

In the Beginning, She Was

Luce Irigaray

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5

Between myth and history: The tragedy of Antigone

The tragedy suffered by Antigone takes place between a myth and its possible embodiment in History. It is the difficulty of unveiling the meaning of Antigone's will and act, and the resistance of our History to their realization, that explain why Antigone remains such a persistent myth in our tradition. I will not cite here the names of all the prestigious creators who have shown an interest in Antigone, a figure who generally appeals to them but sometimes also repulses them. Their interpretations are usually too psychological, egological, indeed narcissistic, to correspond to that epoch in which Antigone's character entered into our culture. In those ancient Greek times, specular or speculative reflection did not yet exist, nor a subject as such who may be concerned by them. The habitual manner of approaching

Antigone's character transforms it into a feminine subjectivity, a sort of eternal feminine, situated within what is really a later tradition in which psychology and sociology lay down the law and are used as methods of interpretation. But Antigone has little to do with these more or less recent understandings, which often amount to the projections of men into or onto the mystery that woman remains for them, a mystery that they do not want to consider and respect as such; that is, as the sign of a belonging to another identity, to another world and culture than their own, which our Western tradition has repressed, indeed forgotten. The persistence of Antigone's character is linked to our History more than the usual interpretations claim, even though it has not yet entered into History and still represents today a question put to the Western historical tradition concerning its development from a certain epoch onward.

Sharing Antigone's tragic fate

Since *Speculum*, and even before, I have been interested in Antigone. I have been fortunate enough – certainly it has been a painful lot to endure – to experience exclusion because I tried to unveil truth, notably regarding Antigone. Anyway, it is revealing that the numerous essays concerning this character which have been published after *Speculum*, in particular those written by men, ordinarily do not cite my interpretation nor other interpretations which in one way or another follow the same lines as, for example, that of Clémence Ramnoux relating to the evolution

of early Greek culture or, in part, that of Johann Jakob Bachofen concerning matriarchy – Bachofen who they say inspired Hegel himself and of whom he was a presumed cousin. This is a sign of the resistance to recognizing the truth that Antigone conveys and of refusing the possible entry of such a truth into History.

Hence the continuation of the tragedy, the continuation of fate as the Greeks said, in the life of the one who upholds such a truth. I have shared Antigone's tragic fate: the exclusion from socio-cultural places because of my public assertion of a truth that has been repressed, or at least not recognized as such, and that thus disturbs our usual order. Fortunately, if I have been excluded from society – from universities, psychoanalytical institutions, circles of scientists and even of friends, in part from publishing houses and, more recently, from my house itself – I have not been deprived of my relation to the natural world. Expelled from public organizations, enclosed or shrouded within a silence that I sometimes felt to be the opaque wall of a tomb, I have not been deprived of my relation to air, to the sun, to the plant and animal worlds. I have been expelled from the polis, the city, the human society to which I belonged and sent back to the natural world that my contemporaries no longer appreciate or consider of much value, and hence something of which it was unnecessary to deprive me.

Being sent back to the natural world in this way has allowed me to survive or, better, to rediscover what life itself is. Furthermore, it helped me to unearth that Greek world in which Antigone's character appeared, and to perceive the meaning of her tragic destiny.

In contrast to Hegel's thinking as well as that of most commentators on Antigone's tragedy, and furthermore in contrast to a large number of feminists, I did not imagine – like Antigone herself – that coming into conflict with men could solve my tragic destiny or, at least, I quickly understood that such conflicts were useless. The matter was, the matter still is, one of entering another time of History, reviving the message of Antigone and pursuing its embodiment in our culture. But for this we need first to realize that the two periods of time which come into conflict in Sophocles' tragedy, the two discourses that alternate between one another, that reply to each other without any mutual understanding, belong to two different worlds whose difference has to be respected without intending to incorporate them into the higher unity of a single world. This requires us to embody the negative in a way other than that which is usual in our tradition. Thus, in Hegel's system, the negative serves to overcome a subjective and an objective scission in two with a view to oneness. In my own thinking, the negative has become insuperable and serves to maintain the existence of the duality of subjects and of their worlds, between whom the question is now one of constructing a culture without abolishing either the one or the other. This implies that we relinquish our logic based on pairs of opposites at the service of oneness, and enter a logic of coexistence and dialogue between two different subjects and worlds. I could add that this demands that we invent another dramatic play through which we can relate to each other as different.

