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The *Antigone* as Cultural Touchstone: Matthew Arnold, Hegel, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Margaret Drabble

WHO PROPS, in these bad days, the mind by providing what is still a classic defense of the classical action's enduring verity—if not Matthew Arnold? For in a Victorian extension of the case Swift made in *The Battle of the Books*, Arnold insists that the distinction between the ancients and the moderns is specious: the ancients *are* the moderns. Against those false critics who would argue that the contemporary writer must leave the dead past behind, Arnold proclaims the great human actions that attracted antiquity as the stuff of poetry to be independent of time. “Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido,—what modern poem presents personages as interesting, even to us moderns, as these personages from an ‘exhausted past’?” he asks in the Preface to his 1853 edition of *Poems*. No time and place are more reflective of, or more deeply significant for, the Victorian present than fifth-century-B.C. Athens, he goes on to say in “On the Modern Element in Literature,” where he continues his polemic; and certainly no literature has ever been quite so “adequate” to the expression of an ageless modernity as the poetry of that time, particularly the work of Sophocles.¹

The way in which the singer of sweet Colonus' steady and whole perspective serves to correct Victorian instability and narrowness is so well known a part of Arnold's message that it hardly needs demonstration. And yet not all of Sophocles appears to Arnold so immediately useful. In what is surely one of the strangest local judgments Arnold ever made, he specifically, in the 1853 Preface, excludes the *Antigone* from modern pertinence:

What, then, it will be asked, are the ancients to be our sole models? the ancients with their comparatively narrow range of experience, and their widely different circumstances? Not, certainly, that which

is narrow in the ancients, nor that in which we can no longer sympathise. An action like the action of the *Antigone* of Sophocles, which turns upon the conflict between the heroine's duty to her brother's corpse and that to the laws of her country, is no longer one in which it is possible that we should feel a deep interest. (Preface, p. 12)

When we remember E. M. Forster's remark in *Two Cheers for Democracy* about the necessity of betraying the state before betraying a friend (much less a brother), when we recall how Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* meditates on the psychology of Antigone's pain as the single best example of “The Ancient Tragical Motive . . . Reflected in the Modern,” or when we consider the antitotalitarian uses to which the Antigone mythos has been put in our time (preeminently by Jean Anouilh), Arnold seems downright perverse in excepting this play from Greek poetry's lasting appeal. And since this judgment appears in an essay that centrally affirms a major Victorian writer's classical values (the Preface is at any rate one of Arnold's most frequently anthologized pieces), his startling blindness here, if that is what it is, calls attention not only to itself but even more to the peculiar status of the *Antigone* in the nineteenth century. Arnold's animadversion and our puzzled response suggest that the play's action is especially problematical—and even that it may be, in a full Arnoldian sense, *the* most “interesting” classical foil against which a modern author's attitude toward the ancients may be gauged.

To explore this possibility we must place Arnold's assessment of the *Antigone* in at least a brief historical context. I therefore examine how the play has been viewed by a great theorist of tragedy in the generation preceding Arnold's (Hegel); by a critic and novelist who was Arnold's contemporary (George Eliot); and by

two writers who, because of their fictional surveys of English joylessness and incertitude in different generations of the twentieth century, would seem to qualify as among his direct heirs in our own time (Virginia Woolf and Margaret Drabble). We can then turn to the new perspectives on Arnold's judgment that become available when it is seen within this frame.

If we concentrate on the character of Antigone, as Arnold's judgment asks us to do, we can find little that is outmoded in her defiance of Creon's order that she not bury her dead brother, a traitor to Thebes. Arnold considers her motive culturally dated because she believes that the soul of an unburied Polyneices would be condemned to wander restlessly along the banks of the Styx for a hundred years. But surely every age since that of Sophocles has quite naturally translated into its own terms the imperatives of family loyalty and religious duty that inspire Antigone. The morning mail, for instance, brings the latest issue of the *New York Review of Books*, with Caroline Blackwood's "Liverpool: Notes from Underground," a mordant account of the overflow of corpses stored in unrefrigerated, disused warehouses during a gravediggers' strike in northern English towns. The "horrific last straw" in an ongoing process of national decay,

this eerie and unexpected strike aroused feelings of outrage, a sense of violation. There is a general feeling that if one's society owes one nothing else at least it owes one the right to be decently buried. In a pub I heard a woman saying, "The bereaved can't stand the idea that the people that they've just lost are floating around rotting in warehouses."²

Even in our enlightened times, few tribes of the race can accept with equanimity the prospect of unburied kin.

Moreover, Antigone's local conception of duty is accompanied by something even more universal than respect for one's dead: the extravagant egoism that colors her early words and grows increasingly insistent as it encounters the equally overbearing rigidity of her antagonist. ("Such orders they say the worthy Creon gives to you and me," she rages at Ismene, "yes, yes, I say to *me*—.")³ This towering willfulness is precisely the sort of *hamartia* that transcends

historical limits and that would seem to constitute the *Antigone's* most obvious claim to ageless modernity.

But although Arnold does not mention it, a conceivable ground for the charge of obsolescence does exist in the bizarre hierarchy of family values that Antigone asserts in her bond to her brother. Deserted by the chorus, facing imminent death, stripped of all consolations, she retreats into a strict final ratio: for a husband she would not have done what she has done, nor would she have made the sacrifice for a child, but a brother makes an undeniable claim because "with my parents hid away in death, no brother, ever, could spring up for me." Husbands and children are replaceable; brothers, once one's parents are dead, are not (ll. 904–20). Here, in the chilling formula of these much disputed lines,⁴ if anywhere in the play, we can find some justification for dismissing the action's modern appeal.

