

Antigone Revisited in Antigone Project: A Play in Five  
Parts by Karen Hartman, Tanya Barfield, Caridad  
Svich, Lynn Nottage and Chiori Miyagawa

أنتيجوني في "مشروع أنتيجوني": عمل مسرحي من خمسة أجزاء  
لكارين هارتمان وتانيا بارفيلد وكاريداد سفيتش  
ولين نوتيدج وكيوري مياجاوا

Dr. Hala Sayed Ahmed Al-Metwali Ibrahim  
associate professor of English Literature  
Faculty of Al-Alsun – Ain Shams University

د. هالة سيد أحمد المتولي إبراهيم  
أستاذ مساعد بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية  
كلية الألسن – جامعة عين شمس



**Antigone Revisited in Antigone Project: A Play in Five Parts by  
Karen Hartman, Tanya Barfield, Caridad Svich, Lynn Nottage and  
Chiori Miyagawa**

Contemporary dramatic literature appropriates and transforms pre-existing mythic and incredible narratives. Antigone never loses her fascination for her unbending and self-certain character. She has always been the classic individual female against the authority of the state. This paper is a study of the *Antigone Project* (2004), an exceptional multi-authored re-consideration of an ancient Greek story of Antigone that continues to resonate across the centuries. Five multi-racial women playwrights were asked to resurrect Antigone's legend and line up the story with the political landscape of the early twenty-first century. Each playwright creates a one-act version of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Every part of Antigone's Project lasts for about fifteen minutes. Thus, the five total about seventy five minutes, roughly the same performance length of the usual ancient tragedy. Each reflects every author's special concerns, and each part has different women directing. Each play situates Antigone in an enormously different context: a beach, the U.S. during World War I, an archive, an African Village, and the underworld, respectively. The paper concludes that Antigone's willingness to act upon her beliefs makes her an archetype of secular individualism and a metaphor that continues to be contemporary and relevant.

**Keywords: Antigone, Adaptation, Myth, authority, sacrifice and religion.**

**أنتيجوني في "مشروع أنتيجوني": عمل مسرحي من خمسة أجزاء لكارين هارتمان وتانيا بارفيلد وكاريداد سفيتش ولين نوتيدج وكوري مياجاوا**

يقوم الأدب المعاصر بمعالجة بعض الروايات الأسطورية. فأسطورة أنتيجون، على سبيل المثال لم تفقد بريقها وسحرها وتأثيرها مطلقا على مر الزمان. فهي دائما المثال الكلاسيكي للأنثى التي تقف ضد سلطة الدولة. لهذا نجدها في أعمال الكثير من الكتاب نموذجا للسمود والجد والتمسك بالمبادئ والقيم والوقوف أمام قوى الشر. وتتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة لخمس مسرحيات جاءت تحت عنوان "مشروع أنتيجون" والذي صدر عام (٢٠٠٤)، ويعد العمل إحياء للأسطورة اليونانية القديمة لأنتيجون التي لا يزال صداها يتردد عبر القرون حيث تقوم خمس كاتبات من أعراق مختلفة بكتابة عمل مسرحي يتكون من حوالي خمس وسبعون دقيقة، قامت كل كاتبة فيه بكتابة مسرحية مدتها خمس عشرة دقيقة تكون فيه أنتيجون هي البطلية. وقد قامت الكاتبات المسرحيات بإحياء أسطورة أنتيجون مع مراعاة مواءمة القصة مع المشهد السياسي في أوائل القرن الحادي والعشرين. فخرج كل عمل عاكسا للمخاوف والاهتمامات الخاصة بكل مؤلف، وكان لكل جزء مخرجا مختلفا. وتضع كل مسرحية أنتيجون في زمان ومكان مختلفين تبعا لرؤية كل مؤلف مثل الشاطيء، الولايات المتحدة خلال الحرب العالمية الأولى، متحف، قرية أفريقية، والعالم السفلي. وتخلص الورقة إلى أن رغبة أنتيجون في العمل انطلاقا من معتقداتها وصلابتها وصمودها تجعلها نموذجا أوليا للتفرد وتجعلها الأيقونة الخالدة على مر العصور.

**Antigone Revisited in Antigone Project:  
A Play in Five Parts by Karen Hartman, Tanya Barfield, Caridad  
Svich, Lynn Nottage and Chiori Miyagawa**

*Many plays arise from something,  
some story that their audiences  
can recognize. Critics typically  
designate such plays 'adaptations'*  
(Verna Foster<sup>1</sup>).