It is thus with the aid of my own experience, of my own destiny – to which even my psychoanalyst sent me back – and

in particular with the help of a tragic solitude that I will propose my interpretation of the figure of Antigone. I have already presented certain aspects of it in some of my writings, but I will now resume my meditation on Antigone's character, notably in connection with my own life and my own work, and develop some traits of this character that I had not yet elaborated and that seem to me necessary for understanding both Antigone's way of acting and the perpetuation of her myth as a truth which is insistent but remains veiled.

In my current interpretation of the duty carried out by Antigone, I will distance myself more from Hegel than I did in the chapter 'The Eternal Irony of the Community' devoted to Antigone in *Speculum*. Because I have been expelled from social places, from the belonging on which Hegel founded his reading of Sophocles' tragedy, because in a way I have been buried alive in the natural world, and also because the truth that I tried to unveil, after arousing enthusiasm and bedazzlement, has again been covered and hidden by the arbitrary and subsequent blindness of our civilization, the mystery that envelops Antigone has become more familiar to me, indeed more intimate. It also shed light on the way for me to go deeper into an interpretation of patriarchal tradition as well as towards the elaboration of a logic or a dialectics in the feminine that could enable women to enter into relations with men without renouncing their own subjectivity and world, their own path.

No doubt my practice of yoga and my approach to Eastern traditions have allowed me to envision and value Antigone's rationality and wisdom in contrast to Creon's irrationality and

madness. Sophocles' tragedy takes place in the passage from a manner of thinking faithful to life, love and desire towards a reasoning which leads only to destruction, hatred and death. There are many signs of such a passage in Sophocles' tragedy, for example, in the allusions and invocations to certain gods, in the words of the chorus or the omens of the soothsayer.

I have been, like Antigone herself, criticized for disturbing the established order in the name of personal passions. I would like to make clear that I spoke and acted in the name of an order repressed in our tradition, an order that it is necessary to consider again with the becoming and accomplishment of humanity in mind. To come back to Antigone, she in no way wills the perturbation of the order of the city, but she has to obey a higher order, unwritten laws, which the new order, embodied by Creon in Sophocles' tragedy, intended to abolish.

The law or the duty Antigone defends at the risk of her life includes three aspects that are linked together: respect for the order of the living universe and living beings, respect for the order of generation and not only genealogy, and respect for the order of sexuate difference. It is important to stress the word 'sexuate,' and not 'sexual,' because the duty of Antigone does not concern sexuality as such, nor even its restraint as Hegel thought. If this was the case, she ought to have privileged her fiancé Hemon and not her brother. Antigone undertakes the burial of her brother because he represents a singular concrete sexuate identity that must be respected as such: 'as the son of her mother.' For Antigone, human identity has not yet become one, neuter, universal as Creon's order

will render it. Humanity is still two: man and woman, and this duality, already existent in the natural order, must be respected, as a sort of frame, before the fulfillment of sexual attraction or desire. What Antigone sustains is the necessity of respecting her brother as brother before wedding Hemon. She explains that without placing herself in relation to the different sexuate identity of her brother, she cannot marry another man, and while she could not substitute any one for her brother, this brother being unique for her, she could marry another man. She thus has to protect her dead brother from the derision and from the decay of being eaten away, from the regression to animality through being devoured by birds of prey or other carnivores, from endless wandering as a ghost deprived of burial. She must secure for her brother the memory of a valid sexuate identity, and not just of an anonymous and neutralized bodily matter.

Respect for life and cosmic order

Thus the first law that Antigone obeys concerns respect for the cosmic order. It is important to understand that *cosmos*, for the Greeks, refers to a comprehensive order that includes nature and living beings, the gods and humans. It is, then, not a question of an undifferentiated natural world, as Western culture imagines after it has destroyed the cosmic order that previously existed.

Sophocles' tragedy tells us about the passage from the harmony of a cosmic order to a fabricated human world, a world

that no longer takes into consideration an established harmony between living nature, gods and humans. The duty that Antigone attempts to accomplish is that of preserving the equilibrium of the cosmic order, notably with regard to the difficult relations between Zeus and Hades, the god of light and the god of darkness or shadow, who will later be called the god of the heavens and the god of the underworld. To give burial to Polynices means trying to maintain a delicate balance between the two gods, the two worlds. It is not to favour the god of the underworld – as has too often been said in relation to the character of Antigone, and firstly by Creon himself – but to endeavour not to break a possible passage between the two worlds, a passage that not only the dead brother needs but also, more generally, the harmony of the whole cosmos. Antigone's gesture intends to venerate Zeus as much as Hades and to maintain a fragile harmony between the two gods and their mutual realms.

