

The Power of the Powerless and the Disinherited: The Public in Sophocles' *Antigone*

Carolyn M. Jones Medine, University of Georgia

John Randolph LeBlanc, University of Texas at Tyler

Sophocles' *Antigone* is a work that is timely in our historical moment. Sophocles, using the house of Thebes as a foil and mirror for Athens, works through conflict in the Greek polis, the tension with the oikos, as Athens enters its modernity. The play has been rewritten and rethought in conflictual times—in Anouilh's and Brecht's *Antigone* plays for the two World Wars and the Holocaust, in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* to examine the life of British Muslims, two of whom die in a terror attack, and in George Porter's *Black Antigone*, linking Greece to Africa. Like these reworkings, recent efforts at rethinking the play reorient our engagement with it and the possibilities to be derived from it. For instance, Judith Butler rethought *Antigone's Claim* to examine the implicit but necessary risk of Antigone's resistance, while Bonnie Honig read the play for its pauses, finding an agonistic counter-sovereignty in unexpected places like Antigone's lamentations. Roy Williams, bringing these tendencies together in his reworking of the play, made Creon a gang leader, with Antigone as his antagonist.¹ Inevitably, the figures of Antigone and Creon, standing in their absolute positions, intrigue, challenge, and, sometimes, affirm us.

Here, we want to think about the *Antigone* for this moment, not over-determining the rightness of either Antigone or Creon. Indeed, we see both as offering legitimate but hyperbolic claims. Rather, we are thinking through where those claims emerge in what Mircea Eliade called the "Terror of History." In a moment such as ours, where (once again) "tender things," as Aeschylus called them, are being destroyed in ongoing conflict, we return to Antigone and to Creon and their claims. We agree with Judith Butler that Antigone is not confined to the sphere of the family in its tension with the state. She acts in the public sphere, representing, as Butler suggests, kinship in "its deformation and displacement."² By turning to the Chorus and Ismene,

who has become a prominent figure in philosophical thought, we ask, in Antigone's and our age of the Strongman, what does the ordinary human being do, that is, how does she survive, in the Terror of History?

If we follow the Oedipus trilogy in narrative or mythological order, we see that Antigone and Ismene have been suppliants, as their father was to Theseus at Colonus. Like their father, they have wandered and been homeless. Theirs is a different wandering homelessness, however, as they are women, on whom the terrors of history are marked--by rape, particularly--on the body.³ While, on the surface, they may be royal and, in that, valuable, they nonetheless are powerless women, non-persons, trapped. The recent turn in philosophy to the character of Ismene has highlighted this point. The traditional tendency has been to read women in the play as acting in the space of the *oikos*, with their authority from the "Unwritten Laws" to tend to familial obligations, including burial of the family dead. Indeed, in the play, we see Antigone and Ismene carrying out a traditional woman's role, each as mourner, but each also, we will argue, addresses the terror of history in her own way.⁴ Yet, their gestures are fraught, for, as Kerri J. Hame argues, while women prepared the dead body, the control of funeral rites belonged to men who were "responsible for conducting the act of burial and, indeed, played a dominant role in the rituals."⁵ Creon, therefore, has the authority to give Eteocles a hero's honors and to deny Polyneices' body a proper burial. Of course, what he should not do is to keep the unburied body within the borders of the city.⁶

In this denial, Creon, who is ruler-relative, creates a "knot," (Meineck, ll. 39-40) as Ismene puts it. The riddle is whether it will be loosened or pulled tighter.⁷ This riddle, the knot in this noose (*ibid.*) that binds the sisters and the state, seems impossible to unravel given that the actors are women. Patchen Markell argues that, since Antigone cannot complete the burial rites,

what she intends to do is to sprinkle dust on the corpse, ““enough to turn the curse.””⁸ In other words, she recognizes that the curse on the house may be compounded by another curse if the customary requirement of justice for the dead is violated.⁹ In this act, however, she and, if Ismene did the first libation, her sister step outside, each in her way, the sphere of the feminine and into the public, political space of Thebes, which Creon, following Greek custom and expectations, defines as wholly masculine.

The Terror of History

In 1806, G. W. F Hegel, who had just finished his *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, was one of those fleeing Jena when Napoleon and his troops entered and occupied the city. Despite experiencing an “hour of anguish,” and worrying that he will not live through the night,¹⁰ Hegel was fascinated by Napoleon. He wrote to Fredrich Immanuel Niethammer:

I saw the Emperor—the world-soul—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it... such [military] advances... are only possible by this extraordinary man, whom it is impossible not to admire.¹¹

Napoleon became one of Hegel’s ideal types (the hero, the citizen, the person, and the victim).¹² He was the hero, the Spirit of History, that is, an instrument of history—Tolstoy saw him as a chosen, but sad and unfree executioner¹³--the chosen one who will usher in a new age and found a new nation out of negation, “destruction and purgation.”¹⁴

Napoleon, for Hegel, is the figure of Enlightenment. Coming out of the French revolution, he is a figure of the break with tradition¹⁵— ruling out of reason alone. All ties on which the ordinary life depends seemed torn asunder under the hooves of Marengo, his war

horse.¹⁶ It seems no accident that the *Antigone* fascinated Hegel. If Antigone is a figure of the family and of natural existence, her heroic action from that sphere suggests a self-consciousness that truly emerges, in Hegel's thought, only in the universal, in the communal *polis*. We, here, are not so much interested in explicating Hegel's philosophy or reading of the play. Rather, we point to his sense of the chosen-ness of Napoleon. The chosen hero, for Hegel, the one who makes history, is the figure of the Terror of History for Mircea Eliade and all those on whom history is made.

For Eliade, who lived through the World Wars, a figure like Napoleon was not a chosen hero but a figure of the Terror of History, like Creon in the *Antigone*. Eliade addresses the terror of losing oneself in the meaninglessness of profane existence (92) as one finds oneself as one on whom history is made (156), a victim of historical catastrophe (141) that has no meaning beyond terror itself--continuous terror (152, fn.11) for some nations and some persons. That we all can "make" history is, for Eliade, an illusion (156). Those on whom history is made live between "suicide and deportation," taking refuge in "a subhuman existence or in flight" (155). For Eliade, only "archaic man," living in the ritual of the eternal return, can erase history. For Eliade, religious ritual action manifests a hope that human beings, through directed action, can begin to repair the world and reclaim some remnant of freedom. On the other hand, philosophy, Eliade held, has not sheltered us from this terror. Rather, it has, as Derrida has shown, left us in a haunted world. Derrida writes that the specter unhinges, disjoins, and dis-adjusts the living present. Indeed, for Derrida, haunting marks "the very existence of Europe" (3)¹⁷ and, we would add, the New World. The project of paying the debt, the work of mourning, is to learn to live in "being-with" ghosts in instances not docile to "what we call time" (Derrida xix).

