLUTION

Antigone stands as this kind of revolutionary. She represents and performs the revolutionary potential of sexual difference. She does so by remaining, as the unconsumable remainder, the system’s vomit, because she embodies sexual difference and enacts that difference in speech and action. For example, she aligns herself with a revolution and a revolutionary by performing her sisterly duties of filial piety for her dead brother Polyneices despite his revolt against their brother Eteocles and against Thebes. She enacts her own revolt against Creon and his artifice of civil law that refuse to admit and that even actively oppose difference, with its potential to effect sexual and political displacement.

Antigone’s more fundamental revolutionary actions also come by remaining, through a remembrance of and respect for difference, conceptually and practically. She remembers and respects sexual difference through her insistent, sisterly fidelity to Polyneices, for it is as a sister and thus as a woman that she stages her revolution. But as Irigaray points out, Antigone is not “a sort of young anarchist” (Irigaray 1989, 81; 1994, 67) who “wants to destroy civil order” (1989, 82; 1994, 68) out of a suicidal pathos (or pathology), for “Antigone wants neither disorder nor death” (1989, 83; 1994, 69).²¹ Her revolution aims not for disorder but for respect for another other—a different order—one that remembers and respects gods, maternal ancestry, burial rites, and cosmic order (all of which are, in *Antigone*, figured in terms of sexual difference). Binding these differences is the legal order that follows from the unwritten, divine laws that Antigone upholds.

In doing so, she demonstrates her respect for the gods, particularly the gods associated with maternal ancestry, such as the chthonic god Hades. Respecting maternal ancestry entails respecting, in Irigaray’s words, “the blood and the gods of her mother” (Irigaray 1987, 209; 1993b, 194). Maternal ancestry intertwines respect for different laws, different gods, and different relations of law, gods, and blood—relations that do not dissociate civil and religious duties and powers. As Irigaray notes, “in the time of women’s law, the divine and the human were not separated by the beyond, by ‘heaven.’ This means that religion was not a realm apart that concerned something beyond the earth . . . the divine was always bound up with nature” (1987, 204; 1993b, 190; see also Irigaray 1989, 83; 1994, 68–69). Hence remembering and respecting maternal ancestry involves reconceiving religion as intimately and inextricably woven into every corner of human experience, here and now. Rather than dissociating transcendence and immanence, earth and “beyond,” religion intertwines humanity, divinity, and nature. (Patriarchy, according to Irigaray, “has

separated the human from the divine” [1987, 204; 1993b, 190].) Religion allows humanity, divinity, and nature to remain porous, fluid, in relation to one another. This allows for dynamic interaction through the spaces that separate them while still maintaining their differences, refusing to collapse them into one another. Such a collapse would forestall human being, particularly in terms of sexual difference, for as Irigaray suggests, “having a God and becoming one’s gender [as distinct from another gender] go hand in hand. God is the other that we cannot be without [*Dieu est l’autre dont nous avons absolument besoin*]” (1987, 79; 1993b, 67, emphasis added). In this way, religion remains fundamental to sexual difference.

Maternal ancestry thus represents a different order, with different gods and different genealogies, so respecting it entails respecting mothers. It entails remembering that every child has two genealogical lines, two different sets of familial roots—maternal and paternal—without subsuming one into the other. Preserving female genealogies means that a mother’s ancestry will not be buried if she sacrifices her family name, itself a genealogical marker, and, through marriage, substitutes in its place the paternal name of her husband. It means that a mother’s role in procreation, thanks to which genealogies are possible, will not be buried but acknowledged. It also means a mother’s body, and embodiment in general, will not be buried, for a mother’s womb houses and nurtures the living bodies to whom it gives birth. In this way, a mother’s body literally makes space for an other to live within it *as* an other, so respecting maternity and maternal ancestry involves a respect for otherness as otherness and engenders an ethics that makes room for difference.