Only because of the failure of her attempt to bury Polynices according to the rite of passage from an earthly sojourn to the sojourn of the dead, does Antigone talk about sharing Persephone's destiny. Persephone is the name given to Kore after she has been taken away from her mother, the great goddess Demeter, by the god of the underworld. This sacrificial rape of his virgin daughter was accepted by Zeus himself in order to re-establish a possible cosmic order, notably thanks to a link with his brother Hades.

It seems that the death sentence Creon pronounces on Antigone repeats in a way the sacrificial removal of a virgin from the earthly maternal sojourn and leaves her without any

dwelling either on earth or in the underworld, either with living beings or with the dead. But, as Antigone asserts, this time Zeus himself is no longer the one responsible for her removal from the earthly sojourn or life; the one responsible is now Creon, who appeals to Zeus in a way that breaks the cosmic harmony. This appeal to the omnipotence of Zeus, to the detriment of considering the total cosmic harmony between gods, humans and all living beings, then begins to rule Western culture and to lead it to possible chaos and destruction.

This is announced by the chorus, which tells of a desire of man for mastery, a desire that endangers cosmic harmony and can sometimes result in a bad situation or nothing, sometimes in the achievement of brave deeds. The chorus says that man's thirst for dominating the sea, for taming wild animals and breaking-in horses and bulls, his wish to understand everything through words, his capability to escape bad weather by building houses and to rule over cities, show an arrogance that defies the gods and could provoke their wrath. The chorus explains how man intends to bring the earth, the noblest of the gods, into submission and work her until exhaustion. The chorus talks about man as a clever manufacturer who lacks experience, and seeks to master all, including the power of the gods, but is unable to escape death. The chorus describes how man has lost the possibility of dwelling because he only dominates and overlooks his place on earth without living in it. And the chorus, which is presumed to represent the people, invokes the words: 'may such a man never frequent my hearth, and my mind never share the presumption of the one who acts this way.'

Some commentators wonder whether these words refer to Creon or to Antigone. In my opinion, they can only allude to Creon and the culture in the masculine that he inaugurates. In contrast to Creon, Antigone fights to maintain cosmic harmony: not to provide her brother with burial harms nature itself, notably the air and the sun. The question is not only of ensuring a personal passage for Polynices from the earth to the underworld but of caring about the balance between the cosmic elements, of which divinities are the guardians.

And Antigone is not the only person who claims respect for the cosmic order. The soothsayer – like the chorus – talks in the same way. The soothsayer tells how he heard barbarous calls of birds previously unknown and saw the birds killing one another; furthermore, he tells how no sacrifice could restore peace and harmony because the flame did not arise from his offerings. All this means that both the heavens and the underworld are polluted because Polynices' flesh has remained without the appropriate ritual and has been left to birds of prey and wild dogs.

The lack of a burial for Polynices harms life itself for all living beings, breaking the economy of relations between earth and sky, air and sun. At that time, providing burial first had to do with respecting earthly harmony and the atmosphere depending on it. Caring about the burial of Polynices is certainly a religious gesture on Antigone's part, but 'religious' is here endowed with a meaning that differs from what we now attribute to this word. It is not a question of being submitted to the law of one unique God, whom we have to join in heaven, but of being concerned

with maintaining balance in the cosmic order by caring about the living world that surrounds us.

Unfortunately we, Westerners, usually forget to consider as religious the concern for cosmic order. We can even harm the world through bombs, indeed atomic bombs, if it is in the name and in the service of our God, this is a religious act. This behaviour is irreligious from Antigone's point of view but not from the point of view of many monotheists, who consider it valid to destroy the living world, including humans as living beings, in order to defend their belief in an eternal reality.

