DYING BECOMES HER. POSTHUMANISM IN SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE IN THE LIGHT OF LÁSZLÓ NEMES' SON OF SAUL.

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a reading of the Sophoclean Antigone through the lens of Posthumanism in tragedy (as a discourse coming from the dead) and Classical Reception (referring to indirect resonances of the Greek drama in László Nemes' Son of Saul). Both theoretical perspectives are used to reflect new light back on the ancient source. In my approach I suggest that the play can be divided into two parts: in the first, comprising the prologue and second episode, Antigone connects with the dead obliterating all other desires to prevent her mission being jeopardized by the 'call of life' (applicable to both Antigone and Saul). In the fourth episode (the second part of the play), however, Antigone reasserts her connection with the living through her lamentation for dying prematurely deprived of any opportunity to marry and bear children, thus abandoning her obstinate attachment to the dead. Thus, Antigone undergoes an internal transposition moving from the realm of the dead (posthumanism) back to the living. This reading helps us reconsider some of the apparent inconsistencies in the diction and behavior of the heroine between the two parts of the play, notably the limiting of Antigone's choice to burying only her brother (905-912).

INTRODUCING THE ARGUMENT: TRAGEDY AND POSTHUMANISM

I N NOVEMBER 2014, Miriam Leonard gave a paper in a Conference on "Posthuman Antiquities" held at New York University titled: "Precarious

^{*} Earlier versions of this paper were presented in the following venues: at the International Conference on "Classical Reception and the Human", Jocasta Classical Reception Greece, University of Patras (10-12 June 2016); University of Florida at Gainesville (November 2016); University of Saint Joseph, Philadelphia (December 2016); Plenary Session of the Postgraduate Colloquium of the English Department, School of Humanities, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (June 2017). I thank the members of the audiences (students and colleagues alike) for their questions and remarks, for they have helped me greatly to advance my argument. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the anonymous reader of Logeion for his/her insightful remarks helping me to clarify my argument.

Life: Tragedy and the Posthuman". There, she advocated that posthumanism in Greek tragedy is "the speech that comes from elsewhere; that is the voice of the non-human coming from the realm of the dead". When Leonard, in QA session, was asked whether she believed that tragedy was the speech that comes from elsewhere, or whether it was a *mechanism* to think about this question, she replied that, as yet, she could not make up her mind, but she inclined to think the latter. So, tragedy, put in the context of posthumanism, according to Leonard, is a mechanism to think about death.

However, thinking and talking about death has been always part of the humanistic discourse. Testing the limits of mortality and considering human finitude, especially in the context of *Antigone*, have been raised succinctly, as of late, by feminist scholars as part of the discourse renegotiating our humanity, as will be shown later in this paper. Thus, are we entitled to talk about posthumanism rather than humanism? Death, we all agree, is part of the human condition:² can we draw the fine line that distinguishes between 'death' as a discourse of the human condition and 'death' as 'voice coming from elsewhere', that is, the 'voice of the non-human'? Where then do we enter the realm of the latter?

This is where the film *Son of Saul* enters the stage. The Oscar-winning Hungarian film (released in 2015) focuses on a forbidden burial at the expense of the protagonist forfeiting his own life within the broad context of the 'factory of death' in the German extermination camp of Auschwitz. The film sets Saul's quest for a rabbi to provide his son with a proper burial within the overwhelming presence of death and extreme de-humanization brought about by the Nazis' practices. I suggest that this 'factory of death' and the de-humanization of the human beings in the extermination camp exemplify the posthumanistic element as a 'discourse coming from the dead' that Leonard detects in Greek tragedy. Moreover, Saul's ignoring the living for the sake of the dead (one among them in particular) provides an interesting link with Antigone's attitude and claims when she obsessively ignores the living

This cross-disciplinary Conference held at the Department of Comparative Literature of New York University (14-15 November) had the general title: "Posthuman Antiquities". Miriam Leonard's presentation is to be found in the Conference's link to youtube and was accessed on the 11th of November 2017).

^{2.} From Homer onwards, people reflected upon death as part of the human condition — great episodes in literature have turned on this; one of the most 'famous' is when Odysseus declines Calypso's offer of immortality in preference for his own mortal life and the inferior charms (in terms of beauty) of the mortal Penelope. Odysseus chooses his mortality and the pains of existence over living in a world that is not his own — in the world of non-human, even if it is the superior world of the divine.

in favor of her kindred dead. Saul only seeks the burial of his assumed son blatantly ignoring everything else in the camp. His 'frozen' face throughout the film substantiates to my mind Antigone's abstinence from the 'call of life' until she herself consummates the burial of Polyneices.

Thus, in the present paper I will examine those connections in the context of the wider posthumanistic framework that explores the 'pure desire of death' detected in Antigone. This special tendency in posthumanism will be traced in important thinkers such as Foucault, Freud and Lacan, connecting them with Leonard's opening remarks. I suggest that Antigone substantiates the 'voice that comes from the realm of the dead,' especially in the prologue and the second episode, where the burial of the brother takes precedence over everything else — even (and especially) over her desire to live. In the fourth episode, when the protagonist is on her path to death, she reconnects with the realm of the living through her long lamentation; it is here that she expresses the 'bizarre' justification of bestowing burial only on her brother, as opposed to a husband or son, that has perplexed scholarship ever since the time of Goethe; through the lens of Antigone reconnecting with her humanity (abandoned, as it were, in the 'first part' of the play) this 'inconsistency' is smoothed out. Such insights are especially timely now that, in recent approaches to Antigone, there is a refocusing on the notions of mortality and human finitude rather than ethics and politics as has been the case since the play's Hegelian and Lacanian readings.