Antigone demonstrates her related respect for gods and for maternal genealogy by respecting blood and the obligations it entails. She does so, moreover, as a daughter, who relates to her mother in a different manner and on different terms than a son does. Her respect for maternal genealogy provides an opening for women, especially mothers and daughters, to relate to one another in feminine ways—ways that are preserved by preserving sexual difference (which includes the space between sexes).²² It also engenders her burial of Polyneices insofar as Antigone identifies Polyneices as her brother because they share the same mother and the same blood.²³ Remembering and respecting maternal genealogies therefore means remembering and respecting the mother’s blood and bloodline, so that respect for blood—corporeally and relationally—implicitly involves remembering female genealogies that flow sanguinely. This Antigone does, as Irigaray writes, by “taking care of the living bodies borne [*engendrés*] by the mother, burying them when they are dead” (Irigaray 1989, 82; 1994, 68). These are her duties as a sister, which depend upon her role as a daughter (both matters of blood), so that her observance of burial rites for her dead brother Polyneices stems from her respect for gods and for maternal genealogy. Her performance of these rites intertwines ethical

(especially vis-à-vis the family) and religious obligations, thereby supporting Antigone's contention that ethics cannot be disjoined from religion, particularly by and for secular, civil legal authority.

This performance also respects blood ties (as well as the accompanying maternal genealogies and gods) and maintains the cosmic order, which includes the *polis*, the *oikos*, and the earth. Antigone does this, as Irigaray writes, by remembering "the difference between day and night, the difference between the seasons" as well as "the earth and the gods of the home . . . those who are near, in the first place the family, but also, the citizens and ancestors of the city" (Irigaray 1997, 139; 2001, 77). By remembering, she keeps these differences present and vital, respecting them as well as the difference *between*. She does not allow difference to get buried by Creon's univocal, patriarchal, phallogocentric order—or any order that buries difference (especially sexual difference) through resolving sublation or dissolving liquefaction. Instead, Irigaray avers, Antigone "reminds us that the earthly order is not a pure social power, that it must be founded upon the economy of the cosmic order, upon respect for the procreation [*engendrement*] of living beings, on attention to maternal ancestry, to its gods, its rights [*droits*], its organization" (Irigaray 1989, 84; 1994, 70). Antigone insists on maintaining her respect for matters of nature and sexual difference as well as the differences they engender.

These matters, these differences, are what, in Irigaray's words, "Antigone supports, shores up [*étaye*], in the operation of the law," so that "by confronting the discourse that lays down the law she makes manifest that subterranean supporting structure that she is preserving, that other 'face' of discourse that causes a crisis when it appears in broad daylight. Whence her being sent off to death, her 'burial' in oblivion, the repression—censure?—of the values that she represents for the City-State: the relation to the 'divine,' to the unconscious, to red blood" (Irigaray 1977, 162; 1985b, 167). With her is also buried the difference she embodies as a woman, as a daughter, as a sister, and as a human being who respects nature, gods, maternal ancestry, burial rites, and cosmic order. As Irigaray writes, "the female has been buried together with the divine law," with nature, with sexual difference, with blood relations, and with the dead (1987, 125; 1993b, 110).

UNENCRYPTION

Antigone (and all that she represents) has been buried by Creon's patriarchal order and by Hegel's philosophical system, which throw her up and then cover her over. Her sublation by Hegel's dialectic of Spirit constitutes what Irigaray calls "*an amazingly vicious circle in a single syllogistic system*"—or, in sexualized terms, a rape of the female by the male (Spirit) (Irigaray 1974, 278; 1985a,

223). Hegel's system robs her of her distinctiveness, her difference, her vitality—even her blood.²⁴ On its systematic terms, Irigaray writes,

the female [*le féminin*] has already ceased to serve her own gender, her dialectic. The female has been taken along, taken in by the passage out of divine law, out of the law of nature, of life, into male human law. Antigone is already the desexualized representative of *the other of the same*. . . . she now performs only the dark side of that task, the side needed to establish the male order as it moves toward absolute affirmation. . . . Antigone is no longer fulfilling her own task, her *affirmative* relationship to ethics; she no longer serves *her* gods. . . . Antigone is no longer a *goddess*. (Irigaray 1987, 125; 1993b, 111)