But Antigone's reasoning has not struck every modern ear as particularly jarring. Almost the entire section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* concerning *Sittlichkeit* 'ethical behavior'⁵ focuses on a discussion (though a maddeningly implicit one, in the usual fashion of the *Phenomenology*) of Antigone's logic. For about three pages, Hegel argues that the feminine has the highest intimation of the ethical life—but only insofar as the woman is a sister, that is, insofar as she is willing to acknowledge her highest duty to a brother, whether living or dead. Precisely because a woman's relationship to a husband, parents, or children is based on natural feelings and emotional dependence, ethical considerations tend to be secondary. An "unmixed intransitive form of relationship," in contrast, binds a brother and sister:

They are the same blood, which, however, in them has entered into a condition of stable equilibrium. They therefore stand in no such natural relation as husband and wife, they do not desire one another; nor have they given to one another, nor received from one another, this independence of individual being; they are free individualities with respect to each other. The feminine element, therefore, in the form of the sister, premonizes and foreshadows most completely the nature of ethical life (*sittliches Wesen*). (pp. 475–76)

And for Hegel the most eloquent demonstration of the ethical life, a sister's disinterested love for her brother, is the fidelity of "the heavenly Antigone, the noblest of figures that ever appeared on earth."⁶

My point is not that Hegel's argument, what Walter Kaufmann calls such special pleading,⁷ is particularly compelling as either philosophy or literary criticism. Rather, I wish to suggest that Hegel's addiction to the play, partially for so idiosyncratic a reason, may be seen as the nineteenth-century appreciation exactly polar to Arnold's summary dismissal. For if Arnold focuses on the *Antigone* as the classical work irrelevant to modern existence, Hegel keeps returning to it as the single most expressive play in Western literature. His frequent praise is habitually couched in absolute terms: "Of all the masterpieces of the classical and the modern world," he rhapsodizes in the *Aesthetics*, the *Antigone* "seems to me to be the most magnificent and satisfying work of art of [its] kind"; it is "one of the most sublime and in every respect most excellent works of art of all time."⁸ And so on.

An early section of the *Phenomenology*, then, celebrates the play's ethical perfection. But ethics alone may not be enough to explain its recurring appeal, since a later section of the *Phenomenology* (pp. 509–48) argues that ethical judgment and behavior are at best limited way stations in the development of Absolute Spirit, Hegel's *Geist*, and at worst "self-estranging" (*sich entfremdeten*) obstacles. The *Aesthetics* indicates that another, perhaps deeper reason for Hegel's prizing of the *Antigone* is the play's ideal embodiment of something more fundamental, the action of Hegelian dialectic.

Arnold's assessment locates the play's struggle within a single character's conflicting loyalties to family and state; Hegel's plot description, in contrast, finds the ethical commitment of Antigone and Creon equally defensible. The two characters are self-deceived parts of one potential whole in that

they are in the power of what they are fighting, and therefore they violate what, if they were true to their nature, they should be honouring. For example, Antigone lives under the authority of Creon; she is herself the daughter of a King and the fiancée of Haemon, so that she ought to pay obedi-

ence to the royal command. But Creon too, as father and husband, should have respected the sacred tie of blood and not ordered anything against its pious observance. So that there is immanent in both Antigone and Creon something that in their own way they attack, so that they are gripped and shattered by something intrinsic to their own actual being. (*Aesthetics*, II, 1217–18)

Classical tragedy of the finest sort thus represents for Hegel the "collision" (*Kollision*) of two ethical substances, both justified in some sense but "criminal" in that neither partial substance has as yet transcended a self-estranging ethics in the evolution toward pure Spirit. The dialectical process stands out in brilliant clarity, and the *Antigone* is for Hegel the paradigm of that process in the most dialectical of art forms, the drama. For drama, particularly tragedy, in its mediation between epic and lyric, between music and sculpture, can be discussed most readily in terms of a dialectic that moves toward a third-term resolution.⁹ Antigone's death and Creon's despair at the consequent deaths of his son and wife are the balanced price of a final cathartic harmony, a synthesis that goes beyond ethics and brings us closer to Absolute Spirit. The aptness with which the play acts out Hegel's dialectics reinforces his view of its moral excellence and explains why it is his favorite work of art, whatever reservations we may have about his larger theory of tragedy. For it must be said that, however well that theory may apply to the *Antigone*, Hegel's description of tragedy as the clash of right and right fits relatively few other examples of the genre.¹⁰

If Hegel's celebration and Arnold's dismissal of the *Antigone*'s ageless appeal may themselves stand as thesis and antithesis of a nineteenth-century argument, the synthesis—at least in England—occurs in the work of George Eliot. For while she does not allude directly to either Hegel or Arnold when treating the matter, her imaginative sympathy allows her to mediate between the positions they best exemplify.

Eliot's fullest discursive, as distinct from novelistic, response to the play appears in "The *Antigone* and Its Moral," the review of a school text that she wrote for the *Leader* of March 1856. Her opening, an acceptance of the notion that the *Antigone* contains a dramatic motive "foreign to modern sympathies," may quite con-

sciously echo Arnold's similar assertion in the 1853 Preface, as Pinney was the first to suggest.¹¹

But if the *Antigone* seems outdated, she continues, it is only superficially so:

It is true we no longer believe that a brother, if left unburied, is condemned to wander a hundred years without repose on the banks of the Styx; we no longer believe that to neglect funeral rites is to violate the claims of the infernal deities. But these beliefs are the accidents and not the substance of the poet's conception. The turning point of the tragedy is not, as it is stated to be in the argument prefixed to this edition, "reverence for the dead and the importance of the sacred rites of burial," but the *conflict* between these and obedience to the State. Here lies the dramatic collision: the impulse of sisterly piety, which allies itself with reverence for the Gods, clashes with the duties of citizenship; two principles, both having their validity, are at war with each other. (*Essays*, pp. 262–63)

In asserting such a "collision"—what she calls, with explicit reference to the German critic Augustus Böckh, the "antagonism between valid claims"—was Eliot consciously echoing Hegel?¹² Admittedly, although as a Germanophile she obviously knew Hegel's work and mentions it now and then in passing, she only once, as far as I can discover, alluded specifically to his views of tragedy¹³ and never to his reading of the *Antigone*. But such matters were certainly in the air, and her use of Böckh's formulation to buttress her own reading of the play demonstrates her debt to the Hegelians, if not to Hegel directly. For Böckh was the leading advocate of the Hegelian view that the *Antigone* dramatizes the struggle between partial truths¹⁴—and Böckh's edition of the play was reviewed by George Henry Lewes in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* of April 1845.

Eliot thus seems to be using a Hegelian interpretation of the *Antigone* to correct the narrowness of an Arnoldian one—an ironic enough charge to bring against Arnold! But if that is the import of her strategy, it must be added that she qualifies Hegel as well. For Hegel, as we have seen, classical tragedy dramatizes the clash of ethical substances, though in the most schematic fashion. In general he finds modern tragedy (by which he means the works of Shakespeare,

Goethe, and Schiller) inferior because it blurs the confrontation of divine agencies with the clash of mere characters, thus obscuring the collision of ethical substances with the accidentals of mere personality. In "romantic" modern literature the irruption of realism into a classical idealism renders, say, Shakespeare's characters excessively idiosyncratic and individual, their aims too personal and eccentric.