TRACING POSTHUMANISM IN CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM

I will begin by raising a fundamental question for the argument of the present paper leading to formulating a working definition of the term; has human culture entered a posthumanistic phase? Within this broad question, and regardless of the answer, one thing is for certain: we need to "rethink our takenfor-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of Homo Sapiens itself [...] by (paradoxically, for humanism) acknowledging that [the human] is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is". This 'technicity and materiality' is what immediately springs to mind when we speak about posthumanism, to which we should add

^{3.} Wolfe (2010) xxv; my emphasis.

animals, systems, symbols, objects, inorganic substances and all that is exterior and prior to humans. Therefore, the notions of the human and humanism need to be reconceptualized and reconfigured, especially now that the present widespread humanitarian crisis forces us to rethink of ourselves as human beings, and re-evaluate the culture that we, as human beings, have produced. Therefore, as a viable definition of the term one should understand posthumanism as:

any critical engagement with the possibility that what we have always considered to be *the* human condition (which is *both* a particular way of being in the world *and* a particular way of positioning ourselves in this world) is no longer a given, that is more fluid than we once thought, and that we are free (or will soon be free, or are becoming increasingly freer) to remould our identities. Thus, [...] posthumanism [...] is a reflection on the malleability of the human condition.⁵

Towards the direction of the 'malleability of the human condition' one can recall Michel Foucault, who in his 1966 book, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, famously wrote: "... Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end." He claimed that the human sciences (biology, linguistics, economics) revealed to man that "his knowledge

^{4.} According to an intriguing approach in recent critical posthumanism: 'we have always been posthuman'. Stemming from Latour's 1993 book titled: "We Have Never Been Modern" Hayles explains that "the seriated history of cybernetics — emerging from networks at once materially real, socially regulated, and discursively constructed — suggests, [...], that we have always been posthuman" (Hayles (1999) 291). Moreover, in the broad debate whether posthumanism means that a definition of the human is displaced by another, or that humans are to be displaced by intelligent machines (or technologically enhanced individuals) the scholar takes a stance advocating that humans are above all embodied individuals; the body, she continues, is "the net result of thousand of years of sedimented evolutionary history" and this history affects "human behaviors at every level of thought and action" (1999, 284). The body itself becomes a "congealed metaphor" resonant with cultural meanings; this is something that machines do no share (1999, 285). See also Halberstam & Livingston in their most affirmative claim: "a posthuman condition is upon us"; their volume titled *Posthuman Bodies* is "an open invitation to engage discursive and bodily configurations that displace the human, humanism, and the humanities" (1995, vii).

^{5.} Hauskeller, Philbeck, and Carbonell (eds.) (2015) 7. Of course there are many 'variants' within this broad definition including the broad but defined subcategories of 'transhumanism' (when emerging technology is used to enhance the human intellect and psychology, applicable for example to 'transhuman' athletes); and the metahuman describing any human-like being with extra normal powers and abilities, as depicted in the Marvel World of mutants and mutates; see Miah (2008), Sorgner (2010), Ranisch & Sorgner (2015).

Quote from the English translation published (in paperback by Routledge) in 1974, p. 387. The English title The Order of Things is not a literal translation of the original French title: Les Mots et les Choses (= Words and Things) but the alternative title that the author

is exterior to him, and older than his own birth", and that this very knowledge "anticipate[s] him, overhang[s] him with all its solidity, and transverse[s] him as though he were merely an object of nature, a face doomed to be erased in the course of history". The human sciences have changed over time in their determination of what is acceptable as scientific discourse. This mutability is what makes modern science (from 19th to 21st c.) a recent invention, reconfiguring its discourse and displacing it from natural history to biology, from general grammar to linguistics, and from the science of wealth to economics. 9

"Modernity", says Foucault, "begins when the human being begins to exist within his organism, inside the shell of his head, inside the armature of his limbs, and in the whole structure of his physiology; when he begins to exist at the centre of a labour by whose principles he is governed and whose product eludes him; when he lodges his thought in the folds of a language so much older than himself that he cannot master its significations, even though they have been called back to life by the insistence of his words. But, more fundamentally, our culture crossed the threshold beyond which we recognize our modernity when finitude was conceived in an interminable cross-reference with itself. [...] Modern man — [...] — is possible only as a figuration of finitude;"¹⁰ and he concludes: "[...] man is finite [...]" and "since he has killed God, it is he himself who must answer for his finitude".¹¹

wished even for the French edition (but avoided so as to avoid confusion with two other publications by structuralist authors just prior to this one).

^{7.} Foucault (1974) 313; my emphasis.

^{8.} Even the taxonomy of our scientific system of thought should not be taken for granted. Foucault begins the Preface to his book the *Order of Things* (Engl. ed. 1974 xv) by referring to a passage in Borges supposedly quoting a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' that classifies animals as follows: "a. belonging to the Emperor, b. embalmed, c. tame, d. sucking pigs, e. sirens, f. fabulous, g. stray dogs, h. included in the present classification, i. frenzied, j. innumerable, k. drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, l. *et cetera*, m. having just broken the water pitcher, n. that from a long way off look like flies". The author admits the "wonderment of this taxonomy" to be the starting point of his entire book, as all the "familiar landmarks of [our] thought" collapse demonstrating the limitation of our western system.

^{9.} In Nayar's *Posthumanism* Foucault (and his *Order of Things*) also 'opens up' the array of critical thinkers who, intentionally or otherwise, introduce with their ideas the field of posthumanism, revisiting in essence the notions of the human: "Foucault focuses on man in three domains: life (therefore as a biological category, as an animal), labour (as a productive creature in economics) and language (culture)" (Nayar [2014] 12). See also Heynes (1999, 283-291).