The violence of “a single syllogistic system” makes clear that, as Irigaray contends, “*a single dialectic is no longer sufficient*” (Irigaray 1974, 278; 1985a, 223).²⁵ Irigaray seeks not to eliminate but to pluralize dialectics, thereby resisting the singularity that defines Hegel's dialectic of Spirit. This move fractures dialectic's quintessentially Hegelian element: singular, teleological, self-reconciled resolution and the consequent dissolving of difference. By insisting on (at least) two dialectics, Irigaray (like Antigone) maintains plurality and subsisting difference, eliminating any teleological resolution that would threaten to eradicate difference. She (like Antigone) refuses any monological reconciliation in which sameness (identity) comes to perceive itself in otherness (difference)—an otherness that amounts only to the other of the same. Her dialectics move not toward seeing identity-in-difference but toward seeing difference-in-difference, through the other of the other. She resists any monologic that operates according to only one term and its potential negation, as in A and not-A, suggesting instead a logic of irreducibly different terms, such as A and B.

For Antigone, this means that her relation with Creon need not be simply an inversion, according to which they are mirror images of each other. This is how Hegel presents Creon and Antigone: in binary opposition, as male/female, conscious/unconscious, known/unknown, human/divine, light/darkness, abstract/material, and so on. Such a presentation remains within a monologic of A and not-A, with Antigone representing (for Hegel) not-A on every count. Irigaray suggests that Creon, too, remains monological—and therein lies the source of his discord with Antigone, for Creon's logic of A and not-A admits only one mode of human subjectivity, namely, male and civil. Creon imposes himself and his system by manifesting (in Irigaray's words) “arbitrary power founded upon a bestowed command and the obligation to obey” as well as “the use of force to impose order” and “the passage from singularity to abstract universality” (Irigaray 1997, 140; 2001, 78).²⁶ Creon operates within a single

dialectic, while Antigone operates in and across (at least) two dialectics, maintaining their irreducible differences and the space of difference between them.

By multiplying dialectics, Antigone complicates Hegel's hermeneutic premise according to which *Antigone* stages the dialectical tension between two structural opposites. This tension remains until these differences are reconciled through an interpenetration that collapses the differences and the space of difference between them. Multiple dialectics destroy the teleological linearity upon which Hegel's progress of Spirit depends. This multiplicity opens a different dialectical space, an other space, in which Antigone positions herself: refusing to be penetrated or buried by a monological dialectic that ends in sameness. Her refusal becomes most palpable and her disruptive potential (for Hegel's system) most tangible insofar as, Irigaray maintains, Antigone "is neither master nor slave" (Irigaray 1984, 115; 1993a, 119).²⁷ She stands outside of the dialectical opposition of master and slave, lordship and bondage, that most strongly exemplifies Hegel's account of Spirit. This is at least one reason why Antigone is silenced, locked away, buried alive, so as to remain cryptic.

Because she respects and embodies sexual difference according to multiple dialectics, Antigone stands as a grave threat to Hegel's philosophical system as much as to Creon's political system. As Joan Copjec observes, there is no sexual difference in this section of the *Phenomenology* (Copjec 2002, 17). How could there be, with only a single, all-consuming (male) dialectic? Irigaray extends this insight, noting that "in place of a fully realized dialectic *between* the spiritual duties of both genders, Hegel presents us with a *doubly locked closing* [*enfermement à double tour*]" (Irigaray 1987, 124–25; 1993b, 110, emphasis added). Doubly locked in (or out), closed and closed off, sexual difference, like Antigone, lies buried, underground. This is why, when Antigone appears in the only dialectic that exists for Hegel, she cannot but appear as what Irigaray calls "already the desexualized representative of *the other of the same*" (1987, 125; 1993b, 111). She cannot appear as a woman—that is, as a vital, feminine (that is, sexually different) subject—since the only way she can make an appearance is within the frame of and with respect to the same. If there is no sexual difference in Hegel's ethical dialectic, then Antigone cannot *be* sexually different within this system. She can "be" only as a functional inverse of man, a not-A to his A. On Hegelian ground, the "unmoved solid ground" of Spirit, womankind can exist only as this sort of functional inverse, only as a means to an end, only as a not-A that is eventually sublated, penetrated, and dissolved.

