ABSTRACT

GENDER CONFUSION: 
SEX AND SUJECTION IN ANOUILH’S ANTIGONE

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This thesis explores the conflicts between sex and gender, and the part they take in subjection. Gender is performative and subjectifies sex, which in turns subjectifies the body. The subject cannot escape the power by which she or he is subjectified, and the body experiences several layers of subjection. Using Jean Anouilh’s Antigone as a literary example, viewed through the lens of the critical writings of Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, sex is shown to be ineluctable, and gender a strong subjecting power. Antigone proves to be trapped by her sex; she cannot avoid the divine law. This thesis shows the problematic binary societal understanding of gender; because of the ineluctability of sex, individuals are not able to define their own genders, but instead have to perform their genders as the society expects them to do.
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Gender Confusion: Sex and Subjection in Anouilh’s Antigone

Introduction

The most famous version of Antigone is probably Sophocles’s, written around 442 B.C. The best known contemporary French version is a play by Jean Anouilh, staged for the first time in 1944 in Paris. The two texts share the same basic plot, but have important differences as well. Not only are the historical contexts different—Anouilh’s play was written during World War II and aimed at encouraging the French Resistance against the Nazi invasion—but the purpose of the play and the intended reaction of the audience were different as well.

Antigone’s mythical genealogy is incestuous, following the same pattern as most mythical genealogies. She is at the same time Oedipus’s daughter and half-sister, since they have the same mother, Jocasta. Antigone also has two brothers and one sister with the same mother and father. Eteocles, Polynices, Ismene, and Antigone are at the same time brothers and sisters, uncle or aunt, and nephews or nieces. Antigone’s fiancé Haemon is also her cousin. Finally, Antigone has an uncle, Creon, who is Haemon’s father, and Jocasta’s brother. Eurydice is Creon’s wife, and Haemon’s mother.

The two plays have the main characters in common: Antigone, Creon, Ismene, Haemon, Eurydice, and the dead Polynices and Eteocles. They also have a chorus. However, each play has specific characters as well. Sophocles introduced Tiresias, the prophet of Thebes, while Anouilh added Antigone’s nurse. The same story is told: Polynices and Eteocles kill each other in a fratricide fight for the throne of Thebes. Creon becomes king after their death. He decides to give Eteocles a proper funeral but forbids the burial of Polynices. Antigone decides nonetheless to bury her brother Polynices. After being arrested, she is imprisoned in a cave. In Sophocles’s version, Creon decides to follow the advice of Tiresias: he should free Antigone, and bury Polynices. He does both of these actions, but in the wrong order, allowing enough time for Antigone to kill herself. Her suicide leads her fiancé and Eurydice, Haemon’s mother, to commit suicide as well. In Anouilh’s play, Creon tries to convince Antigone to remain quiet so he can save her from being executed, but she refuses and forces her uncle to condemn her, killing herself before Creon can execute her.

Another difference between the two plays is the question of gender, or more specifically, enactment of gender roles and performing acts that go against these roles. In Sophocles’s version, Antigone’s gender does not seem ambiguous at first: she is a woman. However, soon, several references are made to Antigone’s gender. For instance, Ismene says: “We must rather bear in mind, first that we are women, not meant to fight against men” (Sophocles 25, emphasis mine). Later in the play, Haemon says about Antigone: “But I can hear in the darkness how the city mourns for this girl, saying that she, who deserves it least of all women is dying the worst of deaths for the most glorious of deeds” (Sophocles 79, emphasis mine). Her feminine gender is explicitly stated. However, through her actions, Antigone is referred to as a man by Creon who rejects this idea: “Now I swear that she is a man and I am not, if she is to prevail in this and go unpunished. No . . . she and her sister shall not avoid the worst of deaths” (61). Creon punishes Antigone, he condemns her, and he does not let her be a man.

Moreover, as Judith Butler explains in Antigone’s Claim, Antigone is not only a woman:

Antigone is to love no man except the man who is dead, but in some sense, she is also a man. And this is also the title that Oedipus bestows upon her, a gift or reward for her loyalty. When Oedipus is banished, Antigone cares for him, and in her loyalty, is referred to as a “man” (aner) . . . she is at once cursed with a loyalty to a dead man, a loyalty that makes her manly, compels her to acquire the attribute that carries his
[Oedipus’s] approbation such that desire and identification are acutely confounded in a melancholic bind. (62)

In Anouilh’s version, Antigone’s gender seems to be an issue as well:
ISMENE (throwing herself at ANTIGONE). Antigone! Please! It’s all right for men to die for their ideas. But you’re a girl.
ANTIGONE (through clenched teeth). Only a girl! The tears I’ve shed because of it! (Anouilh 13-14)

Sophocles’s Antigone was analyzed by Hegel and Luce Irigaray who was greatly influenced by Hegel’s work. Hegel explores Antigone through what he defines as human and divine laws. The reason why Antigone decides to bury Polynices is to follow divine law. In Sophocles’s play, Antigone tells Creon that she did not follow his orders because they did not come from Zeus: “Yes, for it was not Zeus who proclaimed that edict to me . . . and I did not suppose that your decrees had such power that you, a mortal, could outrun the gods’ unwritten and unfailing rules” (Sophocles 59). The only law that she is willing to execute is the law that comes from the gods, laws that are “not of today or yesterday but for ever, and no one knows when they first appeared” (59). Antigone refuses to follow human law. Kelly Oliver explains Hegel’s account on divine and human law, to which she refers as civil law, in her article “Antigone’s Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit.” She writes:

The tension between the divine law and the civil law is figured by Hegel, following Sophocles, as a tension between feminine and masculine. For Hegel, woman is the keeper of the family and the divine law, while man is the citizen of the community subject to, and maker of, the civil law. Antigone acts on the divine law which commands her to bury her brother, while Creon as king embodies the civil law . . . Hegel follows Sophocles in identifying the divine law with the inner feelings of the individual (Moralität) and its conflicting principle, the civil law, with the outer behavior of citizens of a community (Sittlichkeit). Woman embodies the divine individual law, and man (through woman's work) embodies the civil law of the community. (77)

In Sophocles’s Antigone, Creon ignores the dichotomy between private and public spheres, and human and divine laws. His decision to first execute Antigone results from following human law, regardless of the consequences. The private sphere has no appeal to Creon, ruling his kingdom publically, without showing any emotion for his family, for his own son, Haemon, or for Antigone. Human and divine laws conflict in the public sphere, where human law ends victorious over divine law and the family, at a very heavy cost for Creon. However, what should have been a decision for the public, in favor of the community—the punishment of a traitor— truly turns into discord between human and divine law, without any consideration for public and private spheres.

In Anouilh’s Antigone, the conflict between the public and private sphere is also found when Creon decides to apply human law. However, Creon’s decision to keep Polynices’s body unburied is not only questioned by Antigone, but also by Creon himself. He refuses to apply his decision as long as he can, that is to say as long as the crowd knows nothing of Antigone’s crime. This confusion between public and private, and human and divine laws creates a conflict between human and divine laws. This conflict is not resolved until Antigone dies, which has consequences in Creon’s private sphere. In the modern version of Antigone,

1 ISMENE, se jette contre elle.
Antigone ! Je t’en supplie ! C’est bon pour les hommes de croire aux idées et de mourir pour elles. Toi tu es une fille.
ANTIGONE, les dents serrées. Une fille, oui. Ai-je assez pleuré d’être une fille ! (30-31)
private sphere prevails over the two laws, and over public sphere to the point where Creon has no other choice but to give in, and act as a ruler for the city.

The distinction made by Hegel between human and divine law becomes problematic when we note that Hegel linked each law to one of the two sexes: the divine law pertains to women, the human law to men (Hegel 280). He explains that “human law . . . in its activity in general is the manhood of the community, in its real and effective activity is the government . . . it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it an internal enemy—womankind in general” (288). Women and divine law are the common enemies of the community. Hegel created a closed system provoking conflicts that seem unavoidable.

When Antigone decides to disrespect Creon’s orders and to bury Polynices, Creon has no other choice but to have her arrested and executed. In both Sophocles’s and Anouilh’s play, Antigone commits suicide. In Anouilh’s play, Creon tries to save Antigone from her arrest and execution to come. He wants her to go back to her room; he can make the guards disappear. But Antigone fights back and constrains her uncle to bury her alive. She takes her own life soon after. In Sophocles’s play, Creon feels remorse for condemning her and follows Tiresias’s advice to free Antigone. He concludes he does not want to have her executed, but he arrives too late: Antigone has already killed herself.

The conflict between divine and human law, assigned by Hegel to the opposite sexes, brings up the question of the difference between sex and gender. The Oxford English Dictionary defines sex as: “either of the two divisions of organic beings distinguished as male and female respectively; the males or the females . . . viewed collectively.” The article on gender states: “In modern (especially feminist) use, a euphemism for the sex of a human being, often intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological, distinctions between the sexes.” In this definition and in everyday language, gender is confused with sex, and if a distinction is made, gender is defined as the “social and cultural” aspect of sex. In Anouilh’s play, Antigone and Ismene both refer to the difference between being a girl and being a boy. Antigone says: “How easy it must be not to have foolish thoughts, with all these lovely sleek locks hanging round your head!” (10). Antigone is envious of the hair of her sister who thinks correctly, as a girl should think. This implicitly gives Antigone’s point of view. She desires to look like her sister, like a girl, to be able to think like one. Ismene is the personification of divine law in Antigone’s eyes, Ismene’s long hair signifying her identification with womanhood and divine law. It is natural for Ismene to think ‘the right way.’ As Antigone tells Ismene that she is lucky to have feminine hair, she caresses Ismene’s hair; she is sincere in her compliment to her sister. She wants her sister to remain beautiful because “it’s a comfort to me this morning, your being pretty” (10). Antigone has the certitude that Ismene is a woman, and, as such, if we transpose Hegel’s account on divine law to Anouilh’s play, Ismene is supposedly a good subject of divine law; she does not want to change her perception of Ismene. Ismene tries to convince Antigone that she is indeed a girl and that she should start thinking like one: “It’s all right for men to die for their ideas. But you’re a girl” (13). The difference between Antigone’s sex and her gender is illustrated: she is a girl, but thinks and acts like a man.