^{10.} Foucault (1974) 318; my emphasis. Contrary to modern science, Renaissance humanism, and Classical thought allotted man a privileged position in the universe, "but they were not able to conceive of man" (Foucault [1974] 318).

^{11.} Foucault (1974) 313, 385.

Thus, finitude and its inherent mortality have become part of the discourse of reconfiguring the notion of the human in postmodernity; but, as I stated earlier, are we entitled to speak about posthumanism as opposed to (a revisiting of) humanism? To this end, we shall be turning to an emblematic figure of modernity, who, at the turn of the 20th century, came up with what he called 'beyond the pleasure principle', which introduces a certain 'death drive' as a constituent part of the mental and psychic apparatus of human beings — we all recognize Sigmund Freud behind this. In this controversial work, first published in 1920 (in the aftermath of the 'Great War'), Freud identified in humans a death drive — something as universal as the already famous by that time 'life drive' or libido. He detected the death drive in the repetition-compulsion motif that revived painful experiences from the past with the aim of recreating a painful situation. 12 This repetition enabled the discharge of psychic energy associated with these experiences, and so the compulsion might reflect an instinct for the reinstatement of an earlier situation¹³ where the human psychic apparatus would tend towards achieving a minimum level of tension (excitation). According to Freud death drive is a universal tendency "of all living matter to return to the peace of the inorganic world". 14 Thus, Freud, in boldly introducing the inorganic into the organism of the living as a powerful drive connecting the living with death, becomes, so to speak, the precursor of posthumanism. Although Freud's observations were based on the mental and psychic apparatus of traumatic neurotics and children's play, one cannot but think that the 'death drive' theory emerges just after the massive traumas of WWI as, in a sense, a clinical observation of the phenomenon of collective death in Europe. With military and civilian casualties exceeding 38 million, WWI ranks among the deadliest conflicts in human history. Would the death drive detected by Freud represent a form of collective inertia as a means of dealing with the millions of dead?

In a later development of psychoanalytic theory, Lacan interestingly combines 'the pure desire of death' with Antigone as his central focus in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959), especially in the VII seminar. One of his main concerns is the rupture between politics and ethics, introduced into the reading of Antigone by Hegel, and emerging as a 'hot issue' again in the wake of the atrocities of WWII;¹⁵ this second 'Great War' engenders further reflection

^{12.} Freud (2009 [1920]) 20, 21.

^{13.} Freud (2009 [1920]) 74.

^{14.} Freud (2009 [1920]) 81.

^{15.} Leonard (2005) 100.

on finitude and death, and marks the shift in the interest of the intellectuals from Oedipus to Antigone, from the question of human knowledge to that of our own mortality. ¹⁶ Turning to Antigone and Sophocles to answer these questions, Lacan opined: "[...] we consider ourselves to be at the end of the vein of the humanistic thought". ¹⁷ Sophocles becomes his main interlocutor in terms of posthumanism in tragedy, ¹⁸ for his Antigone "fulfills what can be called pure desire, the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates this desire". ¹⁹ Thus, Lacan detected, in a sense, the 'beyond the pleasure principle' in Sophocles' *Antigone*. Hence, the inspiration for the title of my paper: *dying becomes her*. ²⁰

DYING BECOMES HER

Antigone can serve as a prime case in point in an investigation of death in tragedy, be it in a humanistic or posthumanistic context. However, Antigone's claim (to use Judith Butler's familiar title) is not unambiguously a discourse from the dead. On the contrary, Judith Butler and Bonnie Honig have argued that her connection with death can be seen as a renegotiation of the human in the most positive way. Butler suggests that Antigone renegotiates the human from the perspective of the underprivileged: "if kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion of the new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human²¹ speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws". ²² Furthermore, Honig claims that grievability "position[s humans] in a sentimental ontology of fragility" that actually renegotiates the notion of the human condition. ²³ Despite this, I think that we can safely support the view that Antigone connects with the

^{16.} Honig (2013) 31.

^{17.} Lacan (1992) 337.

^{18.} Leonard (2005) 102.

^{19.} Lacan (1992) 328-329.

^{20.} I am playing of course with the emblematic title of Eugene O'Neill's trilogy Mourning Becomes Electra, which premiered in 1931. The trilogy, which consisted of The Homecoming, The Hunted, and The Haunted parallels the structure and themes of Aeschylus' Oresteia.

^{21. &}quot;That is women, slaves, and other minorities in ancient and contemporary societies", Butler (2000) 82.

^{22.} Butler ibid (2000) 82.

^{23.} Honig (2013) 31.

dead in an absolute way that reminds us of the 'inorganic substance' of the Freudian death drive, and of the Lacanian 'pure desire of death.' We need to assess the whole tragedy in order to be able to distinguish the posthumanist meaning from the renegotiation of the human. I suggest that the play is 'divided' into two parts: the first ends when the burial is completed and the death sentence is pronounced (prologue and second episode); the second is the long lamentation of Antigone in the fourth episode. Seen in this light, some of the apparent inconsistencies in Antigone's behavior and thought can not only be resolved, but become significant.