Is irrationality, then, to be found on the part of Antigone or on the part of monotheistic people? On which side is madness, and on which side wisdom? And could it be because man wanted everything at once and only for himself that such a God has been created by him? What can be shared with man when he has faith only in his God? God himself? But this God is not shareable by all humans in the whole world. He is presumed to be the absolute for everyone. Perhaps he has been the absolute for men of our culture. It is not even certain that the God of monotheism can correspond to the absolute for a woman of this culture who is faithful to herself. Perhaps her absolute is closer to that of Antigone. At the very least, it requires respect for the unwritten laws that Antigone defends. Could a divine absolute in the feminine exist before the respect for our duties concerning life itself? Could it impose its law on life itself, or substitute itself for life? Becoming divine in the feminine takes place beyond simply living: it amounts to accomplishing life and making it blossom, and does not have to do with something

existing instead of life, indeed against life, as God has too often been understood in our tradition.

Antigone cannot reach this stage of divine fulfillment because the law concerning life is not respected: with regard to cosmic order, with regard to generational order, with regard to sexuate order. She was waiting for the divine blossoming of her life, of her love. But this could only happen after a respect for and a cultivation of her living surroundings, after giving thanks to those who brought her into the world, after securing a valid memory for her brother. Without taking into account the unwritten laws regarding these dimensions of our existence, she cannot attain another level in becoming divine.

Antigone knows this, and she cannot fulfill her desire for Hemon, her fiancé, without first providing for Polynices' burial. There is no blind or adolescent passion in this, but a deep consideration for unwritten laws regarding life. Blind passion would be to marry her fiancé before discharging her duty with respect to life. Her respect for such laws preserves her autonomy and her feminine world, and prevents her from becoming a mere function or role in the patriarchal world then beginning to impose its order, at least the one that Creon represents.

Antigone cannot submit to the arbitrary laws on which Creon founds his power – that is, to a basically nihilist order – because she defends life and its values. Rather than being subjected to death drives, as it has been said, Antigone struggles to preserve living beings and their dwelling. She cannot accept survival instead of living. She loves life and the living world, living beings. Even Jean Anouilh, who does not understand a

great deal about Antigone, talks of her love for the garden before dawn, when no human has yet looked at it, and of her concern for her dog after her death. Her love for the sun, as giving light and warmth to living beings, compels her to give burial to her brother although in doing so she runs the risk of being sentenced to death by the king Creon. The sun, like the air, takes part in the dwelling of living beings on earth, and Antigone has to care about them.

It is precisely the air and the sun that the king will deprive her of; that is, the living world that she needs to live. He tries to avoid an act forbidden by the law; he tries to kill without overtly killing, depriving Antigone of the surroundings that permit her to live, without actually murdering her and refusing her body burial.

In a way, all of our Western patriarchal system amounts to this: killing without openly committing a murder; that is to say, little by little depriving us of the surroundings that allow us to live, by polluting, annihilating the equilibrium of the environment, destroying the plant and animal worlds, and finally humanity itself. And it may happen that people then prefer to take their own life rather than waiting for a complete imbalance of our planet that does not permit them to quietly pursue their survival. This may happen, and this really does happen, as we know. People, in this way, somehow anticipate a death planned by the patriarchal economy, which often only grants us survival and not life itself.

To such a state of merely surviving, Antigone says: no. Can we then talk about a desire for dying, or about a love for life? Is it not surviving at any cost that testifies to a wish to die rather

than to really live? This choice does not suit Antigone. The supreme value for her is life. No other value can substitute for it: no abstract ideal, no truth or absolute. And she is not waiting for another life in another world, beyond her earthly sojourn. It is here and now that she desires to live and share life, not later, beyond her present dwelling. If Antigone cares about her dead brother, it is not because she takes a particular interest in the dead, as has often been said. She wants to preserve life.

Antigone does not ask for this or that, she only asks to live, to be. What has been described, indeed condemned, as Antigone's passion for the absolute is instead an outward sign of her desire to live, to be. She is not fighting in the name of an absolute that is external to her, but for living, for being.

Each living being is an absolute insofar as it remains faithful to life. Life needs one to keep oneself whole and not to become some thing or some reality onto which one projects one's passion. It is not true that Antigone wants all at once, an all external to her, or to die. She wants to be the whole that she is as a living being. And it is true that if she gives up being this whole, she will die, in one way or another. She wants to live and not to die. To be and remain as a living being does not require possessing some things or others, but rather being a someone.