Antigone sustains difference and thereby remains open to a model of double subjectivity, according to a logic of A and B that allows for singularities, in the plural. These singularities take place thanks to (at least) two different dialectics that respect and maintain sexual difference as well as the correlative differences

of gods, maternal ancestry, burial rites, cosmic order, physical nature, and embodied experience. Preserving these dialectics' differences is an interval, a space (or space-time) *between*. This interval's existence and thus the persistence of difference depend upon the finitude of these dialectics: they must have and recognize their limits to avoid becoming totalizing or all-consuming. Hence the possibility of multiple dialectics (and the vital space *between*) that Antigone represents depends upon limitation. Difference requires limits.

These limits take place thanks to the labor of the negative. Here Irigaray takes another of Hegel's philosophical terms and refracts it so that it performs a labor of a different kind. For Hegel, the labor of the negative refers to the movements of sublation, thanks to which Spirit advances toward the self-reconciling absolute as the *telos* of its dialectical journey. For Irigaray and her Antigone, the labor of the negative is no longer the linear negation of progressive sublation. Instead, the labor of the negative takes place *between* dialectics. Rather than taking up difference in a movement toward the absolute, the negative keeps apart—and so maintains the difference of and between—these two dialectics. It performs not an overcoming but a spacing, not a sublation but a differentiation. As Irigaray writes, the negative “is what safeguards the unappropriable site of difference” (Irigaray 2002, 168; see also Irigaray 1992a, 99; 1996, 56). The negative labors for difference, in the differentiating space *between*.

In particular, the negative labors for sexual difference. According to Irigaray, her work as a whole insists on the negative by insisting on “the irreducibility . . . of the sexes to one another, which requires us to establish a dialectic of the relation of woman to herself and of man to himself, a double dialectic therefore, enabling a real, cultured, and ethical relation between them” (Irigaray 1992a, 106; 1996, 62; see also Irigaray 1992a, 231; 1996, 148). In this sense, then, Irigaray's intellectual work is or works for the negative, for she, too, labors for sexual difference. She holds that “being sexuate implies a negative, a not being [*un « ne pas être »*] the other, a not being the whole” (1997, 63; 2001, 34), so that “the negative in sexual difference means an acceptance of the limits of my gender and recognition of the irreducibility of the other. It cannot be overcome [*Il est insurmontable*]” (1992a, 32–33; 1996, 13; see also Irigaray 1992a, 168–69; 1996, 107). To maintain the difference between two dialectics, between man and woman, between self and other, requires that a human subject accept and admit his or her own limits as a sexed, embodied, located subject who is ethically and ontologically finite. Irigaray makes difference and the limitation that it implies key features of her intellectual and political projects. She refracts and turns Hegel's sublating negative into a force of enduring difference thanks to the recognition and maintenance of limits. These limits and the difference *between* them mean that neither of these (at least) two dialectics can bury or

consume the other. They remain (at least) two, thanks to the nature of their limits—or the limits of their nature.