I begin by highlighting some of the thoughts and actions of Antigone in the play. Antigone, as we know, is obsessed with burying her brother. She does not conceal her intentions. When she meets with her sister in the prologue to elicit her compliance to the burial, Ismene refuses to do so; however, she tries to protect Antigone by encouraging her to keep her plan a secret. Antigone indignantly calls on her sister to publically proclaim it to all (84-87):

ΙΣ. Άλλ' οὖν προμηνύσης γε τοῦτο μηδενὶ τοὔργον, κρυφῆ δὲ κεῦθε, σὺν δ' αὕτως ἐγώ.
ΑΝ. Οἴμοι, καταύδα· πολλὸν ἐχθίων ἔση σιγῶσ', ἐὰν μὴ πᾶσι κηρύξης τάδε.

ISMENE: Well, tell no one of this act beforehand, but keep it secret, and so shall I. ANTIGONE: Ah tell them all! I shall hate you far more if you remain silent, and do not proclaim this to all.²⁴

Nor does she try to evade death when she confronts Creon (460-468):

[...] θανουμένη γὰς ἐξήδη — τί δ' οὔ; — κεὶ μὴ σὰ προὐκήρυξας. Εἰ δὲ τοῦ χρόνου πρόσθεν θανοῦμαι, κέρδος αἔτ' ἐγὰ λέγω ὅστις γὰς ἐν πολλοῖσιν ὡς ἐγὰ κακοῖς ζῆ, πῶς ὅδ' οὐχὶ κατθανὰν κέρδος φέρει; Οὕτως ἔμοιγε τοῦδε τοῦ μόρου τυχεῖν πας' οὐδὲν ἄλγος · ἀλλ' ἄν, εἰ τὸν ἐξ ἐμῆς μητρὸς θανόντ' ἄθαπτον ἠνσχόμην νέκυν, κείνοις ἄν ἤλγουν· τοῖσδε δ' οὐκ ἀλγύνομαι.

^{24.} All translations of the passages from *Antigone* are by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, (1998), *Sophocles*, vol. II, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge Mass.

I knew that I would die, of course I knew, even if you had made no proclamation. But if I die before my time, I account that gain. For does not whoever lives among many troubles, as I do, gain by death? So it is in no way painful for me to meet with this death; if I had endured that the son of my mother should die and remain unburied, that would have given me pain, but this (i.e my death) gives me none.

She repeats time and again that she is already dead; she says to her sister (555): $\sigma \dot{v}$ $\mu \dot{\epsilon} \nu \gamma \dot{\alpha} \varrho$ $\epsilon \tilde{l} \lambda o \nu \zeta \tilde{\eta} \nu$, $\dot{\epsilon} \gamma \dot{\omega}$ $\delta \dot{\epsilon}$ $\kappa a \tau \theta a \nu \epsilon \tilde{l} \nu$ ("you chose life, and I chose death"); and further down (559-560): $\sigma \dot{v}$ $\mu \dot{\epsilon} \nu \zeta \tilde{\eta} \varsigma$, $\dot{\eta}$ $\delta' \dot{\epsilon} \mu \dot{\eta}$ $\psi \nu \chi \dot{\eta}$ $\pi \dot{\alpha} \lambda a \iota / \tau \dot{\epsilon} \theta \nu \eta - \kappa \nu$, $\omega \sigma \tau \epsilon$ $\tau o \tilde{l} \varsigma$ $\theta a \nu o \tilde{l} \sigma \iota \nu$ ("you are alive, but I have long been dead, so as to help the dead"). Antigone in the prologue and the second episode of the play articulates a discourse that emanates from the dead. She seems to say 'I am already there, and nothing matters to me anymore —save one thing, to bury my brother.'

I suggest that we should consider this attitude as something special that Antigone adopts, in what I called the first part of the story, in order to overcome any desire for survival that would jeopardize her obsessive mission. It is not an attitude she adheres to consistently throughout the play — she resurfaces to the realm of the living when she begins her lamentation for herself a few minutes before her death. If we take this interpretive stance, then the inconsistencies that scholarship has long detected (and pondered over) in her words and actions now achieve coherence; paramount among which is the limiting of her choice to burying only her brother, as opposed to her husband or sons (905-912), despite her earlier two famous statements that the divine laws are equal for all the dead (519, 521), and that she was born to love and not to hate (523). In the fourth episode, she seriously undermines her previous actions and arguments.

So, why would this happen? Are these inconsistencies a maladroit Sophoclean treatment of the story, or do they mark a shift in the ideology of the heroine? Is Antigone 'unstable' or has she developed a special attachment to her brother bordering on the limits of incest? Over the years, scholarship has produced elaborate justifications of the passage 904-920, as well as strong criticism, beginning with Goethe who wished that Sophocles had never produced these lines. However, I suggest that watching the film *Son of Saul* can give us an insight into Antigone's differentiated arguments, for the film

^{25.} For the relevant discussion and scholarship see later in the course of the present paper (pp. 36-37).

makes it easier to understand the attitude of the protagonist in the overwhelming presence of death. Saul accomplishes his mission by obliterating any 'call of life' (he compromises, for example, the success of the Sondercommando revolt by losing the explosives he has been trusted with). He lets himself rejoice only when the burial (however rudimentary) is completed. Similarly, Antigone, although remaining one and the same person throughout the play, needs to cling to her mission by adhering to the dead rather than the living. For this reason, she adopts a mental and psychic attitude (the attitude: 'not caring about the living anymore'), which ensures the accomplishment of her mission. Once this has been completed, Antigone can let herself 'break' and join the living again. In this new state of mind she finally admits two things: first, she would have buried just this one dead and no one else (as is the case with the assumed son of Saul), and second, that she is the most wretched of all the members of her family for dying prematurely, miserably, and unwed (contrary to her earlier statements of being already there, in the realm of the dead).

