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**Woolf's *Antigone*: Modeling Antifascist Feminism Through a Tragic
Lens**

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A departmental senior thesis submitted to the Department of English at
Trinity University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
with departmental honors.

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Woolf's *Antigone*: Modeling Antifascist Feminism Through a Tragic Lens

Virginia Woolf's Classicism

Virginia Woolf is an author whose poetics can't be separated from her politics. In her feminist essays, she argues for women's education and access to solitude as a means to mental independence and self-actualization, and her fiction reflects back an attention to the interior lives of her characters. A significant facet of Woolf criticism examines her own education as an influence on her writings, both essays and fiction, and research into her biography has shown that much of her education, both in her early life and in a university setting, was in Ancient Greek. Her reading journals show a particular affinity for Attic tragedy, read both in translation and in ancient Greek, and recent evidence has revealed that her education was much more connected to the academic world of her day than was previously believed¹. The influence of this lifelong passion shows the close ties between her feminism and her advocacy for education in both her novels and her political writings. When Woolf wrote about the importance of women's education and privacy of thought, that comes through the lens of her studies in Ancient Greek, and much of what occupied her private thoughts was reading and rereading the tragedies that sparked her imagination. This thesis aims to explore the influence of one particular favorite tragedy, Sophocles' *Antigone*, on two significant pieces of Woolf's body of work, her post-war novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and her less well-known feminist essay *Three Guineas* (1938).

In his 1984 survey of *Antigone* criticism, George Steiner gives this summary of Woolf's career-long exploration of the play, a footnote to a brief mention of *The Years*: "Virginia Woolf's involvement with the Antigone theme is recurrent. It begins with *The Voyage Out* in 1915. It is

¹ See Fowler 1999, Kenyon-Jones and Snaith 2010, Koulouris 2019.

taken up in “On Not Knowing Greek”, *The Common Reader*, 1st series (1925) and given a feminist-political twist in *Three Guineas* (1938)” (141). Steiner’s neglect of Woolf is unsurprising. Though *Antigones* is often considered comprehensive for its time, Steiner omits most female *Antigone* critics, and gave extensive attention to none. Nevertheless his central question--what might have happened if the field of psychoanalysis were rooted in Antigone as its central character, rather than Oedipus?--has been taken up by feminist critics in the years since, including in prominent works from Bonnie Honig, Cecelia Sjöholm, and Judith Butler. The answer to this question has prompted a turn not just to *Antigone* itself, but to Jacques Lacan, the man who introduced Sophocles’ play into psychoanalytic theory. Honig, Sjöholm, and Butler each respond to Lacan in some capacity, whether to affirm aspects of his analysis or to deconstruct and reject it, as do many other feminist *Antigone* scholars. Butler stands out in this field as the widely acknowledged successor in *Antigone* criticism: Lacan responded to Hegel, Luce Irigaray responded to her teacher Lacan, and Butler is responding to all three, prompting scholars for the last two decades to at least reference her analysis. Woolf doesn’t currently have a logical place on this chain, which may explain the lack of widespread acknowledgement of her contribution within the field. Her most prominent work on *Antigone*, the “feminist-political” essay *Three Guineas*, precedes Lacan’s *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* by at least two decades. This distance presents the possibility for a reading of *Antigone* that isn’t entangled in psychoanalysis as an end, but instead interacts directly with both the original text of the play and Woolf’s contemporary social context.

The field of Woolf criticism is not entirely lacking in attention to the Classics, however, and there has been renewed interest in Woolf’s relationship to Ancient Greek in the last few decades. Christine Kenyon-Jones and Anna Snaith recently published “Tilting at Universities,”

an examination of resurfaced records from Cambridge that altered the general understanding of Woolf's education (2010). In addition to her multiple private tutors, Kenyon-Jones and Snaith reveal that her private education at Cambridge, while conducted separately from the classes attended by her male peers, was the equivalent of earning her degree in Greek and put her in close proximity to the preeminent academics of her time. Even prior to this article, there has been a prominent strain of Classics-related criticism in Woolf studies, exploring both Woolf's work as a site of Classical receptions and Woolf herself as an authoritative voice in the Classics field. The new revelations about Woolf's education have also caused a recent surge in attention to these subjects. Emily Dalgarno has written extensively on Woolf's Greek receptions, including a chapter on *Oresteia* receptions in *Mrs. Dalloway* and on Woolf's interest in translation (2001, 2012). Theodore Koulouris has done work on the links between Woolf's Hellenism and her personal life, including work on some of her more recently unearthed reading notebooks (2016, 2019). Most recently, Nancy Worman's monograph on *Virginia Woolf's Greek Tragedy* explores how Classical Greek tragedy informs the aesthetics of Woolf's novels (2018).

In spite of these recent developments in Woolf criticism, however, her lifelong interest in *Antigone* has gone under-discussed. Sybil Oldfield's pivotal essay gives a useful overview of *Antigone* woven throughout the narrative of Woolf's literary career that depends mainly on evidence from her reading notebooks to point to key moments of rereading and renewed interest; however, even she doesn't explore the presence of *Antigone* echoes in Woolf's fiction (1996). The reason for the downplaying of *Antigone* as an influence on the Woolfian canon may lie in the location of her most prominent discussions of the play, *Three Guineas*, which is covered in the concluding pages of Oldfield's essay, and which even within the circle of Woolf criticism is neglected in comparison to *A Room of One's Own*.

Three Guineas originated in essay fragments that were to be incorporated into *The Years*, interspersing the novel's narrative. *The Years* does at times draw on *Antigone* as a point of commonality adjoining several of the family members upon which its decades-spanning narrative focuses, but the story itself has little in common with Sophocles' tragedy, and Woolf ultimately separated and expanded the essay portions into a work that is far more concerned with the issues at the heart of *Antigone*. *Three Guineas* as a whole deals with women's ability to affect change in the face of rising European fascism, a resurgence of English patriarchy, and what she presents as the root cause of these problems: tyranny. She draws a parallel between the limited power women hold within nuclear families and the lack of leverage women have as a class. The premise of *Three Guineas* is that Woolf is answering letters requesting money to support various causes, chiefly the prevention of war, and she uses these fabricated requests to construct both the arguments of those trying to persuade her and her own counterargument illustrating the hypocrisy of making such a request to a financially dependent class. Much of her argument rests on pulling quotes from women's biographies, journals, letters from soldiers, and, an example she returns to repeatedly, photographs from the Spanish Civil War, the freshest proof of the consequences of tyranny. She switches back and forth between picking apart her correspondents' hypothetical logic and bringing in her own primary sources as indelible proof of her assertions and damning evidence of ignorance or indifference in the writings of upper-class British men.

With such a heavy reliance on authoritative sources as evidence, it's no wonder that Woolf would return to tragedy to help underline her point. She figures ancient Greece and the characters of its literature as early civilization archetypes, larger than life. In her essay "On Not Knowing Greek," she describes the characters in Greek tragedies as "the originals...of the human species," more easily understood due to their directness. When she brings in *Antigone* as

supporting evidence, therefore, Woolf's own general attitude towards Greek calls for her readers to view the battle between Antigone and Creon as the Ur-struggle between powerful men and powerless women. By referencing *Antigone*, Woolf underlines her assertion that only viewing tyranny as a foreign problem is hypocritical, and that the marginalized social position of women, the nature of corrupt power, and the need to transform gender relations are immediate problems in post-WWI England. She asserts that the problems of patriarchy and tyranny are connected, and common across societies that experience one or both. *Antigone's* central conflict thus becomes Woolf's call for a morality that casts off the social restrictions created by patriarchal power structures and focuses on the obligations people ought to have towards one another: "Antigone's distinction between the laws and the Law" (98). Woolf's archetypal feminist struggle, then, defines patriarchal power as a manufactured state of being, and the struggle for equality as the discovery of innate social facts. Given *Three Guineas'* universalizing approach to the fight against tyranny, the value of such an archetype to the whole of the argument shouldn't be underestimated.

Connections to *Antigone* in both *Three Guineas* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are indicative of an overlap between the themes of each work. The feminist antifascist philosophy that culminates in *Three Guineas* can be seen in its nascent form in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The negative impact of war, its roots in classist patriarchy, as well as an alignment of upper-class womanhood with working class men as an Outsider class, are all issues central to the novel. There is both a textual and a biographical basis for linking *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Antigone*². The same year Woolf wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*, she reread *Antigone* to refresh her memory for "On Not Knowing Greek," published

² Karla Alwes has argued for identifying *Mrs. Dalloway* as epic, particularly for its emphasis on the passage of time (58); however, as Elizabeth Gourd points out, Woolf's use of "the Aristotelian unity of time and place" creates a sense of tragic anticipation (97).

in *The Common Reader* (Oldfield 50). This essay discusses the limitations of modern readers when reading Ancient Greek, and expresses extensive admiration for great tragedians, among them Sophocles. The admiration she expresses for the tragedians highlights both the aspirations she had for timeless fiction and the strained differences between her views of ancient Greece and modern England. She fixates particularly on characters as they were written by Sophocles, referring to them as larger-than-life archetypes who represent a liberation of speech; there is a stark contrast between her admiration for Sophocles's noblewomen characters who "stand at the door bandying words like village women" and Woolf's own Clarissa Dalloway, who displays a rigid sense of social restriction and is open only in her own thoughts. This grandeur of personality, grounded also in Woolf's sense of Greece as a sensual and geographically dramatic place, is both aspirational and inaccessible to the modern day.

Mrs. Dalloway has previously been linked to Greek tragedy mainly because of the madness and climactic suicide of Septimus Warren Smith, a soldier who is haunted by visions of his dead friend, Evans. The first instance of Evans's apparition is preceded by Septimus's hallucination of sparrows as a Greek chorus: "A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death" (24). This allusion to Hades has been pointed to as Woolf's indication that Septimus can be interpreted as a tragic character, particularly as a Cassandra figure³. However, the specific language here, especially the ideas of "no crime" and "no death," is reminiscent of *Antigone's* themes surrounding defiance of tyrannical power.