2 “Comme cela doit être facile de ne pas penser de bêtises avec toutes ces belles mèches lisses et bien ordonnées autour de la tête!” (Anouilh 23).
3 “Cela me rassure ce matin, que tu sois belle” (23).
4 “C’est bon pour les hommes de croire aux idées et de mourir pour elles. Toi tu es une fille” (30).
If we consider that gender was a notion that already existed in Sophocles’s time, that is to say that one was not only female or male, but female and a woman, or male and a man, then sex determines gender, and no escape is possible. Gender is binary, just as is sex; gender depends entirely on sex to be expressed. In Sophocles’s play, Creon states the fact that Antigone is not a man; he is the man. Butler writes: “both Antigone’s act of burial and her verbal defiance become the occasion on which she is called manly by the chorus, Creon, and the messengers. Indeed, Creon, scandalized by her defiance, resolved that while he lives ‘no woman shall rule’ (51), suggesting that if she rules, he will die” (“Antigone’s Claim” 8).

However, as we have shown before, Sophocles’s Antigone’s gender is not clear-cut. As for Anouilh, Antigone’s gender does not seem to be fixed either. As we already said, Antigone’s gender is not totally feminine.

However, gender appears to be a crucial point in both plays. Considering the similarity of the gender issue in Sophocles and in Anouilh’s Antigone, to what extent does the distinction between divine and human law apply to Anouilh’s play? I propose to explore the distinction between gender and sex, and more particularly the subjectification process that comes into play in Anouilh’s Antigone. Subjectification can be defined as that which subjectifies, the process by which the individual becomes a subject. Subjectification is different from subjection. Subjection is when one is subjected, meaning already a subject, after experiencing subjectification. I will also study the paradox Antigone has to face in relation to her gender: she is preserved through death. Similarly, she has to fight against her uncle to be able to obey divine law. She succeeds even though she cannot bury her brother, for she follows divine law as well as human law.

The historical context in which Anouilh rewrote Antigone is a clear indicator of what the author had in mind when he questioned the notion of humanity, among others. The atrocities committed during World War II, as well as French Resistance and Nazi occupation are implicit in this play and should be kept in mind for an analysis exploring the historical weight of this work. However, the question I want to explore is the place of gender within the play. I will not hint at the questions raised by the historical context, and the politics implied by the characters.
Chapter I: Human and Divine Laws Corrupted.

In “The Eternal Irony of the Community,” Luce Irigaray studies several kinds of relationships between men and women, including the relationship between brothers and sisters, and the articulation of divine and human law. Highly influenced by Hegel, she explores what human and divine laws are and how they interact. Women, who are in charge of divine law, have to bury men: “In essence, woman has to take it upon herself over and over again, regardless of circumstances, to bury this corpse that man becomes in his pure state” (215).5 Irigaray then adds: “Man is still subject to (natural) death, of course, but what matters is to make a movement of the mind out of this accident that befalls the single individual and, in its raw state, drives consciousness out of its own country, cutting off that return into the self which allows it to become self-consciousness” (215).6 By burying men, women allow men to find their own self-consciousness, which links them to human law, the law to which they belong. Human law, according to Hegel, is linked to individuality, which “has the meaning of self-consciousness in general, not of a particular, contingent consciousness” (Hegel 267).

Man is supposed to sacrifice his life for the city: “man must strive to make this negativeness [the death of man] into an ethical action by sacrificing his life for the city” (Irigaray 215).7 Woman has to be the link between the dead and the dead himself. She has to protect him from total destruction:

woman must be that external and effective mediation that reconciles the dead man with himself by taking upon herself the operation of destruction that the becoming of mind cannot manage without. Thus woman takes this dead being into her own place on his return to the self—a being that is universal, admittedly, but also singularly drained of strength, empty and yielded passively up to others. She must protect him both from all base and irrational individuality and from the forces of abstract matter, which are now more powerful than he. (Irigaray 215)8

Antigone is thus supposed to bury her brother to protect him from “all base and irrational individuality” which could be embodied by Creon, who prohibits the burial of Polynices. The “forces of abstract matter” are the sun and the heat accelerating the decomposition of the body. It is Antigone’s duty as woman to protect her brother and his body. Following Hegel, Irigaray defines this as divine law, a positive ethical action vis-à-vis individuality (215).

5 “Elle doit essentiellement, s’occuper à inhumer encore et toujours, en dépit de toute condition, y compris sa vie à elle ce cadavre que devient l’homme dans son pur être” (Irigaray 267).
6 “L’homme est certes encore soumis à la mort (naturelle), mais ce qui importe est de transformer en mouvement de l’esprit cet accident qui survient à l’individu singulier et qui, dans son caractère naturel, exile la conscience d’elle-même, la coupant de son retour en soi pour qu’elle y devienne conscience de soi” (Irigaray 267).
7 “La virilité doit travailler à faire de cette négativité [the death of man] une action éthique en sacrifiant sa vie pour la cité” (Irigaray 267).
8 “La féminité doit être cette médiation effective et extérieure qui réconcilie le mort avec lui-même, en prenant sur elle l’opération de destruction dont le devenir de l’esprit ne peut faire l’économie. Recevant donc à son retour en soi, chez elle, cet être mort, universel sans doute mais singulièrement dépourvu de force, vide et abandonné passivement à autrui, elle doit le protéger de toute basse individualité irrationnelle et des forces de la matière abstraite qui désormais sont plus puissantes que lui” (Irigaray 267).

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In Anouilh's play, after Antigone is caught for the first time, the choir announces that Antigone can now reveal who she really is: “Now it’s beginning. Little Antigone has been caught—and handcuffed. She can be herself at last” (26). Antigone will be able to be herself for the first time, which implies that she acted a part until then. These words echo the beginning of the play when the choir told us that she would have to play her role till the end, that is to say until she fulfils her responsibilities. There is a tension between what Antigone is expected to do and what she does. She should bury her brother, she tries to, but she fails.

Hegel defines human and divine law according to sex, and not gender: “Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law; or conversely, the two ethical powers themselves give themselves an individual existence and actualize themselves in the two sexes” (280). Irigaray, when explaining the two concepts, does not refer to the two sexes. Instead, she uses the word “féminité” (267) to talk about divine law, which does not imply a notion of sex, but of gender.

In Gender Trouble, one of Butler's first points is to explicate the difference between sex and gender:

The distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex. (Butler, “Gender” 6)

Butler puts into question “the unity of the subject.” Antigone is an example of the disunity the subject can experience because of the divide between sex and gender. Her gender does not seem to correspond to her sex, and to how she was brought up and expected to behave, to her nurse’s despair. As it is explicitly stated from the beginning of the play, she plays a role. At the very beginning, “she’s thinking that soon she’s going to be Antigone. That she’ll suddenly stop being the thin dark girl whose family didn’t take her seriously” (3).

Antigone is not herself at first. However, her true self will show. She will be herself, but only later in the play, not when she tries to bury her brother, but when she says ‘no,’ and makes decisions for herself.

One of the main relationships in the play is the one between Polynices and Antigone. Even after the death of Polynices—or especially after his death—their relationship is important for Antigone.

After Antigone came back from burying her brother the first time, her nurse asks her:

NURSE. You mean you’ve got a sweetheart?

Pause

ANTIGONE. Yes... Poor thing.

(Anouilh 7)

Polynices symbolically becomes Antigone’s lover. The reader knows that she lies: the lover to whom she refers is in fact her brother. This confusion foreshadows what is about to

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9 “Alors voilà, ça commence. La petite Antigone est prise. La petite Antigone va pouvoir être elle-même pour la première fois” (Anouilh 58).
10 “Femininity”
11 “Elle pense qu’elle va être Antigone tout à l’heure, qu’elle va surgir soudain de la maigre jeune fille noiraude et renfermée que personne ne prenait au sérieux dans la famille” (Anouilh 9).
12 LA NOURRICE. Tu as un amoureux?
ANTIGONE. Oui, nourrice, le pauvre, j’ai un amoureux.
(Anouilh17).
happen, or more precisely what is not about to happen. The confusion about the relationship between Antigone and Polynices cancels the equilibrium normally reached between brother and sister as Hegel explains it:

They are the same blood which has, however, in them reached a state of rest and equilibrium. Therefore, they do not desire one another, nor have they given to, or received from, one another this independent being-for-self; on the contrary, they are free individualities in regard to each other. Consequently, the feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest intuitive awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain consciousness of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling, and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world. (Hegel 274)

Antigone thus puts into question the equilibrium between her and her brother by pretending he is her lover. Her unconscious knowledge of divine law becomes conscious. She has to bury her brother to regain this equilibrium, to allow the connection between both laws to exist again. She has to fix the link she broke, with which “at least on the higher ethical level, the relationship between man and woman is [rendered] possible” (216)."13

Irigaray later adds:

This is so even if rape, murder, breaking and entering, injury, were still, in appearance at least, in general at least, suspended between brother and sister. But in fact such is not the case, as Hegel admits when he affirms that the brother is for the sister that possibility of recognition of which she is deprived as mother and wife, but does not state that the situation is reciprocal. This means that the brother has already been invested with a value for the sister that she cannot offer in return, except by devoting herself to his cult after death. (217)"14

The brother is thus implicitly superior to his sister, causing a disequilibrium from the beginning. Antigone reinforces this disequilibrium by putting in place an incestuous relationship with her brother. She implies a desire between her and Polynices that wrongs their relationship, and especially their relationship through death. The sister can only be acknowledged through the presence of her brother and their relationship. The only way she can thank him is to bury him after his death. Antigone does not recognize the relationship with her brother; instead, she implies he is her lover. She perverts their relationship and will not be able to accomplish her duty towards him.

The question of the equilibrium with her brother has another consequence for her. As she creates this desire for her brother, she denies the validity of her relationship with Haemon, her fiancé.

After Antigone told her nurse that she had a lover, the nurse imagined what Jocasta would say: “‘You silly old fool,’ she’d say—‘so you couldn’t keep my little girl virtuous for me!’” (8)."15 The nurse, who has a maternal role, is in despair that Antigone is not “pure”

"[le lien qui ] permet le rapport, du moins élevé à la dimension éthique, entre l’homme et la femme” (Irigaray 268).