ANTIGONE IN THE LIGHT OF LÁSZLÓ NEMES' SON OF SAUL

I have argued elsewhere that Classical Reception studies not only offer a valuable insight into "the continued appeal of classical culture and the creation of new works of art modeled on classical source texts", 26 but also the possibility of the reverse route: "using the modern reception as a starting point and focusing attention back towards the ancient source. This approach engenders fresh meanings that have previously been marginalized or forgotten. The old questions can be approached in different ways that yield new insights". This is what happens here, and interestingly in a film that, despite its strong affinities with *Antigone*, does not claim any inspiration from the ancient source. Furthermore, Greek tragedy in film (be it an intentional representation, or a fragmentary and allusive one) can be used to "think about the present as a historical moment". Considering the historical context, Pantelis Michelakis positions the connection between cinematic configurations of Greek tragedy and the very tragedy between two extremes: "Greek tragedy made irrelevant by the tragedies of contemporary history, and Greek tragedy

^{26.} Karakantza (2013) 61

^{27.} Karakantza (2013) 61; Hardwick (2003) 4.

^{28.} Michelakis (2013) 152.

as a key for making sense of contemporary history". ²⁹ To this I should add a third possibility: contemporary cinematic configurations as a key for making sense of Greek tragedy, especially, the 'blind spots' that present difficulties in their interpretation.

The Academy Award-winning film Son of Saul, the first feature film directed by László Nemes, is the story of Saul (starring the Hungarian poet Géza Röhrig), a member of the Sonderkommando in the German extermination camp Auschwitz, who attempts to bury a dead boy that he claims is his lost son. In order to tell the story in the simplest and most minimalist way possible, Nemes' camera sticks to the main character's viewpoint and follows his movements. Thus, the audience see the world through Saul's eyes; everything is filtered through his perspective and, therefore, spectators can only see blurred images of his surroundings, or hear only very raw and unmediated sounds. The spectator's point of view is limited, as was the individual's in the extermination camps, says Nemes regarding this 'new cinematic language' that he introduces. The entire film was shot on film (not digital) in the carré format of 40mm; this produces a suffocating effect because everything happens within this small format without allowing the vision of the spectator any possibility of escape. The director (in one of his many interviews) explains that his intention was to portray a single man, a human being, who guides us through his quest to find a rabbi, in this factory that produces only death, in order to give his assumed son the dignity of a burial. Death is everywhere and the effect of these extreme conditions on human beings is to de-humanize them. 30 This de-humanization is shown in a visually poignant form on the 'frozen' face of the main actor. Saul is always expressionless — no fear, anxiety, hope, sadness, or any tension of survival is depicted on his face. He goes through his task of working within the extermination process without betraying any feeling; neither does he do so when deciding to bury the body of the young boy (who we soon realize is not his biological son).

His obsession with the burial is what the director calls his "inner survival". To the question "what happens where there is no more hope?", the leading actor, Géza Röhrig (who is also an established Hungarian poet) replies: "In the face of a situation in which there is no possibility of hope, Saul's inner

^{29.} Michelakis (2013) 154. For an insightful analysis of shaping political attitudes and the posthuman (as a broad category) in film and television see Hughes (2015) 235-245.

^{30.} Interviews at the following venues: vpro cinema (2015), Academy Conversations at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre (2015), DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood (see bibliography interviews a, c, and d).

voice commands him that he must survive, to be able to do a thing that bears meaning. The command was to show respect to a meaningful act that from the very origin of the [human] communities was very sacred, namely to bury a dead body". The director talks about 'inner survival', which is, in some way, the only possible act of rebellion in this de-humanized environment; but, "I wanted the protagonist to act", Nemes comments, "with a very minimalistic approach and to be as emotionally detached as possible". Even more expressive than his words is the image on the screen of a human being who is not simply "emotionally detached" but has formed a special relationship with death. He acts with this unmovable dedication to his cause because his mind and soul have already crossed the boundary between the living and the dead; he is already 'there', as is Antigone in the first part of the Sophoclean drama.

This explains why, although his comrades prepare an escape in order to physically survive and to join the forces of the advancing allies, Saul loses the explosives with which he was entrusted. "You care more about the dead, than the living", the leader of the rebellion group accuses Saul. This phrase could very well encapsulate what Ismene accuses Antigone of: "you care more about the dead than the living". "My film", says Nemes, "is not about survival. It is about the reality of death". It is this death and the special relation to it that unites Saul and Antigone; their speech comes from the dead. Both of them need to adopt a special state of mind that would prevent them from jeopardizing their mission to bury their dead. Their own physical survival should cede priority to the importance of the burial of kin, in a reality that only speaks of death: the factory of death of the concentration camps, in the case of Saul; the death of the last surviving male members of the accursed family in the aftermath of a destructive civil strife, in the case of Antigone.

ANTIGONE: RESTATING HER HUMANITY

This posthumanistic discourse, which emanates from the dead, and connects with the dead, cannot be long sustained. I cannot really say (along with Freud) that "all living matter [has the tendency] to return to the peace of the inorganic world". What I can say is that Saul lets himself smile when, minutes before he dies, he imagines the boy to be alive and smiling at him.

^{31.} Interview at Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly (2016), see bibliography interview e.

^{32.} Interviews at the following venues vpro cinema (2015), DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood (2015), see Bibliography, Interviews a and b.