³ See Emily Dalgarno, *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World*, pp. 75

Multiple uses of “piercing” also allude to Septimus’s suicide, which itself has resonances with the play which I will explore later. Since *Antigone* was as fresh in Woolf’s mind as the *Oresteia* at the time she wrote the novel, the resonances between Septimus and Antigone are just as relevant, and the overarching themes of the work are much more closely aligned with the post-war world of Sophocles’ play than Aeschylus’.

Antigone’s narrative follows her disobedience of the tyrant Creon’s orders to leave her brother unburied, a decree which is aimed at dishonoring Polyneices in death and severing his connection to his family and the city of Thebes. Septimus’s fixation on Evans within a society that otherwise conspicuously avoids attention to the First World War is a similar act of defiance. Both characters are viewed as mad by others, especially authority figures like Creon and Septimus’s doctor Bradshaw, and both choose suicide rather than acquiesce to the will of those holding power over them. The particulars of how this comparison works within *Mrs. Dalloway* can shed light on both the complexities of the novel’s interwoven structure and on Woolf’s interpretation of *Antigone* as a narrative exploration of defiance in the face of tyranny. Septimus’s narrative is interwoven with Clarissa Dalloway’s, and while the two characters never meet and have little to do with each other, the climax of the novel hinges on Clarissa’s knowledge of Septimus’s suicide. Like *Antigone*, the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* concludes with the impact of a character’s shocking death, and this parallel echoes backwards through the novel, inviting both an exploration of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a reception of *Antigone* and an analysis of how Woolf’s choices in the novel reflect her interpretation of Sophocles’ play.

Woolf’s feminist reading of *Antigone* was not a common approach at the time, and is notable both for this reason and for her position outside of the main continuity of feminist discourse surrounding the play. Her reading therefore diverges significantly from most feminist

criticism, both inviting comparison with later perspectives and resisting alignment with this or that critic. Because Judith Butler's essay *Antigone's Claim* engages so heavily in the history of *Antigone* criticism, both feminist and not, her analysis is useful both for keeping that context present and locating points that converge with or differ from Woolf's reading. Butler's essay is particularly comparable with Woolf's because both focus mainly on social commentary rather than pure psychoanalysis, and both engage with psychoanalytic perspectives mainly to expand or disprove them, suggesting a resonance across decades. Woolf and Butler are working within a critical tradition that has sometimes tended to reduce *Antigone* to mere psychodrama or abstract it to symbolism, and neither critic is willing to relinquish grounding the play in concrete social issues. Woolf's particular approach to antiwar feminism is universalized through her use of *Antigone* allusions as a template for political action, and the basis for that action in both *Three Guineas* and *Mrs. Dalloway* is to prioritize empathy over social conventions. Butler is interested in *Antigone* as a site for and model of political protest, and her engagement with the viewpoints of Hegel and Lacan is often critical of their failures to engage with Antigone's actions as such. An exploration of Woolf's and Butler's perspectives in conversation reveals a model of *Antigone* as a challenge to patriarchal authority and heteronormative family dynamics, and while Butler's reading is inextricable from the critical tradition she responds to, Woolf's is separated from that tradition entirely, potentially founding a new ground for feminist critical exploration of the play. In the following sections, I argue that Woolf's reading of *Antigone* informs her rhetorical style throughout *Three Guineas*, scaffolds her examination of tyranny's marginalization and destruction of its dissenters, and opens a path away from fascism by deconstructing the artificial social divides of patriarchy.

I. Messenger: Speaking Truth to Power, Through Power

The central onstage action in *Antigone* is the repeated delivery of messages of dissent to Creon. This comes first through the watchman appointed to tell Creon that someone has buried Polyneices, then directly from Antigone in her central debate with Creon, and finally from the messenger that announces Antigone's suicide. Present in each of these interactions is the sense of danger in telling Creon, even indirectly, that his will has been defied. The watchman refuses to deliver his message until he has assurance that he won't be blamed for the burial, and again asks not to be punished when he accuses Antigone (223-240, 388-400). Antigone herself is not fearful of telling Creon what she's done, and the chorus attributes this to an uncivilized nature: "Now we see the girl's as wild by birth as her father. / She has no idea how to bow her head to trouble" (471-2). Readings of *Antigone* have dealt with this central debate between Antigone and Creon in myriad ways, but a key dichotomy emerges between politicizing or personalizing the conflict. Hegel reads the play as primarily a clash between opposing political forces, while Lacan refocused interpretation on Antigone as a representation of desire; Luce Irigaray subsequently challenged both on the assumption that Antigone's exclusion from the political sphere is self-imposed (Leonard 122). Following Lacan and Irigaray, feminist critics have found it difficult to separate politicized readings from the psychoanalytic perspective that inevitably ties up the political with the personal. Bonnie Honig, in her survey of Antigone-centric feminist criticism, argues that "those who seek through [Antigone] a politics of counter-sovereignty end up promoting an ethics and politics of lamentation that rejects sovereignty as violent: thus, their politics of lamentation collapses into a lamentation of politics" (37-8). Butler, among the critics whose arguments Honig evaluates, is herself entangled in the question of whether Antigone's actions are in nature politically demonstrative or purely self-interested. However, while Butler's

rhetoric is skeptical of Antigone as a model for speaking truth to power, Woolf shows no such ambivalence. Woolf's references to *Antigone* demonstrate a reading of the play as both personal and political in a way that centers gender hierarchy rather than psychoanalysis as its foundation. Her argumentative style, and the context in which she introduces *Antigone* into her argument, demonstrate this foundation and her approach to challenging authority.

In *Antigone's Claim*, Butler's main entry into *Antigone* is through the arguments of Hegel and Lacan, and to a lesser extent Irigaray. Hegel and Lacan become Butler's primary focus because for her they insist on a heteronormative gender dichotomy; both frame Antigone as in some way primal or pre-societal. Both address the development of social order and the opposition between the feminine, which is family-focused, and the masculine, which is civilization-focused; as Butler summarizes, Hegel's reading interprets Antigone as opposed to state authority on a social level, while Lacan is interested in the play as a dramatization of linguistic developments that follow the transition from familial- to legal-based society. Butler is particularly interested in engaging with Lacan on the level of linguistics, as it's the intricacies of Antigone's language that she will focus much of her argument on. She refutes Lacan by emphasizing the intelligibility of Antigone's language. Where Lacan insists that Antigone's language is pre-legalistic and is thus incomprehensible to Creon and the chorus, Butler points out that in fact it's Antigone's choice to communicate on Creon's level that makes her both intelligible and frightening. Honig points out that Butler is not so much rejecting Lacan's argument in full, but rather taking it a step further by arguing that it is Antigone's combination of unsettling action and intelligible speech that makes her a threat to Creon (50). By insisting on Antigone's intelligibility, Butler is able to engage with Lacan's argument, and Hegel's as well, while also dismissing large swathes of their interpretations. An intelligible Antigone is not a

representation of a pre-social or pre-legal mode of thinking, and thus Creon can't be positioned as the natural successor to Antigone's point of view. The two are instead on equal argumentative footing.

Butler initially opposes both Hegel and Lacan on their abstraction of Antigone's natural law. She argues that both readings universalize Antigone's action, replacing the burial of Polyneices with a general respect for family or the dead. Butler, however, points out the high degree of specificity to the act of burying Polyneices; Antigone's law, after all, notably only applies to her brother, as she says she wouldn't have done the same for other family members (A 908-918). Butler argues, "This is a law of the instant and, hence, a law with no generality and no transposability, one mired in the very circumstances to which it applied, a law formulated precisely through the singular instance of its application and, therefore, no law at all in any ordinary, generalizable sense" (10). Butler ends the first chapter of her essay by stating, "Although Antigone dies, her deed remains in language," a deed that through its verbalization reveals the highly particular context not only of Antigone's actions but of the norms she defies in acting (24). By rejecting the universalizing approaches that read *Antigone* as a symbolic social transition, Butler refocuses her reading onto the nuances of the play's action. This framing also positions Creon as the main opponent to Antigone as a model for feminist politics. Lacan's reading was in reaction to Freud as much as to Hegel, and so when he, and subsequent critics, bring up the idea of an "Antigone complex," the obvious connection is to Freud's Oedipal complex. However, Butler avoids engaging with the paternalistic Oedipal perspective, bringing it in only where the incest is relevant to the complicated relationship between Antigone and Polyneices.⁴ By positioning her reading in conversation with Hegel and Lacan, and focusing

⁴ Bonnie Honig argues that Butler chooses Creon as an enemy over Oedipus because she needs a political rather than familial opponent for her argument (48); Sjöholm similarly states that the limited

primarily on the present-tense conflict with Creon rather than the Oedipal legacy, Butler is reacting against the universalizing tendencies of the *Antigone* tradition.

Woolf's approach to *Antigone* in *Three Guineas* seems to fall into the generalizing trap that Butler avoids, and it's true that Woolf's view of the play sits on ground closer to an apocryphal tale than a personal conflict. Oldfield compares Woolf's citations of Sophocles to quoting scripture (54). Woolf's first reference to the play in the second section of her essay, her invocation of "Antigone's distinction between the laws and the Law," comes without explanation of the connection between *Antigone* and her argument, or any prior introduction (98). She calls the play "a far more instructive analysis of tyranny than any our politicians can offer us," and Antigone's statement "a far more profound statement of the duties of the individual to society than any our sociologists can offer us." This moment in the text supports the idea that Woolf views Antigone primarily as an archetypal defiant woman, but is also an odd break in Woolf's narrative style throughout the essay. Emily Dalgarno, in "*Antigone* and the Public Language," describes Woolf as "the translator who mediates among languages and social groups," avoiding association with the British intelligentsia (40). This casual reference, however, makes an exception to that rule; Woolf is highlighting her upper-class education, which was far beyond what most women received at the time. The language of this first reference can therefore come across as an assumption of familiarity on Woolf's part, universalizing *Antigone* as a text that in itself should both be intelligible and agreeable to her audience. However, if we were to treat Woolf's invocation of *Antigone* as an unusual slip in composure, the third section of her essay, which contains more extensive *Antigone* reference, is deprived of much of its nuance. After all, as Gerhard Joseph notes in his essay "The *Antigone* as Cultural Touchstone," Woolf is well

intelligibility of Oedipus's paternal law is for Butler escapable only by confronting a more intelligible opponent (121).

aware of the need not to reduce the intricacies of Sophocles to a straightforward political screed (28).⁵

In her essay's second section, Woolf frames Creon as a stand-in for the violent state that refuses to abandon the polarizing positions of war, likening him to the patronizing educated men in section three who make a request for funding to protect "culture and intellectual liberty" (102). Antigone is thus aligned with the daughters of these educated men who hear and respond to the request; Woolf presents her as a voice of righteous truth in the face of political obfuscation. In section three, Woolf's main rhetorical strategy relies on countering her opponents' request with the reality of women's financial and educational situation. She draws out the original, simple request into a much longer one: "Daughters of educated men who have enough to live upon, and read and write your own language for your own pleasure, may we very humbly entreat you to sign this gentleman's manifesto with some intention of putting your promise into practice?" (111). The drawn-out version is then made unacceptable for its implausibility. The problem with the request is that women are not only generally financially dependent, but they are excluded from the very culture they are being asked to defend. Her argument, like Antigone's, rests on clarifying "the duties of the individual to society." Woolf refers here to the separation of the political and social sphere from the home and family sphere that dominated gender politics of the time (Gattens 25). This separation de-politicized the home sphere rhetorically, while domestic issues remained among the most politically impactful to women whose needs as a collective were thus effectively ignored. Woolf's exaggeration of her opponents' argument draws on the disconnect between this national culture and the isolation women of her day experience.