"Même si le viol, le meurtre, l’effraction, la lésion, sont encore, du moins en apparences, du moins généralement, en suspens entre le frère et la sœur. Ce qui d’ailleurs n’est déjà plus vrai, comme l’avoue Hegel quand il affirme que le frère est pour la sœur la possibilité de la reconnaissance dont elle est privée en tant que mère et épouse, et ceci sans réciprocité, du moins dite. C’est donc que le frère est déjà investi d’une valeur pour la sœur, dont celle-ci ne peut le gratifier en retour, sinon en lui rendant un culte dans la mort” (Irigaray 269-70).

"Vieille bête, oui, vieille bête, qui n’a pas su me la garder pure, ma petite” (Anouilh 19).
(Anouilh 19, original French version) anymore. Antigone takes the role of a wife—a role she will never be able to play with her fiancé. Antigone’s relationship with her brother that was previously balanced and lawful has become tainted. Incest marks the relationship between Antigone and Polynices because of the confusion Antigone creates.

Antigone consciously decides to choose death over life when Creon gives her the choice to live and orders her: “Listen, then. Go back to your room, go to bed, and say you’re ill and haven’t been out since yesterday. Get your nurse to say the same. I’ll get rid of those three men” (31).16 Antigone’s suicide is a proof of her power. She gets to decide when she dies. She first forces Creon to condemn her to death. It is the first step she takes to overcome him. By forcing him to have her arrested she shows the power she has over him. He argues with Antigone to save her life, but she decides to be executed and kills herself. She dies symbolically when Creon condemns her, and dies a second time when she commits suicide.

Creon is the king; he should be the one in control. Instead, he looks like a king but cannot even negotiate with Antigone. In her two conflicts with Creon, Antigone is victorious. She seems to have the upper hand most of the time, and even when she does not, she provokes what happens to her, fights for it, and regains power by deciding how she will die, and killing herself. Creon then becomes her puppet, not only unable to avoid condemning her when she refuses to hide her crime, but also unable to have her executed when she commits suicide. She has a double victory over Creon, deciding each time to change his decision or preventing him from applying his decision. By choosing death, she refuses to be a sister to Polynices, or to become a wife to Haemon, and a mother. She decides who she wants to be and, regardless of the consequences, she makes choices that do not follow the rules of her sex, the rules of divine law.

Contrary to Antigone, Ismene accepts the role distribution and tries to convince her sister to do the same. Creon’s part is to have them killed. They have to bury their brother: “Of course they will [kill us]. Everyone has his part to play. Creon has to have us put to death, and we have to go and bury our brother. That’s how the cast-list was drawn up. What can we do about it?” (11).17 Ismene is resigned, she accepts her fate. Ismene, Antigone, and Creon have to obey the rules imposed upon them by the laws they are supposed to follow. Yet, Creon seems to take some freedom with the law, even criticizing it at times. His position concerning both laws is ambiguous, sometimes even conflicting.

Hegel explains that the truth of human law “is the authority which is openly accepted and manifest to all” (268). Creon being the king, supreme authority over his people, is the representative of human law. He is the authority of the nation, and as such, should be obeyed. He states at the beginning of the play: “Anyone affording him proper burial rites will be mercilessly punished, with death” (5-6).18 Creon seems at first to be a strong governing figure, strict and authoritative. The conflict between Creon and Antigone starts here. His decision prevents Antigone from performing her role. She faces a dilemma: she follows either the rules imposed by the law of her sex, or the orders of her uncle, that is to say human law.

The reader soon realizes that Creon is not as firm as he seemed to be. After someone tried to bury Polynices’s body, and thus broke Creon’s law, his weakness starts to appear:

16 “Alors, écoute : tu vas rentrer chez toi, te coucher, dire que tu es malade, que tu n’es pas sortie hier. Ta nourrice dira comme toi. Je ferai disparaître ces trois hommes” (Anouilh 69).
17 “Bien sûr. A chacun son rôle, il doit nous faire mourir, et nous, nous devons aller enterrer notre frère. C’est comme cela que ça a été distribué. Qu’est-ce que tu veux que nous y fassions?” (Anouilh 25).
18 “Quiconque osera lui [Polynices] rendre les devoirs funèbres sera impitoyablement puni de mort” (Anouilh 13).
“You and your mates are already guilty of negligence and will be punished for that anyway—but if you talk, and the rumor gets about that someone’s covered up Polynices’ corpse, all three of you will die” (24). He still seems to be serious and threatens to kill the three guards for failing their mission. But instead of trying to find out who is guilty of disobeying his orders, he prefers to hide the fact that someone actually disrespected them, which is the first proof that he is a weak leader. The reader witnesses it, but the citizens do not. The “authority which is openly accepted and manifest to all” (Hegel 268) is questioned, and one can start to wonder if Creon is indeed a representative of human law.

He quickly starts to blackmail the guard, threatening to kill him if someone learns what happened: “Clear out. If no one finds out, you’ll live” (35). Creon seems ready to do everything to protect his reputation as a strong leader. He struggles to remain the representative of human law that he is supposed to embody. At first Creon does not know who tried to bury Polynices’s corpse. He imagines it is a young boy, and thinks about the opportunity it could provide him: “A genuine little white-faced brat ready to spit down the barrel of my guns! My hands stained with fresh young blood!” (24). He rejoices at the advantage he can take of the crime. He could use it to show his strength to his people.

When he learns that the culprit is in fact Antigone, he tries to save her, pushing back the limits of human law. He does not want to have Antigone executed as he should have had if he had followed his previous orders: “Do you realize that if anyone other than those three louts gets to know what you’ve tried to do, I shall have to have you killed?” (34). The orders Creon gave earlier seem to weigh heavily on his shoulders. He does not want to follow them and wants to save his niece. He almost acts accordingly to divine law. The roles are inverted. Creon tries to save Antigone from death.

Creon puts into question the usefulness of both laws. He tells Antigone: “Yet now you risk death because I’ve denied your brother that piffling passport, that mass-produced mumbo-jumbo you’d have been the first to be ashamed and hurt by if it had actually been performed. It’s absurd” (35, translation modified). Creon dismisses divine law by judging Antigone’s behavior and her following of this law as absurd. Divine law is a positive ethical action vis-à-vis the individual and is perceived negatively by human law: “This supreme duty constitutes the divine law, or positive ethical action, as it relates to the individual. Yet, on the other hand, human law places a negative meaning upon this individualism” (Irigaray 267). It thus seems normal that Creon tries to ridicule Antigone’s duties regarding divine law. She tries to save an individual, her brother. Paradoxically, Creon tries to do the same with Antigone. Creon’s gender appears to be feminized in part; he wants to apply divine law, the law he finds absurd.

19 “Vous êtes coupables d’une négligence, vous serez punis de toute façon, mais si tu parles, si le bruit court dans la ville qu’on a recouvert le cadavre de Polynice, vous mourrez tous les trois” (Anouilh 55).
20 “Va vite. Si personne ne sait, tu vivras” (Anouilh 56).
21 “Un vrai petit garçon pâle qui crachera devant les fusils. Un précieux sang bien frais sur mes mains, double aubaine” (Anouilh 54).
22 “Tu ne comprends donc pas que si quelqu’un d’autre que ces trois brutes sait tout à l’heure ce que tu as tenté de faire, je serai obligé de te faire mourir ?” (Anouilh 75).
23 “Et tu risques la mort maintenant parce que j’ai refusé à ton frère ce passeport dérisoire, ce bredouillage en série sur sa dépouille, cette pantomime dont tu aurais été la première à avoir honte et mal si on l’avait jouée. C’est absurde!” (Anouilh 76-7).
24 “Ce devoir suprême constitue la loi divine, ou l’action éthique vis-à-vis du singulier. Auquel la loi humaine impose par ailleurs une signification négative” (Irigaray 267).
However, individuals must not forget the most important institution: the community. Irigaray explains:

The mind reminds the parts that they are dependent upon this totality and that they owe their life to it entirely. Thus any associations—such as families—that one assumes have been founded primarily to serve individual ends, whether the acquisition of personal wealth or the search for sexual pleasures, invite a war that may disrupt their intimate life and violate their independence since these threaten to shatter the whole. All those who persist in following the dictates of individualism must be taught by the government to fear a master: death. (215)

Community should come first, and whoever forgets it will be punished by death. Polynices and his brother are the first instance. They fought for control over Thebes and killed each other. Polynices was then turned into an example for the whole city. If you are a traitor, death, not only of your body, but also of your soul, awaits you. The next example is Antigone who tried to bury the traitor and found death as well. The last example is Creon who tried to save Antigone for his own sake and his son’s. In this case, the government did not have anyone to execute, so everyone close to Creon dies: his son Haemon, his wife Eurydice, both his nephews and one of his two nieces, Antigone. Death is the ultimate master, even for Creon.

Antigone doubts Creon’s humanity. This suggests that he could be not humane or human. After Creon explains that he could execute Antigone if she tries to bury Polynices again, she tells him:

ANTIGONE. But if you want to be humane (human), do it quickly. . . All you can do is have me put to death.
CREON. And what if I have you tortured?
(Anouilh 36, translation modified)

In response to Antigone’s request to be killed quickly if Creon is humane, he threatens to torture her, and he appears inhumane.