Similarly I suggest that the signs of a profound change in her psychic and mental state can be detected in Antigone in the fourth episode when she is led to her death. Antigone returns to the realm of the living, and connects with her humanity, when she initiates her lamentation, while walking alive to her grave; it is then that she reflects on her solitude, desertion, and profound misery. Everything that held her together previously, — in the extreme situation when she could only talk about death, considering herself already dead, — now collapses. After the burial is completed and her own death sentence is pronounced and imminent, she lets herself grieve for her premature death — contradicting her earlier statements, and undermining her own motives for the burial. She lets herself 'break down in tears' and this grievability, as Bonnie Honig claims, "position[s her] in a sentimental ontology of fragility", 33 that actually is a means to renegotiate the notion of the human condition.

I will follow in Antigone's steps in her short itinerary to her own death, to show how she reconnects with life, for there are several aspects of life that she begins to mourn; she laments being alone, deserted by her family, friends, and by the citizens of Thebes (οία φίλων ἄκλαυτος, 'how unwept by friends', 847; ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος, ἀνυμέναιος ταλαί-/φρων ἄγομαι τάνδ' ετοίμαν δδόν, 'unwept, friendless, unwedded, I am conducted, unhappy one, along the way that lies before me', 876-878; τὸν δ' ἐμὸν πότμον ἀδάκουτον οὐ-/δεὶς φίλων στενάζει, 'and my fate, unwept for, is lamented by no friend', 881-882). She is led to die, in an egregiously perverted funeral procession, for firstly she is still alive, and secondly she initiates her own ritual lamentation. True, in the antiphonal exchange with the chorus, the elders of Thebes participate in her dirge: ἴσχειν δ' / οὐκέτι πηγὰς δύναμαι δακούων ('I can no longer restrain the stream of tears', 802-803), but this empathy is often mitigated by their critical disposition towards her (observe their criticism of her action: $\pi\rho\sigma\delta\tilde{a}\sigma'\dot{\epsilon}\pi'$ ἔσχατον θράσους / ύψηλὸν ἐς Δίκας βάθρον / προσέπεσες, ὧ τέκνον, 'advancing to the extreme of daring, you stumbled against the lofty altar of Justice, my child', 853-854). And Antigone rightly feels that the sometimes condescending attitude of the elders is of little comfort to her (839-843):

Οἴμοι γελῶμαι. Τί με, πρὸς θεῶν πατρώων, οὐκ οὐλομέναν ὑβρίζεις, ἀλλ' ἐπίφαντον;

② πόλις, ὧ πόλεως πολυκτήμονες ἄνδρες·

^{33. (2013) 31;} consider also what Honig calls the "mortalistic humanism": "what is common to humans is not rationality but the ontological fact of mortality", (2013) 17.

Ah, I am being mocked! Why, in the name of the gods of my fathers, do you insult me not when I am gone, but while I am still visible? O city, O rich men of the city!

Yet, her last appeal is again to the lords of Thebes, the Elders, whom she calls upon to witness how she, the last member of her miserable royal family, is driven to her last dwelling place in solitude (940-943):

Λεύσσετε, Θήβης οἱ κοιρανίδαι, τὴν βασιλειδῶν μούνην λοιπήν, οἶα πρὸς οἴων ἀνδρῶν πάσχω, τὴν εὐσεβίαν σεβίσασα.

Look, rulers of Thebes, upon the last of the royal house, what things I am suffering from what men, for having shown reverence for reverence.

This part of the drama is as much a perverted funeral ritual as is a reversed wedding ritual, because Antigone is led to a grave that is also her bridal chamber; her own address to her grave is as if to her bridal chamber (891-892):

 \mathfrak{D} τύμβος, $\tilde{\omega}$ νυμφεῖον, $\tilde{\omega}$ κατασκαφής / οἴκησις αἰείφρουρος

O tomb, O bridal chamber, O deep-dug home, to be guarded forever

The fusion between the rituals of death and marriage in this passage (comprising the intense lyrical exchange between the chorus and herself in lines 802-882; her quasi-soliloquy of the fourth episode, 891-928; and her final lyric address to the land of Thebes, 937-943) is poignant, as many scholars have already pointed out.³⁴ Antigone actually experiences her funeral and wedding rituals simultaneously; she is led by Creon, her male guardian (kyrios), in a gesture that recalls the Greek wedding gesture of $\chi \epsilon i \varrho$ $\epsilon i \epsilon i \epsilon i \epsilon i$ $\epsilon i \epsilon i$ ϵ

^{34.} Seaford (1987) 107-108, 113 and (1990) 76-77, 79; Rehm (1994) 59-71; Goff (2004) 309.

^{35.} Griffith ad 781-800.

lead Antigone to her new 'dwelling', a rocky cavern, where she could only invoke Hades as her rescuer (773-778); but Hades is the place of her wedding, as Creon himself had said earlier (653-654): $\mu \dot{\epsilon}\theta \dot{\epsilon} c / \tau \dot{\eta} \nu \pi \alpha \tilde{\iota} \delta' \dot{\epsilon} \nu \mathcal{A} \iota \delta o \nu \tau \dot{\eta} \nu \delta \epsilon \nu \nu \mu \varphi \dot{\epsilon} \dot{\iota} \nu \tau \iota \nu \iota \iota'$ ('allow her to marry someone in Hades'), an idea which is confirmed later by Antigone herself ($\dot{\delta} \tau \dot{\nu} \mu \beta o \varsigma$, $\dot{\delta} \nu \nu \mu \varphi \dot{\epsilon} i o \nu$, 891). Thus, the declaration, the gesture, and the procedure all evoke a mock wedding procession, leading Antigone to her new 'home' where her wedding will be consummated, when Haimon will take her lifeless corpse in his last embrace in a sinister enactment of the sexual act (1235-1241).

Amidst this overstressed nuptial context, Antigone at last can let herself grieve for all the things that she will be deprived of: marriage and childbearing (916-920).