From the perspective of this distinction we can see that, if Eliot diverges from Arnold by insisting on the modernity of Antigone's idealism, she parts company with Hegel in arguing that the play is less a clash of pure, speculatively determined ideas than a dramatization of the heroine's unique being pitted against the crush of flattening circumstance. For Eliot the collision of Antigone and Creon, finally, "represents the struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs" (*Essays*, p. 264). In insisting on the primacy of inward needs, Eliot transforms Antigone into precisely the sort of modern figure that Hegel criticizes as idiosyncratically subjective and "romantic."

The best place to follow Eliot's personalization of Sophocles' heroine, however, is not in the criticism but in the fiction, where Antigone appears both in momentary allusion and as mythic foil for entire novels. David Moldstad, for instance, has suggested that the struggle between Maggie and Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* is analogous, from beginning to end, to the Antigone-Creon conflict as described in Eliot's *Antigone* essay.¹⁵

But the work that most explicitly addresses our immediate concern, Antigone's (and the *Antigone's*) modern relevance, is *Middlemarch*. While the Prelude to Eliot's masterpiece establishes Saint Theresa of Avila as the ancient whose pioneering spirit and moral grandeur most significantly prefigure similar qualities in Dorothea Brooke, halfway through the novel Antigone emerges as a pendant foil from the past. To see why, we must look briefly at the scene in which the connection is made. In Book II, Chapter xix, Will Ladislaw and Adolph Naumann, a German artist imbued with the sensuous fervor of continental Romanticism that has not yet penetrated cold English climes, are

admiring the “marble voluptuousness” of the reclining Ariadne at the Vatican Museum in Rome when Dorothea, on her disastrous wedding journey with Casaubon, enters dressed in “Quakerish grey drapery.” Initially, the German is struck by the “fine bit of antithesis” between art and life, between the erotic perfection of Ariadne’s antique loveliness and the equally stunning beauty of the living Dorothea, marred for him, however, by her drab attire. While he at first describes Dorothea as “the most perfect young Madonna” (i.e., as the Saint Theresa of the novel’s Prelude), he changes that characterization to suggest a conjunction of classical and Christian elements within her. In a subsequent passage she becomes for him “antique form animated by Christian sentiment—a sort of Christian Antigone—sensual force controlled by spiritual passion.”¹⁶

Since Naumann has just paralleled Ariadne’s ancient perfection with Dorothea’s modern excellence, we might expect Eliot to have him call Dorothea a “modern Ariadne,” especially since Casaubon approximates a Minotaur: his “attractively labyrinthine” mind and great work (p. 17) eventually become “anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhere” (p. 145). To understand the shift to Antigone as classical analogue, we must examine the other occasion in Eliot’s work where Ariadne gives way to Antigone, in *Romola*; for the displacement in *Middlemarch* makes complete sense only in the light of a similar but more allegorically elaborated switch in that earlier novel. In Book 1, Chapter xvii (“The Portrait”), Tito Melema commissions the artist Piero di Cosimo to paint as a wedding present for Romola a triptych whose major picture will show Bacchus adorning Ariadne with a crown of joy. In this intended emblem for the coming union between Tito and Romola (Tito stipulates that the two of them must act as models for the ancient pair), Ariadne (Romola) will join Bacchus (Tito) in a lifelong celebration of the Greek ideal of sensuous delight. Piero, as much an artist-spokesman for Eliot in this novel as Naumann is in *Middlemarch*,¹⁷ says that he will use Romola for Ariadne only if Tito will in turn persuade her to sit for Antigone in a painting of Oedipus and Antigone at Colonus—Piero habitually thinks of Romola as “Madonna Antigone.” The distinc-

tion between the passionate willfulness of Antigone in the *Antigone* and her softer virtues in *Oedipus at Colonus* is important, and I discuss its conceivable relevance to *Middlemarch* below. With respect to *Romola*, let it suffice that, as Barbara Hardy has remarked, Tito’s *Bacchus and Ariadne* is “revalued” by Piero’s *Oedipus at Colonus*,¹⁸ since Piero understands that Antigone’s repeated self-sacrifice befits Romola more accurately than does Ariadne’s triumphant eroticism.

Extending this fully developed contrast of competing ancient models forward to *Middlemarch*, we can understand the parallel revaluation of Naumann’s fine antithesis between Dorothea and Ariadne into one between Dorothea and Antigone. For while Eliot certainly prizes the Bacchic impulse throughout her work and within *Romola* in particular (Tito Melema’s surname means “precious gift” in Greek),¹⁹ she also suggests that the Bacchic Ariadne, the figure associated with the fertility cults, is *too* blatantly sensual to serve as unqualified mythic type for either Romola or Dorothea; the appropriate substitute is the suffering, severe, though still representatively Hellenic Antigone. In a pattern confirmed by *Romola*, *Middlemarch* may thus be said to set up a continuum of mythic foils for Dorothea between the Christian virtue of self-denial embodied in St. Theresa and a Greek capacity for appetitive joy associated with the Bacchic Ariadne. As each figure/culture curbs the extreme tendencies of the other, Antigone holds the two ideals in tension, defining something like a synthesis of, or a middle state between, what Arnold would call Hebraic and Hellenic impulses.

For if Antigone serves to revalue the excessively self-indulgent “Greek” intentions of Tito in *Romola*, her corrective force in *Middlemarch* moves in a counter direction: there she tethers Dorothea’s Christian propensity for martyrdom, her passion for “giving up,” as her sister Celia puts it (p. 13). One of the ways in which England and Dorothea are narrow (or “short-sighted,” to adopt the imagery assigned to her) is that both lack the Romantic Hellenic spirit. With Naumann’s introduction of the Ariadne-modulated-to-Antigone parallel, Eliot establishes the balance between Christian and pagan sentiment. And that balance is confirmed in the

novel's penultimate paragraph, in which the Hebraic Saint Theresa and the Hellenic Antigone combine, in the sentence I have italicized, to become the single type of the moral pioneer:

Certainly those determining acts of [Dorothea's] life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. *A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is for ever gone.* (p. 612)

Thus, pace Arnold, the character of Antigone is profoundly relevant to a "modern" life, providing one of the mythic types against which Dorothea's soul making asks to be measured. But what of the *action* of the play, which was after all the focus of Arnold's judgment? The above quotation suggests that Eliot all but seconds Arnold's charge that the action is obsolescent, although her grounds differ. The distance between the heroic, larger-than-life context of Thebes and the prosaic reality of Middlemarch is too great. From the perspective of Dorothea's life, the clash of Antigone and Creon seems too grand, too concentrated, too bald, its issues too readily identifiable by all participants to have much application to their murky and unfocusable equivalents in Dorothea's struggle, whatever her moral grandeur. Compared with the immaculate single crossing of purposes that structures the *Antigone*, the manifold "tests" that Middlemarch throws up, the imperceptible motions in the web of circumstance that shape human choice, come in subtle clusters, and characters recognize them *as* tests mostly in baffled retrospect: "The choice of Hercules"—or, Eliot might have added, of Antigone—"is a pretty fable; but Prodicus makes it easy work for the hero, as if first resolves were enough" (p. 139). For all Dorothea's dogged integrity, the equivalent of Antigone's fabled piety, the action of Sophocles' play constitutes primarily a negative model, a reminder of a society that believed, as