One can think about the similarity between the spelling of ‘human’ and ‘humane’—which is the same word in French: ‘humain.’ A parallel can be drawn between the two words, showing that if Creon is not humane, he may not be human either—which seems to be a predisposition, as Creon tells Antigone: “For your father, too, ordinary human misery—there was no question of happiness!—wasn’t enough. In your family, what’s human only cramps your style” (33). He shows us his little faith in human law as well as in divine law, and his answer shows his inhumanity: “All right—I’ve got the villain’s part and you’re cast as the

25 Les rappelant à leur dépendance à cette totalité et à la conscience de recevoir leur vie seulement dans/de celle-ci. Ainsi, les associations—y compris familiales—qui se fonderaient en vue de buts en première instance singuliers, soit l’acquisition pour elles-mêmes de richesses ou la recherche en elles-mêmes de la jouissance, appellent une guerre qui vienne les ébranler dans cette intimité, les déraciner de cet isolement, les violer dans cette indépendance, qui menacent le tout de désintégration. A ceux donc qui s’enfoncent dans cet ordre de la singularité, le gouvernement doit donner à ressentir leur maître : la mort. (Irigaray 268)

26 ANTIGONE. Mais si vous êtes un être humain, faites-le vite . . . Vous pouvez seulement me faire mourir.
CREON. Et si je te fais torturer?
(Anouilh 79, emphasis mine)

27 “Pour ton père non plus—je ne dis pas le bonheur, il n’en était pas question—le malheur humain c’était trop peu. L’huiain vous gêne un peu aux entournures dans la famille”
(Anouilh 73).
heroine . . . If I were just an ordinary brute of a tyrant you’d have had your tongue torn out
long ago, or been taken apart with red-hot pincers, or thrown into a dungeon” (36). 28 It is only
a matter of time before Creon carries out his decision. He wants to prove to Antigone he is
humane because he has not tortured her yet—even if he threatens to. The last part of his
answer foreshadows Antigone’s fate. It proves Creon wrong: he has finally become the
‘ordinary brute of a tyrant’ he denied he was.

Creon’s behavior in relation to both laws is biased. He openly criticizes divine law, a
criticism that seems logical. However, he perceives human law the same way. In a few
exchanges of the play, Antigone and Creon disagree after he told her that: “One morning, I
woke up King of Thebes. Though heaven knows there were things in life I loved better than
power” (38). 29 This is when a fight starts between them. Antigone tells Creon he should have
said ‘no’ instead of conforming to what was expected from him.

The explanation Creon gives about saying ‘yes’ can be shifted to the question of
gender. Creon explains:

Can you imagine a world where trees have said no to the sap? Where the animals have
said no to the instincts of hunting and love? Brute beasts at least are good and natural
and tough. They all jostle each other bravely along the same path. If any fall, others
trample them. No matter how many die there’ll always be one of every species left to
reproduce and follow the same path with the same courage. (40-41) 30

Unlike Antigone, Creon thinks it is better to act as one is expected to, that is to say that
one has to perform one’s gender accordingly. In this perspective, the ‘yes’ can be read as
behaving following the expectations of one’s gender. The ‘no,’ still defended by Antigone, is
the fight to act according one’s gender, regardless of what is expected from that gender.
Antigone refuses to understand why one cannot act the way one wants regardless of the
normative performativity of gender.

Antigone tries to explain the consequences of saying ‘yes’:
That’s your look-out? I didn’t say yes! What do I care about your politics and what
you ‘have’ to do and all your paltry affairs! I can still say no to anything I don’t like,
and I alone am the judge. You, with your crown and your guards and your
paraphernalia—all you can do, because you said yes, is have me put to death. (38) 31

To Antigone, what matters is to say ‘no’. Creon accepted human law even if he says
he could have refused it. Now he has to apply it and have Antigone executed. He is the king

28 “J’ai le mauvais rôle, c’est entendu, et tu as le bon . . . Si j’étais une bonne brute ordinaire
de tyran, il y aurait déjà longtemps qu’on t’aurait arraché la langue, tiré les membres aux
tenailles, ou jetée dans un trou” (Anouilh 80).

29 “Un matin, je me suis réveillé roi de Thèbes. Et Dieu sait si j’aimais autre chose dans la vie
que d’être puissant…” (Anouilh 83).

30 “Tu imagines un monde où les arbres aussi auraient dit non contre la sève, où les bêtes
auraient dit non contre l’instinct de la chasse ou de l’amour ? Les bêtes, elles au moins, sont
bonnes et simples et dures. Elles vont, se poussant les une après les autres, courageusement,
sur le même chemin. Et si elles tombent, les autres passent et il peut s’en perdre autant que
l’on veut, il en restera toujours une de chaque espèce prête à refaire des petits et à reprendre le
même chemin avec le même courage, toute pareille à celles qui sont passées avant” (Anouilh
89).

31 Et bien, tant pis pour vous. Moi, je n’ai pas dit ‘oui’ ! Qu’est-ce que vous voulez que ça me
fasse, à moi, votre politique, votre nécessité, vos pauvres histoires ? Moi, je peux dire ‘non’
encore à tout ce que je n’aime pas et je suis seul juge. Et vous, avec votre attirail, vous pouvez
seulement me faire mourir parce que vous avez dit ‘oui’. (84)
but he does not have any real power. He is the government, and as such, his only duty is to protect the community. Creon defends his point of view: “Someone has to say yes” (39). It is a necessity that some people say ‘yes’ and accept to follow the law that governs them. One can see here that Creon follows his law not because he wants to, but because he has to. It sounds almost unavoidable. He then uses a ship metaphor to explain his responsibilities in his world: “It’s letting in water on all sides. It’s full of crime and stupidity and suffering” (39). Everyone is too selfish; no one wants to take responsibility. That’s why he had to say yes and accept to rule the city.

Creon explains that when it is time to take charge, one does not have the time to think whether one wants to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’: “Do you think there’s time to debate whether you say yes or no, to wonder whether some day the price isn’t going to be too high, whether you’re still going to be able to be a man afterwards?” (40, translation modified). Once again, it is a necessity. One has to accept what one has to do, one’s duties, what is imposed on one.

The question Creon did not have time to ponder is “whether you’re still going to be able to be a man afterwards.” This is paradoxical. Human law is designed and fulfilled by men. It should be obvious that whoever represents human law should be a man, and remain a man. One can wonder if Creon is still a man. Or has his gender changed as a consequence of his reign? Creon follows human law according to his sex—male—, but his behavior is ambiguous. Could he also respect divine law, following his feminized gender?

Earlier in the play Ismene says to Antigone:

ISMENE. Listen. I’m older than you, and not so impulsive. You do the first thing that comes to your head, never mind whether it’s sensible or stupid. But I’m more level-headed. I think.

ANTIGONE. Sometimes it’s best not to think too much.

(Anouilh 11)

Ismene took the time to think about her decision. She decided to say ‘no,’ she refused to bury Polynices and to follow divine law. Ismene thought about it, unlike Creon or even Antigone who, according to Ismene, does not think. Ismene reflected on her decision. According to Creon, that time of reflection is what catalyzes the fear of the loss of masculinity. Ismene decided to do nothing, even if it means she does not respect the law of her sex. Ismene has a paradoxical role. By refusing to bury Polynices, she says ‘no’ to divine law, the law of her own sex, but at the same time says ‘yes’ to Creon’s decision, and thus to human law. The reason why she refuses to bury Polynices is purely selfish; she does not want to be executed by Creon. Unlike Antigone who wants to either bury her brother or die, Ismene does not want to endanger her life and be executed. Instead, she sacrifices Polynices.

When Antigone says: “Sometimes it’s best not to think too much” (Anouilh 11) her point of view is close to Creon’s, which is different from her point of view when she confronts him. Both Creon and Antigone agree on the fact that sometimes, one has to act

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32 “Il faut pourtant qu’il y en ait qui disent oui” (Anouilh 87).
33 “Cela prend l’eau de toutes parts, c’est plein de crimes, de bêtise, de misère…” (Anouilh 87).
34 “Crois-tu alors qu’on a le temps de faire son raffiné, de savoir s’il faut dire ‘oui’ ou ‘non’, de se demander s’il ne faudra pas payer trop cher un jour et si on pourra encore être un homme après?” (Anouilh 87).
35 ISMENE. Ecoute, j’ai bien réfléchi toute la nuit. Je suis l’aînée. Je réfléchis plus que toi. Toi, c’est ce qui te passe par la tête tout de suite, et tant pis si c’est une bêtise. Moi, je suis plus pondérée, je réfléchis. ANTIGONE. Il y a des fois où il ne faut pas trop réfléchir. (Anouilh 25).
without dwelling upon it, or even without thinking at all. They both apply it to their own law, rejecting the necessity of the other’s law, which is what creates the conflict.

For Irigaray, “the cult of the dead and the cult of death would thus be the point where divine law and human law join” (216, italics in original). Yet, Creon and Antigone do not seem to understand each other. Antigone is even against the very notion of understanding: “Understand! You’ve always been on at me about that, all of you, ever since I was little . . . Understand, understand, always understand! I don’t want to understand! I can do that when I’m old. If I ever am” (12). Antigone was asked to understand every rule she had to follow. She refuses to understand Creon’s decision and human law at the same time. Later in the play, she says: “I don’t want to [understand]. It’s all very well for you, but I’m not here to understand. I’m here to say no to you, and to die” (40). She does not even want to try to comprehend. According to her, she has to say ‘no’ and thus die. Antigone represents the link between both laws. She wants to bury her brother—give him a proper ‘culte du mort,’ and at the same time she sustains her culture of death, knowing that what she does will lead to death. Yet she rejects human law by not wanting to understand it. “The cult of the dead and the cult of death” separate both laws here. Antigone’s duties and her death drive create a division between Creon—the representative of human law—and Antigone—who tries to represent divine law. As long as one of the two is not dead, the two laws cannot understand each other and reunite.

As for Creon, he wants Antigone to understand. He asks her: “For God’s sake! Try to understand for a minute, you little fool! I’ve tried hard enough to understand you!” (39). He tried to understand her and tries to convince her to do the same, without success. Both laws seem to function the same way, rejecting the other’s reality. They do not appear compatible, except in death itself. Death appeases the conflict between “the cult of the dead and the cult of death.” Hence the only way for Creon to have his law respected is to have Antigone executed, which Antigone has known since the beginning. She has to die to remain faithful to her law. She dies because she follows her law. Irigaray explains: “woman must be that external and effective mediation that reconciles the dead man with himself by taking upon herself the operation of destruction that the becoming of mind cannot manage without” (215, italics in original).