Καὶ νῦν ἄγει με διὰ χερῶν οὕτω λαβὼν ἄλεκτρον, ἀνυμέναιον, οὔτε του γάμου μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς, ἀλλ' ὧδ' ἔρημος πρὸς φίλων ἡ δύσμορος ζῶσ' εἰς θανόντων ἔρχομαι κατασκαφάς.

And now he leads me thus by the hands, without marriage, without bridal, having no share in wedlock or in the rearing of children, but thus deserted by my friends, I come living, poor creature, to the caverns of the dead.

In typically Sophoclean style we have thrice the repetition of the idea of the wedding, which Antigone will never experience, condensed into one and a half lines (ἄλεκτρον, ἀνυμέναιον, οὔτε του γάμου / μέρος λαχοῦσαν, 917-918); the passage is overloaded with the accumulation of references to a wedding that will never take place. The alpha-privatives, so dear to the playwright, contribute to the feeling of deprivation, desperation, and loneliness. It cannot be said more emphatically that Antigone laments her dying unwed (ἀνύμφευτος), and this is where she abandons all previous sang-froid attitudes towards her impeding wedding. It has been noted, to the astonishment of our 'romantic' souls, that Antigone never utters a word of sympathy for Haimon, leaving this to Ismene. This omission is so troubling to contemporary scholarship that suggestions have been made to assign line 572,

^{36.} Especially in lines: ἀμφὶ μέσση περιπετῆ ('embracing her around her waist', 1223), προσκείμενον ('pressing up against her', 1223), ἐς δ' ὑγρὸν / ἀγκῶν' ἔτ' ἔμφρων παρθένω προσπτύσσεται (a conflation of (i) 'he took the maiden into his arms', and (ii) 'he clung to the maiden'— as if Haimon began by attempting (i) and relapsing into (ii), see Griffith ad locc).

'ὧ φίλταθ' Αἷμον, ὥς σ' ἀτιμάζει πατήρ', to Antigone and not to Ismene. ³⁷ I strongly believe that lines 572 and 574 are not uttered by Antigone, for she is so absorbed in the second episode by her mission to bury her brother — a mission that requires abstinence from the 'call of life' — that she cannot but erase all sentiments and desires save the burial and its defense.

In the same vein of thought I shall confront the well-known passage, between lines 905 to 912, where Antigone declares that she would not have buried a husband or a son in defiance of Creon's decree, but only her brother; because the brother, her argument goes, now that both her parents are dead, cannot be replaced.

Οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὖτ' ἂν εἰ τέκνων μήτης ἔφυν οὖτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανὼν ἐτήκετο, βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἂν ἠρόμην πόνον.
Τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω; πόσις μὲν ἄν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν, καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακονμητρὸς δ' ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοιν οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ.

For never, had children of whom I was the mother or had my husband perished and been mouldering there, would I have taken on myself this task, in defiance of the citizens. In virtue of what law do I say this? If my husband had died, I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I had lost the first, but with my mother and my father in Hades, I could never have another brother.

This passage has created much controversy (and dismay) even from the time of Goethe who wished that Sophocles had never written these lines; for in his opinion this passage is definitely *unworthy* of Sophocles.³⁸ True, one does feel uncomfortable with this declaration of Antigone's, which

^{37.} See Griffith ad 572-6 for the problematic assignment of speakers in line 572 between Ismene and Antigone, and in lines 574 and 576 between the Chorus and Ismene. Many editors (beginning with the Aldine) attribute line 572 ('the passionate apostrophê ὁ φίλταθ' Αἶμον ...) to his fiancée, Antigone, and line 573 (τὸ σὸν λέχος) as directed at her in response ('your marriage'). Griffith suggests that: "it is [...] much more characteristic of the warmhearted Ismene to express such concern, than of Antigone, who is already devoted to death and never utters a word about Haimon and her feelings for him".

^{38.} In his conversation with Eckermann on the 28th of March 1827 Goethe wished that a philologist in the future would prove the passage "interpolated and spurious" (Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann, tranl. J. Oxenford, Everyman Ed., 177); Agard (1937)

undermines everything she has stood for in the second episode: equal treatment of the dead, divine laws that disregard the categories friends and enemies, and her sharing in love and not in hatred. The easy way out of this bewilderment is to consider the passage spurious because unworthy of Sophocles, as did Jacob, Goethe, Kitto, Jebb, and many other intellectuals and scholars, ³⁹ or to refrain from discussing the passage at all (or at least not to any serious extent). All of a sudden, when the reader comes to this point, all the idealism of the heroine (with which we have hitherto read into Antigone) collapses. Is it possible that Antigone, minutes before she is taken to be buried alive, utters such a pedantic statement, which seriously undermines her claim to universal love as encapsulated in the phrase συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν? As insightful a scholar as Winnington-Ingram considers the passage "an ogre across the critic's path" and "interesting, but maddening". 40 I will not even attempt to cover the variety of suggestions for interpreting or emending the passage; alongside the dismay produced by the passage, one could read, at the other end of the critical spectrum, a nearly incestuous love for the brother (so fitting for a family ravaged by incest!) or the reconfiguration of the laws of the kinship put forward by feminist scholars, 41 without forgetting, of course, the "elaborate philosophical justification" by Hegel (the brother as

^{263;} Neuburg (1990) 55n6; Cropp (1997) 138-39; Griffith (1999) ad 904-915; Willink (2008) 18.