Eliot's minutely calibrated social determinism will not allow her to believe, in the individual's ability to define with a measure of clarity the terms of his or her fate. If an Antigone prefigures the Dorothea of the novel's plangent closing chapters, it is the compassionate sufferer of *Oedipus at Colonus*, not the fiery spirit of the *Antigone* whose willfulness partakes of a dialectic by which, in Eliot's own humanistic appraisal, the "outer life of man" is being forced "into harmony with his inner needs" (*Essays*, p. 262).²⁰ In *Middlemarch* inward being willy-nilly accommodates itself to, is "greatly determined by," the world's iron. Or, as Hegel would put it more reductively, the poetic idealism of tragedy gives way to the "Dutch realism" of the novel, the "middle-class epic," which he considers prose, mere imitation, nonart.

Eliot refers to the *Antigone* at least one more time, in her late work. In Chapter xxxii of *Daniel Deronda*, Mirah Lapidoth says that "it is much easier to me to share in love than in hatred" and recalls reading a play in German in which the heroine says something like that. Deronda supplies the name, *Antigone*, and the reference is to line 523 of the play—"I cannot share in hatred, but in love," in the Wyckoff translation. This line—"Ὅντιοι σονέχθειν, ἀλλὰ σουμεγίλειν ἔγνω"—seems to have had a special significance for Eliot, since it appears on the front flyleaf of her Commonplace Notebook, now in the Beinecke Library at Yale.²¹ And George Eliot is not the only novelist in whom that sentiment has called forth an answering echo. Her most direct twentieth-century feminist heir, Virginia Woolf, also singles out line 523 for special, no doubt self-referential attention. Indeed, their comparable sympathy for an Antigone in whom love outfaces hatred and fear is a good way of defining the sibylline bond between the two writers. Creon's determination not to be bested by an irrational "girl" (l. 561), Ismene's conventional acceptance of woman's inferior status (ll. 61–62), and Antigone's pride in herself as self-sufficient being throughout the play have made the *Antigone* a natural counter for both sides in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discussions of the Woman Question. If Eliot's choice of Antigone as heroic model in *Middlemarch* and elsewhere indicates the figure's positive uses for the feminist cause, the very title of

W. F. Barry's three-volume attack on the "new woman" of the 1880s, *The New Antigone: A Romance*, encapsulates the broadly ironic purposes Antigone's feminist implications could also serve.²² In her political tract *Three Guineas* Virginia Woolf is the most polemical of all, momentarily advancing Antigone as the classical forerunner of Mrs. Pankhurst and of the anti-Fascist martyr; and it is within this context of female rebellion against patriarchal tyranny that Woolf quotes line 523 (in Greek and in the Jebb translation) as "worth all the sermons of all the archbishops."²³

But immediately thereafter Woolf recognizes the danger of appropriating Antigone for suffragette and antitotalitarian propaganda: "if we use art to propagate political opinions," she warns her reader and herself, "we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us cheap and passing service." If we are to render the character full justice, we must like Sophocles "use . . . freely all the faculties that can be possessed by a writer" to weave Antigone into a complex work of art (p. 259, n.). And that is the alternative Woolf did indeed choose in *The Years*, the novel she was working on when she wrote *Three Guineas*.

A chronicle novel describing the fortunes of the upper-middle-class Pargiter family as it moves from the 1880s to the early 1930s, *The Years* uses elliptical repetition of image and incident to establish the deeper pattern that underlies the drift of the period's social history. More specifically, the recurrent allusions to the *Antigone*, with its theme of being "buried alive," constitute one of the leitmotifs intended to exemplify the cyclical rhythm the book's title offers as the paradigm of human experience. In the "1880" section we first meet Edward Pargiter as a student glancing over the play while preparing for university examinations. As he drinks a glass of port, the image of a passionate Antigone merges with that of his cousin, Kitty Malone, the love of his life and one of the livelier Pargiters, who "held herself upright, lived, laughed, and breathed."²⁴ But Kitty, sensing the funereal coldness of Edward and of the academic life that marriage to him would entail, refuses him—and marries the comparably unsatisfactory Lord Lasswade. By the time of the "1907" section Edward has become an Oxford

don and has made a gift of his translation of the *Antigone* to another cousin, Sara. Crippled by a childhood accident, she imagines herself buried alive like Antigone, in a brilliant hallucinatory fantasy released by reading the play (pp. 132–37).

Such earlier scenes prepare for the climactic reference in the "Present Day," where at Delia's party we encounter Edward and his generation of Pargiters for the last time, now through the critical eyes of his nephew North. With "the look of an insect whose body has been eaten out, leaving only the wings, the shell" (p. 405), Edward betrays in every word and gesture the sepulchral hollowness of the Pargiters, especially the men. Such a verdict on the family is generated in North by the chance mention, once again, of line 523 of the *Antigone*:

Edward nodded. He paused. Then suddenly he jerked his head back and said some words in Greek: "οὔτις οὐνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν ἔχειν ἔργον."

North looked up.

"Translate it," he said.

Edward shook his head. "It's the language," he said.

In Edward's refusal to translate (conceivably because he recognizes the line's indictment of his own loveless existence), North reads the timorousness of all the Pargiters, including himself—their fear "of criticism; of laughter; of people who think differently. . . . That's what separates us; fear, he thought" (pp. 413–14). With a complex irony worthy of Sophocles, Woolf lets line 523, in which Antigone courageously pits her love for her brother against Creon's attempt to frighten her into submission, confirm, unbeknownst to North, his self-definition and epiphany about the family. Such subtlety is the opposite of propagandistic flatness, for Woolf portrays the gradual decay of a house into a tomb—the variegated lot of a class, if not of all humanity. Still, the feminist critique of *Three Guineas* is at least a subtext: it is the Pargiter women who dream, who are the vessels of the intense passion associated with the line from the *Antigone*, while the men sink into the power structures they dominate—the university, the law, the military—and congeal into the fearful attitudes with which they bury alive both themselves and a patriarchal society's women.