Antigone accepts her limits not in embracing her impending death but in remembering and respecting difference in its multiple manifestations without, like Creon, attempting to conquer, sublimate, bury an other who is (sexually) different. Her difference and the (at least) double dialectic that it entails resist Creon's monological system, and this exceeding resistance engenders her tragic fate of being buried alive. Similarly, she resists Hegel's single dialectic of Spirit from the ethical position that he assigns her in this system, and she pays the price of remaining cryptic, encrypted, buried by the nature of Hegel's system. This price is so high not because Antigone is, as Hegel suggests, the embodiment of ethics (though she is that) but because she embodies and thus re-members a different ethics, an ethics of difference. By respecting her limitations, she maintains respect and even reverence for others and for otherness. She thus becomes a vital figure for an ethics of difference, especially of sexual difference that respects the differences of and between (at least) two dialectics. For Irigaray, this is because "our only chance today lies in a cultural and political ethics based upon sexual difference" (Irigaray 1987, 201; 1993b, 1987) that "consists concretely in the respect for real differences, of which sexual difference is at one and the same time the most particular and the most universal model" (1992a, 92; 1996, 52). Because Antigone recognizes and respects differences—sexual, religious, ethical, social, political, or otherwise—she remains ethically relevant, speaking and enacting difference from the other side.

NOTES

1. To illustrate *Antigone's*—and with it, tragedy's—continuing influence in occidental thought, Steiner suggests that "to philosophize after Rousseau and Kant, to find a normative conceptual phrasing for the psychic, social, and historical condition of man, is to think 'tragically'" (Steiner 1996, 2).

2. Lacan's reading of *Antigone* serves as the centerpiece of his 1959–1960 seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

3. Irigaray herself proposed such a reflection in 1974 by organizing her teaching around *Antigone*. In 2006 and 2007, Irigaray presented on a number of occasions a public lecture entitled "Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of *Antigone*," indicating the continued relevance of *Antigone* for Irigaray's own thinking and teaching.

4. References to *Antigone* give line numbers that correspond in Greek and English. Greek references are to Sophocles (1994). The "she" to whom Creon refers is *Antigone*.

5. See also Sophocles (1998, 202–02 and 658). *Antigone's* insistence that the divine and the human ought not be disjoined in this way relates directly to the critique of humanism that she embodies.

6. For a developed treatment of the supplement, see Derrida (1997, 141–64 and 280–316).

7. Sustaining the play of difference requires maintaining differences, which itself requires that limits must exist. To this end, Irigaray mobilizes what she calls the negative (which I discuss below) not as a sublation but as a real force of limitation and finitude—and thus of sustained differences.

8. Jean-Luc Nancy calls *Aufhebung* “the suppression that conserves” as well as “the concept of dialectical mediation” (Nancy 2002, 51).

9. Readings of Hegel’s reading of *Antigone* abound and are too numerous to cite. Notable among them, especially in relation to my analysis, are Derrida (1986, 141–88), Mills (1996), Lacoue-Labarthe (1998, 208–35), Copjec (2002, 12–47), Szondi (2002, 15–22), Gourgouris (2003, 116–58), and Sjöholm (2004, 28–55). For readings of Hegel’s and Irigaray’s readings of *Antigone*, see Whitford (1991, 118–22), Chanter (1995, 80–126), Battersby (1998, 103–24), and Sjöholm (2004, 111–15).

10. References to *Phenomenology of Spirit* give paragraph numbers. German references are to Hegel (1952).

11. See also ¶465. As Peter Szondi remarks, “the tragic process is the dialectic of ethics,” which places “the tragic (of course, without naming it as such) at the center of Hegelian philosophy” (Szondi 2002, 16, 18). While it might be at its center, it is not at its end, for the dialectic ultimately overturns the tragic.

12. See also ¶463 and ¶468.

13. *Weiblichkeit* is elsewhere translated as “the female principle” (Hegel 2001b).