Contemporary dramatic literature appropriates, and transforms pre-existing mythic and fantastical narratives. This paper is a study of *Antigone Project* (2004); a play in five parts that reconsiders the classic story of Sophocles' *Antigone* and adapts it into modern scenarios that discuss social injustice. It tells the classic tale of family, love and dignity from a variety of rich and radical perspectives of race, class and gender. Five award-winning female playwrights were commissioned to resurrect Antigone's legend and line up the story with the political landscape of the early twenty-first century. The deconstructionist approach of the classic's central themes reveals how the ancient Greek story continues to resonate across the centuries.

Adaptation Studies has recently become a field of increasing importance. Old stories are used for new cultural purposes and adaptations exist as works that are in dialogue. Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art where pleasure arises from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the sharpness of surprise. (170) Hutcheon is convinced that adaptation is part of nature and culture where all art is bred of another art and adaptation is not the exception, but the norm. (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 197)

The term adaptation implies making fit for a new cultural environment and a new audience as well. Maya E. Roth argues,

Many postcolonial and feminist artists today are drawn to translation and adaptation modes, just as so many generations of artists and cultures have been before, driven to re-tell known

stories with a difference; this spurs not only their creativity but also a social ethics of deep engagement with audiences, myth and history to re-imagine cultural politics and meaning. For these contemporary artists, whether directors or poets, playwrights or novelists, the political and poetic actions relate, as artists engage both the forms and stories of the past: transforming them in order to forge new images of the world and identity, looking back, forward and across to more versified horizons. (22)

Though myths are eternal, they can reappear in fresh ways. T.S. Eliot believes that ancient dramatic texts must always be recreated for modern audiences: "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. Where the last of earth left to discover is that which was the beginning. (Little Gidding). Hence, audiences will come to "know the place for the first time" and learn something new, not only about the beauty and glory of the ancient myths, but about themselves and the modern world as well.

Ancient Greek playwrights serve as inspiration for both classic and new interpretations, for Greek tragedy gives insight into ourselves and poses important questions. Contemporary adaptations of Greek tragedy provide many remarkable and inspiring female figures and give female characters more major roles, more self-assured personalities, and more compassionate incentives. However, none matches the allure of *Antigone*: "Greek tragedy in general and *Antigone* in particular occupy both a troubled and hallowed place among feminist theatre theorists...These revisions typically give female characters more prominent roles, more assertive personalities, and more sympathetic motivations" (Martin 82). *Antigone* never loses her fascination for her unbending and self-certain character. S. George Steiner writes, "As it comes to us from Sophocles' *Antigone*, 'meaning' is bent out of its original shape just as starlight is bent when it reaches us across time and via successive gravitational fields." (50)

Antigone has always been the classic individual female against the authority of the state: "Antigone is the first conscientious objector, opposing the king, and what she sees as his unjust laws"(McDonald12). Sophocles' *Antigone* (ca. 441 BC) is based on a myth that goes back to Homer (8<sup>th</sup> century BC). Antigone is the daughter of King Oedipus who unwittingly killed his father, and married his mother. Unfortunately, he would not rest until he discovered the truth about himself. His exile and the events that follow comprise the Antigone narrative. The play continues the Oedipus story by following the curse into the next generation. After living with her blind father in exile for years, Antigone returns to Thebes, where her two brothers have slain each other. Polynices fought on the wrong side in Thebes' civil war and was killed by his brother Eteocles who had denied him his fair share of the kingship. Antigone's uncle, Creon, now king, orders that one brother, Eteocles, shall be given a hero's burial while the other, Polynices, is a traitor and his unburied corpse will be left to rot, a form of going to hell. Anyone who honors his corpse will be executed. Like her father, Antigone decides to defend what she knows is right and obey the gods' laws as the higher order regardless of the consequences. She must purify her brother's body by giving him a proper burial.

Thus, Antigone attempts the impossible and sacrifices her own life to honor her dead brother. Personal issues confront public issues: while Creon tries to be the best ruler he can and to benefit the city after a bitter civil war, Antigone wants to honor the appropriate burial that the gods of the underworld demand. Accordingly, she overtly disobeys the king and affronts him. In contrast, Creon opposes Antigone with the power of law. Antigone prefers the old law of the gods to the new law of the city-state. On the other hand, Creon is neither just nor wise. Indeed, both should have compromised, but neither did and a series of tragedies and betrayals set off. Haimon, King Creon's son and Antigone's fiancé, stands against his father to defend her. By the end of the play, Creon and Ismene, Antigone's sister and counterpart, are the only survivors. Antigone, Haemon; and Creon's wife, Eurydice, have all taken their own lives: "Antigone is punished by the ruler whose laws she opposes, and Creon is

punished by the loss of his own family, whose values he subordinated to those of the city"(McDonald14).