Respect for generational order

To be a living being needs a certain surrounding world: it is not possible without air, water, but also the light and warmth

of the sun, and the fertility of the earth. To be someone really living also calls for limits. Limits are provided by the necessities of life itself, among other things its surroundings, but also by relations with other living beings, in particular those of one's own species. Relational limits between humans are provided through genealogy and sexuate difference.

Genealogy is here endowed with a meaning different from that to which we are accustomed. We generally understand genealogy within the horizon of the patriarchal tradition, especially, but not only, regarding the organization of the family. The main cause of the tragedy of Antigone, and one of its teachings, is that patriarchy has been established in an arbitrary and repressive manner. Instead of attempting to achieve an alliance between maternal and paternal genealogies, one has tried to supplant the other. However, each one contributes to culture in a specific way and with specific values.

The maternal genealogy favours the values of life, of generation, of growth. It is based on unwritten laws that do not clearly distinguish civil order from religious order. It does not attach an absolute importance to family as such, as patriarchy does. It privileges daughters and, later, the youngest son as heirs. This privilege is founded in relation to the perpetuation of generation itself and not the inheritance of goods, functions, or names.

It is obvious that Antigone tries to be faithful to a maternal order or culture that Creon is destroying, erasing, through an arbitrary power, arbitrary laws and discourses. Beyond her concern for life itself, Antigone cares about her youngest brother,

the one who does not inherit power in a paternal genealogy, but is 'the son of her mother.' Other things bear witness to the values of a maternal genealogy: of course the words of the chorus and those of the soothsayer, but also an unusual beginning in the tragedy, a conversation between two sisters who, furthermore, embody the dilemma between faithfulness to maternal values or subjection to the power of Creon. It is interesting to note that, in their exchange, the middle voice is initially used – a Greek verbal form which expresses that the two have a part, even if differently, in the same whole – and that this form disappears after their division between two traditions, two genealogies.

The reason put forward to justify the repression of the maternal order is that incest was frequent in such a tradition. I, for one, do not believe this. Rather, the generalized practice of incest takes place after the emergence of a contempt for the unwritten laws of the maternal order, an order renowned for its ethics and in which it is obvious to all who the mother is. What can then happen is love outside the family ruled by patriarchal power. The revered goddess is Aphrodite rather than Hera, the divinity who presides over the patriarchal family and who only with difficulty relates to Aphrodite, a goddess who resists the confinement of love in the new family institution.

In the tragedy of *Antigone*, the chorus alludes to Aphrodite as the goddess who governs alongside the masters of the world, and is capable of breaking up the patriarchal family in the name of desire and love. These invocations-to and praise-of Aphrodite occur after the rebellion of Hemon against his father Creon because of his love, his desiring love, for the virgin *Antigone*.

According to the chorus, Aphrodite is the one who is victorious in the murderous confrontations of this tragedy in which, in spite of the death of Antigone and Hemon, desire and love win out over the power that tries to submit them to new institutional bounds.

In fact, Aphrodite, like the maternal tradition, respects an ethical order, at least originally. Desire and love, desire as love, then, obey certain laws that, along with the greatest laws, take part in the government of the world. Incest, which would be the cause of the tragedy suffered by Antigone, does not result from the maternal order or that of Aphrodite. Rather it comes from a regression to undifferentiation provoked by a truly problematic establishment of patriarchy. It is then that the mother loses her identity and lovers their difference.

To the best of my knowledge and information, Oedipus' incest is neither unique nor singular. It represents a figure or character that appears with the culture then beginning. Because he wants to annihilate maternal and feminine identity and values, man falls back into a lack of differentiation and chaos with respect to his origin and attractions. The world that he constructs through his logic is parallel to the original natural world that he intends to dominate. But this division between a supposed nature and its mastery by masculine culture results in two artificial and in some way neuter universes that no longer correspond to a living real and its cultivation, beginning with the real that man is. Incest, then, can be understood as a nostalgic regression to an initial state, and culture as an attempt to emerge from it, with all the ambivalences that accompany such movements. On no account does the possibility of attaining an identity of his own

exist, and man continues to claim it from two worlds which lack differentiation because he fabricated them through the annihilation of maternal and feminine difference. His quest leads him from a regressive incestuous return to a neutralization in a someone or a somebody who differs from others only through goods or power; and this in some way amounts to an indirect incestuous behaviour.

