

**A Danish Antigone: The Legacy of Ancient Greek Consciousness
in the Fragmentation of Modern Tragedy**

Sabina Sestigiani

“Stay happy, then, dear Antigone! We wish you a long life, as meaningful as a deep sigh. May no forgetfulness rob you of anything! May the daily bitterness of sorrow be offered to you abundantly!”

Kierkegaard, “The Unhappiest One”, *Either/Or*

In Søren Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*,¹ the engaging analysis of the concept of the tragic in ancient and modern dramas hinges on Kierkegaard’s poetic invention of the figure of a new Antigone and the shift in her subjectivity. Such analysis moves from the unquestioning acceptance of fate in Sophocles’s *Antigone* to the self-reflective brooding of Kierkegaard’s creation.

Kierkegaard’s illustration of the tragic derives from a mixture of the characteristics of ancient and modern dramas. His Antigone incarnates the peculiarities of both: necessity of action and self-subjectivity. The fictitious author of *Either/Or, Part I* that goes under the name of A, the Aesthete, reads the story of Antigone before a meeting of the *Symparanekromenoi*, the “Society of the Buried Lives.”² A imagines himself among a group of individuals who are leading lives spiritually dead or alienated within society. They become the discreet spectators of a most secretive representation: a

revisited version of Antigone. This ironic parable in the romantic mode belongs to the genre that Novalis named “literary Saturnalia.”³ It is a fragment, a shred of theatre that can be viewed with the mind’s eye but not entirely grasped because it depicts a “nebulous”⁴ and most reserved modern heroine. The story of the new Antigone and her proverbial inwardness echo Kierkegaard’s biography and his obsession for silence and indirect discourse. How not to think of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms such as *Frater Taciturnus* or *Johannes de Silentio*, ironically alluding to a silent form of wisdom?

The puppeteer pulls his Antigone by a string of silence in a theatre of the hereafter mirroring Antigone’s living burial in a sort of *teatrum mundi*.

In this article I will discuss the discrepancy between the definition of the tragic hero in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*⁵ and *Either/Or*. I will argue that although both works were published in 1843, the analysis of the tragic heroine of Antigone in *Either/Or* is more nuanced than that of the tragic (ethical) hero in *Fear and Trembling*. The tragic heroine in *Either/Or* seems projected toward an overcoming of the ethical sphere. The tragic (ethical) hero of *Fear and Trembling* moves entirely in the sphere of the ethical and the tragic results from a conflict between two ethical spheres. In *Either/Or*, before introducing Antigone, A presents to the foreground two kinds of tragic heroes: the ancient and the modern. The ancient hero is the shadow of fate, the modern is a free willed character who defies his destiny and moves in the sphere of the ethical. The tragic (ethical) hero of *Fear and Trembling* seems close to the tragic modern hero outlined in *Either/Or*, whereas he seems to have little in common with the fated hero of the ancient world, crystallized in the aesthetic sphere. The responsibilities of both the tragic (ethical) hero of *Fear and Trembling* and the modern hero of *Either/Or* can be traced in the ethical sphere: they are the result of an act of free will. I will analyse these two typologies of tragic heroes in the third section of the present article. In *Either/Or*, A proposes the model of the truly tragic hero/heroine: his Antigone. She oscillates between the two realms of the ancient and the modern: she is a self-reflected character who is embedded in her “substantial determinant,”⁶ namely her fate. With his Antigone, A enacts a critique of the fragmentation of the modern world and of the unauthentic modern tragedy as its paradigmatic product.

I will also argue that the coexistence of “fate” and “character” in the narration of Antigone by A is a literary device that enables Kierkegaard to give voice to some autobiographical events under disguise. A seems to be aware of the impossible resurrection of the ancient Greek consciousness as he produces a fragment of a performance for a most private audience, the “Fellowship of the Dead.”⁷