However, Antigone remains a heroine who makes her mark in myth and history as a woman rising above her family curse and circumstances to honor her family and the gods and stay true to her beliefs and responsibilities: "Antigone upholds her religious duty to bury her brother by invoking the freedom to follow her conscience and the laws of religious practice...She honors family before the state, the gods above humans, the sacred over the secular. She is willing to die alone 'unwept and unwed' for her convictions"(Martin85). In consequence, Antigone has always been regarded as the first freedom fighter in western literature that has constantly inspired playwrights: plays about her confrontation with organized government have been used to protest against oppressive regimes.

As Fanny Söderbäck puts it:

Like all great Greek tragedies, Antigone presents us with existential questions similar to those addressed by Socrates and Jesus. In the choral ode to man (the perhaps most famous passage from this drama), human existence is characterized as wondrous, riddle-like, uncanny. Human beings are natural and rational at once, bound by necessity yet gifted with freedom, mortal yet capable of transcending the mere necessities of life and survival, the doers of good and evil, makers and breakers of laws and city walls. Although the story of Antigone addresses these universal and timeless contradictions and perplexities of humankind, it simultaneously tells the story of a singular individual: Antigone, a woman who defies King Creon's edict without any fear, doubts, or regrets. This courageous woman, the fruit of incest, has fascinated philosophers in the nineteenth century, inspired playwrights in the twentieth century, and intrigued feminist thinkers and activists for decades. (2)

European translations and adaptations that focus on Antigone and Creon date back to at least the 1530s. In recent years, revisions of



*Antigone* often resituate Antigone in specific political movements. Sophocles' play has been adapted several times in the past century, often to dramatize resistance workers in conflict with a bureaucratic regime. Productions throughout the world have used the play to call attention to repressive circumstances in different countries, stressing the integrity of Antigone's attitude: "Front and center in many adaptations of *Antigone*, is the heroine's rejection of waiting in the antechamber of history. Antigone acts. For many playwrights who have written adaptations of *Antigone* this is her cause celeb. Antigone has outsized fate and has the personality to meet that fate head on...Antigone's moral stance...has most compelled theatre artists"(Martin84). Many of these plays were first produced under oppressive governments and so had to disguise their politics. Most notable examples are Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944), first produced in Nazi-occupied and Athol Fugard's 1973 version of *Antigone The Island* that condemns apartheid in South Africa. Fugard's is based on real events occurring in the Robben Island prison where many were detained for opposing the racist system. Other examples include the 1984 four versions of *Antigone* that were produced in Ireland and indict colonial occupation and Mac Wellman's 2001 adaptation of *Antigone* of the same title.

Meanwhile, contemporary perspectives, "have come to full circle from an ideological position that Greek tragedy is a misogynist form of theatre that that needs to be rejected to a broad spectrum of engagement with the genre employing methodologies that include a variety of feminisms inflected with the fields of psychoanalysis, theatre studies, and performance theory"(Martin83).

Greek tragedy in general and *Antigone* in particular occupy a sacred place among feminist theatre theorists. Feminist readings of *Antigone* situate her consciously electing to die in order to do what is ethically right, focus on her ultimate willingness to act and reject passivity, and highlight her beliefs that privilege religion over the state. Steve Wilmer notes in "Women In Greek Tragedy Today: A Reappraisal," "Feminist scholars have continued to address the complexities of Greek tragedy because females in Greek tragedy often hold a moral and ethical stance that is different from their male

counterparts, creating the opportunity for strong female roles in the service of reflecting upon the consequences of obeying edicts driven by male hubris"(108).

This approach is re-contextualized in *Antigone Project*: In 2004, Loretta Greco, the artistic director of the Women's Project wrote that the Women's Project –founded in 1978 by Julia Miles- aims to honor its rich legacy: by investigating the female artists who came before them, celebrating the legends among them, mentoring a new breed of women artists and delivering them to the front line where they will continue the vital tradition of telling stories and revealing voices that would otherwise remain unheard. Accordingly, the Women's Project asked five multi-racial women playwrights to re-dream the Sophocles myth, and re-interpret this mythical heroine's story. The American Karen Hartman, the African American Tanya Barfield, the US Latina playwright Caridad Svich, the American Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage and the Japanese-born, American playwright Chiori Miyagawa signed on to portray Antigone, "in a kaleidoscope of historic periods to see how she fares. Antigone's desperate striving towards sanctity; justice and rest are amplified by the hysteria of the post 9-11 Bush war on terror"(Schlesinger6).