Creon criticizes Antigone’s view on the ‘yes/no’ question. The defense he gives corresponds more to Antigone’s behavior than his own:

It’s easy to say no! . . . To say yes you have to sweat, roll up your sleeves, grab hold of life, plunge in up to the neck [s’en mettre jusqu’aux coudes]. It’s easy to say no, even if it means dying. All you have to do is keep still and wait. Wait to live. Wait to die,

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36 “Le culte du mort, et la culture de la mort seraient donc ce qui articule l’une à l’autre la loi divine et la loi humaine” (Irigaray 268).
37 “Comprendre... Vous n’avez que ce mot là dans la bouche, tous, depuis que je suis toute petite. . . . Comprendre. Toujours comprendre. Je comprendrai quand je serai vieille. Pas maintenant” (Anouilh 27).
38 “Je ne veux pas comprendre. C’est bon pour vous. Moi je suis là pour autre chose que pour comprendre. Je suis là pour vous dire non et pour mourir” (Anouilh 88).
39 “Mais bon Dieu ! Essaie de comprendre une minute, toi aussi, petite idiote ! J’ai bien essayé de te comprendre, moi” (Anouilh 87).
40 “La féminité doit être cette médiation effective et extérieure qui réconcilie le mort avec lui-même, en prenant sur elle l’opération de destruction dont le devenir de l’esprit ne peut faire l’économie” (Irigaray 267).
even. It’s feeble!—something human beings have thought up for themselves [C’est une invention des hommes]” (40).

She said ‘yes’ to her law. It led her to literally “sweat, roll up [her] sleeves . . . plunge in up to the neck [s’en mettre jusqu’aux coudes]” (40) to bury Polynices, which seems to be the contrary to the proper way of behaving for a young woman, and already when she was a young girl, she did not understand why she could not “play with water . . . or with earth, because it dirtied my clothes . . . or run in the wind till you drop, or drink when you’re hot, or go swimming just when you feel like it” (12).

Through their behavior, but also through their discourse, Antigone and Creon show that they are not who they seem to be. Antigone creates confusion in the relationship with her brother Polynices, implying that they are lovers. She tries to bury him because she has to, questioning Creon’s power at the same time since he decides at the beginning of the play not to bury Polynices whom he considers a traitor. He promises death to anyone who will try to bury Polynices: “Anyone affording him proper burial rites will be mercilessly punished, with death” (6). Polynices tried to gain power, fighting against his own brother, Eteocles. He let his singularity be more important than the community. By deciding to punish Polynices and letting his body decompose, Creon also punishes Antigone when she tries to save Polynices’s spirit. Creon breaks the articulation between the two laws. He prevents Antigone from burying her brother and thus prevents her from playing her role as a woman. Creon undermines Antigone’s womanhood.

Antigone appears to belong to divine law only because of her sex, when her gender is in fact more complicated. She has more affinities with human law. She is conscious of why she has to bury Polynices. Creon, on the other hand, wants to save her from death, which makes him behave against his own orders, and even his own law. It brings him closer to divine law while bringing Antigone closer to human law. In Antigone’s Claim, one of Butler’s arguments is that Sophocles’s Antigone is manned, and that, on the other hand, Creon is unmanned by his own actions and by Antigone (6). In Anouilh’s version of the play, we face the same development. Antigone bitterly regrets she is a girl, but her actions do not correspond to the expectations of her sex since her gender does not correspond to her sex.

Both Antigone and Creon try to respect their respective laws, but they invariably seem to be drawn towards the opposite law. Creon does not do anything except give orders and wait, which is the ‘invention des hommes.’ The role he describes reflects his own passivity. Antigone said ‘yes’ to her own law, and ‘no’ to Creon’s while Creon said ‘yes’ to his law and ‘no’ to Antigone’s. The divine and human laws are mutually exclusive. They cannot peacefully coexist, except in death.

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41 “C’est facile de dire non . . . Pour dire oui, il faut suer et retrousser ses manches, empoigner la vie à pleines mains et s’en mettre jusqu’aux coudes. C’est facile de dire non, même si on doit mourir. Il n’y a qu’à ne pas bouger et attendre. Attendre pour vivre, attendre même pour qu’on vous tue. C’est trop lâche. C’est une invention des hommes” (Anouilh 88-9).

42 “toucher à l’eau . . . à la terre parce que cela tache les robes . . . courir dans le vent jusqu’à ce qu’on tombe par terre et boire quand on a trop chaud et se baigner quand il est trop tôt ou trop tard, mais pas juste quand on en a envie” (Anouilh 27).

43 “Quiconque osera lui rendre les devoirs funèbres sera impitoyablement puni de mort” (Anouilh 13).
Chapter II: Gender and Subjection.

We have shown that, in both plays, Antigone’s gender does not correspond to her sex. This dichotomy leads not only to Antigone’s destruction, but also to Haemon’s and Eurydice’s death. In each case, the body becomes a victim. Already with Polynices, the conflict between Creon and Antigone revolve around the problem created by Polynices’s body. Creon wants Polynices’s body to rot as an example for the entire city, in spite of the cost (we assume, the moral cost) of such an act. He tells Antigone: “Your brother’s body rotting under my windows is a high enough price to pay for law and order” (39).

Bodies play a crucial part in the course of the play. The body is hurt, threatened, killed. Creon tells Antigone: “If I were just an ordinary brute of a tyrant you’d have had your tongue torn out long ago, or been taken apart with red-hot pincers, or thrown into a dungeon [un trou]” (36).

Creon uses the threat of torture as a way to have Antigone follow his orders. Her body is the only means Creon still has to persuade Antigone and bring her to her senses.

Creon uses the dead bodies of Polynices and Eteocles to unite the city. One of them was a traitor and will be treated as such; the other supposedly fought for his city and has to become a hero. However, when Creon explains how he chose the body that was going to be buried, tension builds. Creon does not know whose body is buried, and whose body is rotting. He confesses to Antigone:

But it was necessary for me to make a hero out of one of them. So I had my men seek out their bodies. They found them in one another’s arms—for the first time in their lives probably. They’d run one another through, then the Argive cavalry had ridden over the bodies and made mincemeat of them. They were both unrecognizable, Antigone. I gave orders for whichever corpse was least damaged to be scraped together for my national obsequies. And for the other to be left to rot. I don’t even know which was which. And I assure you I don’t care. (44)

In this quote, the dead bodies of Polynices and Eteocles are nothing more than objects. Creon uses them to serve his own ends. Neither of them is a hero, but Creon takes the opportunity to transform the truth to fit what he has in mind. Their bodies do not matter: Creon does not even know for sure if he buried the right body.

Bodies appear to have to face the same consequences, although caused by different reasons. For instance, when Creon hears his son screaming and understands he is with Antigone in her cave, he decides to help and take away stones: “the slaves hurled themselves on the heaped-up rocks, and the king fell on them too, digging with his bare hands until they bled” (58).

Creon’s hands bleed because he tries to rescue his son. Antigone does something similar when she buries Polynices. When she wants to go back to his body, and bury him

44 “Le cadavre de ton frère qui pourrit sous mes fenêtres, c’est assez payé pour que l’ordre règne dans Thèbes” (86).
45 “Si j’étais une bonne brute ordinaire de tyran, il y aurait déjà longtemps qu’on t’aurait arraché la langue, tiré les membres aux tenailles, ou jetée dans un trou” (80).
46 “Seulement, il s’est trouvé que j’ai eu besoin de faire un héros de l’un d’eux. Alors, j’ai fait rechercher leurs cadavres au milieu des autres. On les a retrouvés embrassés—pour la première fois de leur vie sans doute. Ils s’étaient embrochés mutuellement, et puis la charge de la cavalerie argyenne leur avait passé dessus. Ils étaient en bouillie, Antigone, méconnaissables. J’ai fait ramasser un des deux corps, le moins abîmé des deux, pour les funérailles nationales, et j’ai donné l’ordre de laisser pourrir l’autre où il était. Je ne sais même pas lequel. Et je t’assure que cela m’est égal” (96).
47 “Les esclaves se jettent sur les blocs entassés et, parmis eux, le roi suant, dont les mains saignent” (127).
again, Creon asks her: “What else can you do but scrape more skin off your fingers and get yourself caught again?” (34). Neither of them can master what they intend to do, but they do not have any other choice than to try, regardless of the consequences on their bodies, symbolized by their scratched bleeding hands. They both try to save someone, someone different, and from something different too, but their decisions obey the same principle: they have to try to save the ones they love, which echoes divine law. Blood is an important characteristic throughout the play. Everyone’s actions lead to shedding blood: Antigone’s and Creon’s hands, but also the suicide of both Haemon and his mother Eurydice. Indeed, they do not kill themselves in a bloodless way as Antigone did when she hung herself. Haemon stabs himself: “without a word [he] plunged the sword into his own belly. Then he lay down besides Antigone, embracing her in a vast red pool of blood [immense flaque rouge]” (59). Eurydice cuts her throat after she learns of her son’s death: “and she cut her throat . . . If it wasn’t for the red on the draperies around her throat [cette large tache rouge sur les linges autour de son cou] you might think she was sleeping” (59).

In the essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault describes the signification of the physicality of the body:

The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict.