Antigone and Creon: The Written Laws and the Ambiguity in the Ode to Man

In the *Antigone*, we see the problem of living in a haunted world play out. Thebes had long been the symbolic externalization of Athens's internal problems—like “the border” in current American politics and thought. In *Antigone and Creon*, Sophocles stages the issue confronting the polis: What is lost as Athens moves towards empire? Creon, initially confronted with a situation he did not create (the curse, the corresponding familial boundary violations culminating in the civil war, etc.), is the politically powerful “great man”—what Gideon Rachman and others have called, for our time, the Strongman¹⁸--who is tasked with reshaping a post-war Thebes through his will. Woefully inadequate to that monumental task—i.e., untying the knot of the curse on Oedipus's family—he makes it worse by recreating the civil war through his edict and his subsequent actions. He is confronted and revealed by Antigone who, representing the unwritten laws of the *polis*, chooses to live with ghosts. This family is riddled with ghosts. It is too intimate, with kinship in knots recreated on the level of the polis.

What is at stake in the *Antigone*, then, is the shape of the *polis*. With recent critics, we agree that it is wrong to make Antigone a figure representing the private, hearth, and home. Her position on the unwritten laws, custom or natural law,¹⁹ is part of the ideoscape, to use Arjun Appadurai's term, of the Athenian *polis*, which included, in a world always at war, the idea that the dead, even the enemy dead, should be respected and treated with care.²⁰ In Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*, burial of the enemy dead is a proper, bound duty (*Suppliant Women*, l. 538).²¹ Creon violates this customary understanding without thought, proceeding as a general (which he is) would, bringing a war ethic to governing that makes his word a command and, therefore, the only law that counts. Antigone resists Creon's law of the exception, under the banner of kinship and custom.

Critical to the resulting confrontation is that neither position can reshape the world without the other. Both Antigone and Creon act in the public sphere, with honor at stake,²² as Weberian ideal types, set up by Sophocles as heuristic devices for investigating how the world works.²³ We might see their extreme positions like Flannery O'Connor sees her characters: "To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures."²⁴ These ideal types act out a social drama²⁵ that brings to the fore the buried issues and conflicts of the *polis* in a recurrence of the kind of boundary-crossings that characterize both the Oedipus family and civil war in general. Hegel read Greek tragedy—and this play--arguing that the suffering of the tragic hero was a way to reconcile oppositional moral claims between the *oikos*, the domain of women that is a "subversive threat to male authority" and is being violated, yet is a "perilous" domain for men," a site of intrigue, since women are seen to have access to powers, the gods, beyond the political,²⁶ and the *polis*, the domain of men. This reading leaves both figures "outside" the *polis*, as Creon positions himself above it even as he is responsible for it.

This position above, outside, and beyond reminds us, with Froma Zeitlin, that Greek theater allowed the possibility of playing the radical other, of mimetic action, as a way to analyze the self. Women in tragedy, she writes, functionally are never ends in themselves, and their presence on stage changes nothing for real women. They serve as anti-models and hidden models for the male self.²⁷ In Greek drama, as Zeitlin argues, and particularly in the House of Oedipus, it is the "misadventure of the human body" that is on stage—here, the suffering body politic.²⁸ The body politic suffers because the "softer" emotions have been denied as virtues, with the replacement of "empathy with antipathy, love with hate, trust with suspicion, and confidence with fear,"²⁹ with these emotions signifying power and strength, in which peace "becomes a sanction for continued suffering."³⁰ Indeed, Zeitlin argues that "the final paradox" of Greek

theater is that it uses the feminine for the “purposes of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self,”³¹ opening it to pity and forgiveness, among the “softer” emotions.

The play begins with intrigue, the “manipulative mobility” of the powerless in dissent,³² as Václav Havel will show us, with the secret meeting of Antigone and Ismene, but also with the Chorus of Theban elders, that is, old men. Margeret Rachel Kitzinger argues that the Chorus’s mode of expressions is not the speaking of the actors, but song and dance. In those complementary but irreconcilable modes, different viewpoints are set out, different ways of understanding the world. The Chorus’s bodily—movement and sound—action provides another level of tension in the *Antigone*. They are old men who have lived through the rise and fall of Oedipus and the war between the brothers and who now desire peace. Understandably, they are conservative, invested in the albeit fragile stability of the *polis*. At first, they know nothing of Antigone’s anger,³³ and her acts create confusion, as they value, throughout, the gods, showing a public piety.

One example of this kind of tension comes when, as the Chorus learns of Antigone’s act, it launches into the famous “Ode to Man,” which comes after Creon has declared that the body of Polyneices can neither be buried nor, as in tradition, cast out of the city limits.³⁴ Either Ismene or Antigone has already buried Polyneices’ body one time, carrying out the necessity of the laws of piety. The Chorus knows that Creon is, in terms of piety, wrong. Therefore, the “Ode to Man,” at first, marvels at man’s power and ingenuity, which may link to Creon’s triumphal entrance, but the Chorus, then, argues that man’s powers are ambivalent. As Gregory Crane writes in his essay on the Ode, human beings, the Chorus says, are δεινά. This suggests that they will stop at nothing, potentially commenting on the one who has dared to undertake this burial. It could mean that such a person is god-like, but, Crane suggests, also one who is cunning or criminal,³⁵

accepting no boundaries. As Markell shows us, using Robert Goheen's work, human beings have both "'marvelous capacity'" and are "strange."³⁶ In this tension, we find the seeds of the form of excess called *hubris*.

To be great, one must not only support the "laws of the land" but also "the gods' sworn right" (369). Antigone enters at the end of the Chorus's speech, seeming to be like her father, stateless—"stateless the man/Who dares to dwell with dishonor" --and homeless--"Not by my fire/never to share my thoughts..." (370-371). On a simple level, Antigone is the homeless one, in burying her brother a second time and dishonoring the laws of the land, but Creon, as we know, has dishonored the unwritten laws of the hearth.³⁷ Each "alone" suggests he or she is right, and they answer to no one. Antigone abandons her sister, violating her own claim of kinship as the ultimate connection; Creon at turns browbeats the Watchman, refuses to listen to his son Haemon, attempts to co-opt the Chorus in the killing of the sisters, and disrespects Teiresias. His own approach, repeatedly demonstrating the degree to which he is not in control of the situation, violates his claim that political reason is the ultimate connection.