The Ancient and the Modern World

The dissertation on the tragic in ancient and modern dramas signed by A precedes his story of Antigone. A describes ancient tragedies as permeated with a profound feeling of sorrow in contrast to the feeling of pain that emerges from modern tragedies. The world of ancient Greece was highly governed by what A calls “substantial categories”⁸ – namely the state, family, *fatum*. Sorrow is the feeling aroused in the spectator following the fall of the hero or heroine due to the guilt inscribed in their genetic legacy. But can one be guilty if the guilt is inherited? Society in ancient Greece was organised in such a way that every individual was born with a destiny engraved in their skin. They are embedded in their substantial categories to the extent that they suffer their fatal destiny without questioning whether it could have been otherwise. Sorrow is the silent acceptance of one’s destiny as the result of the guilt inscribed in one’s genetic legacy. But guilt is not simply inherited; it is dictated by a compulsion to atone for the ancestors’ errors. It is the sense of belonging that drives the hero or heroine to filial piety. Blood binds individuals of ancient Greece in a chain of sin and deferential atonement, where atonement is a practice of paying homage, of bringing flowers to the father’s tomb. “There is a degree of ambiguity concerning inherited guilt for it is dependent not upon some action of later generations, but upon their attitude to their forbears.”⁹ The nature of guilt in ancient Greek tragedies is very ambiguous. It implies guilt and guiltlessness at once as it would be a contradiction in terms to be guilty by fate.

According to A, modern society’s determinants are self-consciousness and reflexive subjectivity. Pain is the feeling that arises in the spectator following a reflection upon the suffering of the hero. In modern tragedies, the hero falls just as in ancient tragedies, but he does so entirely on his own deeds. He is subjectively reflected in himself and this reflection has reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, kindred, fate and even out of his own past life.¹⁰ The modern individual is isolated and desperate in his own solitude. The brooding modern hero fights on his own, in isolation. Modern tragedy is about responsibility and acceptance of guilt. The hero is not allowed to fall back into the comforting idea that his errors are dictated by his inescapable destiny. Having cut any ties with his family, the state and his destiny (*fatum*), he acts on his own, asserting his independence from his history. He performs acrobatics without a safety net. If he falls, no family, no state and no *fatum* will offer him any consoling embrace. The modern hero ethically reflects on his own deeds and takes responsibility for them. The hero becomes a character, an individual that creates his own fate. A indicates a danger in modern society’s propensity for extreme

isolation and describes as comical its attempt to assert a too distinct independence from universal commonalities.¹¹ The comical results from the individual trying to assert one's individuality, one's self-subjectivity and independence from *fatum*: one's attempt to be absolute, failing to admit one's own relativity. According to A, the authentic tragic is not to be found in modern tragedies as "character" seems to be entirely separated from "fate:" the tragic moves toward the comic instead.

Guilt in "Fate and Character"

The eternal question of whether "character" can govern "fate," or, vice versa, is tackled by Walter Benjamin in his "Fate and Character."¹² He speaks of the comical move of the individual who believes that his actions are free, while acting according to substantial determinants. Therefore, believing in the prominence of his character over his fate, he comically deludes himself. Fate and character are bound together; the freedom of movement of each is marked by one another's position: they are destined to revolve around one another. "The character trait ... is the sun of individuality in the colourless (anonymous) sky of man, which casts the shadow of the comic action. (This places Cohen's profound dictum that every tragic action, however sublimely it strides upon its cothurnus, casts a comic shadow, in its most appropriate context)."¹³ Benjamin's quotation is a gloss to A's belief that the essence of the tragic, springing from a sublation of ancient and modern tragedies, resides in a blend of sorrow and pain, of "fate" and "character."

The juxtaposition of "fate" and "character" implies a different concept of guilt in the ancient and the modern tragedy. Fate is an ongoing temporality that resists any form of interruption questioning its inevitability. If events are ruled by fate, events could not be otherwise. Regardless of what the individual does, he is undone by fate. The decision of the individual does not matter, the event is unavoidable. Fate does not admit that it could have been otherwise. In events dictated by fate, therefore, there is no guilt, or at least, guilt is of a very ambiguous kind. There is the guilt in sharing a common destiny bound to lineage, or state, but no guilt is caused by a *faux pas* or a decision taken by the hero. Ancient Greek tragedies – lacking self-subjectivity and inwardness – relate to the eternal and the possible through external and accidental means. Fate responds to the anxiety of the pagans – it placates their fear of the possible by speaking through oracles. Thus the ancients set their subjectivity outside of themselves. If anxiety is "dialectically defined as fate,"¹⁴ it is impossible to arrive at the concepts of guilt and sin as this would lead to the contradicting affirmation that one becomes

guilty by fate. Sophocles's *Antigone* is all immersed in the present and certainly her anxiety concerning her fate can be traced back to the same oracle that spoke to her father. Her subjectivity is entirely external and preordained by her descent.