The Years, as well as other works by Woolf,²⁵ thus argues for the continuing resonance of the *Antigone* and of classical ideals generally. Her deliquescent Bloomsbury way with such materials approaches Arnoldian sadness, but with a finer touch. To all except irredeemable pessimists, there is something overwrought about Arnold's melancholia, something lugubriously "Victorian," as "The Dover Bitch," Anthony Hecht's double-edged lampoon of that attitude, suggests. In comparable fashion Arnold's high-minded defense of Culture seems both overly pious and palpable in an age that prefers the nonpedagogical virtues of understatement and indirection. (It is arguable that, in addition to the English utilitarians, Hegel had—in the later pages of the *Phenomenology* [pp. 507–59]—dealt the honorific use of "Culture," his "sich entfremdete: Geist; die Bildung," a mortal blow even before Arnold began to write.)²⁶ At any rate, to a modern ear Arnold's ringing tones sound a trifle stentorian, a bit hollow; we tend to prefer the intricacy of Virginia Woolf as she describes both Edward's officiousness and the lasting power of the tradition to which he is the fallible heir.

Defenders of classical learning may well feel themselves even more in tune these days with another Oxford don, Linton Hancox in Margaret Drabble's *The Ice Age*, her survey of contemporary English society as brazen prison.²⁷ (The Arnoldian figure—from "A Summer Night"—is rather directly pertinent in that two of the novel's major characters literally end up in prison.) One does get the sense from *The Years* of free-floating English anxiety, of a generalized national decline, but the class structure still allows Edward Pargiter a measure of insularity. His fastidious and priestly guardianship of Greek studies makes for complacency, provides a comfortable enough redoubt against the revolutionary changes of his time. His equivalent in *The Ice Age* is not so fortunate. With a good degree and a safe post at Oxford after a golden youth, Linton, a talented poet and classicist with his share of honors and prizes, has turned sour. He and his friends have discovered how a new political dispensation, a new egalitarian culture, and an illiterate television age have left them irretrievably behind. Brooding over England's wholesale dismissal of the classical past—and

consequently the dead end of his career—Linton complains bitterly "about falling standards in education, about the menace of trendy school-teachers who couldn't even teach children to read, about the dangers of assuming that all learning could and should be fun. . . ." His students these days

had been appallingly badly taught; Cambridge Latin was in his view a disaster. None of them had any solid grounding in grammar, none of them could write a prose even to old O Level standards, they had all been corrupted by vague "classical studies" and thought that if they knew a few Greek myths and could recognize a piece of Ovid or Homer and make some approximate sense of it, that would do. (pp. 67–69)

Anthony Keating, the friend and former classmate through whose consciousness we experience Linton's malaise, evaluates it from a skeptical distance. Puncturing all that is socially rigid, cowardly, and self-serving in such jeremiads, Anthony habitually thinks of Linton as "a pond, out of which the water had slowly drained, leaving [him] stranded, beached, useless." The recurrence of this draining water figure (pp. 67, 72) to indicate Linton's fear of obsolescence in the 1970s recalls an earlier, more famous version of that figure and that lament—the withdrawal of the Sea of Faith in "Dover Beach." If the rather old-fashioned realism of *The Ice Age*, its sympathetically ironic catalog of ineffectual social attitudes, is indebted to Drabble's acknowledged master, Arnold Bennett, the gloomy postindustrial landscape in which her characters find themselves stranded, beached, and useless recalls nothing so much as the joyless, hopeless darkling plain of Arnold. That Arnold, and especially the brittle stoic of "Dover Beach," strikes Drabble as the most modern of the Victorians may be gathered from her treatment of him and that poem in *For Queen and Country: Britain in the Victorian Age* (pp. 118–19, 123–25),²⁸ her popularizing run-through of how England got from a Victorian past to the present. The way in which the poem epitomizes her conception of the period, however, emerges most forcefully in the closing paragraph of the book: using the Sea of Faith passage to define what is for her the "most resounding note" of the entire period, that of dignified resignation,

she asks in peroration, "Which was the Victorian age; a grassy bank teeming with life, warmed by the sun of prosperity, an endlessly fascinating spectacle—or a naked shingle? That melancholy, long withdrawing roar echoes behind what we read of Victorian life, and echoes still today" (p. 138).

Nowhere do we hear that echo more clearly than in the work of Drabble herself, since *The Ice Age* is surely a "Dover Beach" for our immediate time. And just as Sophocles by the Aegean with his archetypal awareness of human misery's turbid ebb and flow had provided the appropriate ancient frame for an earlier portrait of "modern" dessication, he does so for Drabble's as well. Her purposefully random crosscutting among the novel's characters manages to convey the aimlessness, panic, and despondency of contemporary England, but the most recurring focus is on Anthony Keating. Unlike his former classmate Linton Hancox, Anthony has at least tried to grapple with the new society on its own ever-changing terms. Also a child of the professional middle class with a good Oxford degree (in history), Anthony has drifted through a life of "careless gambles and apostasies"—from hospital porter to launderette assistant to BBC editor and producer to real estate speculator, from financial killing to financial ruin, from marriage to permanent irregular union. At novel's end he finds himself, a "weed on the tide of history," trying to rescue Jane, the fractious and irresponsible daughter of his present love, from imprisonment in an Eastern European country on the verge of revolution. Having got hold of Jane's effects, he finds in her traveling bag a paperback copy of Sophocles' Theban plays, translated and introduced by Linton Hancox; and mulling over the dangers in his present situation, Anthony contemplates the martyrdom of Antigone:

He reopened *Antigone*. Antigone had gone out and died for a completely meaningless code. She had buried her brother, although her brother was a no-good traitor. He noted that Linton, inevitably, made some interesting anthropological kinship commentary, in his introduction, on Antigone's extraordinarily unconvincing explanation for her behavior: I would not have done this for husband and child, said Antigone, for I could get another husband or

another child, but where will I find another brother? Linton explained this in terms of endogamy and exogamy; even Linton, old world as he was, had become a reluctant structuralist. . . . in a way, it was the pointlessness of Antigone's sacrifice that was so significant. Linton Hancox recognized this. "While accepting the force of the anthropological argument," he wrote, "we nevertheless today continue to be moved by the abstract nature of the sacrifice. . . . Maybe our society, so lacking in rigid codes of behavior, so influenced by the rationalism of the eighteenth century, turns all the more strongly toward the apparently irrational. . . ."