The exile from his first natural identity and sojourn leaves man lost and blind in the artificial world that he created. And such a blindness seems to suit him. After knowing that he made love with his mother, Oedipus puts out his eyes instead of learning to henceforth consider the person who appeals to him. He does not learn from his mistake to address and modify his lack of perception of the other: rather, he chooses to increase the risk of being mistaken by gouging out his eyes. He reduplicates his blindness instead of trying to become one who is now capable of seeing. He does not want to renounce being attracted to the mother, an attraction that corresponds to longing for a blind tactile sharing with the maternal world in which difference is still lacking and passive sensations are predominant in well-being.

It is not a mere coincidence that Antigone became Oedipus' guide after he lost his sight. Antigone recognizes the difference between her father and her beloved because she respects the law concerning life and generation. She knows that she has to take the living order into consideration before wedding Hemon. Fulfilling her desire without first respecting life, its

environment and generational conditions, does not enter the ethical world of Antigone.

Respect for sexuate differentiation

Furthermore, nature as such lets many differences arise, grow and bloom. Nature itself is not lacking in differences, as the Western masculine tradition, which has intended to master it, claims. On the contrary, nature is more differentiated than the world built by man, and it requires an order that the earliest Greek culture tried to respect. Natural differences are also less hierarchical because each remains faithful to its own origin, growth and blossoming and is not standardized through its submission to one unique world that knows only quantitative differences.

Humans live among different beings if they remain respectful of their natural surroundings. The human species includes within itself its differentiation, its difference, because it is formed by two. To use this duality exclusively to reproduce is not specifically human, whereas to make difference the place of access to transcendence, a transcendence inscribed in nature itself, seems to fit human beings as such.

The place where human difference appears is between sister and brother. In our tradition man as such does not differentiate himself enough from the maternal world, or from a neuter individual of the polis, the state. Husband and wife are, paradoxically, not distinguished by their different identities but by different functions in reproductive and parental responsibilities.

They are at the service of nature, but only in terms of the survival of the human species. Sexuate identity is not what characterizes the couple in our traditional family. And perhaps Hegel was mistaken on this point, at least in part. He remains within the horizon of his primitive family as a son, rather than situating himself in relation to the family that he founded as a husband. Indeed, this family perhaps did not yet exist, and perhaps does not yet exist today.

Hegel mistakes – as does Sophocles in his tragedy, but with another intention – man with Creon or Oedipus and woman with Antigone or Ismene, taking into consideration only sexuate roles or functions and not sexuate identity as such. He places man in a political role without a real sexuate identity. So Creon affirms his male identity through an arbitrary order and not through an identity of his own that implicates a specific relation to immanence and transcendence. In a way, Creon is a eunuch, as Oedipus is, but in a different manner. They have both sacrificed their sexuate identity to a lack of differentiation from the maternal world: merging in it or rebelling against it, notably through misogyny. But that does not suffice for reaching and accomplishing an identity of one's own.

Antigone is the one who testifies that a sexuate identity exists and has to be respected. And if she defends the generational order it is also because it lets sexuate identity appear. But not between husband and wife, who are destined to become mother and father, but between sister and brother, the place where it appears that neither the mother nor the father could represent a unique and neuter origin, whether it results from natural

or fabricated undifferentiation. Between sister and brother, genealogy becomes the generation of two different horizontal identities: appearance of the transcendence of sexuate identity with respect to the body.

Our natural belonging then supplies a transcendence to a mere material belonging or undifferentiation in relation to all living beings, including humans. And it is no longer necessary to repress our natural origin in order to reach culture. It provides us with a cultural horizon: the transcendence of our sexuate identity, which is not only a bodily identity but also a cultural identity because it creates a world different for man and woman.

To give burial to Polynices amounts, on Antigone's part, to preserving a transcendental world not only as the world of the dead but firstly as the world of her brother, that is, of an identity different from her own. This other world remains invisible: it delimits a horizon within which it is not possible to see. This does not mean that it is merely night or even the underworld, but that it remains irreducible to the ability to see, understand or substitute of the one who does not belong to the same sexuate being. Of course it is possible to perceive some material sign of difference: the sex organs, for example, but not its meaning for the persons or for the construction of their subjectivity. The way in which the world is formed and organized by a sexuate human is irreducible to the way in which a human of another sex builds his, or her, own world. No one of the two can perceive the world in which the other really dwells: it remains transcendent to him, or her. Recognizing this transcendence permits humanity to

emerge from undifferentiation and enter a relational cultural world. The transcendental dimension that exists, or ought to exist, between two differently sexuate persons can provide humanity with a cultural order capable of preventing us from merging or falling back into undifferentiation, notably with regard to the maternal world and any kind of incest that results from an unresolved relation with the maternal origin.