If we are to accept that the hero is able to, and does make, a decision, two different temporal structures present themselves: choice and guilt. The chance that the action could have been different provokes the guilt. Decision is the moment which could always have been otherwise. Hence, the hero is responsible for the action. If something could not have been otherwise, there is not a decision and no guilt. Good sense falls out of the gods. In modern tragedies the idea of decision, and guilt that might ensue an unwise choice, is sharply delineated. The individual demonstrates a self-subjective attitude and reveals anxiety for one's own potential existence. Potentiality implies the future, and in fact anxiety is about a future – not actual – event. “A person is thus anxious about ‘nothing’, ‘nothing’ as understood as the non-actual, the possible whose actualization lies in the future. But this possibility does not belong to the external world; it is always one's own.”¹⁵

A's *Antigone* experiences anxiety about “nothing.” Anxiety gives her insight into her father's incestuous plight. Yet, the triggering object of anxiety is an intangible suspicion, and the relation of anxiety to it is nothing. A's *Antigone* loves and fears the object of her anxiety: her father's incest. As Kierkegaard says, “there is nothing in the world more ambiguous”¹⁶ than the double movement of fear and love toward the object of one's anxiety. By anxiously desiring what she fears to be true, *Antigone* becomes guilty. “But anxiety has an added factor that makes it cling even harder to its object, for it both loves and fears it.”¹⁷ A's *Antigone* reflects on and broods over the future. Her subjectivity is entirely inward.

Andrew Benjamin refers to Sophocles's *Antigone* as a passage from antiquity to modernity for “its elimination of the work of fate.”¹⁸ The play thus represents a “refusal of reference to destiny, it allows for the advent of cosmopolitanism.”¹⁹ In the public sphere of modern society, the disappearance of fate is the starting point for the acknowledgment of responsibilities. Wisdom is the human contribution to the thriving of democracy. The final lines of the *Antigone*'s chorus express the nature of Creon's mistake: lack of wisdom. Fate is not involved in Creon's fall, the chorus suggests. His attempt to ascribe his own error to the gods is a refusal to take responsibility, to account for his own deed. In other words, Creon clings to antiquity. He is unwilling to abandon the unaware state typical of the ancients.

Good sense is by far the chief part of happiness; and we must not be impious toward the gods. The great words of boasters are always

punished with great blows, and as they grow old teach them wisdom.²⁰

The very last lines of the play uttered by the chorus set Sophocles's play in a middle position between "fate and character," making thus a leap towards modernity. As A states, the tragic is an ambivalent promiscuity of both ancient and modern tragedy, where both stances co-exist, ambiguously. But whereas Andrew Benjamin identifies the blend of antiquity and modernity in the conflicting perspectives of Creon and the chorus, A invokes the blend of guiltlessness and responsibility, necessity and possibility within the hero's consciousness to form a genuine tragic protagonist. As Mark Taylor remarks, "ancient and modern tragedies err in opposite directions. Ancient tragedy conceives the self primarily in terms of necessity; the hero is a *sufferer*. Modern tragedy conceives the self fully in terms of possibility, and the freedom to actualize possibility; the hero is an *actor*. As a matter of fact, both elements, necessity and possibility, must be acknowledged in the self's constitution. The self is *both* a sufferer and an actor. To stress either factor to the exclusion of the other is to present an unbalanced view of selfhood."²¹ A's Antigone personifies this tragic consciousness. She attains the perfection of tragic selfhood. But the tragic balance appears just in order to claim its impossibility and to fracture the heroine.

The Greek Antigone:

A Tragic (Ethical) Heroine with Subjective Truth

In creating a new Antigone, A presents the difficult task of dealing with two literary figures at the same time. A's Antigone is a shadowy figure that needs her illuminated alter-ego in order to become visible. The Greek Antigone gives away her life defying the king of Thebes's edict. She buries the dead body of her brother and is condemned to being buried alive. Creon's law seems unjust, leaving unburied a corpse and ordering the burial of a living creature. But one must comply with the law and Antigone, in refusing to do so, embraces a choice that is entirely the result of her "subjective truth." Hers is a passionate commitment to truth, hers is a decision for which she is willing to live and die.²² Kierkegaard insists on the importance of choice as a means to acquire one's own self. He writes in his journal: "It is a question of understanding my destiny, of seeing what the *Deity* really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true *for me*, to find *the idea for which I can live and die*."²³ The truth of the decision is given by the passion one puts in what one takes up; in fact "what is important in choosing is not so much to choose the right thing as the energy, the earnestness,

and the pathos with which one chooses."²⁴ Antigone is jealous of her destiny. She clings to her choice, unwilling to share it with anyone else who, in so doing, might diminish the uniqueness of her gesture. And she is aware that this very choice of hers is what defines the essence of her life: "Hades and those below know to whom the deed belongs! And I do not tolerate a loved one who shows her love only in words ... Do not try to share my death, and do not claim as your own something you never put a hand to! My death will be enough."²⁵