(pp. 283–84)

Or, as a foremost nonfictional authority on Sophocles, H. F. D. Kitto, has commented about the same absurd line of reasoning that Hegel found so compelling, "A frigid sophism borrowed from Herodotus? Yes, the finest borrowing in literature. This is the final tragedy of Antigone: *novissima hora est*—and she can cling to nothing but a frigid sophism."²⁹

That is, for an age that has celebrated the blind existential leap, the *acte gratuit*, the very irrationality of Antigone's motivation can become the ground of its cogency; the irrelevance of her self-justification to a modern sense of self, like the purported irrelevance of Greek attitudes toward burial, can determine her relevance. Such, at any rate, is her prefigurative force in *The Ice Age*: shortly after reading Linton's introduction, Anthony Keating quite mindlessly sacrifices his own safety and freedom to save Jane, a perverse "child of her time" for whom he does not particularly care. (That the Antigone figure of the novel is male demonstrates precisely Drabble's recently affirmed intention of moving from the feminist themes of her earlier work to broader social criticism—"a retreat to masculinity and androgyny" for feminist readers who disapprove of the shift.)³⁰

We have come full circle in our argument, then. If Arnold with his belief that art directly teaches us how to live rejects the action of the *Antigone* as meaningless to a modern audience, Drabble searches out an apparently absurdist motivation as the very basis for its contemporary appeal. Both the discursive criticism of the play and the mythic returns of the heroine in our fiction stress her uncertain cultural status.

But to a time beset by the question of what is and what is not outdated in heroic actions of the past, an age in search of ideals that are not entirely culture-bound, the play seems impossible to ignore. In its roundabout way the *Antigone* may even be the classical play most eminently useful as an Arnoldian “criticism of life” in an age battered by the perception that most values disintegrate with a speed markedly greater than that which unnerved our Victorian grandparents. The stern rock of Antigone’s fidelity thus becomes a standard against which each new generation may ponder the question of what does and does not constitute the “modern element” in literature. Indeed, because Sophocles’ play raises that issue with supreme aesthetic power, it is not a dated action but precisely one of those ageless “touchstones” of excellence by which the greatness of other literary actions begs to be judged. (Since the impact on Arnold of the single-line touchstones in “The Study of Poetry” usually involved the entire context of the play or poem in which they appeared,³¹ I take the liberty of broadening his single-line measure into the gauge for a total action.)

And such a device must finally be turned on Arnold himself: it must be used to correct a merely “personal estimate,” as he defines one of the two salutary purposes of the touchstone (“Study,” pp. 163–64). To be sure, influential voices tell us these days that, because a text is primarily self-referential, the better part of a diacritical meaning arises through the text’s self-deconstruction—with the help of the skilled critic. Alternatively, we are given a “transactive” model of the literary experience, in whose light a text’s meaning is crucially shaped by the encounter with the individual reader’s psyche. In our time, that is, some would argue that nothing *but* the personal estimate, which may or may not achieve acceptance by what Stanley Fish calls the “interpretive community,” has ever been possible.³² Arnold would have cast a skeptical eye on such epistemological offshoots of Romanticism; he would have had a principled disdain for the relativism with which Pater, in the Preface to *The Renaissance*, and his various progeny thereafter have modified—nay, swamped—the classical mimetic ideal of seeing “the *object as in itself* it really is.” (One’s need to add

italics to the famous phrase from “On Translating Homer” and “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” suggests how precarious the world- rather than the text- or reader-centering ideal has become.) Clear-sighted “disinterestedness” is both necessary and possible, Arnold felt, whatever the deficiencies in his own vision and in that of his age.³³ Because such disinterestedness makes for the steady and whole view, for an Idea of Culture that transcends the multitudinous perspectives of an “interpretive community,” an objective company of “best” works that act as touchstones can be seen as they in themselves “really” are, can be hypostatized. And apparently eccentric estimates of such normative works by even our most authoritative critics—say, Dr. Johnson’s preference for Nahum Tate’s over Shakespeare’s ending to *King Lear*,³⁴ T. S. Eliot’s early derogation of *Paradise Lost*, and, to the point, Arnold’s assessment of the *Antigone*—provoke us to think as deeply about the covert assumptions of those critics as about the works they judge.

Of course, in such speculation we no doubt give our personal twist to the critic’s personal estimate. One can imagine, for instance, a biographical argument that would relate Arnold’s dismissal of the *Antigone* to his shrinking from the impassioned, single-minded “Marguerite,” the “daughter of France” with whom he probably had a liaison in Thun during the summers of 1848 and 1849. While rejecting the *Antigone* as obsolete in the 1853 Preface, Arnold had as a matter of fact treated the play in “Fragment of an *Antigone*,” in *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* of 1849. Louis Bonnerot, the critic-biographer who has done the most with the Marguerite connection, has characterized that icy lyric in a way that cannot but relate it to Arnold’s attempt to distance himself from a romantic attachment to the young woman, the impulse Bonnerot sees behind a good many of the early lyrics: “On sent, en lisant ce fragment, que l’auteur a remporté une victoire sur lui-même, et que cette victoire, qui est le triomphe du classicisme, a consisté à rendre la passion plus pure, non à l’éteindre” “One feels, in reading this fragment, that the author has won a victory over himself, and that this victory, which is the triumph of classicism, has consisted in rendering

passion purer, not in extinguishing it' (my translation).³⁵ By the time of the 1853 Preface, so the hypothetical argument à la Bonnerot would continue, the passion had become so purified that it was completely transcended—or suppressed. Hence, the rejection of Antigone (and the *Antigone*) in a preface that more elaborately justifies the suppression of another dangerous romantic passion, the morbidity of *Empedocles on Etna*.

My own guess is that Arnold's denial of the *Antigone's* modern relevance more surely disguises an ideological judgment, the same bias that with even greater certainty Hegel's reading of the play masks in an opposing fashion. As the defender of stable community in its collective and corporate character, as the embattled polemicist of *Culture and Anarchy* with its trumpeting of the state as the means by which "the best that is said and thought in the world" can be widely dispersed, Arnold might be expected to have difficulties with a play that treats as heroic an individual's defiance of the state's claim to primacy. A statist like Hegel, instead of dismissing the play, accommodates its action not only to his ethical but also to his political assumptions. Before Hegel, tradition had seen the play—for so its title directs—as primarily about Antigone's obedience to the imperatives of a blood tie. His essential contribution to that tradition has been to divide the focus by raising the ethical status of Creon's public loyalties to the same level as Antigone's personal ones. Indeed, however much Hegel may admire Antigone's character and whatever his larger view of tragedy as the collision of two equal goods, he tips the balance in favor of the statist idea by alluding to those lines in the play (ll. 450–52) in which Antigone's loyalty is said to be to "inferior" authorities, to "the underworld gods of Hades . . . the inner gods of feeling, love, and kinship, not the daylight gods of free, self-conscious national and political life" who elicit Creon's fidelity (*Aesthetics*, I, 464).

