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The Returns of Antigone: Interdisciplinary Essays
Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014
ISBN: 978-1-4384-5293-7

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The Returns of Antigone consists of fifteen essays on Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* and the countless layers of culturally significant interpretations of its eponymous main character. With diverse foci and different disciplinary backgrounds, the contributors provide yet another showcase of this ancient text's inexhaustible power to spawn imagination, interpretations, and new texts. The volume serves well as a mirror of the diversity of approaches to the play.

Although the book does not concentrate on feminist interpretations, it provides plenty of reflection from the perspective of gender and sexuality. This is not surprising, for Hegel's use of *Antigone* to express his thoughts on gender, family, and the state, combined with the constitutive status of the Oedipal family in psychoanalysis, has ensured that *Antigone* has become a household name in feminist scholarship.

The volume's subtitle, *Interdisciplinary Essays*, reflects the fact that the play has a history in many areas of scholarship: classicists study the political history and the history of art in ancient Greece; philosophers study political theory, ethics, and aesthetics; literature and theater scholars study theories of tragedy; psychoanalysts deal with the constitutive role of *Antigone's* father Oedipus and the entire family in Freud and Lacan; and feminist and queer studies scholars build upon and develop all of this. Most of this diversity is present in this book.

Among numerous volumes on *Antigone*, this one does not speak strongly with one voice or have a distinctive message to deliver. The editors' introduction argues that the essays express two different modes of critique with respect to the Western metaphysical tradition: the immanent mode, on the one hand, and the transcendent mode, on the other, either pushing to the limits of the European tradition from within, or transcending it. I do not find this characterization very successful in reflecting the content of the essays, as will become evident below. Yet the book is very interesting to read for many other reasons, not least for the feminist controversies that emerge, and also in terms of airing controversies in understanding political action. The essays include contributions by well known authors who have also published elsewhere on

Antigone, as well as many new writers, and taken together the essays provide glimpses of a good range of different approaches toward the play; this is a kaleidoscopic view that more than anything emphasizes the fact that Antigone lives on.

The volume is divided into five parts. The essays of the first part reflect on Greek tragedy in its original context. In the first essay, Bonnie Honig focuses on democratic innovation in Athens and puts forward a thesis that Sophocles' play is a comment on the politics of the Athenian republic on mourning. In her view the play marks the defeat of Homeric classical mourning practices, and the shift from patrilineal to democratic, bi-parental citizenship legislation, from the aristocratic principle of worth to randomness and lottery, and from a politics of individuality and distinction to a democratic ethics of interchangeability. The newly formed democratic polis needed to diminish the power of aristocratic families, and encouraged a transition from Homeric individuality of the dead, the family, and irreplaceable life, toward life's honorable dedication to the good of the polis. Honig also suggest that, perhaps, Sophocles provokes his audience to question these values of interchangeability.

The originality of Honig's research is signaled by the fact that although she is clearly aware of the two very powerful interpretations of the play, Hegelian and Lacanian, she is able to avoid both mannerisms. She does not universalize Antigone into a figure of human experience as such but instead keeps close to the context of the original play. In Honig's view, Antigone's family is ancient aristocratic family, not the emerging bourgeois family of Hegel, and Honig also consequently uses the concept "polis" instead of "the state," unlike many other writers in this volume. Honig's historically careful scholarship appeals to me more than the following two essays in this section of the book, which seek to place Greek tragedy within much more extensive or universal themes, such as time-experience and community as such, while simultaneously animating them through contemporary theoretical topics. In "Tragic Time," Sean D. Kirkland connects Greek tragedy with the idea of the temporality of human action, and gives it contemporary relevance through the theme of speed, inspired by Paul Virilio. Kirkland argues that Greek drama stages a tension between two different ways in which human beings experience their relationship to past and future, the time of race, "dromoscopic time," and the time of aporia, "aporetic time."

Similarly, concepts of contemporary European theory—on this occasion Derrida's concept of autoimmunity together with Nancy's ideas on community—are animated in Damian Stocking's chapter, "The Ruin of Song," in which he argues for Greek tragedy's self-ruinous but salutary role in the polis. Stocking elaborates on how tragedy not only helped constitute a community, but also served the polis as a self-administered civic "autoimmunity." In the three contributions of the first section, gender is not present very much, except in Honig's analysis, which links femininity to excess of mourning and expresses a certain ambiguity as to its relevance for the provocation Sophocles' text might possibly present for the process of democratization.

"The Impertinence of Antigone" is the title of the second section, and it includes two interesting essays dealing with political action. Kevin Thompson presents the history of portrayals of Antigone as a figure of revolt against sovereign power, which is indeed an important aspect of the legacy of the play, and is also acutely present in most of the other essays of the book. In contrast, Mary Rawlinson's essay interestingly

departs from the standard view of Antigone as a rebel. Thompson argues that both Hegel's and Hölderlin's accounts of Greek tragedy rest on the classical concept of sovereignty. He argues that a shift—which he figures along the lines of Foucault—from a classical, nautical model of governing to pastoral power occurred at the time when these two thinkers used Sophocles' *Antigone* to comprehend their own time. Thompson further argues that the type of political action present in Sophocles' work—rebellion against sovereign authority—is not relevant in the contemporary world since the political rule has been reconfigured, and that infrapolitics—techniques of ridicule, sabotage, and celebration, instead of resurrection—is needed now.