According to Kierkegaard's definition in *Fear and Trembling*, the Greek Antigone could be read as a true tragic (ethical) heroine.²⁶ Antigone's act, although scornful of Creon's edict, can be justified within the ethical, in so far as she is loyal to the idea of showing respect towards her own stock: "There is no shame in showing regard for those of one's own stock ... It was not a slave, but my brother who had died."²⁷ Her deed is an expression of the ethical life and the city of Thebes applauds Antigone's deed. As we hear from Haemon: "the city is lamenting for this girl, saying that no woman ever deserved it less, but that she is to perish miserably for actions that are glorious, she who did not allow her own brother who had fallen in the slaughter to remain unburied or to be destroyed by savage dogs or birds."²⁸

The tragic hero/heroine takes personal responsibility into the public sphere of language, and justification is what distinguishes this ethical hero/heroine from the silence of A's Antigone. Sophocles's Antigone explains her position and the reasons behind her choice. "But when I come there, I am confident that I shall come dear to my father, dear to you, my mother, and dear to you, my own brother; since when you died it was I that with my own hands washed you and adorned you and poured libations on your graves; and now, Polynices, for burying your body I get this reward! Yet in the eyes of the wise I did well to honour you."²⁹ Antigone has the courage to perform the sacrifice of her own life. The tragic appears from the moment she sacrifices the aesthetic sphere of her life – namely she gives up her life – in order to gain the ethical sphere for the whole society.³⁰ Renouncing her life is instrumental to honouring her brother's memory. She has the courage to perform the sacrifice "for the well being of the whole"³¹ – that is to respect a common ideal of loyalty toward family bonds. Antigone is ready to give up forever the finite and the particular for ethical reasons. The tragic (ethical) heroine Antigone is not in the religious sphere,³² she does not conceive a dimension beyond the earthly, where she could hope to regain what she gave up. Although it is a noble gesture, it is devoid of spirituality. But the play has multi-layered realms of power.

If we keep bearing in mind the definition of the tragic (ethical) hero of

Fear and Trembling, Antigone's choice is a true and ethical decision in the sphere of her very personal perception of reality. Antigone's singularity clashes with Creon when she defies his edict. What seemed just and ethical then, becomes outside the law under the light of another sphere, namely Creon's. Antigone claims that she is acting in the name of the gods, in the name of some unwritten law that is other than Creon's. She claims to depict her choice with a religious motive although her choice is basically the result of a conflict with Creon's law. If we are to take literally the clash between the commandments of the gods and the prescriptions of the city law, Antigone somehow reminds us of Kierkegaard's "Knight of Faith"³³ in so far as she perpetrates a so called "teleological suspension of the ethical." Is Antigone really doing her deed because instructed to do so by the gods or is she using the gods to justify her choice? There is no evidence in Sophocles's text that Antigone has been asked to perform her brother's burial by the gods. It seems that she covers her deed with a divine order so that she can be more authoritative. In fact, Antigone does not expect to receive the finite back, as a true "Knight of Faith" would. She gives it away for good. She decides to die in order to pay homage to the memory of her brother, in order to do justice to her ancestors.

If the Greek Antigone is read according to the tragic (ethical) hero of *Fear and Trembling* – implying that the tragic conflict of the play is of an ethical order – this makes her close to the modern world and the vision of the tragic typical of the modern drama analysed by A. If this is the case, Antigone is ethically guilty, just like Creon, and fate would have only a very marginal implication in the tragic conflict. But for Kierkegaard, this is a modern misreading of the tragedy. Free will unbound of substantial categories unleashes pain – the feeling of modern tragedies.