Both characters are indicted and marveled at. They are both "strange" (332) and, as Kirkwood suggests, we wonder who the evildoer is, injecting "disquiet and confusion," suspense, doubt, and fear.³⁸ Kirkwood sees this tension intensify in the Chorus, as they wonder who is acting in pride, the "greatness in human life [that] brings doom" (613). Both Creon and Antigone are of the House of Oedipus; therefore, both carry intense pride, inflexibility, and destructive violence in their persons. Creon "trusts too much in his own wits" in interpreting the laws of the state and in putting down disobedience,³⁹ while Antigone does the same, only in relation to the unwritten laws of the *oikos*. Both incur the wrath of the gods, and, as the Chorus warns in its next ode, "[t]here is no escape" (598): "The brighter the light ... the darker the shadows."⁴⁰ Together,

they are the two elements of oppression. Creon represents the Terror of History, which makes history on Polyneices. Antigone represents the *oikos*, always violated—raped women’s bodies, dead children, broken kinship ties, and the home, both as physical dwelling and place of identity and belonging, destroyed—but also the customary, natural law of the *polis*. There is no wonder the rewritings of this play have sided with Antigone, who represents the desire for humane political space that respects the human even as the character, doubtless owing to her experience and origins, struggles in making or keeping human connection. We are watching these painful violations of Antigone’s position, now, in the Ukraine and Gaza, at our border, and all over the world.

While Creon’s every act seems to speak to his strangeness and loss of sense of his proper place, neither can Antigone evade appearing strange or vulnerable to both indictment and marvel. Hame reminds us that, while women prepared the dead body, the control of funeral rites belonged to men who were “responsible for conducting the act of burial and [that] women’s actions in funerary rituals were highly controlled.”⁴¹ Given these expectations both Antigone and, if Bonnie Honig and Jenet Kirkpatrick are right, Ismene are “monstrous” in taking on the act that Creon, as their family member, ironically, is obligated to undertake as the male head of the family.⁴² In taking the ritual as their responsibility, the two women also, Hame suggests, take on male *hubris*, warning the polis “of the potential repercussions of improper *male* social, religious, and political behavior.”⁴³ Hame points out that, without being taken back to the home and properly prepared for burial—the action Antigone wants Ismene to help her with—the body cannot be properly buried. Therefore, even if Ismene tried to bury her brother, she did not succeed completely.⁴⁴

Living With(in) the Terror

What could move between the extremes of tragic heroism and martyrdom? Howard Thurman, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, analyzes how those with their backs against the wall survive oppressive regimes.⁴⁵ Thurman, whose work Martin Luther King, Jr., carried with him in his briefcase, sees those who are oppressed living in the fear that arises from isolation and helplessness. An oppressed person facing violence, Thurman suggests, has no recourse and no protection and has her human dignity undone. Embracing deception of self or other may reduce the exposure to violence, but Thurman worries that one who must resort to deception becomes, herself, deception, even though the oppressor uses deception to deprive human beings of their rights.⁴⁶ Finally, the oppressed hate, which Thurman argues is destructive to the hater.⁴⁷ Nonviolent resistance, Thurman taught King, offers a third way, that is quiet and courageous. Ismene may embody this choice.

Ismene

Bonnie Honig, in “Ismene’s Forced Choice,” sees Ismene in the terms we have posited from Thurman. She reads the sisters as acting in solidarity,⁴⁸ with Ismene offering a different image of the hero, opening a “third choice.” Ismene is one of the “unheroic weak—those who are aware of their vincibility and act within its constraints,” acting furtively, using the weapons of “silence, secrecy, and deceit.”⁴⁹ Kirkpatrick, using James Scott, sees such action as not confronting power directly. Instead, it exercises a “comparative sensitivity to political context and power dynamics,” and it watches and waits, working within its power—here women’s power.⁵⁰ We might argue that it confronts power in a signifying mode, acting, as Kirkpatrick

suggests, improvisationally⁵¹ and opportunistically, undoing, if only for a moment, the usual ways that power, in its supremacist, imperial, patriarchal mode, can respond.

Honig, reading through Lacan like Žižek, does not see Ismene as a passive figure, without moral and ethical agency. Kirkpatrick reminds us that this way of acting might be her normal character, since Creon sees her as a “viper in the house.”⁵² Both Antigone and Ismene are active--they are, after all, the daughters of Oedipus. Ismene, Honig suggests, “sacrifices herself in her own way,” as she “confronts her own limit and does not back down: she, like her sister, chooses a “living death” in the home and under the power of the one who murders her sister.⁵³ Honig suggests, reading Ismene’s response to Antigone’s demand to bury Polyneices in the first scene, that Ismene, in secret, may have carried out the first burial—engaging in a less reckless act--perhaps hoping to save her sister.⁵⁴ In this way, Honig argues, when Ismene admits to the burial, she is speaking the truth.⁵⁵ She further reads Antigone’s refusal to allow Ismene to share her fate as an act of protection, insuring that Ismene will survive; as Kirkpatrick puts it, Antigone may be sacrificing herself not just for Polyneices but also for her sister.⁵⁶ In this, Antigone outwits Creon, and doing so, insures that someone of the family survives. Ismene cannot undo the knot, the riddle, in Oedipus’ terms, that the issue presents—to simultaneously, honor her brother, save her sister, and obey Creon, but she does live to fight another day.⁵⁷

She acts, in Arjun Appadurai’s terms, in a cellular mode against the vertebrate state. In modern politics, from the French Resistance to what we call terroristic groups, such subversive power is mobile, recombinant, opportunistic, rhizomatic, networked, and creative, staging actions that disrupt, the norms, protocols, and “the order of things,” the episteme of the vertebrate state.⁵⁸ Together, we might say, they represent two forms of subversive liberatory power: the public-facing activist and the one who works behind the scenes towards liberation.

Honig suggests that they are working together, either consciously or unconsciously against Creon; Kirkpatrick argues that they are trying to save each other's lives. Whatever their motivations, Honig argues that Ismene

...finds her own way. Burying Polyneices surreptitiously, Ismene does not duck the choice, nor does she pass the forced choice on to another. She breaks its spell, choosing neither flagrant disobedience nor meek inaction ... Ismene creates "a possibility where the options seem to be exhausted."⁵⁹

Ismene will not have the glory of the martyr's death. She will live a martyr's life.⁶⁰ Together, the sisters, Honig suggests, hint at "an alternative politics, an alternative to Hegel's dialectic,"⁶¹ which ends in both death and living death. Ismene, in other words, offers a promise.⁶²

Given this, we think it is important that the acts of both sisters take place outside the palace walls. They plot outside the boundaries of power where Greek culture forces them to live. Ismene's action is secret and "haphazard...though technically complete."⁶³ Antigone's is "clear, absolutist, and disciplinary" in her "notion of how her opposition must take place," leading her to take her own life, Kirkpatrick argues, and, ultimately, not to be able to appreciate Ismene's dissemblance.⁶⁴ The sisters are, Kirkpatrick suggests, like two swords,⁶⁵ acting each in her way in this moment. Kirkpatrick also suggests that a god may carry out the second burial, and this leads us to Slavoj Žižek's provocative reading of the *Antigone*.