⁵ Joseph's essay is the source for Steiner's account of Woolf's *Antigone* interest, though Joseph himself extensively cites other, mainly female critics on this point; his brief reference to *Three Guineas* is a tangential setup to an extensive reading of *The Years*.

For Woolf, the position these women are kept in is not only a reason to exempt them from the effort to preserve national culture, but also the direct fault of the men making this request. Women are excluded from participating in national culture by their financial dependence on men. She explains that women are kept dependent on their fathers by a lack of education, and later a lack of inheritance; and husbands, who are usually of the same generation as their wives, are nevertheless in a position of power because they are able to inherit and acquire wealth. Educated men are thus motivated to keep their wives and daughters in a dependent position through the control they can exert over the home sphere as the sole breadwinners. Woolf prefers the term “infantile fixation” for this social phenomenon, but she also refers to it as an “Oedipus complex” (154). Like the feminist theorists that would come after her, Woolf is seeking to break the Oedipal grip on society, and Antigone is her champion for doing so.⁶ She doesn’t keep this “fixation” as purely a psychoanalytic hypothetical, however, but goes on to give real world examples of fathers as a class interfering with the intellectual and financial freedom of their daughters. By addressing the issue of gender disparity on the level of psychology, Woolf is able to recontextualize paternal control as a societal ill. Within this context, she brings up women’s liberation movements as attempts to regain something lost, to fulfill desires for knowledge, worldly experience, and love that have previously been denied. She defines the end goal of such attempts as “like Antigone, not to break the laws, but to find the law” (163). Returning to *Antigone* in context of this lengthy argument, it’s clear that Woolf is invoking Sophocles not merely as scripture-like truth, but as yet another example of the struggle women have faced in patriarchal societies all over the world for millennia. Antigone may be the earliest example of

⁶ See Honig ch. 1 for an exploration of feminist critical engagement with Oedipus

such a woman, thus making her into an archetype, but the nuance of the situation to which Woolf applies this example denies a simplified understanding of Woolf's *Antigone*.

Woolf's footnotes throughout *Three Guineas* are essential for providing the context of her sources and further exploring avenues of her argument. Her footnote on "find[ing] the law" demonstrates the high degree of specificity and nuance she is applying to *Antigone*. She states:

That such laws exist, and are observed by civilized people, is fairly generally allowed; but it is beginning to be agreed that they were not laid down by "God", who is now very generally held to be a conception, of patriarchal origin, valid only for certain races, at certain stages and times; nor by nature, who is now known to vary greatly in her commands and to be largely under control; but have to be discovered afresh by successive generations, largely by their own efforts of reason and imagination (218).

The laws which Antigone was out to discover, which Woolf's modern efforts towards equality are striving to uncover, are not so permanent and innate as a universalized reading of the play would suppose. While the characters and power dynamics in *Antigone* may be archetypes in Woolf's vision, she doesn't portray the play's politics as an inherent moral truth or direct guidelines. Instead, she builds on a multifaceted, anti-idealizing argument to position *Antigone* as a stand-in for the complexities of morality that exist outside of social convention. Woolf's rhetorical opponent is first positioned as attempting to create a general rule that ignores the limitations of gender, which she then dresses him down for; Woolf's counterargument, therefore, is positioned as factual, placing circumstances above ideals, and in so doing argues that the proposed ideals ignore reality. Like Butler, Woolf treats Antigone as the outsider that exposes the instability of authority, and Woolf places herself in that position as well.

Woolf's argumentative style relies on displaying a clear understanding of the counterargument she confronts. She positions herself as a rhetorical outsider, and yet utilizes the language and voice of her opponent extensively. This style means that her argument is conveyed, at least partly, through the voice of her opponent and oppressor. Butler says the same thing of Antigone: "she asserts herself through appropriating the voice of the other, the one to whom she is opposed; thus her autonomy is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists, an appropriation that has within it traces of a simultaneous refusal and assimilation of that very authority" (11). Butler criticizes Antigone for this, but for Woolf it is a necessary component of speaking out. In fact, Woolf seems to not just accept but also to value speaking through power as a means of conveying anti-authoritarian ideas. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, it's Lady Bradshaw, wife of Septimus and Clarissa's psychiatrist, who tells Clarissa about Septimus's suicide at the party (183). Despite the announcement coming through the indifferent voice of Lady Bradshaw, it impacts Clarissa deeply and immediately: "Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt" (184). Lady Bradshaw's conveyance clearly functions in the story as the culminating connection between two otherwise disconnected characters. By presenting this information through Lady Bradshaw, Woolf creates a more neutral moment in terms of the medicalization of Septimus's suffering. Dr. Bradshaw has a fixed and harsh opinion on Septimus's mental state, but Lady Bradshaw has an emotional distance from the situation that makes her a neutral messenger. This moment has narrative similarities to the Messenger's speech in *Antigone* informing Queen Eurydice of the suicides of Antigone and Haemon (1193-1243). The full emotional impact of Antigone's death, and the chain of events that leads Creon to ultimately realize she was right, is verbalized onstage through one of Creon's servants, addressed to a character who is one of the

best equipped to feel the loss. Woolf experiments narratively with conveyance and suicide in a way that presages her eventual choice of rhetorical style in *Three Guineas*.

Woolf and Butler's approaches to interpreting *Antigone* through a feminist lens both rely heavily on what they can convey through their discussion styles; both turn their readings of *Antigone* into detail-oriented, ongoing processes, avoiding static generalizations. Woolf in particular seems to value the conveyance of a messenger, and has a comfort with speaking in the language of authority that verges on a preference. For Woolf, *Antigone* is a power fantasy, an ideal of political rebellion, a defiance of tyrannical power in the name of humane love and through the spoken word. This is the basis for Woolf's understanding of the outsider role represented by *Antigone*; actions against and outside of the system of authority still have need of the system's language, creating a half-in half-out position. Butler is ambivalent about this very position, discussing *Antigone*'s choice of the language of legality as a concession to power rather than an outsmarting maneuver. She also firmly roots her argument in the history of *Antigone* criticism, a choice that frames her analysis as a rejection of the past. At the same time, her dedication to involving herself in the ongoing conversation about *Antigone* creates the need to refute extensive aspects of Hegel's and Lacan's arguments. Woolf too is reacting to the preexisting Oedipus complex, but chooses not to treat Freud's argument beyond what is directly relevant to her own; she predates Lacan and chooses not to address Hegel at all. Where Butler personalizes *Antigone* only by rejecting previous universalizing readings, Woolf is able to contextualize *Antigone* within an argument that attends to the specific without rejecting the potential for a broader application of the play's themes. Woolf's is a potentially useful rhetorical position for further feminist exploration of the play, because it leaves open both close attention to the text and use of *Antigone*'s themes and characters as symbols in shifting contexts. Woolf

doesn't delineate between the personal and political, but merges them in the central metaphor of fathers and daughters. Going forward, I will examine how this rhetorical position creates a platform for Woolf to refute tyrannical presentations of reality, and how her understanding of the consequences of dissent contrasts subtly with Butler's interpretation that transgression against power is the purpose, not the result, of Antigone's actions.

II. Condemnation: Othering and Silencing Under Tyranny

In their central debate, Creon criticizes Antigone not only as a traitor to him, but as a threat to his entire society. Creon has to view her this way because he can't brook a legitimate challenge to his authority, especially not from a young female relative. Creon and the chorus see Antigone as mad because her defiance is a challenge to the normative power structure of Thebes. When the watchman reveals Antigone's crime, the Chorus asks her, "Are you so foolish? / So disloyal to the laws of kings?" (383-4). The only possibilities they initially see for Antigone's defiance is either ignorance or societal betrayal; the use of the plural "kings" instead of referring directly to Creon reveals the necessity of Creon's stable rule to the security of Thebes. The battle for power between Antigone's dead brothers posed a challenge to the stability of the city. In the wake of their deadly battle, the Chorus is willing to accept Creon's rejection of one and veneration of the other as absolute law, representing a general anxiety to return to an ordered society. This is why Creon chooses a side between the two dead brothers; when he declares Polyneices a traitor, it lends legitimacy to his rule by aligning him with one of the two men who had a direct blood claim to the throne, and resolves the conflict between the brothers by positioning one side as victorious now that Creon is king. When Antigone breaks that law and threatens his rule, he treats her as a criminal not just in action but in thought. Creon tells the

chorus, “This girl was a complete expert in arrogance / Already, when she broke established law. / And now, arrogantly, she adds insult to injury: / She’s boasting and sneering about what she’s done!” (480-483). Antigone’s contradiction of Creon’s power is an issue both Woolf and Butler take up; their views of her actions against Creon, leading to her death sentence, are indicative of their broader attitudes towards challenging tyranny.