Despite being published in the same year as *Fear and Trembling*,³⁴ *Either/Or* presents a different analysis of the tragic hero when discussing Sophocles's *Antigone*. It seems in conflict with the thesis of the former text. Antigone's fate is not a result of her own freely chosen deed – it does not pertain to the ethical – but it is preordained by her place in her family, by the fate that is her family's fate. It is an ambiguous and inherited guilt, not the modern guilt of ethical decision and responsibility. This is a critique of the modern world and the vision of the tragic (ethical) hero that Kierkegaard analyses in *Fear and Trembling* through the voice of one of his pseudonyms – Johannes de Silentio. As A states considering Sophocles's *Antigone*: "If this is viewed as an isolated fact, as a collision between sisterly love and piety and an arbitrary human injunction, *Antigone* would cease to be a Greek tragedy; it would be an altogether modern tragic theme."³⁵ Sophocles's Antigone decides to bury her brother in defiance of the Gen-

eral's injunction, but in so doing she is not choosing freely, this is "not so much a free act as a fateful necessity, which visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children."³⁶ Antigone is doomed to act as she does, she is fated. She is not subjective enough to question whether it could have been otherwise. The dominant tone to the soul is sorrow.

A's Antigone: A Secret Brought to the Grave

In the second part of "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," A addresses directly the society of the *Symparane-kromeni*³⁷ and introduces his heroine, Antigone. We are suddenly aware that we are not the only spectators, but we are sharing the performance with a chorus – the society – that has just been disclosed by the speaker. By uttering the name of "the Fellowship of the Dead," he draws the heavy curtains of the stage and admits us to a very secretive theatre arena. The discreet chorus is a group that has refused to live within society and has retired to a sort of a *demimonde*, an enclave where people are initiated to secrets otherwise unknown. The peculiarity of the society is its love for the fragment, for "the glinting transiency."³⁸ It offers a slanted glance on the world, artificially recreating a portion of its magic without attempting to reproduce it in its entirety. This microcosm of society can only grasp a shred, a spark of ideas. The fullness of accomplished literary works is not the ambition of the society as it wishes to allude without entirely revealing. Unfinished works are like ruins, the society cherishes them because they convey an element of the past. Works under the guise of ruins become thus present in the past. The story of Antigone is evoked as if by conjuration to grasp a secret that the heroine hides within. The society is thirsty for sharing concealed grief and secrets not confessed. It evokes things secret by means of magic and incantations, even when death has buried them from our view to relive them again.³⁹ A is fascinated with Antigone; as someone literally buried alive she echoes perfectly the spirit of the association. We guess that the fascination is also shared by every other single member of the society: everyone is invited to feel free to love her in their own way. The indistinctness of her depiction allows this. But would there be any other way to represent artistically "reflective grief"? And truly for our Antigone "the stage is inside, not outside; it is a spiritual stage."⁴⁰

A introduces his Antigone to the chorus. Her story deviates from the Greek Antigone, in so far as her subjectivity shifts from external to inward. The Danish Antigone becomes an internal and self-reflective character, moving from fatalism to auto-determinism. Yet, she does not give up entirely her trail of Greek consciousness. In fact, she embodies the idea of the

tragic of both ancient and modern dramas for her experiencing both sorrow and pain. Antigone is “the daughter of sorrow” wearing “a dowry of pain as her outfit.”⁴¹ She is a direct descendant of the Greek consciousness, bound to her sorrowful fate for being Oedipus’s daughter. At the same time she pains for her plight in a modern, self-reflective fashion.

Antigone is the only one who is aware of her father’s incestuous state. Antigone is shrouded in her silence. She is proud of her secret and she knows that she has been selected to save the honour of the lineage of Oedipus. Her family bonds are tainted by her father’s error and she accepts the consequences – to be buried alive – silently and unquestioningly. The past is a legacy that is not conceivable to reject. The result is profound sorrow. The doubt over Oedipus’s incest instilled anxiety in Antigone. The secrecy of her condition generates a self-reflective pain that does not desire to be seen by others. It is the modernity of this attitude that arouses pain. A’s Antigone is modern because self-reflective, because of her silent brooding and suffering. The modernity of A’s Antigone is also highlighted by her interior conflict: respect for her father would require that she does not share her secret with anyone, yet, not revealing her real essence to her beloved Haemon would mean doing injustice to the depth of her love. Only in death can she find peace. In A’s Antigone the conflict is thus moved from a confrontation between Creon/Antigone to a self-reflected inner conflict within the persona of Antigone.