Both women, though representing family, act within the public space of the *polis*. We would add, however, that they begin, like their brother's body, outside. They, like him, in taking up an act of resistance against the state, both in violation, are already dead bodies. Their bodies remind us of the position of the state between the demands of the family (Ismene) and the divine which, as we will suggest, Antigone comes to embody. The rational politics of the state ignores

these at everyone's peril. And the sisters, in representing what is to family and the gods, in burying their brother, must act as men.

Antigone's Alternative

Slavoj Žižek brought Ismene's position in the play to critical attention through his reading of Lacan, taking up Lacan's reading of Antigone as embodying an ethics of desire.⁶⁶ Žižek does vacillate on his understanding of and appreciation for Antigone.⁶⁷ In his provocative reading of Antigone in *Interrogating the Real*, Žižek, critiques readings of Lacan's Antigone and discusses Antigone's inhumanity as revealing what is "all too human," drawing it into contrast with Ismene's normative human subjectivity.

Žižek sees Lacan thinking through Kant's sense that we cannot know the "Thing in itself." Our symbolic orders structure our perception of reality, and, to put it crudely, distance us from the Thing in itself, keeping us in the "gap of desire."⁶⁸ Žižek argues that this is an overly simple reading of Lacan's Kant. For Žižek, Lacan takes out the static in the symbolic. The Thing is the ideal--in the play, Creon's "unprincipled pragmatism" that insists on the "smooth functioning of the state and civil peace."⁶⁹ In contrast, the "Real" and our desire for it mark an active, driving force of desiring. Žižek argues that we cannot go straight at the Real Thing but, in desire, enter a "curvature of space" that lets us encircle the Thing we desire, recognizing that when we enter the symbolic order, the "Real is lost forever."⁷⁰ Yet, it can be glimpsed in the "between," that is, "between the "pure', 'pre-human' nature and the order of symbolic exchanges," in the "*no longer* but *not yet*."⁷¹ This fleeting glimpse is what we experience in Antigone's "no." If, Žižek argues, we rewrote Antigone today, we would only be able to see her acts as negative; we

[would] deprive Antigone's suicidal gesture of its sublime dignity and turn it into a case of ridiculously stubborn perseverance, which is utterly out of place, and is, in all probability masterminded by the very state power it pretends to call in question...In the modern tragedy, the subject 'is asked to assume with enjoyment the very injustice of which they are horrified.'⁷²

In jazz terms, Antigone creates a break, in which something is experienced without being realized. The drives toward the Real Thing are what is Real, not some "Unattainable" Thing in itself.⁷³ All that remains for Antigone is a "No!"—an insistence without considering consequences.⁷⁴ Yet, in this "No," Antigone "can be said to exemplify the unconditional fidelity to the Otherness of the Thing that disrupts the entire social edifice."⁷⁵ In relation to the "intersubjective collective"⁷⁶ of the *polis* governed by an accepted symbolic order, this, of course, appears mad. As Achille Mbembe puts it the "totem that acts as a double to power is no longer protected by taboo,"⁷⁷ as the vulgar visibility of power is disrupted and each death "leads to a new appearance, is perceived as confirmation, gage, and relaunch of an ongoing promise, a 'not yet,' a 'what is coming,' which—always—separates hope from utopia."⁷⁸

Žižek suggests that Antigone, in making her decision bridges two levels of decision: a Levinasian "abyssal ethical Call of the Other"⁷⁹ and a decision to accomplish some pragmatic, concrete political intervention as a response to the Other's call. Her bridging of these two possibilities, Žižek argues, is radical: "the *direct* identification of her particular/determinate desire with the Other's (Thing's) injunction/call."⁸⁰ This makes her monstrous, Žižek argues, and she, for a moment, "is" the Real Thing—"the impossible Thing, the 'inhuman partner', the Other with whom no symmetrical dialogue, mediated by the symbolic Order, is possible."⁸¹ She is not a figure of *até*, but is one who assumes "an uninhabitable position, a position for which

there is no place in the public space.”⁸² Her brother Polyneices is the “neighbor,” that radical Other, who in Levinas’ sense, masters us in a monstrous way that cannot be “gentrified.”⁸³ Her “no” suggests both “violent rupture” and “founding gesture.”⁸⁴ Polyneices also is, we would argue with Butler, but differently, the radical Intimate. The “knot” that this family cannot detangle is its blood and the overlapping and interconnection of kinship relations to the point that they are unreadable. As Mark Griffith has suggested, sexual intimacy/incest pervades the play.⁸⁵ The family is monstrous.

This recognition is why, to return to the “Ode to Man,” Peter Meineck introduces the monstrous into his translation of that ode. Human beings are “wonders” and “terrors” (333), “awe-inspiring in both good and bad ways” (see note, l. 332). Creon speaks of the “yoke” of justice (292), and this yoking Meineck reminds us, is control, as of animals. What strikes us is that Antigone is no man—as Éowyn declares in both film and novel of Tolkien’s *Return of the King*. She is already, royal or not, a being to be yoked, to be tamed, and one dangerous in her passions. She is “monstrous” and Meineck comments that “the word refers too anything so foreign to common experience that it may be taken as a special omen from the gods” (note to l. 376). Antigone appears in a “tornado” (Meineck 418) or “whirlwind” (Lattimore, 418), that is like a plague from the gods. When Antigone is seen, she cries shrilly, like a bird who finds an empty nest and calls down a curse (428) on “whoever had done this thing” (428)—that is, Creon.

Antigone deconstructs “man,” and doing so, all “man’s” categories. She becomes opaque,⁸⁶ excluding herself from a community regulated by man’s symbols,⁸⁷ including what constitutes the “zero-difference” of the masculine and feminine. She, as the exception, as bare life, as her father becomes in *Oedipus at Colonus*, already is a sacrifice.⁸⁸ As *homo sacer*, she does not, Žižek argues in the introduction to his play, renegotiate political limits; instead, she

reveals that we all are *homo sacer*.⁸⁹ She sacrifices all for one, in love, representing that there is no “mere life.” Indeed, one critic suggests that she acts in love for Creon as well, since he is of her family. This is not “feminine” logic, but a breaking in, “a moment that precedes and makes possible the symbolic order and its social mediation.”⁹⁰ Antigone is seen as stubborn and uncooperative because she stands in this precedent; for her, though standing *in* the public, there is no argument to make in terms *of* the public, and she, in its terms, given all her masculine actions, is already symbolically dead.⁹¹

Conclusions: The Power of the Dispossessed and Disinherited

To see the implications of Antigone’s – and Ismene’s as well—action, we turn to two thinkers, Howard Thurman, in his *Jesus and the Disinherited*, and Václav Havel in *Disturbing the Peace* and *The Power of the Powerless*.