Antigone, of course, is proven right after her condemnation, and Creon’s choice to negate Polyneices is unequivocally proven wrong. The prophet Tiresias comes to Creon after Antigone’s burial with an omen: “And I heard a voice I’ve never known from a bird: / Wild screeching, enraged, utterly meaningless” (1001-2). He then attempts a ritual to interpret this sign, “And so the ritual failed; I had no omens to read,” and finally turns back to the birds themselves for meaning: “And that is why / The birds keep back their shrill message-bearing cries: / Because they have fed on a dead man’s glistening blood” (1012-22). Just as Antigone told Creon that the gods were on her side, Tiresias blames a failed sacrificial ritual on Creon’s choice to leave Polyneices unburied. Early in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf uses signs and omens to explore the internal experiences of Septimus Warren Smith. When Septimus witnesses a skywritten advertisement, his reaction is markedly different from the characters surrounding him: “So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me” (21). Though he can’t read the message, he believes it to be personally directed to him. This represents how Septimus has come to view the world around him as a series of signs, truths for him to interpret. Moments later, as we have seen, he receives another omen:

A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and

piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (24-25)

This precedes the first moment in the text in which Septimus witnesses the ghost of Evans, his friend and officer who died during the war. Septimus interprets the world around him as filled with signs and hidden messages and this is what sets his way of thinking apart from the other characters, what brings his wife to interpret him as mad. In *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*, Karen L. Levenback argues that Septimus's madness is rooted in his ability to see implications, and that he interprets a layer of meaning in the world around him that goes unseen by the civilian characters (52-3). The use of an omen of birds to introduce Evans' ghost has clear similarities to Tiresias' omen that vindicates Antigone. Both Septimus and Antigone view the world differently from all other characters in their respective texts. They are deeply affected by the wars they lived through, fixated on a particular casualty of that war, and adhere to an interpretation of reality that prioritizes a depth of significance that the other characters either do not recognize, or fail to see until too late. As Levenback points out, Septimus is set apart from the rest of the world primarily by a failure to be understood by the characters around him, not because he has a clear and diagnosed mental illness; indeed, at the time, the mental burden of surviving the war was placed solely on veterans (61). It's his nonconforming viewpoint that sets him apart from those around him, just as Antigone's refusal to conform in her way of thinking is as equally offensive to Creon as her rebellious actions. Septimus faces intolerance from the medical institution, represented by his two doctors, rather than from one tyrannical individual, but his experience is just as much a refusal to understand and accept his experience of the world.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf connects tyrannical intolerance to patriarchal nationalism, first by arguing that nationalism is opposed to the goals of feminism. In the third section, she

addresses the idea of patriarchal “culture” and women’s involvement preserving it. Her opponent’s argument, in her words, is that English women should pay to preserve English culture because women are participants in it, and because of its presumed supremacy. This cultural supremacy is also presented as proper motivation to go to war. However, Woolf argues that this is not the case, and goes on to refute the nationalist idea that there is anything innately superior about English culture. When a woman takes an objective look at the cultural landscape around her, Woolf says,

Then she will compare English painting with French painting; English music with German music; English literature with Greek literature, for translations abound. When all these comparisons have been faithfully made by the use of reason, the outsider will find herself in possession of very good reasons for her indifference. She will find that she has no good reason to ask her brother to fight on her behalf to protect ‘our’ country. (128)

Woolf illustrates the contradictions inherent in post-WWI nationalism and the buildup to WWII. If the basis for war is English supremacy, then that basis is already fundamentally broken in Woolf’s view, because there is nothing particularly special about English culture that should motivate women to act selflessly to preserve it. Woolf’s patriarchal father figure expects blind loyalty from the women he is addressing, but without examining his own innate biases. It is these biases that are leading England towards another world war, and because Woolf has already pointed out the hypocrisy of asking women to preserve a culture from which they are excluded, the hypocrisy that follows becomes all the more obvious. She brings attention to women’s wartime activities and to how quickly they were dismissed in the years afterward as an example of the lies the English social hierarchy is built on, thereby justifying a worldview contrary to English national supremacy.

World War I caused a significant change in gender relations as women were called on to take up manufacturing jobs and maintain the wartime economy. But once the war ended, the concessions granted to women in the political sphere led to a backlash and a desire to return to the pre-war status quo (Gattens 22-23). This is the social situation Woolf responds to; women have already contributed to a previous war effort, but in the aftermath of the war, Woolf's English "father" seems to display amnesia about these efforts. Woolf exemplifies this desire to return to the status quo at the culmination of her anti-nationalist argument: "The war is over; we are in England now," she says in the voice of the oblivious patriarch (166). Woolf's view of post-war England is of a nation desperate to return to the stability of its previous social hierarchy, and as a result, she believes women should have no obligation to once again fall for the lie that they will be valued as full participants in English culture if they aid in the preservation of this structure. Sending soldiers to war is not in the interest of all English people, but in the interest of the ruling class; once those interests have been secured, promises made to other classes will be ignored. Through her feminist rebuttal of nationalism, Woolf illustrates the common tendencies between England and the more blatantly authoritarian regimes the English claim to oppose. English patriarchy is predisposed to nationalist, hierarchical views, and as she will go on to demonstrate, this mindset leads to the violent suppression of its opponents.

Woolf's anti-nationalism draws on *Antigone* as its anchor. In a footnote to section 2, she directly compares Antigone and Frau Pommer, an opponent of the Third Reich. Pommer was arrested and condemned to death for speaking out against the Nazis, and Woolf's reference to her connects Nazism to the ills of patriarchal nationalism. She quotes Pommer as saying, "The thorn of hatred has been driven deep enough into the people by the religious conflicts, and it is high time that the men of today disappeared" (quoted in *TG* 201). Pommer opposes not just violent

actions, but a violent and specifically masculine way of thinking. Woolf goes on, “Antigone’s crime was of much the same nature and was punished in much the same way.” Her connection between Pommer as a tragic heroine and Antigone as a political rebel aligns with both her valorization of Antigone and her understanding of authoritarian violence. While her assessment of Pommer’s motivations may or may not be accurate to the situation, she chooses an example that connects the violent rejection of opposition to Antigone’s condemnation by Creon. She views the othering of women as a result of patriarchal nationalism in England; the violent suppression of Pommer’s dissenting views by the Nazis represents a logical extension of that othering. Antigone, too, is then an outsider to the state who is condemned to death because of the threat she poses to the regime. Woolf’s analysis hinges on a reaction of social conservatism against women’s liberation in an immediate post-war nation, and so her view of women who choose to rebel is both admiring and pitying. She argues that Antigone and Frau Pommer were acting according to their own moral compasses in the face of authoritarian states over which they had no control. Just as England’s wartime women saw their country reverse its progressivism towards them once the war ends, the regime changes her heroines live through are completely disconnected from the reality of their experiences. Outsiderhood is thus expected from women living under authoritarian regimes. Pommer is condemned, in Woolf’s view, because she dared to participate in a political conversation that welcomed neither her voice nor her opposition; English women are expected to be silent supporters of English culture and wartime efforts, but not to participate in politics; and Antigone’s crime was against not just Creon’s law, but his mindset. Woolf presents tyranny as the suppression of dissenting thought first and foremost, and Antigone exemplifies women who dare to seek reality-based ethics rather than adhere to authoritarian thought.

While Woolf focuses her analysis on the othering enacted by authoritarian regimes on rebellious individuals, Butler's argument is more interested in the reverse directionality: transgression against authority. Butler views the burial primarily as an act of transgression, rather than a moral act in itself. A large part of Butler's focus on the socially transgressive nature of the burial comes through her reading of prior critics: "How interesting, then, that so many of the readings of Sophocles' play insist that there is no incestuous love here, and one wonders whether the reading of the play does not in those instances become the very occasion for the insistence of the rule to take place: there is no incest here, and cannot be" (17). Butler is not necessarily arguing that there is incest between Antigone and Polyneices, but rather pointing to the strong reaction of many critics against such a suggestion as a function of the text itself. For Butler, *Antigone* deliberately creates discomfort by obfuscating social rules, and since the readings she criticizes focus on the play primarily as a text that is symbolic of the creation of social order, her reading means that the text has succeeded by creating a discomfort that pushes its readers back towards an order they're more comfortable with. By raising the incest query, Butler points out the threat to the social order that Antigone has posed by prioritizing her love for her brother over her adherence to Creon's laws.

Butler focuses on the transgressive nature of Antigone's argument with Creon, as well. This insistence that the purpose of Antigone's actions is to be transgressive creates the idea that refuting power is an end in itself, rather than a means, and Butler believes this is exemplified by the fact that Antigone argues with Creon even though she knows he won't listen. Butler states, "In speaking to him, she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender throughout the play" (10). By depicting their verbal battle as a mutual struggle to define

and be defined, Butler emphasizes the interwoven nature of Creon's and Antigone's actions throughout the play; Creon's power is not a static force, but one that adapts at every step to Antigone's actions, and likewise her actions and arguments adapt to his reactions.⁷ This, again, is a view of Antigone's actions that is primarily interested in their transgressive nature. Butler doesn't view Antigone as acting in the right regardless of society; it is in fact because of Creon's laws, and interacting with them, that she is able to set herself apart as his opponent. This is an extension of the way in which Butler views Antigone as using the tools of power to act against power. Her transgressions against Creon aren't a side effect of the burial, they are the driving cause behind her actions in the first place.

Bonnie Honig criticizes Butler's reading on this point of transgression. While Butler focuses on Antigone's intentions and actions prior to her death, Honig says, she doesn't consider how Antigone calls for vengeance in death or how the subsequent consequences of her suicide impact the characters around her (42). Honig is correct to raise this question--it would be inaccurate to situate Antigone's actions solely in the realm of the verbal or social, when the consequences of her suicide are so tangible.⁸ The argument, however, that Antigone is condemned on the basis of her social transgressions harmonizes with Woolf's theory of authoritarian othering. In Woolf's view, nonconformance in thought is particularly threatening to authoritarian systems, because patriarchal authority figures demand to be the intellectual heads of society as well as the political decisionmakers. Tyrants therefore not only reject opposition, but also refuse to give any understanding to those whose lived experiences contradict their reality. Woolf's way of exploring Septimus's mental experience is later echoed in the way in

⁷ Sjolholm notes that Antigone's verbal adaptability is a basis to call into question not just her gender, but also her origin, as she denies familial responsibility to Eteocles and Creon (120).