14. The line in Hegel’s German (which follows Friedrich Hölderlin’s translation of *Antigone*) is “*weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, daß wir gefehlt.*” The line in Greek is “*παθόντες νενόγημεν μάρτηκόντες.*”

15. My critique of Hegel, based on his reading (or misreading) of this crucial line, entwines a number of elements that respond to implicit questions. (1) Does Antigone, in Sophocles’ text, acknowledge any error on her part? According to my reading, she does not in any serious way but remains steadfast in her decisions and allegiances. (2) Is Antigone’s “error” greater than Creon’s? Antigone could imagine none greater than Creon’s. (3) How can Antigone, on Hegel’s account, recognize her error? She cannot, I maintain, insofar as Hegel’s systematic confines her to intuition rather than self-consciousness. Her inability, on Hegel’s terms, is what I point to as a deconstructive moment in Hegel’s text. I thank an anonymous reader from *Hypatia* for suggesting this untangling of my argument’s strands. On a related note, for a quite different but provocative reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* via Antigone, see Oliver (1996).

16. This leaves open the possibility that their relation might be contaminated if mixed with any “unnatural” desire, such as incestuous desire. This point bears directly on the possibility of kinship, the key trope in Judith Butler’s creative, erudite reading of Antigone and of Hegel’s Antigone (in light of subsequent scholarship) in Butler 2000. I engage her reading at length in Robert (2010) and with requisite expositions of Antigone’s complex loves as well as of the crucial figure of *atē*, around which Lacan’s reading of *Antigone* turns—expositions that I am unable to perform here.

17. Woodruff’s translation of the final cited line—“And there is no ground to grow a brother for me now”—resonates with Hegel’s identification of Spirit as “unmoved solid ground” and suggests a different model of reproduction. The line in Greek is “*οὐκ ἔσται δὲ ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάσται ποτέ.*”

18. See Irigaray (1974, 266; 1985a, 214). Tina Chanter explores in some detail the connection of these epigraphs to Irigaray’s reading of Hegel’s reading of Antigone, in Chanter (1995, 82–89). For a consideration of Irigaray vis-à-vis Antigone and this “eternal irony,” see Féral (1978).

19. Irigaray also contends that “the law has a sex, justice has a sex,” which bears directly on Antigone and the matter of sexual difference (Irigaray 1987, 207; 1993b, 193). For an illuminating reading of Irigaray that turns on conceptions of nature, see Stone (2006).

20. I thank Gail Hamner for illuminating discussions on this point. Moreover, an interval is spatiotemporal especially insofar as Kant identifies space and time as the two *a priori* pure forms of sensible intuition that form and inform any concept of or judgment concerning human experience. See Kant (1965, 67–90), under the heading “Transcendental Aesthetic.”

21. Though I strongly agree that Antigone does not want disorder along these lines, I question whether she might not want death.

22. Irigaray has written extensively on mother–daughter relations, which serve as a key part of her thinking. See Irigaray (1987, 21–33; 1993b, 9–21; as well as 1989, 111–23; 1994, 100–12).

23. See Sophocles (1998, 513, as well as 467). Irigaray points this out in Irigaray (1974, 270; 1985a, 217).

24. This is an example of what Irigaray, following Ty Grace Atkinson, calls “metaphysical vampirism” (Irigaray 1987, 135; 1993b, 120).

25. For her later reflections on this point, see Irigaray (1989, 55; 1994, 39, as well as 1992a, 106; 1996, 62). Though one might argue, especially based on these later texts, that Irigaray suggests a single, alternative structure—the maternal—to the patriarchal, I read this earlier citation as more dynamically plural, explosive rather than substitutive, especially insofar as difference requires plurality: difference is always already differences.

26. See also Irigaray (1989, 83; 1994, 69), where she remarks that “all Antigone’s misfortunes [*malheur*] stem from the fact that Creon no longer wishes to observe these basic laws” concerning respect for gods, maternal ancestry, burial rites, and cosmic order.

27. Hegel describes lordship and bondage under the heading “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness” in Hegel (1977, ¶178–96). This relation is among the most commonly referenced parts of Hegel’s philosophical system by inheritors of its legacy. Consequently, it has generated its own body of commentary and secondary literature, though its appearances in others’ texts have become so common that producing a list of these works would be nearly impossible. For a reading of Irigaray’s relation to the master–slave dialectic, by way of Irigaray’s relation to Simone de Beauvoir, see Chanter (1995, 60–79). For alternate readings of Irigaray along these lines, see Miller (2000, 121–37) and Purvis (2005, 2–10).