The Creons of our day are those Gabriel Rachman and others call the Strongman, patriarchal (or, in the case of women, patriarchally coded) authoritarian leaders for which Vladimir Putin is the archetype. In a sense, then, Hegel was right: this “chosen” figure is an instrument of the *Geist*, one that has appeared across Western history. Typically, Rachman writes, these leaders are nationalists and cultural conservatives, with little tolerance for minorities, dissent, or the interest of foreigners. At home, they claim to be standing up for the common man against the “globalist” elites. Overseas, they posture as the embodiment of their nations. And, everywhere they go, they encourage a cult of personality.⁹² Along with the cult of personality-- “I alone can fix it” -- such leaders erode the distinction between the state and the leader, using media and language in the service of violence,⁹³ controlling law to challenge “elective democracy itself.”⁹⁴

Culture and society, in their hands, become violent and cruel.⁹⁵ Thinking of the situation of the *Antigone*, we can envision Polyneices' body rotting in public space—perhaps with those of his companions—and courting disease. The populace must be in shock, from the war and, now from Creon's actions. We imagine fear as Creon makes his edict. Afraid, the weak operate with deception and in hate, to undermine the authority of the strong⁹⁶—to this we will return. This play, written in 441BCE is produced in the Athenian Golden Age, but is prescient. Sophocles seems to worry about the strongman and the emergence of that kind of power in a weak democracy. And Athens will experience plague during the Peloponnesian Wars, as the population is trapped in the walls.

We must acknowledge that the whole House of Oedipus participates in the Strongman power as well.⁹⁷ Antigone, justly, has been accused of being unable to communicate with anyone, and this sense of command, of power and its downfall, runs throughout Sophocles' Theban plays. At least, however, Antigone loves her brother and, if the feminist readings are right, her sister. This is a proud house, and Creon seems to forget that he is part of it. In his *hubris*, he destroys everything. He, as Markell points out, uses *patra* as a synonym for *polis* and makes “citizenship and rulership...properly the business of men, and only men”; masculinity determines political authority.⁹⁸ And, Creon refuses to act as a kinsman, in complex relationship to the women.

Under Creon's rule, Antigone and Ismene are just women, both treated instrumentally. Antigone's only use to Creon is to further his line through Haemon; Ismene is left a lonely, isolated figure. Antigone and Ismene, as women, royal or not, are essentially powerless and find history being made *on* them. They are *homo sacer*, beings who can be killed but have no meaning in the sacrificial order—in contrast to Oedipus at Colonus. Yet, either they act together or Antigone acts, undermining Creon's authority.

Creon's every tyrannical gesture testifies to the fact that he is in over his head but saddled with the responsibility to act. As the one who must fix everything, he cannot act in relation to or for the "other." By Creon-ing everyone with whom he comes in contact, he reveals his powerlessness and that the power that he wields is illusory. He can decree, but what he decrees is destructive for the *polis* because he fears losing power and recreating the disorder which characterizes his family.

As Rousseau remind us, fear is not a legitimate basis of real authority or power. On the other hand, if Haemon is to be believed (and he is), Antigone -- and perhaps Ismene -- exercises power, despite her apparent powerlessness. What she and her sister exercise is the power of the powerless, of the dispossessed and the disinherited, that is, the power to disrupt. Howard Thurman, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, argues that there is one "overmastering problem" that the socially and politically disinherited, those who live "with their backs constantly against the wall," face: "Under what terms is survival possible?"⁹⁹—when the vanquished face "an attack," as Václav Havel writes, "on the very essence of human freedom and integrity" and an attack on "the spiritual and intellectual freedom" of human beings.¹⁰⁰

For Thurman, under oppression, disciplined acts involve standing up to the powerful through an "inner authority" the power of which is enacted in concrete relationships.¹⁰¹ Thurman was the source for the practice of nonviolent resistance for King, and burial, in the *Antigone*, is a nonviolent act, only defined as violent in the eyes of the state. Antigone moves beyond the fear of being killed to a more "transcendent goal," a more courageous goal of being "simply, directly truthful, whatever may be the cost."¹⁰² Thurman suggests that when the disinherited claim their human dignity, "the dominant themselves are caught with no defense, with the edge taken away

from the sense of prerogative and form the status upon which the impregnability of their position rests.¹⁰³ We see this reaction in Creon's rigidity and, then, in his despair.

What such nonviolent action presents to power is "the opportunity to retreat with dignity," as Havel puts it.¹⁰⁴ Totalitarianism creates "fictional" identities,¹⁰⁵ as the lie of the regime, to which it is captive, degrades individuals.¹⁰⁶ Havel, in *The Power of the Powerless*, meditates on a greengrocer who, through a very simple gesture, displaying a sign in his store window, makes a public declaration of his loyalty to the regime, and its lies.¹⁰⁷ The simple display shows acceptance of the "rules of the game" and affirms and confirms the "power that requires slogans in the first place."¹⁰⁸ Denying Polyneices burial is like the slogan, in a sense. Accepting the edict is an affirmation of compliance.

Yet, as we see, the women's breaking the rules of the game gradually exposes the layers of Creon's wrongness and weakness. It breaks into the lie that creates a "*deep moral crisis in society*," one that creates, for Havel, "demoralized beings" with no root in "the order of being."¹⁰⁹ Resistance, as King configured it in nonviolent resistance, locates itself in what Václav Benda called a "parallel *polis*" that preserves and renews national community and its values.¹¹⁰ Such a structure neither completely ignores nor completely separates from the official structure, acting rather as its "negative image."¹¹¹ In this way, the parallel *polis* is a place of refuge,¹¹² one that resists the reduction to sameness, as it

stresses variety, but not absolute independence, for a parallel course can be maintained only with a certain mutual respect and consideration. Furthermore, it does not rule out the possibility that parallel courses may sometimes converge and cross each other... Finally, it is a global characteristic, not merely local, [opening] the door to a merging of both

communities, and even more, to the peaceful dominance of the community anchored in truth over the community based on mere power and manipulation.¹¹³