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. (148) The body carries the traces of the mind as well as the marks of its own existence. The body seems to endure the mind’s whims, and to be the slate on which conflicts eis written. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault acknowledges that man himself is the first entity that subjects man:

The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor of the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. (30) 

48 “Que peux-tu donc, sinon t’ensanglanter encore les ongles et te faire prendre?” (76).
49 “sans rien dire, il se plonge l’épée dans le ventre et il s’étend contre Antigone, l’embrassant dans une immense flaque rouge” (128).
50 “Et puis elle est passé dans sa chambre . . . pour s’y couper la gorge . . . Et s’il n’y avait pas cette large tache rouge sur les linges autour de son cou, on pourrait croire qu’elle dort” (129).
51 “Sur le corps, on trouve le stigmate des événements passés, tout comme de lui naissent les désirs, les défaillances, et les erreurs; en lui aussi ils se nouent et soudain s’expriment, mais en lui aussi ils se dénouent, entrent en lutte, s’effacent les uns les autres et poursuivent leur insurmontable conflit.
Le corps : surface d’inscription des événements (alors que le langage les marque et les idées les dissolvent), lieu de dissociation du Moi (auquel essaie de prêter la chimère d’une unité substantielle), volume en perpétuel effritement” (Foucault 154).
52 L’homme dont on nous parle et qu’on invite à libérer est déjà en lui-même l’effet d’un assujettissement bien plus profond que lui-même. Une ‘âme’ l’habite et le porte à l’existence qui est elle-même une pièce dans la maîtrise que le pouvoir exerce sur le corps. L’âme, effet et instrument d’une anatomic politique; l’âme, prison du corps. (Foucault 34)
The soul, or mind, of the body is both the “the effect and instrument of a political anatomy.” For Foucault, the soul inhabits the body—“a soul inhabits him,” and its power comes from the outside, a power created and used by society. In both cases, the body is passive: in the first instance, the body is like a blank page, the “inscribed surface of event . . . and a volume in perpetual disintegration.” (148), unable to defend itself against destruction. For Butler, body’s destruction by history has to take part in subjectification. In her account on Foucault’s writing about the body as “inscribed surface of events” (148), she writes:

The task of genealogy, he claims, is ‘to expose a body totally imprinted by history.’ His sentence continues, however, by referring to the goal of ‘history’—here clearly understood on the model of Freud’s ‘civilization’—as the ‘destruction of the body’ (148). Forces and impulses with multiple directionalities are precisely that which history both destroys and preserves through the entstehung (historical event) of inscription. As ‘a volume in perpetual disintegration’ (148), the body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history. And history is the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body. This corporeal destruction is necessary to produce the speaking subject and its significations. (“Gender” 129-30)

Butler concludes that if the body had to be destroyed to create “values, that historical mode of signification” (“Gender” 130) the body must exist before becoming this “medium . . . a blank page” (130). In the second example, the body is imprisoned by the soul, subjectified even, since the soul that “inhabits him” also “brings him into existence” (“Discipline” 30). Once again, the body appears as passive. Even though the body exists before its subjectification, before being inhabited by a soul, the body does not have any value since it is not recognized by any system. As a blank page, the body should be tractable. Hence, there is no specific reason a particular gender should be drawn on the body. However, as we are about to see, gender characterizes a specific sex, which in turn subjectifies the body.

In a larger setting, society as a whole is what subjects and sustains man’s agency. Man is a subject within society, and one obvious proof of such subjection—the fact of being a subject—is the very existence of gender, more precisely the commonly accepted belief of the existence of only two genders. Following Foucault’s account of subjection, the mind subjectifies man as well. The subjection of his body by his mind is the consequence of this larger subjection. The body acquires the status of a subject. The body’s mind is a tool used to its own subjectification by society, that is to say that the mind turns the body into a subject. What consequences do these successive subjectifications have on the body, and on sex?

Sex is linked to the body in that bodies are sexed. Bodies are gendered as well. Do bodies take the print of gender on themselves? In her book Bodies That Matter, Judith Butler opens with two questions that connect these notions: “Is there a way to link the question of the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender? And how does the category of ‘sex’ figure within such a relationship?” (1). Both the human law and the divine law require a performativity on the part of the individual. Since these two laws are linked to sex, a parallel exists between the effective application of the laws and the performativity that is expected from the individual. In the case of Antigone, this expectation is complicated by the discordance between her sex and her gender.

If the body is the “the locus of a dissociated Self” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy” 148), the discordance between gender and sex in Antigone can be understood as a case of this disassociation. Indeed, her behavior is paradoxical, and if we refer to the two laws we discussed before (human and divine), Antigone does not belong to any of these laws entirely. She wants to bury her brother, but Creon prevents her from doing so. The two characters start arguing, causing Antigone’s death in the end. The fact that she tried to bury her brother acknowledges her relation to divine law, unlike Ismene who refuses to follow the divine law.
because she fears death. Later in the play, Antigone dies, killing herself. At that very moment, human law is engraved in her. She dies for the community, as a common enemy: if someone else other than Creon knows what she tried to do, he’ll have to arrest her. He says: “I order you to be silent! . . . The ante-room’s full of people. They’ll hear you. Do you want to destroy yourself? . . . [CREON] (putting his hand over her mouth). Quiet, for God’s sake” (48). Antigone refuses to be quiet. She does not want to hide what she tried to do. She wants everyone else to know. She wants others to do like her when she says: “Hear that, Creon? Her too! And how do you know it won’t spread to others when they hear me? What are you waiting for? Why don’t you call you guards to silence me?” (49).

One of the consequences of Antigone’s defiance turns into violence against herself. She follows a selfish motive, which is punished by the community. Irigaray explains this action and its consequences:

She would pervert the property / propriety of the State by making fun of the adult male who no longer thinks of anything but the universal, subjecting him to derision and to the scorn of a callow adolescence. In opposition to the adult male, she would set up the strength of youth possessed by the son, the brother, the young man, for in them, much more than in the power of government, she recognizes a master, an equal, a lover. The community can protect itself from such demands only by repressing them as elements of corruption that threaten to destroy the State. (226)

Antigone has to die, inscribing death on her own body, killing herself. Her death can be read as gender performativity, in which case Antigone’s death becomes an illustration of human law. Indeed, man has to turn death into an ethical action by sacrificing his life for the city. Antigone dies for the city, uniting and gathering the city around a common enemy. Antigone represents the ultimate instance of what Irigaray describes when she writes: “The cult of the dead and the cult of death would thus be the point where divine law and human law join” (216). Antigone unifies the two laws. She is both successful and unsuccessful in her cult of death. As a matter of fact, she cannot bury her brother Polynices, but she buries herself, killing herself in a cave. When the messenger tells us what happened to Haemon, Antigone is already dead:

They’d just put Antigone in the cave [son trou]. They hadn’t finished rolling the last blocks of stone into the place when Creon and all those around him heard cries suddenly issuing from the tomb [tombeau]. Everyone stopped and listened: it wasn’t Antigone’s voice. . . Antigone was in the depths of the cave [tombe], hanged with her own girdle. The blue and green and res strands looked like a child’s necklace. And

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54 “Tu l’entends Créon? Elle aussi. Qui sait si cela ne va pas prendre à d’autres encore, en m’écoutant? Qu’est-ce que tu attends pour me faire taire, qu’est-ce que tu attends pour appeler tes gardes?” (105-6).

55 Elle pervertirait la propriété de l’État en se moquant du citoyen adulte qui ne pense plus qu’à l’universel, le soumettant à la raillerie et au mépris d’une adolescence immature. Lui opposant la force de la jeunesse du fils, du frère, du jeune homme, en lesquels elle reconnaît bien plus que dans le pouvoir du gouvernement un maître, un égal, un amant. La communauté ne peut se préserver de telles revendications qu’en les réprimant comme des éléments de corruption qui risquent de la détruire. (Irigaray 280-1)

56 “Le culte du mort et la culture de la mort seraient donc ce qui articule l’une à l’autre la loi divine et la loi humaine” (Irigaray 268).
there was Haemon, on his knees, groaning, holding her in his arms, his face buried in her robe. (58, emphasis mine)\(^57\)

The cave where Antigone dies is referred to as a hole at first, ‘son trou’, and as a ‘tombeau’ and ‘tombe’ later, meaning respectively ‘tomb’ and ‘grave’. Antigone buries herself, as well as her lover since he kills himself next to her, in their hole/tomb/grave.

As for the cult of death, Antigone knows she is going to die. The prologue tells us at the beginning of the play: “She’s thinking she’s going to die... though she’s still young, and like everyone else would have preferred to live. But there’s nothing to be done” (3).\(^58\) She plays with her own death in several ways. First, she undertakes twice to bury her brother, burial that is forbidden and punished by death. Then, she refuses to go to her room and not to make a scene, which results in her arrest and execution. Finally, she literally causes her own death by hanging herself.

Since Antigone unifies human and divine laws through her death, what power turns Antigone into a subject? Is she subjectified by her sex, which drives her to fulfill divine law? How is sex materialized? Or is she subjectified by her gender, which leads her more towards human law? How is her gender formed? What is subjection? How does one become a subject? Some of these questions have been studied by Butler. *Bodies That Matter* can give us a first account on gender construction and sex materialization. Sex is categorized and normative. According to Butler, sex “not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls” (“Bodies” 1). The materialization of this regulatory power that is sex is made “through highly regulated practices. In other words, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms” (“Bodies” 1-2). This need of reiteration implies that the materialization of sex is never complete and unstable, and needs to be reaffirmed (“Bodies” 2). The obligation to reiterate the norms to materialize sex can have the opposite consequences and actually destabilize sex. Butler writes:

Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration. As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norms, as that which cannot fully be defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. (“Bodies” 10)

Moreover, sex is what makes a body culturally intelligible: “‘Sex’ is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, all that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural

\(^57\) On venait de jeter Antigone dans son *trou*. On n’avait pas encore fini de rouler les derniers blocs de pierre lorsque Créon et tous ceux qui l’entourent entendent des plaintes qui sortent soudain du *tombeau*. Chacun se tait et écoute, car ce n’est pas la voix d’Antigone... Antigone est au fond de la *tombe* pendue aux fils de sa ceinture, des fils bleus, des fils verts, des fils rouges qui lui font comme un collier d’enfant, et Hémon à genoux qui la tient dans ses brase et gémit, le visage enfoui dans sa robe. (Anouilh 127, emphasis mine)

\(^58\) “Elle [Antigone] pense qu’elle va mourir, qu’elle est jeune et qu’elle aussi, elle aurait bien aimé vivre. Mais il n’y a rien à faire” (Anouilh 9).
intelligibility” (“Bodies” 2). The validity of the body can be dangerously questioned by the very unstable nature of sex, and the body’s cultural assertion which follows from it. Butler explains that sex materialization is also a citationality: “What we might call materialization will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the ‘I’” (“Bodies” 15). This is linked to performativity as well, hence we can say that gender is not only performative, but also a citation. Failure in citing gender correctly can have as consequence the invalidity of the individual performing this gender. Just as for the instability of sex which can lead to the cultural unintelligibility of the body, the instability of gender can result in the invalidity of the subjection gender creates. Sex and its citationality have to exist and persist as such outside of the subject. However, only the subject can enact it and be enacted by it. Paradoxically, the body, and by extension the subject her/himself, cannot exist—cannot be validated—outside of the citationality of sex, and sex and its citationality as well, cannot exist outside of the subject. The relationship that links a body to its sex is ineluctable in that if the subject fails to materialize her/his sex within the sphere s/he cannot choose, then her/his body is dismissed: “The account of agency conditioned by those very regimes of discourse/power cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism, much less with consumerism, and in no way presupposes a choosing subject. . . the limits of constructivism are exposed at those boundaries of bodily life where abjected or delegitimated bodies fail to count as ‘bodies’” (“Bodies” 15).