⁸ Honig cites Lee Edelman on this point. Edelman argues that it is not Antigone's choice to embrace Polyneices that is subversive of heteronormativity, but her rejection of others and embrace of death.

which she admires Frau Pommer in *Three Guineas*. Septimus's tragedy rests in the inability of the world around him to admit his point of view as legitimate; for most of the novel, the character who comes closest is Rezia, who nonetheless rationalizes him as mad. Woolf's framing of Frau Pommer, in comparison with Antigone, takes this othering to a violent extreme. The central difference between Woolf and Butler is one of direction; Woolf explores the impact of restrictive worldviews on those who don't fit within them, while Butler focuses on the transgression of an outsider against the state. Butler's reading is useful as an assertion of Antigone's autonomy, but it becomes clear in Woolf's examination of the violent consequences of marginalization that separating autonomy in rebellion from victimization in punishment is not a clear division. For a further understanding of their divergences on this point, an examination of Woolf's presentation of suicide and Butler's comparable argument about Antigone's death reveals that simplifying the experiences of marginalization as active or passive, while an important point in Butler's argument, is not Woolf's goal. Analysis of the suicide scene in *Mrs. Dalloway* links Woolf's novel to her argument about the discursive possibilities of *Antigone*.

III. Suicide: Death as Punishment and Escape

Antigone's suicide complicates any reading of the play by displacing the responsibility of her death partially away from Creon. The subsequent suicide of Haemon also emphasizes Antigone's choice. Her suicide as Sophocles presents it is unusual in Greek tragedy. In "Antigone's Other Choice," Sarah Iles Johnston connects Antigone's suicide to the tradition of the sacrificial virgin in tragedy. Johnston argues that Creon's sentencing of Antigone has similarities to a sacrifice in that he prevents her from marrying, but his choice of method and her suicide are both far removed from the tradition of virgins having their throats cut (180-2). While

it's clear that Creon's condemnation is meant to reassert control over a young woman who has defied him, her suicide then takes back that control. Antigone's suicide is relatively under-discussed in feminist criticism, although her proximity to death and the implications of her loyalty to Polyneices are connected subjects that are more often explored. In a study on the gendering of death symbols in Ancient Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant identifies the empathetic experience of mourning with the absence of a lover in an analysis that could map neatly onto both Antigone and Haemon's experiences of loss and death:

A play of absence in presence, the obsession with someone who is absent and who occupies one's whole horizon, and yet whom one can never grasp because he belongs to the realm beyond: this is the experience that a living person has of his relation with someone dead, with one who has passed on, when he is in mourning... The figure of the beloved woman whose image haunts and escapes the lover intersects with that of death.
(Vernant 58-59)

Antigone's loyalty in death to Polyneices exemplifies the Classical trope of obsession with the dead, and Haemon's choice to die with her solidifies the link between love and death in the play. Adriana Cavarero argues that both Antigone and Creon are fixated specifically on the body of Polyneices rather than his soul, and that the reverence Antigone gives to Polyneices' corpse presents a conflict of acceptance within the city (46-48). Combined with her suicide, her care for Polyneices is then interpreted as a feminine morbidity. Antigone's final choice to die, then, is interlinked with her fixation on Polyneices, and an act that sets her apart from conformity to both the state and her gender just as much as her act of burying him.

Butler's framing of Antigone's suicide emphasizes the active nature of her choice above the motivation. She assigns the choice to Antigone over Creon in a way that centers her agency.

She says, “Her act leads to her death, but the relationship between the act and her fatal conclusion is not precisely causal... It would be easier if we could say that Creon killed her, but Creon banishes her only to a living death, and it is within that tomb that she takes her life” (27). Antigone dies not because she is being punished by the state, but because she is choosing her love for her brother over conformity. Butler doesn’t specify the significance of hanging, but Sophocles’ choice of method does speak to the agency and defiance Butler assigns to Antigone. Johnston writes that suicides by hanging, particularly by virgins, are actions taken to escape the power of tyrannical men (181). Butler thus endorses the implications of this suicide method by relating Antigone’s choice to die to her nonconformity throughout the play. For Butler, this is specifically a moment of gender nonconformity, since Antigone is symbolically rejecting marriage, although in the strictest terms of tragic symbolism the suicide doesn’t necessarily signal that. Butler’s approach to the suicide is useful in framing the problem Antigone’s death poses to Woolf’s reading; Antigone’s victimhood is complicated by her choice to kill herself rather than allow Creon’s sentence to kill her.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf references Antigone’s death in connection to Frau Pommer. She quotes Antigone’s monologue after her sentencing, saying that her words could also be spoken by Pommer: ““See what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear of heaven!... And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should I look to the gods any more - what ally should I invoke - when by piety I have earned the name of impious?”” (201). Woolf is quoting from a speech in which Antigone seems to give up hope entirely, standing by the rightness of her choice yet also despairing the backward priorities of her society (891-928). Close attention to that particular speech might indicate a focus on the condemnation aspect of Antigone’s death as an unjust punishment handed down by authority, rather than on her

final choice of suicide. Certainly there isn't much agency to be found in Pommer's death, outside of the implication that Pommer likely knew the consequences of her actions, as Antigone did. However, Woolf ends the footnote by remarking that Sophocles can't be reduced to political propaganda, meaning that her interpretation can't be reduced to just her connection to Pommer, and that it's worthwhile to explore other angles. While Woolf doesn't reference suicide in *Three Guineas*, Septimus does commit suicide on the page in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and close attention to this scene reveals similarities to Antigone's death. The circumstances surrounding his suicide in particular, and the emotional impact of his death, are revelatory of Woolf's thinking about the play's end.

In Septimus's final scene, his doctor comes to his home to institutionalize him. Instead of allowing himself to be taken, Septimus is convinced that the better option is to throw himself out of his window and onto the spiked gate below, impaling himself to death. There is a clear textual overlap in Septimus's suicidality and his two doctors' exertion of control over his life. When he learns about Bradshaw's plan, he thinks, "What power had Bradshaw over him? 'What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?' he demanded" (*MD* 147). His wife answers his indignation: "'It is because you talk of killing yourself,' said Rezia," and this answer, rather than motivating Septimus to alter his mindset or behavior, prompts him to make preparations for his own death by burning his writings. Septimus is reacting to being pathologized for his experiences as a war veteran. The prevailing attitude at the time towards sufferers of what we today recognize as PTSD was discomfort bordering on revulsion; medical experts had the idea that returning soldiers who had survived and weren't suffering physical ailments should simply move forward in their lives, rather than fixate on their war experiences (Levenback 61). Burning his writings, for Septimus, is symbolic of preserving his mind, the same way tragic virgins killed themselves

to preserve their virginity. The discomfort Septimus creates for Holmes and Bradshaw as a war veteran who has been deeply changed by his experiences matches the disquieting associations between Antigone and death which Cavarero points to (47). Septimus is fixated on Evans as a beacon of truth as well as fear, and like the righteous Antigone, believes himself to be in the right almost to a degree of holiness, and it is these fixations which lead his doctors to believe he should be institutionalized--in other words, confined.

The class disparity between the doctors and Septimus and Rezia is another significant association leading up to Septimus's suicide. As Rezia tries to prevent Holmes from coming upstairs to take Septimus, she thinks of the two doctors: "Holmes and Bradshaw, men who never weighed less than eleven stone six, who sent their wives to Court, men who made ten thousand a year and talked of proportion; who different in their verdicts (for Holmes said one thing, Bradshaw another), yet judges they were" (148). The passing of judgement is particularly significant here. Rezia thinks of the two men as tyrannical judges who "saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted." Like Creon passing judgement on Polyneices and later Antigone, these men are presented as blinded by their own power and privilege. They are the men Woolf will later characterize as the educated patriarchs at the top of English society in *Three Guineas*, holding power over life and death and yet entirely ignorant of views outside their own. In the buildup to Septimus's choice to commit suicide, Woolf crafts a narrative of an inescapable power dynamic that devalues Septimus's mind and seeks to control and restrict his body.

With Holmes coming up the stairs, Septimus finally makes his plan to commit suicide, and laments his coming death for unexpected reasons. First, he denies the idea that death is something to be lamented at all. He thinks, "It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him)"; by "their", he is thinking of Holmes and Bradshaw, for whom the loss of life

will represent a professional failure (*MD* 149). Antigone similarly denies wrongdoing, and therefore denies the view of her death as a punishment for a crime (*A* 891-928). Instead, she presents herself as a martyr for her cause. As her death approaches, however, she does lament the loss of her own life, yet not for the reasons she might be expected to. The death of a virgin was viewed as tragic because she has failed to reach her potential as a married woman and mother (Johnston 181). For Antigone, however, the potential for marriage and motherhood is something she scorns rather than laments. Instead, she rages at the triumph of Creon's viewpoint over hers that is represented by her death. She lays blame on the city that allows a tyrant to rule (*A* 937-943). The same way, Septimus attributes the perception of his suicide as a tragedy to his doctors' view of the world, not his; yet he does come around to regretting his death: "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings - what did *they* want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him" (*MD* 149). Most other characters in the novel, in confirmation of Septimus's evaluation of the situation, do seem to react to Septimus's suicide as the tragic result of his madness, interpreting him as lacking full autonomy at the end of his life. Rezia understands why he's done what he's done, and remains his ally in her attitude towards him, but she of course feels the loss.