Like Thurman and Havel, whom he influenced, Benda sees the parallel *polis* opening a dialectic, breaking into the closed nature of the totalitarian system, thereby creating a possibility for life lived in dignity, in justice and freedom, in a “human community in mutual love and responsibility.”¹¹⁴ The movement, the parallel *polis*, is grassroots, “small-scale work,” seeking, in Benda’s metaphor, to dislodge a pebble that can start an avalanche.¹¹⁵ This is the power of the powerless. Havel finetunes this idea to recognize that we cannot act independently. Citizens have relative dependence on the state, needing it for certain things, but the parallel *polis* can “persistently, gradually, and inconspicuously enrich their ‘relatively dependent’ surroundings through the spiritually liberating and morally challenging meaning of their own independence,”¹¹⁶ spreading an idea of freedom through society—indeed throughout a world that leaves people with no sense of anything other than the desire for survival and, for both ruler and ruled, depriving them of “their conscience, ...their common sense and natural speech, and thereby, of their actual humanity.”¹¹⁷

The power of the powerless, therefore, is the capacity to organize to resist “the irrational momentum of anonymous, impersonal, and inhuman power” and to rehabilitate values like “trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, and love.”¹¹⁸ For Havel, this engenders hope, which is a state of mind, an orientation of the spirit and the heart, rooted in the “transcendental,” and coming “from elsewhere,” that “transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.”¹¹⁹ Hope is not joy or optimism. It is a recognition that “inhuman power cannot deprive [us] of the inner freedom to make moral choices, and to make human community meaningful.”¹²⁰ It is a practice, “the ability to work for something

because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.”¹²¹ Indeed, the more dire the circumstances, the more hope is necessary. Such hope “propels” us to question our own and our common misery to realize that we must act in a situation in which “the time is getting late, ... the situation is grave, [and] it can’t be ignored.”¹²² For Thurman, hope is the courage to look to –and we would add, live on --the “growing edge.” As he writes in the poem that orients the book, *The Growing Edge*, hope is the “spirit in us and in the world working always against the thing that destroys and lays waste.” Thurman reminds us that we live in a cycle in that demonstrates “the growing edge,” the “upward reach of life” even “when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash.”¹²³ We can and must face the horror, the Terror of History.

Antigone and Ismene are, recent critics have suggested, a small parallel *polis* in the play, and their stance, gradually, draws in the citizenry, Haemon, the Chorus, and the gods, leaving Creon standing alone. Their act signals a “redemptive politics,”¹²⁴ one Creon rejects, bringing down the wrath of the gods.

Havel argues that drama “always mirrors what is essential in its time.”¹²⁵ Creon and Antigone actions can act as a mirror for our times. Creon creates what Havel calls an ideological fiction that “can rationalize anything without ever having to brush against the truth.”¹²⁶ Antigone’s actions, ironically, bring to the fore the questions and the ideal stated in Pericles’ “Funeral Oration” for the Athenian dead in the Peloponnesian War, as Sophocles’ questions about democracy are starkly put. Can giving the distinguished citizen power be balanced with the “hands of the many” in democracy? What do we do when the Strongman stops discussion that is preparatory to action and acts out his own will? If he does this, is our focusing on our private lives and complying to avoid being trampled down by the terror of history a just way to live? Antigone says no and her “No!” is like that of the Athenian dead, who, in

the face of death ... resolved to rely upon themselves alone. And when the moment came, they were minded to resist and suffer, rather than to fly and save their lives; they ran away from the word of dishonor, ... their feet stood fast, and in an instant, at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory.¹²⁷

She puts herself in the path of the terror.

Placing this insight in women characters no doubt created cognitive dissonance for the Athenian audience enjoying the Festival of Dionysus in the Golden Age of Greece. Antigone, however, is descended from this god, whose power, depending on how one sees it, either inspires and creates ecstasy or makes us mad. Antigone's love, Thurman might argue, is her power. It is a radical action, a discipline that is constituted by an ethical demand.¹²⁸ Havel argues that power wielded for less than human purposes is not power worth wielding or having and that the power of the powerless is characterized precisely by the capacity to reclaim those human(e) purposes -- which is what Antigone does.

What Antigone demonstrates is the desire, perhaps one that, under the Terror of History seems mad, as Plato suggested, for a balanced *polis* that internalizes the values of the *oikos*, giving women a potential place within it and for a structure in which the heroic is not raw power, like Creon's, but is utilized for the common good. Plato desires such power, Froma Zeitlin argues, in *The Republic*, power "utilized for the improvement of self and society."¹²⁹ As the *Antigone* ends, the stage/the state is swept clean: death unties the knot. New hands will take over the state, and both *oikos* and *polis* will need to be reconstituted. One must not forget the peak of the relational triangle here, the gods, who deserve reverence. The Chorus recognizes that their day is done, as well; they are old. What they pass on—that wisdom (*Phronein*) is "essential" for *eudaimonia* (flourishing, happiness)—seems like another slogan, except that *Phronein* involves

self-control and prudence, each of which comes through reason. The Chorus suggests a reflection undergone through and coming after terror, an attention to and learning from suffering, work that produces a scarred but wiser “Man,” able to take practical action and live well, from the fire of suffering—as it denies Creon the escape of his own desired death and leads him, with no family to return to and like his ancestor Oedipus, guilty and, perhaps, seeking grace, off the stage.

¹ Roy Williams, “Roy Williams on Antigone: A Play for Today’s Streets,” *The Guardian* (19 Sept. 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/sep/19/roy-williams-antigone-pilot-theatre>.

² Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kingship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 24.

³ See Caroline Kapp, “The Devastating Use of Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War,” Think Global Health, <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/devastating-use-sexual-violence-weapon-war>. “Rape as a Tactic of War,” UN Women, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Media/Publications/UNIFEM/EVAWkit_06_Factsheet_ConflictAndPostConflict_en.pdf.

⁴ See Kerri J. Hame, “Female Control of Funeral Rites,” *Classical Philology* 103.1 (January 2008): 1-15. Hame, we shall see, argues that while women prepared the body, the responsibility for and management and performance of funeral rites fell to men (3).

⁵ Hame, 1-3. Hame points to legislation on pp. 12-13 of her article.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ We will use two translations of the play, the *Antigone* from *Sophocles: Theban Plays*, trans. Peter Meineck (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003) and Richmond Lattimore, trans. *Antigone* in *Sophocles I*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). Translations will be indicated parenthetically.

⁸ Patchen Markell, “Tragic Recognition: Action and Identity in Antigone,” *Political Theory* 31.1 (February 2003), 14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3595657>.