Each playwright creates a one-act version of Sophocles' *Antigone* in a specific way relevant to modern times. Every part of Antigone's Project lasts for just ten to fifteen minutes, so the five total about seventy five minutes, roughly the same performance length of the usual ancient tragedy. This is first time to see five variations mounted on one stage. "*Antigone Project* is composed of five fragments offering various interpretations of Antigone's plight"(Kabatchink32). Each play reflects the author's special concerns, and has a different woman directing.

Marianne McDonald writes:

What distinguishes the five plays in *Antigone Project* is that women are defining the major issues. These multi-racial women playwrights are reclaiming Antigone for themselves and allowing fresh voices to interpret the myth that supplies the syntax behind their words. These authors take the Antigone

story out of the patriarchal Greek setting and bring it into the new society in which a woman can run for president or vice-president. (14-15)

Karen Hartman's *Hang Ten*, Tanya Barfield's *Medallion*, Caridad Svich's *Antigone Arkhe*, Lynn Nottage's *A Stone's Throw* and Chiori Miyagawa's *Red Again*, "all squarely favor Antigone's point of view or at least what feminist theatre practitioners have interpreted as Antigone's point of view"(Martin79) In the meantime, they explore the history and myth of Antigone from varied, global perspectives and present five different explorations of Sophocles' tragedy, each corresponding to twentieth-century issues.

As Carol Martin puts it:

As a woman, Antigone represents the voice of the oppressed of which woman is an unchallenged archetype...Antigone's plight and her determination are resituated from the polis in ancient Greece to women in the third world and other sites, and address the mechanisms of history, the future, civil rights, individual freedom, and national security. All of the plays cast Antigone as the female moral and ethical protagonist of the play and Creon or the world he represents as the rigid, power hungry antagonist. The mission of the Women's Project underscored this perspective. (79-81)

All the plays were required to be political expressions and to have an Antigone character on which they focus their narrative: "What we actually get is five plays whose only link, the source material, is so completely turned on its head that there's no repetition other than that each play features an Antigone"(Sommer Para.4). The five fragmented feminist takes conjure up wildly different Antigones in order to show a sister's love and devotion through many lenses. Fanny Söderbäck argues,

Whatever alias she assumes, she always challenges authority in the specific form it takes. Whenever and wherever civil liberties are endangered, when the rights or existence of aboriginal peoples are threatened, when revolutions are under way, when injustices take place— wherever she is needed,

Antigone appears. And although the details and context may vary, certain elements of the story always remain the same: the lone individual fighting against state power, the kinship burial rites, and, interestingly, her status as a woman. (3)

Each play locates Antigone in an enormously different context: a beach, the U.S. during World War I, an archive, an African Village, and the underworld: "Karen Hartman, Caridad Svich and Lynn Nottage have moved the story to the present, though in vastly different settings. Tanya Barfield has renamed her heroine Antoinette Thebes and used a 1918 time frame, while Chiori Miyagawa has given the myth a surreal twist by following Antigone to the Underworld"(Sommer Para.4).

*Antigone Project* sets out in Karen Hartman's surfer world *Hang Ten* where Antigone and her sister Ismene are recast as bathing beauties discussing their tragic family history while eyeing a muscular surfer. The play takes us to the beach where the two sisters are sitting watching the waves' crash on the shore. "*Hang Ten*, by Karen Hartman, features a surfing culture with attractive young women in their thirties. They bemoan the ruler, Creon (obviously the head of an oppressive regime), although the play is never so specific"(McDonald15). The endless cycle of waves is marked with male surfers who are the subject of the sisters' gaze throughout the play. Antigone shows compassion for the boys' surfing, but criticizes the customs that produce such surfers and she fears an accident:"I can't watch another boy fall,"(32) comments Antigone as she catalogues the way young men in the glow of life prep to take on the sea: "The sounds of water are made by tongues and teeth, and Haemon disguised as the *otoosexy* surfer boy rises in a tide of corporeal images, like, well, like a Greek god, a *kouros* from the waves, sparking both Ismene's and Antigone's desires" (Schlesinger7):