In Gender Trouble, Butler explores the distinction between sex and gender. She explains that gender is not only cultural, but it “must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” (“Gender” 7). Gender prints its political marks on ‘sex,’ which becomes dual. “This production of sex as the prediscursive [prior to culture] ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender” (“Gender” 7, italics in originale). Gender is the instrument by which the sexed bodies are produced. Indeed, gender is performative, and its “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names . . . the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex” (“Bodies” 2).

The body is at the core of gender formation since gender is perceived “as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body’s surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences” (“Gender” 135). Gender is unstable. It is a “constituted social temporality” (“Gender” 141), and its fleetingness is explained by its very nature: “a stylized repetition of acts” (“Gender” 140, italics in original). In this perspective, gender does not exist outside of this mandatory performativity. Performativity not only creates gender but is also the only power through which gender can be expressed. Gender cannot be separated from its performativity and would have no existence outside of it. Performativity actualizes the presence of the body; and gender paradoxically needs the body to be able to be performative. Butler writes about performativity:

In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absence that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (“Gender” 136)
We have already seen that the body exists before being subjectified by the soul. In the same way, the body exists before being gendered, but it is not recognized, and has not value. It is not a body that matters. Butler explains that the distinction between gender and sex implies the existence of the body before its signification “by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (“Gender” 129). Gender performativity materializes sex and actualizes the body.

Gender performativity not only creates the sexed body, it is also a subjectifying power since the aim of gender performance is to maintain “gender within its binary frame—an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject” (“Gender” 140). Moreover, in her introduction to The Psychic Life Of Power, Butler defines subjection as a power [that] imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms. What such an account fails to note, however, is that the ‘we’ who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for ‘our’ existence. . . Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. (2)

The sexed body needs a gender to have an agency. Gender plays a crucial part in the creation of the subject. One of the consequences of this game of power is “the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (“Bodies” 2). This relation between bodies and the norms that regulate them recalls Butler’s own account of subjection: the body becomes dependent on the regulatory norms of sex to exist. Sex subjectifies the body.

Bodies are created through their subjection by sex and its normativity. Butler also explores the suppression of bodies in the framework of repression. She writes:

For Foucault, the body to be regulated is similarly marshaled in the service of suppression, but the body is not constituted prior to that regulation. On the contrary, the body is produced as an object of regulation, and for regulation to augment itself, the body is proliferated as an object of regulation. (“Psychic” 59)

For Foucault the body is produced and proliferated as an object of regulation. The creation of bodies implies that sex is also multiplied, and is at the same time regulated and regulating. The body is emphasized and its sexual differences are more marked; the subject is overwhelmed by the body. Not only is sex preserved, it is also put on a pedestal. Subjection spreads out and the subject “exceeds the dialectical frame by which it is spawned” (“Psychic” 57). Sex is inescapable because of its subjectifying power, and the importance attached to gender is undermined in spite of its subjecting performativity.

This propagation of bodies has another consequence: the more bodies there are to regulate, the more regulation there is. Suppression turns into the creation of a multiplicity of bodies for the sake of empowering regulation. Antigone offers a good example: not only does Antigone die, but almost all of Creon’s family members die as well. Bodies are created by their subjectification and the consequent ineluctable death awaiting them. The purpose of suppression is defeated through its misuse as an instrument that creates bodies. The main reason of this paradox appears to be the empowerment of the regulating authority itself. Since the suppression of the body actually creates and asserts the body, regulation of the body has to be more powerful. As it creates more and more bodies to regulate—and subjects at the same time—the category of sex creates layers of subjection and repression in the body that allow sex to empower itself. The regulation and suppression exerted on the body create a layered subjection of the body.

The body is therefore impossible to overcome, as Butler explains: “If the suppression of the body is itself an instrumental movement of and by the body, then the body is
inadvertently preserved in and by the instrument of its suppression” (“Psychic” 57). The body is preserved not by its suppression but by the “instrument of its suppression,” that is the body itself. The body is only the implement of its own suppression. Suppression itself is an “instrumental movement,” which implies that the suppression of the body is not the purpose of suppression. Rather, suppression becomes the mediation between the body and the body’s preservation and suppression paradoxically protects the body. For instance, Antigone impels Creon to condemn her to death. She succeeds in preserving herself through her death, killing herself, “instrumental movement of the body and by the body” (“Psychic” 57). Suppression is not an end in itself, but the means through which Antigone can preserve her body, meaning that she saves herself by killing herself. Indeed, she applies divine law to herself and takes on herself the destruction of her death to save her spirit. She defeats death through her own suppression. As Irigaray explains in “The Eternal Irony of the Community:”

Man is still subject to (natural) death, of course, but what matters is to make a movement of the mind out of this accident that befalls the single individual and, in its raw state, drives consciousness out of its own country, cutting off that return into the self which allows it to become self-consciousness. Just as man must strive to make this negativeness into an ethical action by sacrificing his life for the city . . . so woman must be that external and effective mediation that reconciles the dead man with himself by taking upon herself the operation of destruction that the becoming of mind cannot manage without. (215)

Antigone’s gender is neither totally feminine, nor totally masculine, hence she is able to perform both laws. To put this differently, she is able to have a complex gender because she decided to perform both laws. She sacrifices her life for the city as a man would have done, forcing Creon to have her executed and killing herself after being arrested. She tries to bury Polynices twice, and admits she would do it again if she could: “I’ll do it again” (31). By acknowledging her deed, refusing to either deny it or be silent, she becomes enemy of the city, just like her brother Polynices. By killing herself in the cave in which she was imprisoned, she buries herself, acting according to her feminine gender this time. She literally takes “upon herself the operation of destruction that the becoming of mind cannot manage without” (215), and doing so, she helps her mind by reconciling the dead Antigone with herself.

Butler explains the results of suppression: “The self-defeating effort of such suppression, however, not only leads to its opposite—a self-congratulatory or self-aggrandizing assertion of desire, will, the body—in more contemporary formulations it leads to the elaboration of an institution of the subject which exceeds the dialectical frame by which it is spawned” (“Psychic” 57). Suppression leads to the destruction of the self and, as we said before, the body is only a medium, as is suppression itself. This suppression creates the opposite effect and actually gives “a self-congratulatory or self-aggrandizing assertion of desire, will, the body” (“Psychic” 57). Not only is the body confirmed through this process, but its subjection is also reinforced. It emphasizes even more the “assertion of desire, will, the body.” The subject as a whole gains agency, which, in turn, increases her subjectification. The phenomenon of suppression leads to the over-subjection of the body.

The purpose of suppression changes again: suppression over-subjects the existing subject and her body at the same time. The body, responsible for its suppression, is also responsible for its over-subjectification and over-subjection. Hence, the body not only preserves itself but also turns its potential erasure into a transcendent existence and an intensified power.

59 “Vous savez bien que je recommencerai” (69).
The body is confirmed in its suppression. As a result, the reinforcement of the body’s existence and presence actualizes its subjection and makes it deeper. Suppression being only an instrument, the thought of suppression itself is enough to enact the body’s preservation. Indeed, the simple thought that there is a body to suppress actualizes the body’s presence. For Butler, “every effort to overcome the body, pleasure, and agency proves to be nothing other than the assertion of precisely those features of the subject” (“Psychic” 53). We face a paradox: suppression, which should destroy the body and ‘unsubject’ it, not only reinforces the body and its existence, but also reinforces its status as a subject.

Over-subjection and the preservation that follows suppression are the reasons why Antigone strives for death. She says to Ismene: “You’re wrong. I was sure you would have put me to death,” (32) and “You’ve chosen life, and I’ve chosen death” (48); and to Creon, “What are you waiting for? Why don’t you call you guards to silence me? . . . [ANTIGONE] (crying out: relieved). At last, Creon! At last!” (49). She is aware she has to die and relieved when Creon calls the guards who arrest her.

Creon insists that death awaited Antigone:

It was her choice [il fallait qu’elle meure]. She wanted to die! None of us was strong enough to persuade her to live. I understand now. She was born to die. She may not have known it herself, but Polynices was only an excuse. And when that excuse wouldn’t work any more she chose another. All that mattered to her was to refuse everything and to die. (49)

Antigone’s desire to die has two separate origins. On the one hand, Antigone had to die. This verdict does not come directly from Creon. He had her arrested and wanted to execute her, but this was done only so that Antigone could apply divine law. Creon prevented her from fulfilling her duties vis-à-vis Polynices. Yet, she could not escape the law of her sex and had to bury a body. The only way for her to achieve this was to bury herself. Thus, the second source of this death drive is Antigone herself. She wants to die, aware that she has to bury herself. She provokes Creon until he condemns her. She dies and, at last, completes her duties in relation to divine law.

Antigone fulfills her responsibilities regarding divine law. By doing so, she looks like she has become one of the “bloodless shadows” (225) Irigaray references when she explores further the role of femininity:

Woman is the guardian of the blood. But as both she and it have had to use their substance to nourish the universal consciousness of self, it is in the form of bloodless shadows—of unconscious fantasies—that they maintain an underground subsistence. . . . femininity consists essentially in laying the dead man back in the womb of the earth, and giving him eternal life. For the bloodless one is the mediation that she knows in her being. (225, italics in original)

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60 “Vous vous trompez. J’étais certaine que vous me ferez mourir” (Anouilh 72); “Tu [Ismene] as choisi la vie et moi la mort” (Anouilh 105); “Qu’est-ce que tu attends pour me faire taire, qu’est-ce que tu attends pour appeler tes gardes ? . . . dans un grand cri soulagé Enfin, Créon !” (Anouilh 106).