⁹ See Gabriela Remov, “Aristotle, Antigone, and Natural Justice,” *History of Political Thought* 29.4 (Winter 2008): 585-600, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44797179>. Remov writes that Aristotle argues, in the *Rhetoric* (1.13-15) that Antigone appeals to natural justice and law. Argues that Aristotle is arguing that Creon did violate natural justice. She writes: “Aristotle held that it is a dictate of nature to do what is normatively natural” (596). Creon, then, even if acting in legal justice, did violate natural justice. She follows what is customary and normative in her culture.

¹⁰ Hegel to Niethammer, October 13, 1806, Marxists.org. *Hegel: The Letters*. Trans. Clark Butler and Christine Seiler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p? Hegel distinguishes between the person, the citizen, and the victim. The citizen is rooted in his state, while the person lives for himself and the victim is a victim of himself, the “last man” who takes advantage of the comfort of the state, without critical thought. The victim makes everything small, who is, as Nietzsche put it, despicable.

¹³ Elizabeth Duquette, “The Man of the World,” *American Literary History* 27.4 (2015):635-64. P. 636. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/43817723.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Af91533f746b96959b63fd21240bc121c&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Duquette illustrates how Napoleon captured the literary imagination of the Atlantic world in its anxiety about such a figure and its celebration. He is Carlyle’s great man.

¹⁴ Paul Krause, “‘Heroism’ and the ‘World Soul’ at Jena,” *Merion West*. <https://merionwest.com/2021/10/13/heroism-and-the-world-soul-at-jena/>.

¹⁵ The Holy Roman Empire has been dissolved by this time.

¹⁶ Friedrich Schiller, in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, characterized the modern age thusly—

State and Church, law and customs, were now torn asunder; enjoyment was separated from labor, means from ends efforts from reward. Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment; with the monotonous noise of the wheel he drives everlastingly in his ears, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation, of his science. [...] the lifeless letter takes place of the living understanding, and a practiced memory is a surer guide than genius and feeling.

<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2023/09/11/hegels-phenomenology-spirit-journey-eighteen-steps>.

Marengo’s remains, his skeleton, is in the Natural History Museum in London.

Napoleon is said to have ridden him through many of his campaigns between 1800 and 1815. In 1815, the [Duke of Wellington](#) defeated Napoleon at the [Battle of Waterloo](#). Marengo was captured on the battlefield and taken to England. After his death, Marengo's skeleton was displayed at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), established by Wellington in 1831. It moved to the National Army Museum in the 1960s.

Then it was moved to the Natural History Museum. (National Army Muesum, “Marengo’s Makeover,” <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/marengos-makeover>).

¹⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

¹⁸ Gideon Rachman, *The Age of the Strongman: How the Cult of the Leader Threatens Democracy Around the World* (New York: Bodley Head/Vintage Books, 2002).

¹⁹ See, Martin Ostwald, *The Unwritten Laws and the Ancestral Constitution of Athens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). Ostwald argues that the unwritten law is not “law” in the formal sense, though *nomos* can be used for both. Herodotus, Ostwald argues, sees *nomos* as “anything that determines and characterizes the order in which human societies live,” no matter how that law is sanctioned. It is social custom, enforced by community understanding and practice.

²⁰ See Robert J. Dleahunty, “The Unwritten Laws of Greece,” Law and Religion Forum, <https://lawandreligionforum.org/2015/10/29/the-unwritten-laws-of-greece/> for a succinct overview.

²¹ Euripides, *The Suppliant Women*, trans. George Theodoridis. Poetry in Translation, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/SuppliantWomen.php>.

²² See Joshua Mendelson, “Hegel on the Ethics of Antigone,” 6. <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/voices.uchicago.edu/dist/f/106/files/2015/01/Mendelsohn-Hegel-on-the-ethics-of-Antigone.pdf>

²³ “Ideal Type,” Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095956574>.

²⁴ Quoted in, Jonathan Crowe, “Flannery to Lit Professor: ‘My Tone is Not Meant to be Obnoxious.. I’m in a State of Shock,’” *Literature* (23 Jan 2015), *Open Culture*, <https://www.openculture.com/2015/01/flannery-oconnor-to-lit-professor.html>.

²⁵ Victor Turner calls these dramas, narratives, of living acted out by persons in whom the cultural group have a stake to address a crisis (149) brought about by the “breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena” causing social conflict. See Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and Stories about Them,” *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 141-168.

²⁶ Froma I. Zeitlin, “Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama,” *Representations* 22 (1985): 63-94. See 72.

²⁷ Zeitlin, 66-67, 73, 75. Zeitlin notes that Creon’s suffering ends the play and provides the resolution of the drama.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁹ Kenneth Cloke, “Mediating Evil, War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflict.” *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: December 2005 <<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/mediating-evil>>. Cloke argues that we “organize our hatreds” through:

- *Assumption of Injurious Intentions* (they intended to cause the harm we experienced)
- *Distrust* (every idea or statement made by them is wrong or proposed for dishonest reasons)
- *Externalization of Guilt* (everything bad or wrong is their fault)

-
- *Attribution of Evil* (they want to destroy us and what we value most, and must therefore be destroyed)
 - *Zero-Sum Expectation* (everything that benefits them harms us, and *vice versa*)
 - *Paranoia and Preoccupation with Disloyalty* (any criticism of us or praise of them is disloyal and treasonous)
 - *Prejudgment* (everyone in the enemy group is an enemy)
 - *Suppression of Empathy* (we have nothing in common and considering them human is dangerous)
 - *Isolation and Impasse* (blanket rejection of dialogue, negotiation, cooperation, and conflict resolution)
 - *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* (their evil makes it permissible for us to be an enemy to them)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Zeitlin, 80.

³² “Political Intrigue,” dHRAF World Cultures,” Human Relations Area Files, Yale University, <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/subjects/662/description>.

³³ See G. M. Kirkwood, “The Dramatic Role of the Chorus in Sophocles,” *Phoenix* 8.1 (Spring 1954): 1-22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1086857>.

³⁴ Robert Coleman, “The Role of the Chorus in Sophocles’ *Antigone*,” Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society (1972), 8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44698780>.

³⁵ Gregory Crane, “Creon and the ‘Ode to Man’ in Sophocles’ *Antigone*,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 92 (1989), 105-106. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/311354>.

³⁶ Markell, 21.

³⁷ See Crane, 106.

³⁸ Kirkwood., 15, 17,

³⁹ Crane, 114.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁴¹ Hame, 1-3.

⁴² Ibid., 8.