ANTIGONE. It's sick. He tries with all his might. He works his pecks in his mom's garage, he pumps iron from a catalogue so he hold up the board, paddle out, paddle paddle. He goes to a beach where he knows no one: he kneels, he bites it, he kneels, he holds it, he stands, he stands. He's ready to come to his home beach and ride waves in front of us, in front of girls. (32)

However, surfer boy, though hot, has no power. "It's his very youth that reminds us, the public, that this mythic family is already caught in the entropic vortex of war, that blinded and dead, has already taken most of the family down"(Schlesinger7): ISMENE: "There's the reason four of six of us are dead."(36) Antigone repeats twice: "'Family?' You mean me?"(42)

As she holds him in her sight, Antigone sees the young man, all young men, as physically ripe for both waves and war. "He gets hard little muscles down his skinny front...he is a buttfuckable Hellenic god...But how will it end? How does it end no matter how worthy, how pretty, how ready the boy? Waves crash one way, into coast, into rock. I can't look."(33) In contrast, "Ismene sees everything in a positive light. This contrast also existed in Sophocles' play. Ismene represents the complacent majority"(McDonald15). Ismene wants not only to stay out of trouble but also to rewrite her story so that she can get out of the tragic narrative and enjoy the muscled boys on the beach:

IRENE. There once was a girl named Ismene. She had parents and siblings. They were not the same people. She was an exiled princess surviving a war. Her brothers fought on different sides. That's okay. Families split and that is okay. That is how humans move on, the capacity to love new people. The rules changed. The ruler changed. The ruler changed. And everyone forgot about Princess Ismene's rotten family. Such that she got a really good job with full benefits and two-hour lunches in a specific town and watched surfers all afternoon. She hired the surfers to do odd jobs for her, washing walks or clipping flora. They wear little pants called jams expose the hipbones and unlace below the navel. Ismene was a lucky princess. (35)

Following the myth, the siblings are Antigone, Ismene, Polynices, Eteocles and Oedipus, all children of Jocasta. Since Oedipus is the father of the previous four, the incest is obvious:"Incest is efficient."(35) Antigone announces that she will bury their brother:"I'm burying our brother."(36) It seems there was a conflict between two sides of the

family, and now his burial is forbidden. Ismene warns, "We're under surveillance,"(37) "another modern allusion, which could apply not only to America, but also to any country subject to oppressive control"(McDonald16).

While sitting in their beach chairs watching the horizon marked with the endless sight of young men riding the waves, falling and getting up again, a spiteful view of men emerges. "Boys spring fresh from the waves every day,"(40) Ismene comments in an attempt to ameliorate Antigone's desolation at the loss of her brother.

Carol Martin argues:

Boys and men are not only expendable; they are the pleasure of sex and war. They are their bodies provocatively unclothed for easy availability and killing. Ismene confesses that she is loyal to no one, to nothing, except change. She is a survivor without moral gumption and doesn't want Antigone to bury Polynices precisely because it will make life difficult for her. (87)

Antigone then makes the speech:

That kid tips over and another pops up. You employ a surfer, he finds a real girlfriend, and a new boy comes to work. I get married and if after seven years or fourteen or twenty-one the guy absconds keels over, I replace him...Birth a kid, kid drowns in the bath, birth another...To make a new brother, I'd have to make a new me. (40)

McDonald explains, "Those who know Antigone would recognize this speech as a reworking of the heroine's claim that she would not do what she did for a husband or a child, but only for a brother, arguing that the former are replaceable; since her mother and father are dead, a brother is irreplaceable"(16-17).

Next a surfer, who turns out to be Haemon, approaches the women, confesses his love for Antigone and proposes marriage. He asks which of the women is Antigone and Ismene responds, " I am Antigone,"(46) and she accepts the boy's offer. This shows that this

Haemon, Creon's son, is interested in doing the adequate thing, just like Ismene: "Here he's more of a conformist than the rebel he was in the original" (McDonald 17).

Martin elucidates,

Just as young men ride the waves (of power and war) that will take them under, young women are interchangeable vessels for lust and progeny. Ismene responds so quickly because she knows that she must create a new future and, for her, marriage is the only way to do that. In *Hang Ten*, Hartman pits moral conscience against survival. The cycle of waves and boys bobbing in the sea is its own seduction that makes risking everything to bury a dead man look like a naïve folly. The foolishness is Antigone's and by extension anyone who risks everything for moral conviction. Hartman makes Ismene look smart but vapid. Ismene doesn't care, she lies, but she survives because she delimits her accountability as a matter of freedom of choice. (87)

Hartman's assessment of democracy is that freedom is for all, for anything, at anytime and anywhere according to whatever mood. Democracy includes the choice of full self-interest.

