

PREVIVAL

It's really important to get somehow into the mind and make it move somewhere it has never moved before. That happens partly because the material is mysterious or unknown but mostly because of the way you push the material around from word to word in a sentence. . . . Given whatever material we're going to talk about, and we all know what it is, how can we move within it in a way we've never moved before, mentally? That seems like the most exciting thing to do with your head.

— Anne Carson

I thought I was done with Antigone. I have taught courses about her. I have given conference papers about her. I have written articles and a book about her. After all of that, after being together for more than a decade, I thought I was finished with her.

I was wrong.

I am not done with her. Or she is not done with me—with us. She, it seems, returns like the repressed, as powerfully and as predictably. She perdures and endures, insists and persists. After nearly 2,500 years, she keeps coming back, or we keep coming back to her, each time with a new question. She persists as a question, one that insists, calls for response.

Why? Why, after millennia of rereading, does Antigone keep returning? Why does she continue to call for revivals?

And why respond? Why revive Antigone? More pressingly, why revive Antigone now?

I don't have an answer to any of these opening questions. I don't have *an* answer. I have many, potential answers. But (full disclosure upfront) none will ultimately answer any of these questions, not completely, not once and for all. Antigone insists and persists—and resists closure. She is not an answer. She is a question. She remains in question.

She remains *poly*: many, multiple. (She, like Walt Whitman, contains multitudes.)¹ She is polytheistic, revering multiple gods. She is polysemic, meaning multiply, even excessively. She means too much. She is polyphasic and polyvalent, occurring in multiple stages and combining many things. She is polymorphic and polymorphous, coming in many forms and remaining formative, in formation. She is even, to borrow Sigmund Freud's phrase, polymorphously perverse. She is polysexual, performing masculinity as well as multiple femininities. She is polyzoontic, a neologism that enfolds *poly*, *zōē*, *zōon*, and *ontic*: plurality, living, being.

Antigone is polygraphic. A polygraph is a machine that measures vital signs, such as heart rate (and hence blood flow), as a means of discerning truth. A polygraph interprets vitality as a way of interpreting, determining, assigning validity. Antigone performs this polygraphic operation, diagnosing or deciding on what is valid based on what is vital.

She is also etymologically poly-graphic. She engenders poly-graphics: multi-writing(s). These poly-graphics call for a *poly* hermeneutics, pursuing many expositional paths and accommodating multiple interpretations—and reinterpretations. These expositional paths cross disciplinary terrains. They induce reinterpretations that are philological, philosophical, psychological, political, historical, cultural, dramaturgical, sexual, religious, or some combination of these.²

These rereadings, reinterpretations, are *poly*: many and multiple—too many, too multiple, to count. And they continue to come. With every re-turn, Antigone re-calls for re-readings.

Each return brings a reinterpretation. Each revival recasts Antigone. After more than two millennia, she has acquired quite

a repertoire of roles. She is polyperformative, cast and recast in so many roles, in so many contexts. Antigone has performed as feminist and antifeminist, humanist and antihumanist, human and inhuman, masculine and feminine, defiant and cooperative, aristocratic and democratic, sovereignty-usurping and sovereignty-rejecting, death-desiring and life-loving. These reviving, often conflicting, recastings indicate her persisting relevance.

(In the last two centuries, Antigone's revivals recur with greater frequency. They have resulted in what some have called an Antigone effect, and even Antigone fever.)

Some of her most notable roles come from castings by modern philosophical master-minds. She plays a dialectically sublated sister for G. W. F. Hegel and an exemplarily homeless human for Martin Heidegger. For Jacques Lacan, she portrays an ethical extreme who lives in "unbearable splendor" between two deaths. Jacques Derrida casts her as "the system's vomit." Under Judith Butler's direction, she performs a gender-troubling, kinship-destabilizing "occasion for a new field of the human."³

Among these stagings, only Hegel's locates Antigone. Only Hegel's puts Antigone in her place: the *oikos*, the place of "womankind" (*Weiblichkeit*). In Hegel's *mise-en-scène*, Antigone stays at home, in the dark. On these other stages, Antigone does not stay anywhere. She is dislocated and dislocating: homeless (Heidegger), excessive (Lacan), undigestible (Derrida), inhuman (Butler).

Luce Irigaray dislocates Antigone again—and again. She repeatedly recasts Antigone (especially Hegel's Antigone) throughout her textual corpus, from 1974's *Speculum of the Other Woman* through 2013's *In the Beginning, She Was* (a title that seems apropos of Antigone). Between these texts come other recastings, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, *Sexes and Genealogies*, *Thinking the Difference*, *I Love to You*, and *To Be Two*.