Rawlinson makes a point that feminist readers standardly follow Hegel in portraying Antigone as an active political agent with a dose of masculinity, particularly in comparison to her sister Ismene, who serves as a character of feminine passivity through her withdrawal and turning away from rebellion against Creon, the king. Against this view, Rawlinson radically turns the tables and provides a different reading of both *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. She points out that Ismene can be read as the independent actor departing from patriarchal order, whereas Antigone is shown to adhere to her father and brother and to the feminine task of mourning them. Interestingly here, female mourning, taken up by Honig, comes to the fore again. Whereas Honig merely marks it as a female practice of the Homeric order, as opposed to the democratic new order, Rawlinson more agonistically points to it as patriarchal assignment of women to the care of the body.

Rawlinson seems to acknowledge the basic point in Hegel's famous reading: that neither Creon nor Antigone is right or wrong but that both of them present one-sided views. Rawlinson emphasizes in particular that both Creon and Antigone are stubborn, whereas—in Rawlinson's reading—Ismene shows an admirable plasticity of reflection. I find this quite a cunning reading with respect to Hegel's view, since the mobility of reflection, an exclusively masculine ability in Hegel, is here assigned to the most feminine of the characters. Most important, when Hegel's reading designates a clear gendered division of labor—Antigone cares for the family and Creon for the state—Rawlinson would like feminist argumentation to problematize this instead of reinforcing it by admiring this confrontation. Her tone is polemical when she writes of "feminism's failure to criticize Antigone." Although this is a fair point, her critique also constructs an unrecognizably monovocal "feminist" subject of reading Antigone. Nevertheless, Rawlinson's essay is in my view one of the most interesting in this collection, and undoubtedly an original contribution to feminist readings of Antigone.

The third section of the book is comprised of three chapters, all of which operate within the vocabulary of psychoanalysis. Mary Beth Mader's "Being Genealogical: The Tragic Necessity of Sophocles's *Antigone*" is, along with Honig's and Rawlinson's, one of the most distinctive in the collection as it also presents an original take on the Sophoclean drama. In Mader's view, there is a double fault and guilt involved in this drama: wrongdoing (such as the deed of incest) and wrongbeing (such as being a product of incest, as are both Antigone and Polynices). Antigone calls Polynices "brother" and Oedipus "father," although she could use other names. When Antigone insists upon burying her brother, as a brother, and insists that Oedipus is her father, not a brother, Mader reads her act as restorative or reparative with respect to the fact of knowing herself to be the offspring of incest. In Mader's view, Antigone could not do otherwise, but simultaneously misconstruing the nature of fault leads to

failure. Antigone's attempt to bury her brother is an attempt to undo that which cannot be undone. The reading is powerful, yet consistently remains within psychoanalytic norms, and as such it produces an interesting contrast to less norm-following readings, which comes up in Marie Draz's essay in the last part of the book, where Draz contrasts Mader's reading with Butler's.

S. K. Keltner's chapter is an extensive and precise Kristeva exegesis, based on the complete works of Kristeva. Ultimately Keltner argues that what is at stake for Kristeva in her evolving Antigone interpretation is the status of psychoanalysis. Keltner shows how Kristeva redescribes Oedipus, rather than abandoning psychoanalysis. The essay is able to demonstrate an interesting shift in Kristeva's reading, which challenges the status of Oedipus and moves to ideas of the construction of family and kinship based not on blood, but on contract. Finally, in the third powerful essay in this section, George Leroux reads the two Sophoclean plays closely, and views Antigone's role as both submissive to her father and her brothers, and simultaneously as defiant of archaic authority. Leroux explains Antigone's character as a tragic subject, a split subject of difference. He systematically reads Antigone as a transgression concerning three basic differences: those of mortality, the law, and sexual difference. He shows that Antigone refuses all these differences: as many others in this volume also note, Antigone is both alive and dead; she obeys laws and does not obey them; she is called both a woman and a man in this text.