After that, one spins into Tanya Barfield's *Medallion*, a much more touching and satisfying straightforward piece about racial injustice. The play marks the absence of the dead in the physical form of a telegram held by a black laundress, Antoinette (Antigone), as she sits in the office of bureaucratic General Carlton (Creon), a white officer at the close of World War One. To the sounds of stenographers transcribing condolence letters, Antigone demands with stubborn and dignified beauty that her brother who fought valiantly in World War I be given the purple heart medal for what he did. She also asks for his body back, a sign of appreciation. However, it is made clear from the beginning that Americans do not honor their blacks: they have shamefully denied recognition to brave Americans like Antoinette's brother. A telephone operator is heard reciting part of General John Joseph Pershing's message to the French military about the inferior status of black American

troops: "We must not eat with blacks, must not shake hand or seek to talk or meet with them outside the requirement of military service. We must not commend too highly the black American Troops, particularly in the presence of white Americans."(49) Carlton, on the other hand, boasts about the heroes in his family, who received honors, from burial as a hero to a medal, because they were white.

As history rushes into the background, Antoinette confronts General Carlton with the command, "Give me my brother's body."(50) The General yields and listens to Antoinette's plea for something of her brother's to bury: The Medal of Honor the French awarded him. With nothing at all left of her brother, Antoinette poignantly demands that the U.S. government award him some kind of Medal of Honor: "Colored boys got a way of disappearing,"(52) she says to Carlton who refuses to give anything but the tragic answer, "True. It is a pity,"(52) and puffs, "Mrs. Thebes, the French may award Croix de Guerre to the Negroes, but we do not."(55) Antoinette responds with a recital of the equality of suffering of those who go to war: "Squattin' in the rotted rat-filled trenches, ear ripped by Machine fire, burnt by shells, squalid smell of blood,...Rats feedin' off the flesh of fresh cadavers, Eatin' the eyes, stealin' the sight...gassed for mother-land...lost hand in battle...twisted and barbed by wire, continued to fight."(55-56) The General has also lost both his father and brother in war: "My father, a chaplain, died-My youngest brother, a pilot died-"(59) He shouts at her to shut up and remember that she is only a colored woman, and he can dismiss her without so much as a thought: "Silence! I demand your silence now. I have been kind. I have been more than necessarily kind. Some men of my kind would not be so kind. And I demand your cessation in this matter. I demand you recognize your station and stay in step."(59) There is nobody to bury and no honor to award: "I cannot deliver a heart. Or a body. Or a medal. And you cannot come in to my office. You cannot come—a Negro—a black apparition-"(60)

Carol Martin argues:

Barfield makes the ritual act of burial at the center of Sophocles' *Antigone* impossible. There are no remains; there is no body, so there can be no act that blankets mourning.



Antoinette's litany of the wages of war, its toll on the bodies of young men, underscores her realization that she must live without closure. The war continues at home in race relations that will not allow the recognition of common grief or of compassionate listening. No action can be taken. Resisting the ethos of a corrupt and immoral state is beyond both Antoinette and the General for entirely different reasons. They are in the same room but exist in different spheres. (88)

Antoinette is finally dismissed and silenced by Carlton turning on the radio, a way to erase Antoinette's presence as he turns his attention away from her: "She is condemned to forever live a war without conclusion," Martin comments. (89)

Caridad Svich's digital\historical archival live media installation *Antigone Arkhe* then begins. It is the only play among the five adaptations that sets Antigone in the future and is by far the longest of all the pieces in performance time. The play is a postmodern multimedia dissection of Antigone, that cleverly imagines an Antigone museum where an archivist uses the artifacts and documents in an archeological dig, to beautifully reconstruct Antigone's narrative and the rituals inherent in the journey of the body including its search for love, its longing for immortality, and the ultimate grieve over its own lost life: "Caridad Svich's *Antigone Arkhe* cleverly uses an archivist-lecturer in an Antigone museum to reconstruct the story from statues"(Sommer Para.5). Svich places the story of Antigone in an archive where a historical Antigone is pitted against a digital one. It is a, "meta-theatrical piece, very interested in fragments from the past and how they are used. It uses lots of projections and technical aids. The words dance with the projections, offering the commentary of a Greek chorus. Digital Antigone announces in a fragment that Antigone buried her brother's body, but the context is not elucidated."(McDonald18).