Antigone's reappearances in these texts are not simple repetitions. Irigaray creatively recasts Antigone in a variety of roles, but without relinquishing or erasing her prior castings of Antigone. These castings include as an unsettling sister; as a respectful subject

of earthly and cosmic orders, of the dead and the divine; as a key ancestor in engendering feminine genealogies; as a lover of life; and as an enduring example (whether model or warning) for women.

In Irigaray's *mise-en-scène*, Antigone enacts these roles, each resolutely feminine, on sexual difference's stages of ontology, genealogy, and ethics. Antigone's enduring relevance means that Antigone repeatedly returns to these stages. In revival after revival, Antigone replays her roles—or plays new ones. She is not yet offstage. Ontology, genealogy, and ethics are not done with Antigone, either.

Nor will they be, according to Irigaray. Antigone's example, she writes, "is always to be meditated upon as a figure of History and as an identity or identification for many young girls or women living today" (and, I would add, not only for girls and women).⁴ Irigaray exemplifies her exhortation. She will, she writes, repeatedly "return, once again, to the figure of Antigone because of her relevance [*à cause de son actualité*]," with each return "reviving the message of Antigone and pursuing its embodiment in our culture."⁵

Just as Antigone keeps coming back, Irigaray keeps coming back to Antigone. Irigaray keeps returning to Antigone. She keeps reviving Antigone and her message by recasting her, again and again, in this range of roles.

But what if Antigone played other roles?

The text that follows turns on this question. It unfolds as an extended response to this question.

This question contains or engenders other questions. Why might Antigone play other roles? What other roles might she play? In what other ways might she be cast? What effects might her playing other roles have?

These dramatic questions are also ethical questions. They are *other* questions: questions of otherness, alterity, disparity, divergence, difference, even differance. They ask, dramatically: What roles other than those she already plays might Antigone play? They also ask, ethically: What roles of others, of animated otherness, might Antigone play? She plays an other, always a *sexuate*

other, in many of her repertorial roles: feminine, sororal, homeless, excessive, undigestible, inhuman, as well as respectful, ancestral, exemplary. She performs disruptive differences that desire real differentiation.

Real differentiation requires, in each case, a real, robust difference. It requires more than being an other defined as a lesser version of a single, monolithic ideal. It requires being other than a not-A (or not-quite-A) to an ideal A. A not-A, which Irigaray calls an “other of the same,” is a reductive, hierarchically devalued, illusory other. A not-A is a merely mimetic mirror image.

Antigone is no mere mirror image. She does not act as an other of the same. She enacts an *other* other. In doing so, she performs robust alterities, irreducible differences.

She performs them from the start. Her differences are sexual, familial, filial, religious, legal, political, and biological.

Antigone and her siblings (her brothers, Eteokles and Polyneikes, and her sister, Ismene) are children of an incestuous union, between Oedipus and Jokasta. She insists on these kinship bonds, and on her piety, by insisting on doing her divinely ordained sisterly duty: to bury Polyneikes’s dead body (twice). By doing so, she transgresses the edict of Kreon, her uncle and Thebes’s king, forbidding Polyneikes’s burial. Antigone acts according to laws other than Kreon’s. Her act and her refusal to repent for it render her politically other. They ultimately render her biotically other, when (as her punishment) Kreon has her buried alive. Left to die, she instead hangs herself in her tomb. Her suicide engenders the suicides of Haimon, Kreon’s son and Antigone’s fiancé, and then of Eurydike, Kreon’s wife.

Antigone’s *other* performances insist ethically. She, Irigaray writes, “asks [*demande*] to be considered as really an other, irreducible to the masculine subject” or any related homology.⁶ She calls for other relations, with real others.

So, what if Antigone played *other* roles? What if Antigone played roles of *other* others? What other roles of otherness might she perform? What other others might she portray, or become?

To respond to these other questions, I stage three revivals of Antigone. These revivals are not reprisals. They do not mount new versions of old productions. To do so would occasion reproductions rather than revivals. Such reproductions would be more imitative than imaginative, more mimetic than poetic. I suggest something different: three other revivals, of other Antigones. I recast Antigone as an animal, an angel, and a future.

By responding to these other questions, I respond to my opening question: why revive Antigone, and why now? Recasting Antigone in other roles shows her enduring relevance, now. It evinces her *poly*-ness. It intimates why she keeps returning, persisting, calling for revival.

Why revive Antigone now? Because she can intervene now as never before. Particularly recast in these other roles, Antigone can intervene in “the human” and in the humanities.

She intervenes at the edges. Antigone tests “the human”: its pliability, its mutability, its boundary. In her other recastings, Antigone presses the human. She presses on the human. She pushes it to its limits, seeing how far it will go, how long it will last, before fracturing.