Antigone is a fragment, a ruin of history and in virtue of this fact she is present in the past – a particle of a lost whole. The tragic in modern drama that A juxtaposes to the tragic in ancient drama is also hosted by a fragmented society that has lost its ties to history. Modernity has accentuated the concept of the individual’s responsibility, thus his/her prominence as a “character,” as a pure fragment of a society once whole. Both Antigones are marked by a distinct demarcation of external and internal dimensions: “The one (Sophocles’s) is dominated by external forces, yet remains innocently carefree within; the other (A’s) is not bound by any external actions demanded of her, but she is utterly and painfully bound by inner anxiety. The common element is that both are victims of the contradiction between externality and inwardness, between the objective relations that constitute fate for the Greek and subjective uncertainty and guilt that are the modern’s prison.”⁴²

A depicts Antigone with venerating religious attributes. This mode is not new; it suffices to think of Hegel’s tone in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, where he celebrates the “celestial Antigone, the most resplendent [*herrlichste*] figure ever to have appeared on earth.”⁴³ Antigone is “the *virgo mater*.”⁴⁴ She is pregnant with her secret and she conceals it under

her heart. She has swallowed her secret and it has now become part of her corporeality. Transparency is the consistency of her sorrowful pain. Antigone is assailed by anxiety that instils doubts about her father's incest. Anxiety about "nothing" – understood as the non-actual, the possible – begets her secret that is imploded silence. Her secret gives life and death at the same time in so far as it represents at once her impalpable essence and the interior conflict that leads her to death.

Antigone's silence is witness to a heroic gesture – the renunciation of the joys and passions of finite existence for some "higher cause." She renounces her life to honour her brother and guard her father's secret. This choice is unspeakable and must remain silent, because it is loaded with an almost religious significance. Silence and indirect speech are distinguishing features of the entire work of Kierkegaard. It is not surprising that Antigone's behaviour has an affinity with the silence of the "Knight of Infinite Resignation" heralded by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*.⁴⁵

"Her thoughts are my thoughts"

Why does Kierkegaard need to create a new character in order to elucidate the differences between ancient and modern tragedy and thus the essence of the tragic? Was he perhaps trying to create a character that would help him to understand and keep at bay his own personal tragedy? Kierkegaard creates his own Antigone as a sort of guise of his being. Antigone becomes his literary alter-ego, his literary creature that allows Kierkegaard to live his life a second time, taking the time to explain, to reveal his pain to the spectators. Kierkegaard's life had been deeply signed by his abandonment of his beloved Regine Olsen for mysterious and apparently concealed reasons. Seemingly, he also shared a "terrible" secret concerning his father. Like A's Antigone, he could not reveal it to his beloved Regine for fear of not being understood; like A's Antigone, he could not conceive of not sharing the most intimate essence of his soul with his beloved: "In the marriage ceremony I must take an oath – therefore I dare not conceal anything. On the other hand, there are things I just cannot tell her. The fact that the divine enters into marriage is my ruin."⁴⁶ Allegedly, he forsook Regine in order to keep his father's secret: "But if I were to explain myself I would have had to initiate her into terrible things, my relationship to father, his melancholy, the eternal night brooding deep inside me, my going astray ... and where was I to find a roof when I knew or suspected that the only man I had admired for his strength and power wavered?"⁴⁷ Kierkegaard seems to be speaking through his Antigone: "Her thoughts are my thoughts."⁴⁸ He had to renounce Regine; Antigone had to forsake Haemon.

In his journal, in the process of working on his *Antigone*, Kierkegaard wonders whether he should change *Antigone* for a male hero. He lingers in a draft particularly indebted to his biography: "No doubt I could bring my *Antigone* to a conclusion if I let her be a man. He forsook his beloved because he could not hold on to her along with his private agony ... This scandal outraged the family: a brother, for example, came forward as an avenger; I would then have my hero fall in a duel."⁴⁹ He yields to the temptation of indulging in a poetic self-explanation of his crucial choice in life.⁵⁰ He does it wearing the mask of indirect discourse. Kierkegaard protects the truth of a decision that, because of its singularity, demands secrecy. "What have I lost, alas, how could you know or understand? This is a subject on which you had better stay silent."⁵¹ Speaking would require suspending one's own absolute singularity, one's own uniqueness to share a generality of ethics that requires justifying and accounting for one's decisions and actions. According to Jacques Derrida, speaking equals to entering the realm of ethics and Kierkegaard cannot resist this temptation entirely: he lets his soul speak through *Antigone's* voice.⁵² She has confessed Kierkegaard her secret; she has murmured it in a loving embrace.⁵³ *Antigone's* story is swathed in a veil of secret and cannot be acted on stage, because it remains unsaid. A's version of *Antigone* can only be performed before the "Society of the Buried Lives:" it is an inward theatre. Through A's *Antigone*, Kierkegaard expresses his yearning to represent his life, but he does so from a slanted perspective: his point of view is hidden behind a ventriloquist puppet. *Antigone* is the poetic invention that springs from his imploded silence. He considers silence a sign of wisdom, the shield that protects an internal storm. "I am unconditionally the most silent person in this age. Silence concealed in silence is suspect, arouses suspicion, almost as if one were bearing witness to something, at least to the fact that one is silent. But silence hidden is the most definitive talent for conversation – now there's silence for you!"⁵⁴