⁴³ Ibid., 12. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁸ Bonnie Honig, "Ismene's Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority In Sophocles' *Antigone*." *Arethusa* 44.1 (2011): 29-68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44578337>. p. 50. Jennet Kirkpatrick also suggests that Ismene made the first burial. See Jennet Kirkpatrick, "The Prudent Dissident: Unheroic Resistance in Sophocles' *Antigone*," *The Review of Politics* 73.3 (Summer 2011): 401-424. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23016517>. Kirkpatrick reminds us that this idea was suggested by other critics, J. E. Harry and W. H. D. Rouse.

⁴⁹ Kirkpatrick, 403, 407.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 414.

⁵¹ Ibid., 417.

⁵² Ibid., 407.

⁵³ Honig, 33.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 40-41.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43. Kirkpatrick, 410.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45ff. Kirkpatrick, 411.

⁵⁷ Kirkpatrick, 408.

⁵⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006.

⁵⁹ Honig, 57-58.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁶¹ Ibid., 63.

⁶² Ibid., 64.

⁶³ Kirkpatrick, 412.

⁶⁴ Ibid. and 417.

⁶⁵ Kirkpatrick, 412-413. She uses Heidegger's "Hölderlin's Hymn."

⁶⁶ As Brian Robertson in "Antigone: Diabolical or Demonic," *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 6.1 (2102), <file:///Users/medine/Downloads/582-1190-1-SM.pdf>. explains, offering his reading of Antigone, in contrast, as excess, Žižek takes up Lacan's argument that true ethical action can be conceived only in

terms separate from communal moral values but “in terms of a *diabolical* desire, that is, in terms of a desire so stringent and uncompromising in its ethical fidelity that it effectively disrupts (or breaks apart: *dia-bolon*) the moral standards shared by a community,” revealing an “‘inhuman’ subject.” Žižek, 26.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Matic Kocijančič’s discussion of Žižek’s own rewriting of the *Antigone*, “First as Creon, then as Chorus: Slavoj Žižek’s *Antigone*,” *Interlitteraria* 25:1 (2020): 231-245.

⁶⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (New York: Continuum Books 2005), 333.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 232, 235.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 251.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Post-Colony,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62.1 (1992): 3-37. P. 11.

⁷⁸ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2001), 206.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Slavoj Žižek “Introduction,” *Antigone* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), xxiii.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Sarah De Sanctis, “From Psychoanalysis to Politics: Antigone as Revolutionary in Judith Butler and Žižek,” *Opticon* 1826 14: 27-36. p. 34.

⁸⁵ Mark Griffith, “Psychoanalyzing Antigone,” in *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Wilmer and Aurone Zukauskaitė (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 110-134.

⁸⁶ Robertson, 36. He invokes Kierkegaard's concept of "muteness" (5).

⁸⁷ Žižek, *Interrogating*, 386.

⁸⁸ Žižek, 205.

⁸⁹ Žižek, "Introduction," xxii.

⁹⁰ Žižek, *Interrogating*, 446.

⁹¹ Robertson, 11.

⁹² Rachman, *The Age of the Strongman*, 8, 1.

⁹³ Ibid., 12. See also: Henri Giroux, "The Culture of Cruelty in Trump's America," Truthout (March 22, 2017), <https://truthout.org/articles/the-culture-of-cruelty-in-trump-s-america/>.

Rachman writes that Strongmen have contempt for the rule of law, suggesting that the law stands in the way of what needs to be done since it is controlled by the elites in an obscuring way; therefore, they attack judicial independence. At the same time, they use the law as a weapon.

Strongman leaders make the populist claim that they are representing and that they love "the real people," with whom they have a "unique rapport," against the elites, and preside over a politics driven by fear and nationalism. This allows them to deploy master signifiers—like "Build the Wall" or "Get Brexit Done"—that suggest that "there are simple solutions for complex forces." They desire to be admired for their strength, particularly as it stands between the people and "shadowy" external enemies.⁹³ This strength feeds the sense that they should have power for life, because only they can bring back the good times again, and they build that power by "merging the interests of the strongman with [those of] the state, letting family members be appointed to key offices, for example."

Strongman leaders are adept at using media, particularly social media. This direct, personal connection lets the strongman, as Giroux puts it, empty language of any ethics and responsibility and to "operate in the service of violence."

⁹⁴ Rachman., 13.

⁹⁵ Giroux.

⁹⁶ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 53. On hate, see pp. 64ff.

⁹⁷ The curse originates with the family's actions but is the work of the gods. Everything that happens in these plays (until Oedipus's apparent apotheosis at Colonus) is a function of the multi-generational curse put on the family by the gods who are supposed to be a necessary part of a more humane political environment. They are, but maybe Sophocles is suggesting that perhaps "not yet." We might think of the curse as a focus on choice, in an African way in which the gods bestow fate. As Akinloye Ojo explains, discussing an African system which includes reincarnation, we all are fated—given a destiny by the gods, but circumstances determine how we can carry out those fates, making them incomplete, imperfect, and, perhaps, even impossible in a lifetime. Gods act through human actors who are faced with choices in

concrete situations. In the end, in Greek tragedies, when human beings fail, the gods enter and reinforce the order.

⁹⁸ Markell, 14-15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3595657>.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvízd'ala*, Trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Random House, 1991), 128-129.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰² Ibid, 59-60.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁴ Havel *Disturbing the Peace*, 130.

¹⁰⁵ Timothy Snyder, "Introduction," Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*. Trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Press, 1978), xvi.

¹⁰⁶ Václav, *Powerless*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 29-31.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 49.

¹¹⁰ VÁCLAV Benda, Milan, ŠIMEČKA, IVAN M. JIROUS, JIŘÍ DIENSTBIER, VÁCLAV HAVEL, LADISLAV HEJDÁNEK, JAN ŠIMSA, and Paul Wilson, "Parallel Polis, or An Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe: An Inquiry," *Social Research* 55: 1/2 (1988): 211-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970497>, p.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 217.

¹¹² Pankaj Mishra, "Vaclav Havel's Lessons on How to Create a 'Parallel Polis,' *The New Yorker*, 8 February 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/vaclav-havels-lessons-on-how-to-create-a-parallel-polis>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 218.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 221.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 237.

¹¹⁷ Mishra.

¹¹⁸ Mishra.

¹¹⁹ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 181.

¹²⁰ Mishra.

¹²¹ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 181.

¹²² Ibid., 199.

¹²³ Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1956).

¹²⁴ Mishra.

¹²⁵ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 200.

¹²⁶ Mishra.

¹²⁷ “Pericles to the Athenians,” quoted in *The European War: January to March 1916* (*The New York Times Current History*), Vol. 6 (New York: The New York Times Co., 1917), 756.

¹²⁸ Thurman, *Disinherited*, 96.

¹²⁹ Zeitlin, 84.