In doing so, she unearths its limits’ past movements. These human limits have moved before, expanding from their androcentric delimitations to include differences. These differences, these others, include—at least ostensibly, nominally—women (sexual others), ethnicities (“racial” and genealogical others), slaves (social and financial others). They include primitives (cultural and religious others) and degenerates (mental and moral others). They include cyborgs (mechanical and organic others) and zombies (mortal and medical others) and many other others. This list is necessarily incomplete because these human limits remain on the move.

How far will they move? Reviving Antigone offers a way of seeing. Her revivals have tracked these moves. Antigone has been cast as almost every one of these others. She has been and is cast as inhuman.

This casting is nothing new. It is part of the original casting, the original staging, by Sophokles in 442 BCE. When Antigone

makes her first public appearance in the play that bears her name, the chorus greets her by calling her “monstrous [*teras*].”⁷ This interjection immediately follows the choral Ode to Man, a hymn to humanism—the first in occidental literature. Having just established and extolled the human, the chorus encounters Antigone and cries “inhuman.” (The chorus names Antigone negatively, as not human.)

My revivals of Antigone as animal, angel, and future also cast Antigone as inhuman. But they name “inhuman” positively, specifically: as “other than human,” not “less than human”; as *alter*, not *sub*. They ascribe Antigone identities rather than refusing her one. These inhuman identities push against human borders, portending potential border breeches. As animal, angel, and future, Antigone tests the human from the *other* side.

By testing the human, Antigone tests humanism. She is a test case for humanism’s resilience and renaissance, however maximal or minimal, however muscular or meek. Her testing revivals reveal humanism’s current contours, its contemporary challenges. They uncover humanism’s relations to its resistant, dis-ordering offspring: antihumanism, transhumanism, posthumanism. They test for what “human” names *now*, and for what others remain unnamed.

Her “human” interventions, through her “inhuman” revivals, intervene in the humanities. They cross disciplinary boundaries. They mix methods. They join conversations about animals, religions, sexualities, biopolitics. They interlace these fields of critical inquiry. They interpose phenomenological, ethical, and ontological queries.

The revivals that I stage here can help to revive the humanities. They can recall their vitality, their import, for shaping and reshaping real relations, reflexive and reciprocal, with humans and with others. Other Antigones make way for other humanities, for other human-animal and human-divine relations. Other Antigones engender other sexualities, and other sexual differences. Other Antigones herald other ways of reading Antigone and other ways of reading others *through* Antigone.

Her revivals’ human and humanistic effects recall my opening double question (why revive Antigone, now?) by responding

to it: because Antigone is undone. She returns, calls for revivals, remains, because she remains undone. She is, still, undone. She is, still, unmastered, untamed, unconfined, untied, unfinished. She is unbounded and unbinding.

Antigone remains loose, on the loose, loosening. She loosens. She loose-ends. Antigone is a loose(ning) woman. She undoes. She is undone because she is, still, undoing. Loose-ending, unbinding, undoing are her effects. They are the effects of her interventions. They are what her revivals perform.

To stage these revivals, to unfold these other recastings, I offer something a bit loose. I tender something loosened, or loosen(d)ed. I venture something unbinding and unbounded. In doing so, I resound Irigaray's methodological disclosure, that "what I am going to say to you, or confide in you, today, will remain rather primary, loose [*délié*]. Deliberately [*délibérement*], and also time's fault. . . . So I will speak more or less freely [*librement*], offering, to your associations or interpretations, some of my experiences, trials, associations, still nocturnal or oneiric."⁸

"Loose" does not mean lax or lacking care. "Loose," "*délié*," means not tied up. It means not "tied up," as in a scene of bondage. "Loose" means unmastered, untamed, unvanquished. It also means not "tied up" as a package or a present or a totality would be. "Loose" means undone. It means to still have loose ends.

I have not tied up all the loose ends. I have left many undone. I have left open questions, as potential places for further exploration. Loose ends abound in my experiences, trials, associations of Antigone.

What follows, woven of these experiences, trials, associations, is an essay about Antigone. It is an essay about otherness, about other kinds of others, about how others count according to human valuative metrics. It is an essay about ontology and ethics, entwined.

What follows is an essay: an attempt, an experience, a trial, a venture, an adventure. It is unconventional. It ventures to forego

some scholarly protocols, such as reviews of secondary literatures done for their own sakes. It does not have a footnote fetish. It does not wade into the tide pools of internecine academic skirmishes.