But there is also another aspect to Kierkegaard's *Antigone*. Kierkegaard is aware that the modern era has lost the Greek consciousness that would enable us to understand properly the profound sorrow in Greek tragedy. In other words, the modern spectator has lost compassion and Kierkegaard believes that the modern age has no great real sympathy with the Greek tragedy: "Our age has lost all the substantial categories of family, state, kindred ... the spectator has lost compassion, but in a subjective way and also in an objective sense compassion is the authentic expression of the tragic."⁵⁵ His *Antigone* presents the vestiges of the ancient Greek consciousness, while at the same time engaging us in a modern self-subjective analysis. In other words, Kierkegaard creates his *Antigone* to artificially re-

produce in our society an extinct consciousness so fundamental to the tragic. Kierkegaard has created his character for his imaginary fellowship, the *Symparnekromenoi*, and we are left to speculate as to the reasons why he decided not to produce it for the real stage: "Perhaps Kierkegaard discovered that he had no talent for writing dialogue or drama. In any case, in not producing the tragedy, the Aesthete is at least true to his own character – while arguing that ancient times cannot be repristinated, he succeeds in repristinating them – in aesthetic contemplation."⁵⁶

Coda

The vicinity of the definition of the tragic (ethical) hero in *Fear and Trembling* and A's analysis of the modern tragic hero is a reflection of Kierkegaard's critique of the modern world and its fragmentation. The tragic (ethical) hero of *Fear and Trembling* is juxtaposed to the Knights of Infinite Resignation and of Faith, both paradigmatic of a religious dimension of existence. Like the modern tragic hero in *Either/Or*, he is entirely imbued with the ethical and does not know the infinite gentleness of tragedy.⁵⁷ The true tragic afflatus that arises from A's dissertation – a blend of fate and character – has a somewhat religious ascendance. Although *Either/Or* analyses the aesthetic and the ethical spheres of existence, A hints at the consoling sphere of the religious as the final movement of the tragic.⁵⁸ It is the second movement of the genuine tragic hero, who embraces the consoling idea of belonging to a universal sinfulness after having experienced the harshness of the ethical, namely the share of responsibilities for his acts. It is a fatherly love that all embraces "by means of continuity."⁵⁹ This movement back to fate after having felt the ethical, is taken up by A's Antigone. This makes her the quintessential tragic heroine. A's Antigone is also a poetical invention, a fragment of theatre. She enables Kierkegaard to give an indirect voice to some episodes of his life. "The society of the Buried Lives," the stage where her story is performed, seems to allude to the fact that the resurrection of her Greek consciousness can only take place in the theatre of the half dead.

Monash University
 sabina.sestigiani@arts.monash.edu.au

NOTES

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Mod-

- ern Drama”, *Either/Or, Part I*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), pp. 139-64.
- ² Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 623, n.1.
- ³ See George Steiner, *Antigones* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984), p. 53.
- ⁴ Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 153.
- ⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).
- ⁶ Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 143.
- ⁷ Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 137.
- ⁸ Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 150.
- ⁹ John A. Norris, “The Validity of A’s View of Tragedy with Particular Reference to Ibsen’s *Brand*”, in ed. Robert L. Perkins *International Kierkegaard Commentary Either/Or Part I* (Macon: Mercer UP, 1995), p. 147.
- ¹⁰ See Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 143.
- ¹¹ See Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 56: “Pure isolation is at once comical and desperate, a formidable premonition of the Kafka-Beckett aesthetic.”
- ¹² Walter Benjamin, “Fate and Character”, *Selected Writings*, vol. I (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1996).
- ¹³ Benjamin, “Fate and Character”, p. 206.
- ¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 96.
- ¹⁵ Dan Magurshak, “The Concept of Anxiety: The Keystone of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger Relationship”, in ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety* (Macon: Mercer UP, 1995), p. 173. See Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 41.
- ¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 43.
- ¹⁷ Kierkegaard, “Tragic”, p. 155.
- ¹⁸ Andrew Benjamin, “Where Philosophy Begins: The Event of Plurality”, *Philosophy’s Literature* (Manchester: Clinamen, 2001), p. 37.
- ¹⁹ Benjamin, “Where Philosophy Begins”, p. 37.
- ²⁰ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1994), p. 127.
- ²¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975), p. 150, n. 49.
- ²² Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 11: “It is honourable for me to do this and die.”
- ²³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 32.
- ²⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, “The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality”, *Either/Or, Part II*, Edited and Translated by Howard

V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), p. 167.