REFERENCES

- Battersby, Christine. 1998. *The phenomenal woman: Feminine metaphysics and the patterns of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2000. *Antigone’s claim: Kinship between life and death*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chanter, Tina. 1995. *Ethics of eros: Irigaray’s rewriting of the philosophers*. New York: Routledge.
- Copjec, Joan. 2002. *Imagine there’s no woman: Ethics and sublimation*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1986. *Glas*. Trans. John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- . 1993. *Aporias: Dying—awaiting (one another at) the “limits of truth”*. Trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 1997. *Of grammatology*. Corrected edition. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Féral, Josette. 1978. Antigone or the irony of the tribe. *Diacritics* 8 (3): 2–14.
- Gourgouris, Stathis. 2003. *Does literature think? Literature as theory for an antimythical era*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1952. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Hamburg: Verlag von Felix Meiner.
- . 1977. *Phenomenology of spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2001a. *Hegel on tragedy*, ed. Henry Paolucci. Smyrna, Del.: Bagehot Council.
- . 2001b. *Spirit: Chapter six of Hegel's phenomenology of spirit*, ed. Daniel E. Shannon. Trans. Hegel Translation Group. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1974. *Speculum de l'autre femme*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 1977. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 1984. *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 1985a. *Speculum of the other woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- . 1985b. *This sex which is not one*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- . 1987. *Sexes et parentés*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 1989. *Le temps de la différence: Pour une révolution pacifique*. Paris: Librairie Générale Française/Livre de Poche.
- . 1992a. *J'aime à toi: Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire*. Paris: Grasset.
- . 1992b. *Elemental passions*. Trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still. New York: Routledge.
- . 1993a. *An ethics of sexual difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- . 1993b. *Sexes and genealogies*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1994. *Thinking the difference: For a peaceful revolution*. Trans. Karin Montin. New York: Routledge.
- . 1996. *I love to you: Sketch of a possible felicity in history*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge.
- . 1997. *Être deux*. Paris: Grasset.
- . 2001. *To be two*. Trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc. New York: Routledge.
- . 2002. *The way of love*. Trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček. New York: Continuum.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1965. *Critique of pure reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's.
- . 1998. *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1997. *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book VII: The ethics of psychoanalysis (1959–1960)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. 1998. *Typography: Mimesis, philosophy, politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The elementary structures of kinship*, ed. Rodney Needham. Trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard Von Sturmer. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Miller, Elaine P. 2000. The “paradoxical displacement”: Beauvoir and Irigaray on Hegel's Antigone. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 14 (2): 121–37.
- Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz. 1996. Hegel's Antigone. *Feminist interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, ed. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills. University Park: Pennsylvania University State Press, pp. 59–88.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. 2002. *Hegel: The restlessness of the negative*. Trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Oliver, Kelly. 1996. Antigone's ghost: Undoing Hegel's phenomenology of spirit. *Hypatia* 11 (1): 67–90.
- Purvis, Jennifer. 2005. Generations of Antigone: An intra-feminist dialogue with Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Butler. *New Antigone* 1 (1–2): 2–10.

- Robert, William. 2010. *Trials: Of Antigone and Jesus*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Sjöholm, Cecilia. 2004. *The Antigone complex: Ethics and the invention of feminine desire*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sophocles 1994. *Antigone, The women of Trachis, Philoctetes, Oedipus at Colonus*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- . 1998. *Antigone*. Trans. Ruby Blondell. Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Classical Library.
- . 2001. *Antigone*. Trans. Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett.
- Steiner, George. 1996. *Antigones*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Stone, Alison. 2006. *Luce Irigaray and the philosophy of sexual difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Szondi, Peter. 2002. *An essay on the tragic*. Trans. Paul Fleming. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Whitford, Margaret. 1991. *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the feminine*. New York: Routledge.