Clarissa, however, when she leaves her party to reflect on what she's just learned about Septimus's death, has a different reaction (*MD* 183-186). Initially she is caught up in rationalizing Septimus's suicide: "He had killed himself - but how?... But why had he done it?" Quickly, however, she connects Septimus's death to her own suicidal thoughts, and reaches an understanding of his motivations: "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (*MD* 184). She thinks

of the suicide as a freeing decision, one that is upsetting, yet ultimately a choice he made that holds a compelling beauty for her. In thinking of Septimus's death as a choice, she restores the autonomy that was denied to him in life, and the lack of which was what drove Septimus to kill himself. When Clarissa learns about and processes Septimus's death, she is able not only to empathize with him, but also to ground herself in the present moment, and this moment echoes Septimus's experience just prior to his death: "She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising! - in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her!" (186). She isn't aware of it at that moment, but her observation of the woman out the window parallels Septimus seeing the old man out his window just before his death. The quotation she remembers in that moment, "Fear no more the heat of the sun," echoes Septimus's last thought before his suicide; Woolf constructs the two scenes to mirror one another, reflecting Septimus's suicide in Clarissa's thoughts and thus connecting the experiences of two characters from entirely different spheres, who would likely have never met in life. The empathy at play in this link between Septimus and Clarissa is also active in *Antigone*. Because of her choice to commit suicide, Haemon does the same thing, forcing Creon to feel an irreplaceable loss like Antigone felt for Polyneices, and Haemon then feels for her (A 1211-1243). When Septimus throws himself out the window, it's as an act of defiance towards Holmes and Bradshaw's attempted confining; but the specific act that kills him, impalement on the fence below, also parallels Haemon's death.⁹

Just as *Three Guineas* draws a connection between upper-class women and working-class men through their subjugation to England's patriarchs, *Mrs. Dalloway* draws the same connection between two such individuals. Haemon dies as an act of solidarity with Antigone, and so to parallel Septimus's suicide with Clarissa's final scene in the novel is replicating that

⁹ Haemon's suicide in the play, like Antigone's, is also motivated by his defiance of Creon's will, and has a similar destabilizing effect on the power structure of the play (Miller 171).

solidarity between them. The heart of the novel, and ultimately the thesis of *Three Guineas*, rests on the empathy between people who would otherwise view themselves as having dissimilar experiences and interests; it is both a deep and obvious link to Woolf's Classical background and a troubling image that, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, this solidarity is actualized only through suicide. While the symbolism of Antigone's death is a palpable component of both *Three Guineas* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the literal loss of human life is an equally, if not more, significant part of her reading. Especially in light of Woolf's own suicide, it would be a mistake to read Septimus's death as purely an act of pyrrhic defiance. While Butler focuses on the active nature of suicide, her framing is also useful in the contrast it draws between Creon's condemnation and Antigone's actual death, an issue that sits at the heart of Septimus's suicide scene. Woolf shows a sharp awareness of the consequences that living under tyranny has on the bodies and minds of the oppressed, and while there is power in feminist readings that hold up Antigone's death fixation as an unflinching insistence on naming the reality of her world, even the ancient understanding of suicide takes into account the mental anguish that motivates such an action. Woolf's use of suicide in *Mrs. Dalloway* functions in much the same way as her frequent reference to civilian victims of the Spanish Civil War; the image of death is a powerful tool for creating empathy, but comes at the cost of lives that were devalued by tyrants. In Woolf's view, death can function as defiance, but in connection with her argument's central conclusion, it will become apparent that death is more importantly a means for building common understanding.

IV. Kinship: Marginalization and Death as the Basis for Solidarity

Creon and Antigone have contrasting views of kinship that position them as ideological opposites, and this gives rise to their power struggle and to Creon's portrayal of Antigone as not

just in defiance of him, but morally incorrect. Creon prohibits Polyneices' burial to assert his power, but he also asserts his status as the head of Antigone's family. Creon's view of kinship is not rigid, but malleable on the basis of status within the family; he alone is therefore capable of accepting or casting out family members. Antigone's choice to defy him takes that capability into her own hands, upending the order within their family. However, Antigone's conception of kinship cannot be as simple as Creon's, because the brother she seeks to bury, like herself, is the product of Oedipus's incest, meaning there does not exist a clear division of who should be accepted as kin and who shouldn't. The justification she gives for choosing to honor Polyneices as a brother is just as applicable to Eteocles, whom she doesn't concern herself with, or Ismene, whom she rejects (543). Ismene's presence in the play highlights these contrasting ideologies, but also shows a commonality between them. At first, she seems to behave as Creon expects of the two women; she refuses to help Antigone not on principle, but because of Creon's order (49-68). However, when she tries to join Antigone in her punishment, Creon lumps them together: "And I never realized / I was raising a pair of deadly, crazed revolutionaries!" (532-3).

Ismene's attempt to join Antigone in death thus shows the equal malleability of Antigone's kinship. She rejects Ismene as an ally, the sister that Creon has accepted into the family, just as Creon has rejected Polyneices, whom Antigone accepts. The conflict, therefore, is not between one rigid view of kinship and one malleable one, but rather two malleable views that disagree on the criteria for accepting or rejecting kin.

Butler's presentation of the central conflict in *Antigone* deals directly with this issue of kinship. Following Hegel and Lacan, she at first frames the conflict as between kinship and society, but reorients her discussion around the argument that Antigone's act of burial not only disrupts both, but originates from an already broken kinship. She suggests that Antigone's choice

to honor her brother may relate to her other kin: "Considering how many are dead in her family, is it possible that mother and father and repudiated sister and other brother are condensed there at the site of the irreproducible brother?" (67). Butler goes on to point out that Antigone uses familial language to signal that she chooses to stay loyal to Polyneices. Even after Oedipus's incest is revealed, Antigone chooses to refer to Polyneices only as "brother," maintaining that prior familial connection. Butler suggests that Antigone's connection to her brother is a choice that emphasizes rather than ignores or hides their tainted parentage. On the choice of "brother" for Polyneices, she writes, "This equivocation at the site of the kinship term signals a decidedly post-oedipal dilemma, one in which kin positions tend to slide into one another" (67). The circumstances of Oedipus's incest has disoriented the relationships of the characters to one another, particularly among Oedipus's children; as Butler points out, Polyneices is simultaneously Antigone's brother, uncle, and nephew. In this disrupted state of the family, Creon's attempt to assert a stabilized order is not to try to restore nature, but to force unnatural order onto a disorderly set of circumstances. The kinship that Antigone disrupts, therefore, is a temporary and relatively recent state and not, as Creon asserts repeatedly, the fundamental order of things. Butler does not deal directly with the issue of Ismene and Eteocles, but their presence in the narrative -- what Luce Irigaray refers to as "the fact that each sister and brother has a double" -- surely complicates this unnatural order further. Irigaray writes, "Whereas Ismene is termed a sister because she shares the same blood as Antigone, and whereas Polyneices is termed a brother because he was born of the same mother, Eteocles is brother because he is the son of the same father and the same mother" (102). That is to say, Antigone's relation to Eteocles is moderated by Creon's definition of him as a valid member of the family, leaving her relation to Polyneices open to her own definition. Butler's explanation of the post-Oedipal Theban family

shares the same bones as Irigaray's. This view of post-war Thebes and the post-Oedipal family as already fundamentally disrupted aligns also with Woolf's assessment of post-war England; the paternalistic force in both cases is attempting to adhere to a hierarchy that is already destabilized, and therefore the attempt to keep it intact seems futile.

There is, however, an interpretive problem posed by Butler's reading, and it rests in the presence of Ismene not simply as a specter of the past, as we might consider Eteocles, but as an active participant in the conflict between Antigone and Creon. Ismene doesn't have a strong presence in many readings of *Antigone*; Simon Goldhill notes that she "remains a silenced, despised figure in the critical tradition" (141). Butler mentions Ismene sparingly, seeming to discount her as a significant presence; Irigaray thinks even less of her:

Ismene seems indisputably a "woman" in her weakness, her fear, her submissive obedience, her tears, madness, hysteria—all of which in fact are met with condescending scorn on the part of the king. Ismene is subsequently shut up, as a punishment, in the palace, the house, with the other women, who are all thus deprived of their freedom of action for fear that they may sap the courage of the most valiant warriors. (Irigaray 102)

There is an inherent disdain in these readings towards female characters who act as Ismene does, the women who are incapable of Antigone's valiant defiance. Butler puzzled over the issue of Antigone's language being too like that of Creon's, that she may be too closely aligned with power to undermine it; through this view, Ismene is surely dismissible as a mere pawn. The aim of Irigaray's essay, "The Eternal Irony of the Community," was to criticize the Hegelian portrayal of Antigone as a passive actor, rather than in possession of her own ethical consciousness (Leonard 135). It seems impertinent, then, for Irigaray to do something similar in relegating Ismene to the role of hysterical woman who is subsequently confined. Ismene's

confinement, in Irigaray's description, seems to have an accidental resonance with the rebellion and condemnation of Antigone. Certainly Ismene is a closer approximation to the obedient young woman Creon expects Oedipus's daughters to be, but that is not all she is. In her examination of the psychology of patriarchy, Woolf refers to the "fear and anger" at the heart of gender conflict as "these very ancient and obscure emotions which we have known ever since the time of Antigone and Ismene and Creon" (*TG* 154). Including Ismene on that list raises questions. She does not reappear in Woolf's argument; and yet her presence here suggests that, within the scope of both *Three Guineas* and Woolf's reading of *Antigone* as a whole, Ismene is significant. Ismene's inclusion fundamentally informs Woolf's assessment of the kinship issue, because upon closer examination, Ismene's role in the play resonates with both the empathetic connection at the center of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the analysis of patriarchy offered by *Three Guineas*.

Woolf has previously linked Clarissa Dalloway to *Antigone*, and that link is telling of both Clarissa's initial conception and her role in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *The Voyage Out*, she reaches for *Antigone* as a change of topic during an uncomfortable conversation, but she makes a mistake:

"I own," she said, "that I shall never forget the Antigone. I saw it at Cambridge years ago, and it's haunted me ever since. Don't you think it's quite the most modern thing you ever saw?" she asked Ridley. "It seemed to me I'd known twenty Clytemnestras. Old Lady Ditchling for one. I don't know a word of Greek, but I could listen to it for ever—." (*TVO* 62-3)

It's clear that this is not intended solely as a joke at Clarissa's expense, but it says something fundamental about who she is relative to her society. She is upper-class and surrounded by

intellectuals, but she herself can't be considered an intellectual -- this is apparent when she confuses *Antigone* for *Electra* or possibly *Agamemnon*. Yet this passage is coming from a writer who would go on to say of Sophocles' *Electra* that, "if it succeeded, would cut each stroke to the bone, would stamp each fingerprint in marble" (ONKG). What Clarissa expresses is clearly some version of a broader sentiment Woolf herself holds about Greek, even if it is factually mistaken. Clarissa Dalloway is a character who is enmeshed in her high society status to the point of absolute rigidity, but she also possesses a childlike capacity for empathy; she may not remember correctly whether she is thinking of Clytemnestra in *Electra* or Creon in *Antigone*, but she does recall the personal resonance she felt with the text.