^{39.} See Griffith *ibid* (1999) ad 904-915; Jebb in his edition of *Antigone* (1900³ ad 904-20, and Appendix 258-63) provides "the most formidable summary of the arguments against it" (Agard (1937) 263). Later scholars express their dismay even if they do not athetize the verses: Knox refers to the passage as a "hysterically hyperbolic expression of her love for [her] brother" ([1979] 180), and Bowra thinks that this special loyalty to her brother is expressed in an "unsophisticated, even primitive way" ([1944] 94).

^{40. (1980) 145.} For an interesting discussion about the entire passage, as well as its possible dependence on the Herodotean tale of Intaphernes' wife facing a similar dilemma (3.119) see Griffith (1999) ad 904-915. Additionally, regarding 'sexual politics' the insightful view put forward by Murnaghan (1987, 192-207) should be taken into consideration combining the institution of marriage and the maiden Antigone who had never had a husband or child. The concept of marriage as an institution belongs to the male world of the polis, and from a male perspective must encompass 'replaceability', introducing a conflict between ties of marriage and ties of blood (thus a tension between the interests of women and the interests of men) (201). Of course there is also a personal dimension into marriage, stemming from the "irrational and irregulable realm of love and desire" (frequently attributed to women) (203) and endows marriage with a quality normally associated with blood ties; thus family and polis can overlap. This is a step Antigone never takes as the play "dramatizes the consequences of rifts between entities that ought ideally to overlap and support each other" (207).

^{41.} Butler (2000) 53, 77, 79; Honig (2013) 105-106, 123-37; Leonard (2015) 102-103.

the member of the family in whom its Spirit becomes individuality),⁴² and the Lacanian sublimation of Antigone's attachment to the brother as the "absolute Good, beyond all recognized goods".⁴³

My own thesis is along the lines of thought I have been advocating thus far. In my view, Antigone connects with life (that is with her fragility and finitude) as she abandons her previous attitude and discourse emanating from the dead. When she begins lamenting her own premature and unjust death, she repositions herself in the world of the living: now she has crossed the fine line separating the world of the dead (to which she was obsessively connected) from the world of the living (which she is about to leave for she is led to her death). It is only now that she allows herself to grieve in her funeral lamentation (in the perverted wedding and funeral procession), and this "grievability positions [her] in a sentimental ontology of fragility". As he cares now about the living, but ironically she is the only surviving member of her family (save Ismene), so as to attract to her person all the misery allotted to her unhappy family. All of them died miserably, but most of all me', laments Antigone (892-896):

[...] οἶ πορεύομαι πρὸς τοὺς ἐμαυτῆς, ὧν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς πλεῖστον δέδεκται Φερσέφασσ' ὀλωλότων, ὧν λοισθία 'γὼ καὶ κάκιστα δὴ μακρῷ κάτειμι, πρίν μοι μοῖραν ἐξήκειν βίου.

[...] where I go to join those who are my own, of whom Phersephassa has already received a great number, dead, among the shades! Of these I am the last, and my descent will be the saddest of all, before the term of my life has come.

At the end Antigone breaks and becomes human again. This reconfiguration of the 'human' is materialized through her connection with death. In the first part of the drama, Antigone has little chance to consider herself as anything else but 'already there', that is, in the realm of the dead; she needs to do so for nothing should impede her from the obstinate mission to bury her brother. In the second part, on the contrary, she laments in the most poignant manner the fact that she will miss everything that matters in life: family,

^{42.} Leonard (2015) 103.

^{43.} Lacan (1992) 336-37; P. A. Miller (1998) 204-205.

^{44.} Honig (2013) 31.

a husband, and a (dear) chance to raise children. ⁴⁵ The backdrop to Antigone's actions is the many dead of her family and the widespread death in the aftermath of the war in Thebes; similarly, the *Son of Saul* is located in a factory of death in the extermination camp. Saul's physical and inner survival depends on the intensity of his mission to restore dignity to the dead. His emotionless face (comparable to the 'frozen' sentiments of Antigone in the first part of the play) breaks a few seconds before his actual death, when he 'sees' the boy he had buried, now assumed to be alive. A few minutes before she dies, Antigone breaks down in tears and laments the uttermost misery of her life — to be led to her grave while still alive. Within this context, and while reconnecting with her humanity, Antigone changes her argument about the dead; not all dead are equal, only her brother; for the price to pay for this decision is disproportionally harsh, as she does not connect with death anymore.

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^{45.} Interestingly, Neuburg in his paper "How Like a Woman: Antigone's 'Inconsistency'" (1990) focuses on the structural (thematic) shift between the first part of the play, whith its theme of the opposition between the notions of $\varphi(i\lambda o_{\zeta})$ vs $\dot{e}\chi\theta\varrho\delta\zeta$, and the second part focusing on the contrast between blood-family and marriage-family. Antigone's lines follow closely the thematic shift of the play. Thus, in the second part she needs to defend the blood-tie as opposed to the marriage-tie rationalizing about who is replaceable and who is not. This approach obviates the inconsistency that modern readers feel about lines 904-20; at the end of the play there is "an enforced renunciation of the marriage-tie in favor of the blood-tie" (75), for the necessity of having to choose between them has long been at issue in the play (73).

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Interviews of director László Nemes, leading actor Géza Röhrig, and cinematographer Mátyás Eldély on the film *Son of Saul* (released in 2015)

- a. with director László Nemes at vpro cinema (Netherlands film database), published on the 10th November 2015 (accessed on the 30th of November 2017)
- b. with director László Nemes and leading actor Géza Röhrig at DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood, published on the 22th November 2015 (accessed on the 30th of November 2017)
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UNIVERSITY OF PATRAS karakantza@upatras.gr