Such a transcendence first appears between sister and brother. Perceiving and respecting it allow us to enter another cultural era faithful to the gesture of Antigone, one which could contribute to the entry of her myth into History. The perception of the transcendence of the world of the other—beginning with the sexuate other, who corresponds to the most basic, universal and irreducible otherness – defines the limits of one's own world, permitting us to pass from a solitary apprehension and construction of the world to a relational cultivation and culture. A solitary world always remains somehow in a natural immediacy. And our Western culture itself partly remains at the level of natural immediacy because it is based on the perception and elaboration of one and the same human, whose sexuate aspects and impact have not been called into question by a differently sexuate one.

Such questioning is recent and compels us to enter a new era starting from a cultivation of the natural immediacy still at work in our culture, on the side of man and of woman. Of course there is no question of returning to a mere natural belonging and of coming into conflict with each other in the name of our different immediate perceptions or feelings. This

leads us to a personal and collective regression. And to wars, among others between the sexes, that end in nothing because male and female genders do not amount to the two parts of a single human that could be reached through opposition and conflicts. Male and female genders correspond to two different worlds – and not two roles, functions or characters – irreducible to one another. They have to elaborate a third world through their relations in difference, a third world that does not belong to one or the other, but is generated by the two with respect for their difference(s).

In contrast to Hegel, the question is not to reduce the two to one, but to engender a third starting from the two, whose natural belonging has been cultivated and not abolished or neutralized. The two different worlds do not have to confront each other in order to resolve, cancel or overcome their difference, but have to integrate into their ethical duties the task of forming a new world, taking into account the fecundity of their different belongings. In other words, sexuate belongings are to be taken into consideration to engender a relational culture, and their specificities are not to be ignored so that they unconsciously remain at work in our elaboration of truth and in our practices.

An insurmountable tragedy

To respect our sexuate belonging always partly involves tragedy. Each of us has to embody alone the truth of our own gender; and bringing it forth into History will also remain a tragic gesture,

because our sexuate desire longs for the infinite and the absolute while History is limited and human. Furthermore, sexuate truth is and must remain dual, each one having to accomplish alone, with respect for the other, one's sexuate destiny, a destiny that is higher than merely coming into the world as an anonymous body.

To distinguish sexuate belonging from sexual attraction also includes a tragic necessity to which Antigone's ethics bears witness. She needs to recognize the sexuate transcendence of her brother before wedding her beloved. To provide Polynices with burial signifies securing for the sexuate belonging of her brother a permanent, one could say an immortal, status beyond his death. This is needed to protect him both from existing as a mere body, the same as hers, as that of any one, and from being confined to a simple neutralizing role or function: a destiny that the construction of the new Western culture has in store for Creon and Ismene, ahead of all of us. This amounts to an abolition of our difference by a public functionalism which forever prevents us from meeting or wedding together with respect for our real difference.

Fortunately, Antigone resists the decay of our human identity which is then beginning. In texts other than his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel wonders whether Antigone's mission is not higher than that of Christ himself. Such a question is not without ground. Whatever the comments contrasting the human and the divine could be with regard to Antigone, she defends laws which do not separate civil and religious duties. Of course, this does not mean a form of fundamentalism, because fundamentalism

is sociological by nature. Civil duty and religious duty mingle in Antigone's respect for the other as a being transcendent to her, beginning with her brother, the son of her mother.

To pass from singularity to community often leads us to neglect, indeed to forget, the importance of sexuate difference between us. Now this difference, initially and at each time, happens between two different belongings which it provides with limits, to which it brings a sort of death when we pass from natural immediacy to cultural transcendence in relating between us here and now.

This transcendence is universal and can be shared by all people all over the world. It suffices to listen to unwritten laws inscribed in nature itself: the respect for life, for its generation, growth and blossoming and the respect for a sexuate transcendence between us – first of all between children of the same mother, but more generally between all the children of our human species, of our mother nature, whose we are children on this side of or beyond all the more or less artificial sociological constructions that divide us.