Arnold does not lean that far toward Creon's side in "Fragment of an *Antigone*," but he at least works for a balance. While the lyric praises Antigone's "obedience to the primal law / Which consecrates the ties of blood," it also

makes Haemon, counter to his Sophoclean original, defend Creon's harshness and justify Antigone's death, for "he at least by slaying her, / August laws doth mightily vindicate."³⁶ This rationalization of Creon's behavior, a classical student of Arnold's classicism has argued, erroneously conflates a *kêrugma*, Creon's extraordinary emergency decree unsupported by the tables of the law, with the veneration of the immortal laws proclaimed in the magnificent choric ode on the wonder of man (ll. 332–72). As a result Antigone and Creon are both seen as partially right, and for this "confusion" Arnold was specifically indebted to Hegel, who had earlier sophisticated Creon's "law" in similar fashion.³⁷ Whatever the validity of this critique, by the time of the 1853 Preface Arnold's need for august laws to calm the hectic passions (whether personal or ideological) had arguably become even more peremptory than it had been before—and the disturbing ancient heroine had to be entombed anew, had to be buried once and for all.

Antigone's refusal to compromise a blood tie may, then, be an action in which we can no longer "feel a deep interest." More likely, it significantly anticipates Doing As One Likes, the anarchic self-assertion that Arnold attacks so vehemently in his analysis of the Victorian culture crisis. Thus, his singling out of the *Antigone's* obsolescence undoubtedly tells us more about Arnold's antipathy toward a rampant, community-threatening individualism than it does about Sophocles' play, surely one of the world's monuments of unaging intellect. That is precisely the bracing, the corrective function of a touchstone. And yet when we make a touchstone of the work Arnold regards as a kind of *antitouchstone*—as the exception proving the rule of the classical action's modernity—the relativism implicit in such counterjudgments calls into question, once again, the touchstone doctrine and the ideal of critical objectivity it is intended to perpetuate.

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Notes

¹ Both the Preface to the 1853 *Poems* and "On the Modern Element in Literature" appear in *On the Classical Tradition*, Vol. I of *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960–77), pp. 1–15; 18–37; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. The cited materials are on pp. 4 and 28.

² 3 May 1979, pp. 33–36. The quoted material appears on p. 33.

³ *Antigone*, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles I*, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954), ll. 31–32; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴ The authoritative Victorian editor of Sophocles, R. C. Jebb, brackets lines 904–20 (included in all the manuscripts) as spurious, scribal, "orientalizing" interpolations from a tale by Herodotus. Most modern translators, with the important exception of Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald in their 1939 version, omit brackets, defending the lines as Sophoclean if only because Aristotle quotes two of them in the *Rhetoric* 3.16(147a). For a summary of the controversy, see Phillip Whalley Harsh, *A Handbook of Classical Drama* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1944), pp. 108–09.

⁵ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind (Phänomenologie des Geistes)*, trans. J. B. Baillie, rev. 2nd ed. (1910; rpt. London: Allen and Unwin, 1949), pp. 456–506; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

⁶ *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy (Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie)*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances Simon (New York: Humanities, 1955), I, 441.

⁷ Kaufmann, "Antigone and *Sittlichkeit*," in *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 127.

⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art (Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik)*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), II, 1218; I, 464; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

⁹ René Wellek discusses tragedy and the Hegelian dialectic in *The Romantic Age*, Vol. II of *History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p. 331.

¹⁰ Lionel Abel, one of the more recent critics who have considered this limitation, suggests it as the reason Hegel proposed a second theory of tragedy for Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. See *Moderns on Tragedy*, ed. and introd. Lionel Abel (New York: Fawcett, 1967), p. 26.

¹¹ *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), p. 262, n.; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Essays*. Eliot's review of the *Antigone* text also appears in this volume. Her familiarity with Arnold's Preface is evidenced by her review of the 1853 *Poems* for the *Westminster Re-*

view, 64 (July 1855), 297–98; moreover, George Henry Lewes, her mentor in classical matters, reviewed the volume for the *Leader*, 26 Nov. 1853, pp. 1146–47.

¹² Whether or not Eliot's "collision" intentionally alludes to the Hegelian *Kollision*, the word is habitual with her when she refers to tragedy. In her Notes on "The Spanish Gypsy" she characterizes tragedy as representing "some grand collision in the human lot" and, more specifically, the "irreparable collision between the individual and the general" (*George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals*, ed. J. W. Cross [New York: Harper and Bros., 1885], III, 30–34). That such a definition was meant to apply to a heroine like Dorothea Brooke is clear from the penultimate paragraph of *Middlemarch*. Both in the manuscript and in the parts publication of 1872 (though not in the final revision for book publication, which I quote below in the text), Eliot refers to the inescapable "collisions" of Dorothea's life, given the imperfect, prosaic conditions of the society against which her "great feelings" must struggle. Jerome Beaty, in "The Text of the Novel: A Study of the Proof," *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel*, ed. Barbara Hardy (London: Athlone, 1967), pp. 59–60, compares the three versions of the text.

¹³ Relying on that one allusion—a reference, in a letter, to a single, not particularly important line in Hegel's *Aesthetics*—Darrell Mansell, Jr., in "A Note on Hegel and George Eliot," *Victorian Newsletter*, 27 (1965), 12–15, argues unconvincingly that Eliot's concept of tragedy in the major novels derives in substantial measure from that work. And U. C. Knoepfmacher, in *George Eliot's Early Novels* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 29, n., describes a manuscript in the Beinecke Library at Yale, "possibly in George Eliot's hand," that contains a full commentary on George Henry Lewes' treatment of Hegel in the *Biographical History of Philosophy (1854–57)*. While Eliot could express bemusement over English intellectuals who spoke authoritatively on Hegel after having read him only in John Sibree's translation of 1849 and not in the German (*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954–55], II, 511), the impact of Hegel's work on Eliot, filtered as such influence undoubtedly was through Lewes, seems impossible to assess with exactitude. The most recent study of nineteenth-century Anglo-German literary relations, Rosemary Ashton's *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), does not, in its section on Eliot (pp. 147–77), consider a Hegelian influence, although Hegel figures prominently in the discussion of Lewes (pp. 105–46).

¹⁴ According to R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, III (Cambridge, 1888), xxi; as described

in *Essays*, p. 264, n. For the equally important influence of the Hegelian Otto Friedrich Gruppe's *Ariadne: Die Tragische Kunst der Griechen* (1834) on Eliot's view of tragedy, see Knoepfmacher, pp. 171–75.