It does not announce, or take, an “Antigonean turn,” akin to so many scholarly turns: linguistic, pictorial, material, corporeal, affective, performative, postmodern, posthuman, animal, global, biopolitical, ethical, ontological, and undoubtedly others. (We need not “turn” to Antigone. She will return to us.) It does not explicitly address “Antigone studies” (which, to my horror, exists) or attempt to turn Antigone into one more “area” of studies.

I refuse to turn Antigone into an adjective. She is no modifier. She remains a proper name, which resounds. (I might consider turning Antigone into a verb if I could know what “to Antigone” might mean, what this Antigone-action would be or do—since Antigone does so many things . . .)

What follows is an essay. It is imaginative—inventive, innovative, excentric, definitely queer, potentially idiosyncratic, possibly zany. It is imaginative, which means it is not primarily exegetical or commentarial. It asks not “what is?” but “what if?” It turns on an imaginative question. It takes a leap, speculates. It remains loose, and it loosen(d)s. It is a risk. It is, in Irigaray’s words, a “risk that risks life itself. Exceeding it barely by a breath.”⁹ It undertakes the risk of a revival, a revitalization, maybe even a kind of resurrection.

In undertaking this risk, this excentric venture, I take my cue from a passage of Irigaray’s: “to stage the stakes of this work, I will once again take the figure of Antigone as my point of departure [*pour mettre en scène l’enjeu du travail, je repartirai de la figure d’Antigone*].”¹⁰ This essay is, in many ways, a sustained rereading of this passage. It is a performance of this passage—a passage of revivals: of returning, restarting, departing again. (There is, interestingly, no such thing as a “vival.” There is only a *revival*.) Each of the revivals that I stage takes Antigone as its point of departure. Each revival departs, once again, from Antigone. Departing again is also departing from: a difference or deviation, an other route.

Each risky revival of Antigone redeparts from her by staging a conversation. Each conversation engages different discourses, different subjects, different conversation partners. Across all three conversations, Irigaray remains my principal interlocutor. My revivals of Antigone recast her in other, potential, Irigarayan roles: animal, angel, future. These revivals become double revivals: of Antigone and Irigaray, each through the other. Their revivals open both to possible (and, remember, rather loose) recastings, rereadings, re-visions. They open new hermeneutic paths for following, or pursuing, Antigone and Irigaray.

Why revive Antigone now? Because doing so by way of Irigaray presents new revivals, new recastings, new imaginative possibilities for Antigone. And we need them. As Bonnie Honig writes, “we need a new Antigone.”¹¹ We need new Antigones, in the plural. We need, Honig writes, “to pluralize Antigone, develop new readings, incite new performances,” through which she “is re-birthed by later receptions and alien contexts.”¹² We need new, other Antigones.

Responding to this call for a new Antigone, or new Antigones, means that I do not stage a mere reprisal of Irigaray’s Antigone(s). Such a reprisal would replicate a sequence of scenes. It would involve set pieces—condensed, digested, reductive repetitions—from Irigaray’s readings of Antigone. Scene 1: “The Eternal Irony of the Community.” Scene 2: “An Ethics of Sexual Difference.” Scene 3: “The Forgotten Mystery of Female Ancestry.” Scene 4: “She Before the King.” And so on.

These double revivals revitalize Antigone through Irigaray—and Irigaray through Antigone. Irigaray offers other ways of recasting Antigone. Antigone, in turn, offers new ways of rereading Irigaray. Together, they make way for imagining new figurations of human-nonhuman (human-animal and human-divine) distinctions and relations.

These new figurations come between. They arrive in *between* spaces, and through *between* figures, of Antigone and Irigaray: an animal (between human and nonhuman), an angel (between

human and divine), an awaited event (between now and then). These refiguring relations are *between* relations. They are *inter*: *inter alios*, *inter modos*, *inter vitas*, *inter naturas*. They are *inter-active*. They happen in thresholds. They loosen(d) in between.

They loosen(d) by questioning. Redepartures from Antigone proceed through questions: this essay's opening question (Why revive Antigone, now?) and its pivotal question (What if Antigone played other roles?). Responding to these questions restages "the stakes of this work"—which are vital. Why revive and recast Antigone? Because doing so discloses new ontological and ethical conceptions of life and the living.

These conceptions follow from variations on a valuative question: who or what "counts," and how? What counts as life? What counts as human? Who counts as human? Who else counts? Who (else) counts as a who? Who counts among the living? How much do they count? How might their counting recount "us"?

These are living questions. They are vital. They, like Antigone, persist, insist, call for response.

"To stage the stakes of this work, I will once again take the figure of Antigone as my point of departure."¹³ I depart, once again, from Antigone. I depart from other Antigones, to stage *other* revivals.

I am definitely not done with her.