The "Narration" voice joins an Archivist, who speaks colloquially, and who describes an exhibit of various "things": "a belt of hemp," presumably that Antigone used to kill herself, "She took the belt from around her waist and tied it around her neck, and suspended herself from

this very point,"(65) and body parts, including "A leg torn from a body": "The remains of Antigone in *Antigone Arkhe*- a hemp belt, silk dress, lock of hair and even Antigone's body-remain sealed behind glass unyielding to analysis implying that we continue to hear Antigone say what we would like to hear"(Martin91). Besides, there is a statue that is filled out by the Digital Antigone, and a Historical Antigone speaks, "longing for death and martyrdom as a way of accusing someone who has violated the laws of heaven"(McDonald18). "Uncle" Creon is said to have put his niece in a cave where she hung herself. At one point the Historical Antigone speaks about the process of recording her ("What? Talk into the machine?") (67), another meta-theatrical element. History keeps operating beyond the archive. As the Archivist comments on exhibitions, Historical Antigone continues to speak from a place no one seems able to hear:"Awakening the ever-new lament in your death you have undone my life the day-star's sacred eye watches me. Oh city of my fathers in the land of Thebes. (63)

Following, a possible deficiency is discussed. Antigone herself seems to be the, "Ur-malfunction in a 'civilized state.' Antigone becomes a legend with her death"(McDonald) The Archivist describes "A wedding dress from the Hellenistic period,"(73) "a period," McDonald illustrates, "which is at least a century later than Sophocles' *Antigone*, and several centuries later than the mythical Antigone. Perhaps, this is a commentary on how Antigone has survived throughout the ages in a fragmentary form"(19).

Antigone's body in this play moves from place to place, finally to be frozen in time. The body-parts illustrate the fragmentation of the myth: "My body is transferred from Thebes to another city. I watch it as it moves. As one city and another tries to make a place for it, my body travels by ship, and is frozen in time. Someone wants a finger. Someone else wants an eye. Someone steals an eyelash in the night."(76)

The Historical Antigone and the Digital Antigone hang themselves, yet they continue to speak. The myth suddenly becomes a ghost. It is said that her body and brain have been preserved: "Antigone's body has been preserved forever. Her entire body including her brain has

been preserved."(79) "The outcome is that she has become the physical reification of the myth in a museum, and the Archivist asks for financial support: now the myth has become a commercial product"(McDonald20): "You can also visit the archaeological museum, and delight in a prehistoric collection, a sculpture collection, a vase collection and a bronze collection from various sites and ancient cemeteries. The taking of photographs is strictly prohibited. A new extension to the museum is being planned, pending financial support. We welcome your contribution."(79) The corpse is shown in the final scene as the doors of the palace open.

Svich's play appropriately shows how the myth has been altered and Antigone has become, "the final trophy wife of modernity," argues Lisa Schlesinger, "the piece," she continues, "is an elegy and dirge to Antigone's known fate, which all of us, including Antigone herself, are aware. But in a dramatic reversal the writer veers away from Sophocles version of the myth and allows Antigone to take her death into her own hands"(8).

Then follows Lynn Nottage's devastating *A Stone's Throw*. The play is set in a modern African village where Antigone, an unwed widow, is about to be stoned to death for an illicit affair with a man, even if he had promised to marry her and had abandoned her after making her pregnant. The lovely, moving story is written in six scenes and is presented backwards chronologically. Schlesinger exemplifies, "*A Stone's Throw*, recalls the disproportionate punishment of women in various religions, countries, and political climates, for breaking unreasonable laws"(8). The present to past storytelling opens the play with the ending, the punishment, the execution of a woman buried in sand up to her neck. While she is about to be stoned, she suddenly remembers the time when they both said, "I like you."(81) A flashback follows and the play winds back through time to show how, Antigone's simple love and sound morality ultimately conflict with the social code and the laws and inevitably lead her astray.

Antigone has defied the law by becoming pregnant without being married. We witness her as she discusses her situation with her sister

Ismene while they pound grain. She reveals to Ismene that her period has not come, Ismene warns her, "God is merciful, but the law is not."(87) Carol Martin argues, "The law in Nottage's version of Antigone and Ismene's world prosecutes some but protects others for the same act. The Man in *A Stone's Throw* is not like Haemon, as he doesn't come to Antigone's rescue"(89). Antigone insists that she did nothing wrong and that she is not ashamed, and asks Ismene to assure this to her daughter. However, according to some African Sharia laws, Antigone will be stoned to death for her illicit action. Ismene shows Antigone the size of the stones that will be thrown at her even as Antigone insists that for a woman to have sex with a man is not wrong. Although both sisters know that what Antigone says is true, they know that she will die for her action.