¹⁵ Moldstad, "The Mill on the Floss and *Antigone*," *PMLA*, 85 (1970), 527–31.

¹⁶ *Middlemarch*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston: Riverside-Houghton, 1956), pp. 139–41; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷ See William Sullivan, "Piero di Cosimo and the Higher Primitivism in *Romola*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 26 (1971), 390–405. Hugh Witemeyer, however, both in "George Eliot, Naumann, and the Nazarenes," *Victorian Studies*, 18 (1974), 145–58, and in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 86–87, argues that Naumann's allegorizing tendency represents merely another "incomplete insight" in a novel full of optical failures.

¹⁸ Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot* (London: Athlone, 1959), p. 175.

¹⁹ Felicia Bonaparte, in *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1979), fully describes the accommodation of Bacchus and Christ in *Romola* and elsewhere in Eliot's work. The discussion of Tito's name appears on pp. 83–84.

²⁰ Joseph Wiesenfarth, in *George Eliot's Mythmaking* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977), p. 186, makes the point that in the world of *Middlemarch* the aggressive heroism of the *Antigone* is no longer possible, only the heroism of *Oedipus at Colonus*, which is compassionate fellow feeling.

²¹ *Daniel Deronda* (Boston, 1907–08; rpt. New York: AMS, 1970), II, 137. Joseph Wiesenfarth, who has edited the Commonplace Notebook as *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook, 1854–1879* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, forthcoming), generously called this quotation (which appears on p. 3) to my attention.

²² For a recent discussion of Barry's *The New Antigone* (New York: Macmillan, 1887), see Linda Dowling, "The Decadent and the New Woman," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 33 (1979), 434–53.

²³ Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, 1938), pp. 124 and 259, n. The entry for 29 Oct. 1934 in Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt, 1953), p. 222, records that the novelist was reading the *Antigone* while working on *Three Guineas* and *The Pargiters* (the early version of *The Years*).

²⁴ Woolf, *The Years* (New York: Harcourt, 1937), p. 51; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. In the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 80 (Winter 1977), an entire issue devoted to reappraising this generally neglected and underrated late novel, Jane Marcus' "The Years as Greek Drama, Domestic Novel, and *Götterdämmerung*," pp. 276–301, is especially pertinent to the present emphasis. She suggests that, following the lead of the classical scholar Jane Ellen Harrison, Woolf uses *Antigone* to affirm the return of chthonic matriarchal values as over against the death of historically

secondary patriarchal ones, thereby celebrating the death and rebirth of the Spirit of the Year. For a study that traces the *Antigone* motif through the novel and arrives at conclusions quite different from my own, see Mitchell Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End* (New York: John Jay Press of the City Univ. of New York, 1977), pp. 190–235 passim.

²⁵ Significant allusions to the *Antigone* occur at the outset of Woolf's career in *The Voyage Out* (1915) and in the medial "On Not Knowing Greek" of *The Common Reader* (1st ser., 1925) as well as in the late *Three Guineas* and *The Years*. Such strategically placed repetition of image has led Jean Guiguet to assert that *Antigone* is the most autobiographical of the many literary figures who appear in the works, that she "appeals to Thoby Stephen's devoted sister like a double whose fate haunts her," and that an *Antigone*-like "hopeless passion" for a dead brother is a key to Woolf's personality, especially her attraction to death (*Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, trans. Jean Stewart [London: Hogarth, 1965], pp. 149, 464). In a study of the textual development of *The Voyage Out*, Louise DeSalvo goes even further. She argues that the association of the death of its heroine, Rachel Vinacre, with the burial of *Antigone*, a motif not spelled out until the latest version of the text, alludes to Woolf's desire to rejoin not only her brother but also her dead father and mother (*Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* [Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980], pp. 153, 155, 159).

²⁶ While analyzing Hegel's brilliant discussion of *Rameau's Nephew* in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, Lionel Trilling, in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 42–44, argues that J. B. Baillie felt free to render Hegel's *Bildung* as "Culture" in the 1910 translation of the *Phenomenology* precisely because Arnold's notion of Culture encompassed that Germanic meaning. Hegel appears as an intellectual predecessor of Arnold's throughout Trilling's *Matthew Arnold* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), although Trilling thinks that, while Arnold was generally considered a Victorian disciple, he probably had not read much of Hegel's work (p. 90, n.). For a summary (in which Hegel figures hardly at all) of Arnold's familiarity with German idealist thought, see Park Honan, "Fox How and the Continent: Matthew Arnold's Path to the European Sentimental School and 'La Passion réfléchissante,'" *Victorian Poetry*, 16 (1978), 58–69.

²⁷ Drabble, *The Ice Age* (New York: Knopf, 1977); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁸ Drabble, *For Queen and Country: Britain in the Victorian Age* (New York: Seabury, 1979); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁹ Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), p. 134.

³⁰ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Ambiguity of Female Identity: A Reading of the Novels of Margaret Drabble," *Partisan Review*, 46 (1979), 234–48; the quoted phrase appears on p. 235.

³¹ John Eells, Jr., demonstrates this involvement

throughout *The Touchstones of Matthew Arnold* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1955). "The Study of Poetry" appears in *English Literature and Irish Politics*, Vol. ix of *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

³² For Fish's concept, see his "Interpreting the *Variorum*," *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1976), 465–85.

³³ I have described Arnold's optics, especially the antinomies implicit in seeing the object as in itself it really is and seeing life "steadily" and "whole," in "Tennyson's Optics: The Eagle's Gaze," *PMLA*, 92 (1977), 426–27, and in "Victorian Frames: The Windows and Mirrors of Browning, Arnold, and Tennyson," *Victorian Poetry*, 16 (1978), 70–87.

³⁴ Norman Holland's "How Can Dr. Johnson's Remarks on Cordelia's Death Add to My Own Response?" in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1976–77*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press,

1978), pp. 18–44, may serve as a late statement of reader-response theory especially pertinent to my concern, since the essay tries to meet objections accumulating against that theory, against Holland's earlier work, and against *5 Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975) in particular—objections to the effect that the transactive model accounts well enough for the singular, obviously idiosyncratic reading (i.e., Arnold's "personal estimate") but less well for the generally accepted, "regular" interpretation of a work.

³⁵ Bonnerot, *Matthew Arnold, poète: Essai de biographie psychologique* (Paris: Didier, 1947), p. 368.

³⁶ Arnold, *Poetical Works*, ed. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 195–98.

³⁷ Warren D. Anderson, *Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 32.