- ²⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 53.
- ²⁶ See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 86-9. Johannes de Silentio indicates Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus as examples of tragic (ethical) heroes. All three operate a sacrifice for the well being of society. They give up the aesthetic sphere of their lives in order to gain the ethical.
- ²⁷ Sophocles, *Antigone*, pp. 49-51.
- ²⁸ Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 67.
- ²⁹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 87.
- ³⁰ See Kierkegaard, "The Balance between Esthetic and Ethical", pp. 168-9.
- ³¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 86.
- ³² The tragic (ethical) hero belongs to the ethical sphere of existence. It is juxtaposed to "The Knights of Infinite Resignation and Faith." Both knights move in the religious sphere.
- ³³ See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 70. Kierkegaard describes the Knight of Faith as someone who has renounced the finite and the particular for some higher cause. The Knight of Faith is firm in his paradoxical belief that on the strength of the absurd he will receive the finite back, though perhaps, in some transfigured form. The Knight of Faith "has made and is at every moment making the movement of infinity. He drains in infinite resignation the deep sorrow of existence, he knows the bliss of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, whatever is most precious in the world, and yet to him finitude tastes just as good as to one who has never known anything higher ... [T]he whole earthly form he presents is a new creation on the strength of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he makes it with such accuracy and poise that he is continually getting finitude out of it." The temptation in *Antigone*, as for Abraham – the Knight of Faith for *antonomasia* – is the ethical itself which would keep *Antigone* from doing the gods' will and comply with Creon's edict.
- ³⁴ Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* was signed by the pseudonymous Johannes de Silentio, and *Either/Or I-II* by Victor Eremita. Both were published in 1843.
- ³⁵ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 156.
- ³⁶ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 156.
- ³⁷ See Kierkegaard, "Tragic", pp. 153, 157.
- ³⁸ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 152.
- ³⁹ See Kierkegaard, "Silhouettes", *Either/Or, Part I*, pp. 175-6.
- ⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 157.
- ⁴¹ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 153.
- ⁴² Stephen N. Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), pp. 40-1.
- ⁴³ Quoted in Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 40.
- ⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 158.

- ⁴⁵ According to Kierkegaard, the Knight of Infinite Resignation has a recognisably heroic quality. This can both be recognised as requiring courage, and be judged as ethically admirable. The spiritual inspiration of the knight's choices renders their voicing an almost impossible task to perform. His deeds are, therefore, marked by a silence that is imbued with other-worldly significance, almost religious.
- ⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, p. 160.
- ⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, pp. 159-60.
- ⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 153.
- ⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, p. 146.
- ⁵⁰ See Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 63: "The autobiographical content, the vehemence and concreteness of self-projection which inform Kierkegaard's reading of 'Antigone', are beyond doubt."
- ⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, p. 140.
- ⁵² See Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give to (knowing Not to Know)", *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, eds. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 156-7. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991), p. 61: "The singular being appears to other singular beings; it is communicated to them in the singular. It is a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows, or the communication of the passion to be fellows, to be *in common*."
- ⁵³ See Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 153.
- ⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, p. 603.
- ⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 149.
- ⁵⁶ Clyde Holler, "Tragedy in the Context of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*", in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or Part I*, p. 140.
- ⁵⁷ See Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 146.
- ⁵⁸ See Søren Kierkegaard, "The Point of View for my Work as an Author", *The Point of View*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), p. 35: "When I began *Either/Or* ... I was *potentialiter* [in potentiality] as deeply influenced by the religious as I ever became. ... Here lies *Either/Or*. It was a poetical emptying, which did not, however, go further than the ethical. Personally, I was far from tranquilly wanting to summon existence back to marriage, I who religiously was already in the monastery – an idea concealed in the pseudonym *Victor-Eremita* [the Hermit] ... Strictly speaking, *Either/Or* was written in a monastery." Thus, Kierkegaard's choice for the pseudonym Victor Eremita, who signed as the "editor" of *Either/Or*, a work which discusses the Aesthetic and Ethical spheres, betrays the coexistence of a parallel point of view, namely the patently Religious.
- ⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, "Tragic", p. 146.