The essays in the fourth section debate Judith Butler's contribution to Antigone scholarship. Sina Kramer follows Butler in suggesting that Antigone's position is ambivalently both within and outside the space of politics, but argues in addition that this follows from Antigone's position as a figure produced as constitutively excluded. Kramer criticizes Butler for staying too close to Hegel and Lacan and undercutting the ability to understand Antigone as a political agent who challenges her exclusion from politics. In comparison to Honig's and Rawlinson's, Kramer's essay takes a universalizing approach to Antigone and politics. Instead of a drama staged at the time of the clash between tradition and democratization in Athens, when women's inclusion in politics was not on the agenda, or a drama used in Hegel's time to build a new gendered separation of work between the family and the state, this essay's tone is in defense of Antigone as a timeless, heroic, defiant, and risk-taking political agent against power and exclusion. One of the problems of this type of reading of Antigone, perhaps Butler's included, is that politics risks becoming marked as merely an act of resisting. I wonder whether this rather simplifying positioning of politics is the most interesting aspect of Butler's reading of Antigone; certainly a more potentially politically intervening aspect is to be found in the points Butler makes on Antigone and kinship.

Liz Appel also reads Antigone as a defiant figure, and as an itinerant, wandering, roaming sign that, she argues, fundamentally alters the symbolic system in which she herself is figured. Appel's most original contribution is her intriguing analysis of paintings by Ingres and Francis Bacon portraying Oedipus, though she also picks up from Butler's reading the challenge to the traditional view of Antigone as the representative of kinship relations. This aspect is the main focus in the third essay, by Marie Draz. Draz, as mentioned earlier, takes issue with Mader's reading Antigone's burial practice as a reparative act in the Oedipal family. Draz points out that when Mader argues that Antigone primarily disambiguates kinship through her attempt to

bury Polynices, Butler argues the contrary: that Antigone can be read as pointing to the limits of understanding kinship as such, therefore making it ambiguous. Through this reading Butler adds to the play a lot of relevance in the present world with regard to political struggles over family and kinship forms. Draz is led, in her essay, to discuss the fact that the text was written in another time for another purpose, while present interpreters bring it up for different purposes, wondering whether this is doing justice to Antigone. This question points to a very complex set of ideas with which historians are familiar, and is perhaps too straightforwardly put in this essay, since listening to the "original" Antigone can well be considered a task beyond scholarship.

The fifth and final section is composed of four essays whose aim is to bring Antigone to new, non-European contexts. Moira Fradinger's essay follows the uses of Antigone in Latin American drama, challenging the Europeanness of Antigone, taking distance from the "universal" and complicating the idea of "peripheral modernity." In this excellent essay, Fradinger exposes the most interesting fact of the Latin American reception of the play, which is the change of Antigone from a sister and virgin into a figure of tragic mother, reflecting the role of political maternalism in South America. R. Clifton Spargo's essay argues for understanding Antigone's act as apolitical, as a refusal to be integrated into the life of the polis, and as such as a reminder of the traditional constructs of sociality, such as religion and family, that are needed as an abiding power behind the state. Spargo brings Kierkegaard into the discussion, defends Antigone's act as radical naiveté, and continues with an analysis of Latin American novels and stage productions that bring out this strategic naiveté: family and religion as an apolitical dimension of ordinary existence, in the context of disappearances, and ambivalence toward the state. This reading oddly resonates with Honig's point about the contested value of "modernization," and with Hegel's defense of a separate, femininely marked aspect of sociality. Astrid Van Weyenberg looks at two extremely interesting Antigone adaptations in contemporary African contexts, in which the playwrights undermine the Eurocentric claims for Greek tragedies, and adapt the texts politically to struggles in local South African and Nigerian contexts. Finally, Cecilia Sjöholm's essay also analyzes theater, bringing in many layers of philosophical and aesthetic thought—particularly that of Hannah Arendt—and contemporary performance art. She explores art forms that deal with burial ritual, death, exile, and the role of gender in burials as feminine—even feminist—performances, in particular in Marie Fahlin's and Ana Mendieta's work.

As mentioned earlier, the Introduction frames the essays as two different modes of critique with respect to the Western metaphysical tradition: the immanent mode and the transcendent mode, either as pushing to the limits of the European tradition from within, or transcending it. The editors explain that the immanent mode from within the European tradition is present in parts I, II, and III and that the transcendent mode, focusing on postcolonial and queer appropriations, is in parts IV and V. I find this characterization less than satisfying. First, it strangely places Butler and queer outside Western and European, which is surprising. Second, it does not really correspond to the contents of the chapters, since even in the final sections the interpretations employ such thick layers of European history that they cannot but produce a repetition of Eurocentrism, at least to a degree. The claim that the book majorly breaks from Eurocentrism is perhaps slightly overstated, as a more effective break would begin from elsewhere, from an African or Latin American story, than in a play so central to European heritage. It might have been better to use the Introduction to provide more

worked-through ideas drawn from the chapters, perhaps also bringing out the controversies and disagreements so clearly present in them.

Having said that, the volume shines a lot of light on the layers and breadth of interest in *Antigone*, and it is highly recommended reading in that sense. It is also pleasant to read, as the essays, short as they are, provide a constant change of angle while also building up layers through repetition. The strength of the collection is exactly in this kaleidoscopic view that reveals the diversity of questions inspired by the play. The volume contributes clearly to feminist scholarship by showing just how many interesting interpretations of *Antigone* have grown out of the politics of gender and sexuality.