Clarissa's storyline in *Mrs. Dalloway* revolves around her reminiscences; she is fixated on her premarital life and her relationships with Sally Seton and Peter Walsh in particular. While this has echoes of Septimus's fixation on Evans, Clarissa's social position sets her day's experiences apart from his. Septimus's madness has an immediacy, a sharpness that brings him to observe the world more closely -- this is exemplified by the writings he destroys just before his death. He also has a close relationship with his wife, and this too sets him apart from Clarissa. Septimus and Rezia view each other not only as spouses, but allies. Septimus chooses Rezia as kin, and perhaps more significantly, she chooses him rather than allow his doctors to condemn him unchallenged. Clarissa seems to lack this solidarity throughout the novel; her past relationships with Sally and Peter, two people who can be said to have understood her, are disconnected from her daily reality as wife and mother. This disconnection is the central problem Clarissa faces throughout the day, and it's informed by her class. Alex Zwerdling writes that the British upper class of *Mrs. Dalloway* is characterized by "solidity, rigidity, stasis, the inability to communicate feelings" -- all descriptors that apply equally well to Clarissa herself (Zwerdling

71). At the start of the novel, she is not an individual, not Clarissa - she is defined socially as "Mrs. Dalloway." By the end, however, she is able to not just reminisce about her past self, but also to embody the individual she once was. Upon her reentry to the party, Peter thinks, "What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (*MD* 194). She has become recognizable as herself to a friend who knew her as an individual prior to her marriage and assumption of her position as society wife, and what has brought on that return to self is her contemplation of Septimus's suicide.

Septimus's suicide is comprehensible to Clarissa, rather than pitiable, because her experiences of suppressing her inner self in favor of her social role have brought on similar thoughts. "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy,' she had said to herself once, coming down in white"; she links her suicidal ideation to her past happiness (*MD* 184). Clarissa's orientation towards the past is not the same as Septimus's choice to seize control of his future, but the emotional connection she feels to his action goes beyond the separation of their circumstances. This is a morbid version of what Woolf would later fully explain in *Three Guineas*: that recognition of shared experience is essential to building empathy between otherwise entirely disparate groups. Septimus and Clarissa differ entirely in so many respects, but by intuiting an experience they have in common, Clarissa gains an awareness of what Woolf later refers to as a fundamental law. Their similarity highlights the falsehood of their class and gender separation. Gillian Beer argues that surmounting these barriers is central to the purpose of the novel: "Kinship cannot be measured by event, by class, or even by gender, it seems. Separation may even be the condition for recognising kin" (Beer 55). Just as the immediacy of Septimus's wrath aligns him with Antigone, so does Clarissa's fragile empathy paint her as an Ismene figure to balance him. Like Ismene, Clarissa clings to the social position prescribed to

her in spite of the pain she feels at having to do so. She doesn't rebel like Septimus, but in the end, she aligns herself with him, just as Ismene attempts to die with Antigone.

There is nothing overtly revolutionary about Clarissa -- she remains, after all, safely upper class, with no indication that she intends to leave her role within her family and her society. However, by choosing to see a like mind in Septimus, she crosses a divide that is meant to be kept in place, and in this sense she disrupts society. Lisa Low identifies *Mrs. Dalloway* as an antifascist precursor to *Three Guineas* precisely because of the intimacy of Clarissa's inner monologue on the page. As a representation of the female mind, Clarissa's innermost thoughts are "both inaccessible to patriarchal control and destructive of the patriarchal social order" (Low 98). I argue that this connection to *Three Guineas* is crystallized in the bridge between Septimus and Clarissa. *Three Guineas* accomplishes two main objectives: it builds an understanding of women's experiences in a patriarchal society, and it uses that understanding in service of an argument against state violence, specifically the violence of sending working-class men to war in the interest of the upper class. *Mrs. Dalloway* anticipates both of these objectives. Clarissa's class status creates rather than blocks solidarity in the novel; after all, Ismene's initial obedience to the laws of Creon shows that even a woman fully integrated into her social role can recognize the unjust suffering of, and seek kinship with, those her society casts out. This capacity for empathy in spite of social barriers becomes the heart of Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas*.

The language of kinship is central in *Antigone*, and Woolf centers it as an issue in *Three Guineas* when she structures much of her argument around a conflict between metaphorical fathers and daughters. This choice of language and its concentration throughout the third section impacts the way in which she frames her argument. She applies the idea of paternalism not only to literal fathers, but extends it to husbands, emphasizing that it is the domineering patriarchal

attitude which poses a problem for women. Purely by nature of “father” and “daughter” as labels, her argument presupposes that the ideas of the patriarchs are outdated and destined to be outlived by the progressives. However, she doesn’t universalize the patriarchal attitude as the relationship of all men to all women. As we have seen, she refers to English soldiers as the “brothers” of upper-class women in her argument against nationalism as a motivator for war (*TG* 128). The positioning of a sibling relationship between upper-class women and working-class men recurs throughout the essay. While positioning a class of men as “brothers” rather than “fathers” doesn’t necessarily place them on equal footing to the women she centers, this language indicates a bond of solidarity between siblings that exists when one is not in command of the other. The language of fatherhood, then, is not solely an indicator of gender disparity, but a signal of class hierarchy as well. Woolf uses this familial language as shorthand to establish the nature of patriarchy as she sees it, and to align classes with or against one another based on where they fall in this kinship metaphor. Not only does she underline certain attitudes in the various classes, but her conclusion highlights why, going forward, the differences in these attitudes both motivate and make possible a revolution in gender relations.

In the conclusion to *Three Guineas*, Woolf returns to the idea of nationalism as the patriarchs’ defense for refusing social progress: “The war is over; we are in England now” (166). She clearly ties this issue into her psychological argument by referencing her version of the Oedipus complex, rebuking the patriarchs’ false sense of superiority: “Even here, even how, the clamour, the uproar that infantile fixation is making is such that we can hardly hear ourselves speak” (167). This is the culmination of her argument likening patriarchy to tyranny, underlining why nominally non-fascist England is not exempt from the dangers of fascism. She returns to *Antigone* at the moment Creon passes sentencing, but rather than quoting his condemnation of

her, she combines his speech to Haemon about obedience and his earlier order to send Antigone and Ismene away into the house.¹⁰ That she chooses to combine these speeches, neither of which Antigone directly responds to, as Creon's central argument to be rebutted indicates a deeper layer of meaning to "we are in England now." Creon is here framed as a tyrant particularly because he relegates the sisters to the home and shuts them out of public life, specifically from the sphere of political power; when the "fathers" claim that the end of the war means the end of women in the workforce, they are also caging women in the private sphere and denying their access to politics. Antigone, in Woolf's view, has the same problem of powerlessness that results from being restricted in such a way: "But she had neither capital nor force behind her." While Antigone's words are highlighted, it's clear in Woolf's quotations that Antigone shouldn't be considered the sole victim of Creon's tyranny. Creon subjects women generally to his rule, to the sphere of the household, to silence. Ismene, Irigaray's most womanish of women, is not spared from her fate by passivity and compliance, but symbolically "shut up" just as Antigone will be. Antigone receives additional punishment as a result of speaking out, but it is clear in Woolf's framing that the coming punishment is an extreme version of what happens to women generally as the result of patriarchal tyranny.

Woolf solidifies this connection between Creon's punishment of Antigone and the shutting-up of English women:

And he shut her not in Holloway or in a concentration camp, but in a tomb. And Creon we read brought ruin on his house, and scattered the land with the bodies of the dead. It seems, Sir, as we listen to the voices of the past, as if we were looking at the photograph again, at the picture of dead bodies and ruined houses that the Spanish Government sends

¹⁰ See *Antigone* 578-9 and 666-680.

us almost weekly. Things repeat themselves it seems. Pictures and voices are the same today as they were 2,000 years ago (*TG* 167).

Woolf isn't delivering a tragedy here, but a warning. The first step in Creon's tyranny, as she has arranged it here, was his silencing and confinement of women; and the direct result is ruin and death, which Woolf modernizes in terms of the Spanish Civil War. There is an implicit solidarity between the harshly punished Antigone and the also silenced Ismene, but so too is there a reflection of the English fathers in Creon and the Spanish Government: these groupings are of the same kind. Woolf, here and elsewhere, highlights the bravery of Antigone, and the moral argument she makes, but she does not create a divide between women like Antigone and women like Ismene -- both are the subjects of tyrannical patriarchy. A difference of degrees does not change that reality. The patriarchs of England thus aren't allowed to distinguish themselves from fascist governments by degrees; their actions invite the very violence they claim to be avoiding.

Antigone's death, however, is not the end of Woolf's argument; she goes on to suggest that the division of public and private can be overcome, that the slide from patriarchy to fascism is not inevitable. Returning to the photograph, she says, "It suggests that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other... It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure" (168). This passage seems to recall the shocking empathy that Clarissa Dalloway feels for Septimus, and simultaneously underlines the idea hinted at in the novel: the walls created by patriarchy, between genders, between classes, between nations, are false, and this becomes obvious when, in the voice of an English upper-class woman, Woolf repeatedly expresses empathy and horror at the fate of Spanish working-class civilians. The fundamental shared human experience of death, for Woolf, creates the possibility for universal

empathy, and this is apparent in her use of “we.” Woolf makes a subtle shift in this passage; at first, when she says “we have not laid that picture before you,” it’s evident that the division between “we” and “you” is the same division between “fathers” and “daughters,” or between those asking for female participation in the war petition and those refusing. However, when she goes on to discuss the emotional impact of the photograph, she shifts to a universal “we.” Her opponents, too, are included in the pronoun. She emphasizes this shift as she continues: “A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life. How essential it is that we should realise that unity the dead bodies, the ruined houses prove” (169). Again, her language invokes *Antigone* -- like looking at the photographs, she implies, reading *Antigone* is a unifying experience.