61 Il fallait qu’elle meure. . . . C’est elle qui voulait mourir. Aucun de nous n’était assez fort pour la décider à vivre. Je le comprends maintenant, Antigone était faite pour être morte. Elle-même ne le savait peut-être pas, mais Polynice n’était qu’un prétexte. Quand elle a dû y renoncer, elle a trouvé autre chose, tout de suite. Ce qui importait pour elle, c’était de refuser et de mourir. (107)

62 La femme est la gardienne du sang. Mais, comme celui-ci/celle-ci a dû nourrir de sa substance la conscience de soi universelle, c’est sous la forme d’ombres exsangues—
Antigone bears the physical marks of her responsibilities vis-à-vis the divine law. Indeed, when Creon describes her and Haemon after their deaths, they are “a little pale.” Such bloodless state is the burden of femininity. In The Psychic Life of Power, Butler explains that “the body is not a site on which a construction takes place; it is a destruction on the occasion of which a subject is formed. The formation of this subject is at once the framing, subordination, and regulation of the body, and the mode in which that destruction is preserved (in the sense of sustained and embalmed) in normalization” (92, italics in original). The bloodlessness Irigaray describes can be understood as a subjecting power of women. The body is both destroyed and paradoxically preserved ‘in normalization,’ that is to say in the performance of ‘normal’ duties, the duties of one’s sex. One is not only subjected by one’s gender, but also by one’s sex. As we said before, blood is present through the death of Haemon and Eurydice. Antigone bears the physical consequences of deathly paleness even if she did not bleed to death. She paradoxically spilled blood before, when she buried Polynices and hurt her hands. Since she could not bury Polynices, she could not experience the bloodless state Irigaray describes. When she buries herself in her cave, she dies bloodlessly but she is nonetheless described as pale by Creon after her death. She had to take on her a bloodless-like state to be able to mediate her death with her own dead self. “The bloodless [form] is the mediation that she knows in her being” (Irigaray 225, italics in original). At the same time, she decides to protect the city from her blood. Not only has Creon decided to have Antigone buried alive “so as not to stain the city with [Antigone’s] blood” (Anouilh 55), Antigone also follows his will by dying bloodlessly. This is not the case for Haemon or Eurydice whose blood is explicitly referred to after they are dead. Haemon embraces Antigone “in a vast red pool of blood” (59), and Eurydice’s suicide led to the observation of the chorus that “if it wasn’t for the red on the draperies around her throat you might think she was sleeping” (59). Irigaray explains the place underground woman has to find along with her bloodlessness: “Powerless on earth, she remains the very ground in which manifest mind secretly sets its roots and draws its strength” (225). Antigone remains nonetheless the ground necessary to “nourish the universal consciousness of self” (Irigaray 225), and dying in the cave, she prevented the bloodshed that would have stained the city more than her death already does.

Antigone’s masculinity is reinforced by her bloodless death. Keeping her blood ‘secret,’ she maintains the unconscious status blood has among men, and at the same time, their unifying self-certainty: “self-certainty—in masculinity, in community, in government—owes the truth of its own word and of the oath that binds men together to that substance common to all, repressed, unconscious and dumb, washed in the waters of oblivion” (Irigaray 225).

Irigaray writes that “woman is the guardian of the blood” (225). This can refer to the bloodline of the family, symbolically represented by family names and their survival through male offspring. As such, Antigone’s rebellion leads to the destruction of her family. Almost all of Antigone’s family is dead, killing each other, or killing themselves: Polynices and his brother, Haemon, Eurydice, and Antigone herself. Each of them is one of the “drops of blood” which are “[scattered] at a multitude of points which it will no longer possible to gather up in the intimacy of the familiar cave” (Irigaray 226). An obvious parallel can be drawn between

phantasmes inconscients—que sa substance souterraine se perpétue . . . la féminité consiste essentiellement à remettre le mort au sein de la terre, à lui redonner éternellement la vie. Car l’exangue [sic] est la médiation qu’elle connaît dans son être. (280)

63 “un peu pâles” (Anouilh 128)
the ‘familiar cave’ and the cave in which Antigone is kept and kills herself. It can also be understood as her womb, which will never carry a child. As each “[drop] of blood,” (Irigaray 226)—each son, brother, husband—dies for the city, the family dies for the city as well as “the familiar cave,” that is to say the womb that cannot gather the family together anymore. The womb is unproductive; the fate of the dynasty is sealed: Antigone won’t be able to give Creon a grandchild. Antigone is the reason why her family disappears. If she had married Haemon, Creon’s name would have survived. Almost everyone in her family is dead, and neither Creon nor Ismene will produce heirs who would have Creon’s family name. Antigone’s corruption of divine law leads to the disappearance of Creon’s dynasty. Not only does “femininity [consist] essentially in laying the dead man back in the womb of the earth, and giving him eternal life” (Irigaray 225), femininity also consists in perpetuating male’s family name—his blood, which Antigone fails to do.

Antigone is in a confusing situation because of her subjection by both her gender and her sex. Her body is subjectified by her sex, and she is subjectified by her gender. However, her gender and her sex do not always agree, which causes the questioning of her unity as a subject. Yet, this does not prevent her from applying the divine law, the law of her sex, even after Creon tries to stop her. She cannot bury Polynices, so she buries herself, enacting the roles her gender allows her to play, that is to say masculine and feminine at the same time. Another paradox is Antigone’s survival through her death. There are several reasons for her survival: the first one is that repression and suppression preserve and multiply bodies. The second reason is her death and her burial. She dies, but since she buries herself, she performs the divine law on herself, that is to say she “[lays] the dead man [herself] back in the womb of the earth, and giving [herself] eternal life” (Irigaray 225). She is simultaneously the dead one and the mediation that saves the dead.
Conclusion

In order to follow the law of her sex, divine law, Antigone has to bury her brother, Polynices. The woman has to bury the man and “[take] upon herself the operation of destruction” (Irigaray 215) to save the man’s spirit: this is divine law. Divine law (that applies to women) differs from human law (that applies to men), which “in the form of universality . . . is the known law, the prevailing custom” (Hegel 267, italics in original), that is to say, the law that applies to every citizen. However, since Creon is opposed to the burial of Polynices, Antigone cannot play her woman’s role and fulfill the dictate of the divine law. She then turns to the human law and her death restores her ability to comply with divine law: or, in other words, since she cannot bury Polynices, she will bury herself alive in protest. Antigone is unable to escape her sex and, as a result, she cannot escape the duties that come with that sex. She fulfills her destiny by dying, unable to fulfill her destiny by burying her brother. As for Creon, he has an ambivalent attitude vis-à-vis human law: he disrespects his own orders when he tries to save Antigone. He has to endure the human law.

Antigone causes confusion when she tells her nurse she has a lover, when in fact she tried to bury Polynices. The equilibrium between Antigone and her brother is annihilated at this point, which causes Antigone to become fully conscious of divine law, rather than unconsciously and implicitly following that law. The confusion Antigone caused by conflating an attempt to bury Polynices with a lover’s tryst also puts in question her relationship with Haemon, as well as her ability to respect divine law.

Antigone will eventually fulfill the divine law when she kills herself. Paradoxically, in her death, Antigone both follows Creon’s orders (he sentenced her to die), and overcomes him at the same time (he tried to save her). Creon tried to prevent Antigone from fulfilling her responsibilities; she nonetheless succeeded, if not in burying Polynices, then at least in dying on her own terms and burying herself. Her death insists on the fact that she refused to be a sister, a wife, or a mother. In short, she betrays her universal destiny, and has to be punished for that, which means that she has to die. She dies, but what should have been a punishment for her actually frees her from all constraints and allows her to fulfill her divine duties. That is the double paradox of Antigone.

If we move from the understanding that Irigaray brings to the play, to Butler, we are confronted with a different story. In Butler's optic, Antigone’s gender does not seem clear-cut. Rather, Antigone fights to execute the two laws: male and female, human and divine. Since gender is performative and subjectifies sex by “[materializing] the body’s sex” (“Bodies” 2), gender appears to be variable, unlike sex, which is categorized and normative. Since sex controls the body, the latter is under at least two successive layers of subjection: gender is the first, and sex comes after. Gender performativity maintains “gender within its binary frame” (“Gender” 140), which is what asserts the subject. Gender is essential to the sexed body in that gender gives agency to the body. Hence, Antigone is subjected by her female body and by her gender as well. At the same time that the body is subjected, it experiences regulation, which means that the body is multiplied in the end. Bodies are preserved and even created by the means of their suppression, and regulation is empowered. By condemning Antigone to death, Creon saves Antigone, allowing her to perform her duties in relation to divine law and to die for the city. Her condemnation leads to her preservation from death for she buries herself and is recognized by both human and divine laws. Even though she fails to bury her brother, Antigone still succeeds in applying divine law to herself. Divine law is really applied because of sex rather than gender. However, Antigone is recognized by human law, which reveals that her gender is in part masculine. Divine law is unavoidable, regardless of one’s gender. Women have to suffer the consequences of their sex, which means that Antigone faces the two laws. Her gender causes her to be attracted to human law.
Divine and human laws are mutually exclusive, they cannot coexist, except in death itself, which is pointless; the choir concludes at the end of the play: “all dead: quite stiff, quite useless, quite rotten” (60). The two laws are unified in the end, but purposeless, since everyone is equal in death, that is to say useless and rotten.

We can rephrase Irigaray’s sentence “Woman must be that external and effective mediation that reconciles the dead man with himself by taking upon herself the operation of destruction that the becoming of mind cannot manage without” (215) into: ‘Antigone’s feminine gender is the mediation that reconciles the dead Antigone with Antigone’s masculine gender, killing herself to survive through death.’ Antigone is a unified subject despite the disagreement between her sex and her gender. Although Butler questions the unity of the subject in relation to the differences there can be between sex and gender, Antigone seems to be the counter-example as she shows a stronger unity as a subject thanks to her complex gender.

64 “morts pareils, tous, bien raides, bien inutiles, bien pourris” (Anouilh 132).
65 “La féminité doit être cette médiation effective et extérieure qui réconcilie le mort avec lui-même en prenant sur elle l’opération de destruction dont le devenir de l’esprit ne peut faire l’économie” (Irigaray 267).
Bibliography