In Woolf’s view, this common experience is meant to create “the dream,” something that can only be sought when that common human experience is recognized and prioritized (169). She writes, “You have not asked us what peace is; you have asked us how to prevent war. Let us then leave it to the poets to tell us what the dream is; and fix our eyes upon the photograph again: the fact.” Woolf is highlighting here a problem of approach. The project of preventing war, she implies, maintains the hierarchical divisions that Woolf would destroy; it maintains the separation of public and private, the subjugation of women to men. The empathy that becomes possible through tragic death is thus framed as the first step of a utopian feminist project, and it hasn’t been taken yet. The concept of the “dream,” here, is loosely defined -- “the dream of peace, the dream of freedom” (169). Woolf’s meaning becomes clearer, however, if we return to her footnote essay on Antigone’s “unwritten” laws (218). These, Woolf says, are discoverable by “reason and imagination”:

If it were possible not only for each sex to ascertain what laws hold good in its own case, and to respect each other’s laws; but also to share the results of those discoveries, it might

be possible for each sex to develop fully and improve in quality without surrendering its special characteristics. (219)

Thus, she says, would the domination of one sex over another end. Woolf acknowledges in her conclusion that what is written here is a first step toward gender equality, not the final word; that she spends so little time discussing her envisioned end result to feminist struggle corroborates her assertion. The kind of relationship Woolf envisions for the sexes, a separated siblinghood that rests on a foundation of shared humanity, is the kind of project that welcomes revision. She cuts herself off at the end of the footnote, just as she cuts herself off from discussion of the dream: “But this is to anticipate.” It was not Woolf’s primary goal to create guidelines for the future, but to develop an understanding of her own present and past.

Differences in their objectives, as well as their context, deepen the resonances between Butler and Woolf just as much as they explain the disagreements. In Butler’s view, Antigone’s love for Polyneices is a result not of a broad loyalty to family, but a specific choice to love him. Kinship is thus malleable, because within the Oedipal family it has been exposed as a fiction. Woolf approaches *Antigone* and the idea of a fundamental law a little differently. She presents the idea of “finding the law” as a struggle to uncover basic facts of human interaction separate from learned socialization. By differentiating morality from social rules, Woolf suggests a transcendent ethics at the heart of *Antigone*. This overlaps with Butler’s argument; while they have different explanations for why, they agree that kinship relations are chosen just as much as they are socially constructed -- when that social construct is disrupted, new possibilities for connection are opened. Much of Woolf’s criticism of English patriarchs points to the hypocrisy of social stratification between genders; her solution uses this hypocrisy as a basis for a transformative kinship based on shared ethical truths. She separates these truths between the

binary sexes, which comes across as essentializing, but which also carries the suggestion of a disruptive empathy that is similar to Butler's view of the post-Oedipal family.

The differences between them are rooted in Woolf's refusal to end on the point of Antigone's martyrdom. While she does fixate on the idea of the lone voice speaking against tyranny, and Antigone's symbolic death is certainly a significant aspect of this, Woolf isn't seeking the outsider position as an end, but a means. Butler would likely view Woolf's reading as, like Antigone's, a failure to fully reject the culture she is criticizing; however, for Woolf, being half inside and half out of patriarchal English culture is a deliberate feature of her political positioning. Butler's priority in *Antigone's Claim* is to counteract previous readings, particularly those of Hegel and Lacan, which in her view negate Antigone's agency and individuality within the play. To that end, her reading creates an Antigone who is notable primarily for standing alone. Honig writes of Butler's essay, "Antigone's self-sanctimony and her calls for vengeance go unremarked" (42). Similarly unremarked upon is Ismene's attempt to die in solidarity with her sister. Woolf, however, presents her solitude in death as a tragedy that, while repeated throughout history, can be avoided in the future through solidarity. To Woolf, Antigone is never a solitary figure, because alongside her condemnation are all other women whose voices and agency are oppressed in the same way, and this preexisting collective experience gives rise to the possibility for class solidarity that goes beyond gender divisions. This is why avoiding war, and disrupting models of jingoistic patriarchy, is so essential to her vision of equality. Before the fathers can become brothers capable of listening to their daughter sisters, they first have to stop killing the brothers that already exist, the young working men made into soldiers who Woolf believes are already the class best equipped for a shared understanding with women. Woolf's approach to the functioning of kinship in *Antigone* illuminates the principles of solidarity

between women and common experience among humans that underlie the entirety of her argument in *Three Guineas*, leaving open the ultimate end goal of taking up this solidarity of experience as a project.

Conclusion

In 1984, George Steiner posed the question, “What would have happened if psychoanalysis took Antigone as its basis rather than Oedipus?”, and has received many feminist responses since -- Butler’s among them. Though he was tangentially aware of Woolf’s connection to *Antigone*, he did not consider *Three Guineas* as a possible source for his answer. However, the reading of *Antigone* in *Three Guineas* suggests that he may have asked the wrong question. Woolf puts no rhetorical distance between her argument and the conceptual Oedipus complex; her use of the overbearing father as the symbol of English patriarchy leans into this very concept. Her Antigone doesn’t exist in a hypothetical separate world from Freud’s Oedipus; instead, Woolf entraps her Creon in this complex by locating political power in the father. When she links patriarchal nationalism to the violent Nazism that killed Frau Pommer, she implies a common psyche between the men who condemned Pommer, those who advocate for war, and those who deny women their well-earned place on the workforce -- each of these is the father who sequesters his daughter in the home and denies her access to the public sphere. By crafting this image of tyranny which is both personal and political, Woolf has also merged the fight against fascism with the goals of feminism. Woolf would not have speculated about psychoanalysis without Oedipus, because she is concerned firstly and extensively with the current realities of living in a society in which Oedipus resonates. *Three Guineas* instead poses the question, what can Antigone do in the face of Oedipus?

Part of the answer becomes evident in the differences between *Three Guineas* and *Antigone's Claim*. There are many resonances between the two, particularly on the transformed and transformative nature of kinship within the play, and the threat Antigone is seen to pose to her patriarchal society. Butler's *Antigone* is one that is inherently disruptive of the heteronormative culture it originated in, and of its receiving cultures. She rejects readings of the play as a symbolic cultural shift and focuses on the circumstances of Oedipus's incest and the resulting civil war. In her view, Antigone's actions both challenge and fail to separate from her patriarchal culture, and her death is thus the combined result of her actions and her culture's punishment. Woolf is not so specific about Antigone's circumstances, but by insisting throughout *Three Guineas* on concrete examples of suffering under both patriarchy and fascism, and by subsuming *Antigone* into another of these examples, it's clear that she shares a general interest with Butler in Antigone as a voice for transformation. Butler's focus on the disruptive individual is partially due to her interest in issues of normative sexuality and kinship that apply most clearly on an individual vs society basis, but also clearly informed by the framing of her reading as a response to past critics. However, Woolf's approach proves that close attention to the particular does not preclude an assessment of Antigone as part or representative of a group. Woolf's Antigone is universalized precisely through her experiences of being an outcast and her disruptive choices of kinship. This is not to say that Butler's position as a respondent to previous critics makes her essay backwards-looking in a way Woolf's is not; in fact, the presence of *Antigone* in *Three Guineas* should prompt concerns about elitism and outdatedness.

It's always worth asking in a classical receptions context what is implied by reference to the classical text, and whether that text is carrying antiquated viewpoints into the receiving text. Catherine A. Holland examines several feminist readings of the 80s and early 90s and finds

commonality in their assertions that the modern world has eclipsed something fundamental -- the family, the mother, or the citizen. Holland's concern is that readings in this mode glorify a past that may not deserve it, and that by returning time and again to the *Antigone*, feminist political thought may be limited by the play's classical context (41). Woolf, however, directly contradicts the idea that European fascism is in any way new or unprecedented; rather, by relating new concerns about tyranny to the millennia-old problem of patriarchy, she denies the very form of nostalgia to which Holland objects. Woolf universalizes *Antigone* without abstraction by framing it as a particular variation of a multiform problem. This framing defines the potential use of *Three Guineas* as a starting point for *Antigone*'s place in feminist political philosophy going forward. The connections that Woolf builds between various forms of tyranny -- mainly patriarchy and fascism -- also deliberately align the victims of these tyrannies, forming paths for solidarity that don't exist within the worldviews of gender hierarchy or nationalist warmongering.

Mrs. Dalloway, as a reception of *Antigone*, serves as a test case for this viewpoint. The plot of the novel does not align itself neatly with the tragedy, because Woolf's goal is not to paint the same set of circumstances onto characters whose problems are entirely contextualized within their contemporary society. Instead, the resonances between *Antigone* and *Mrs. Dalloway* rest in the emotional experiences at the heart of both. Clarissa empathizes with Septimus through recognizing their common experiences of the loss of their individuality and resulting suicidal ideation. Antigone empathizes with Polyneices, and is empathized with by Ismene, through a common experience of being cast out or shut out of their society. Woolf values *Antigone* as a site for generating empathy, just as she values the firsthand accounts of soldiers and the diaries of women, because the recognition of common experiences is her basis for undoing the closed

categorization which patriarchy creates. Her model is a difficult one to confront, because she reaches not for Antigone's inspiring words as the site of universal understanding, but the profound discomfort generated by her suffering and death. Nevertheless, the visceral understanding of suffering opens the path to making change -- Antigone's suffering is the "instructive analysis of tyranny" that invites exploration of "the duties of the individual to society" (TG 98). This creates a potential for *Antigone* as a useful tentpole for feminist projects not because Antigone herself is a standout victim of tyranny, but because her experiences are recognizable by so many who are similarly the victims of marginalization. *Three Guineas* as a foundational text doesn't create the requirement for extensive revision or refutation of arguments like Hegel's or Lacan's which were not intended as feminist texts. Instead, Woolf's reading of *Antigone* is left open to the possibilities of intersectionality, welcoming recontextualization within the particularities of various tyrannies. She establishes *Antigone* as primarily an emotive text, rather than a prescriptive model, and creates a forward-looking analysis ripe for convergences which does not demand conformity.

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