Another flashback then follows as the gentle seduction unfolds gradually. The crime was seduction with the character "Man" telling Antigone he wants to carry her basket, to look at her, and to know her name. "Man" offers to wait a year, and bring a dowry then. Though she is widowed, he must still bring a dowry to her father to convince him to agree to his proposal. He offers to leave, but she tells him her name, Antigone, and he asks why she did that and then they exchange the "I like you" phrase stated at the beginning. He promises that Antigone will come to know the road to his house as a bride. When Antigone refuses to yield, "Man" makes his case:

Miss, I don't know why I'm still standing here. But I am. I'm a simple man, a poor man from a village with nothing to recommend it. I'm a good farmer with arid land that is me today. But it may rain tomorrow and everything will be different...Or it may not rain for a year and I'll continue to sift dust for a family. I'll have to walk past you at the marketplace and shut my eyes. Miss, it may take me a year, to think so, to properly woo you away from your family. To earn the right to stand here by law. One year long. I'm telling you this, because I stand here disgracefully and hopefully wanting desperately to know your name. And I'll walk away now and work for a year for your dowry, if that is what you want. But it is too long to wait for one kiss. (101-2)

They kiss passionately and one is taken back hearing the accusations of the reporters heard at the beginning as they accuse her and take pictures: "Did you? Were you? Are you aware of the law? What would God say? Did you? Were you? Do you respect the code of the law? The law? What about the law?"(104)

Marianne McDonald comments,

This ring composition is effective, besides showing a feisty Antigone following her heart in passionate rebellion against the state as she tells Creon: "I was born to love, not to hate." This play is an excellent illustration of how injustice still operates against women. (21)

McDonald finally compares *A Stone's Throw* with Svich's *Antigone Arkhe* saying, "Caridad's Svich's play showed the theoretical underpinning of the myth; the play adapts it to a story that moves our hearts as much as Sophocles' play did for the abuse and suffering of this young woman"(20).

Eventually, Chiori Miyagawa's cross-worldly *Red Again* set ups. Like *Medallion*, *Red Again* is a political play that deals with racial and ethnic prejudice. It is written as a response to the war in Iraq, the fall in civil liberties, and the political climate after 9\11. Miyagawa writes, "I looked at the ways human atrocity gets repeated in history. With the invasion of Iraq and the problem in human rights both in the U.S. and in Arab Countries, I wanted to write about the cyclical nature of history. From this perspective, the events at Abu Gharib became inevitable"(25). *Red Again* is about a larger perception of history that goes beyond individuals and a specific period of time.

Irene, Miyagawa's Ismene character, says:

IRENE. I'm reporting a double suicide. My sister Antigone hanged herself, and her boyfriend Harold found her body and then stabbed himself. My name is Irene. I live in Manhattan. Please hurry. We are being evacuated. All people of Japanese descent received notice to relocate in forty-eight hours. I'm packing my life into two suitcases that I can carry. I can't carry two dead bodies. I can't carry my sister. I can't carry

her. I have to carry linen and silver and our family curse. Antigone is dead. Forever. I can't carry any more. I'm being sent far, far away from home. Somewhere called Treblinka. Do you know where it is? I think it's in Bosnia. Or Cambodia. Please. I need help. I'm reporting a broken heart, broken bodies, broken humanity. (113)

The play is set in the present, with a vivid memory of recent slaughters "Here we have an Asian, and specifically Japanese, perspective that incorporates beliefs from Buddhism...the hero and the heroine...look at their past life, and hear the people left on earth, and both are impelled by an existentialist drive to define themselves in spite of the absurdity of the world they face"(McDonald22).

The incidents take place in the underworld where Antigone and her brother Harold (Miyagawa's renamed Haemon character) find themselves in beautiful blue lights and the air has the sweet odor of the salt ocean. They are both dead but together, as Haemon decides to follow his sister because he thought she would suffer without him. Antigone broke the law by defying the king, and attempting to bury her brother. Her brother here was innocent of any crime, but a victim of racial profiling: police officers misconstrued his wallet for a gun: "IRENE: Yes, you might have called my brother dark-skinned; though not really dark, but definitely not creamy white. That did not make him a terrorist. He didn't have any weapons. All he had was a wallet which transformed into the shape of a gun in the presence of police officers."(115) Antigone and Harold re-meet in the underworld because as Harold says, "We didn't get to finish our story."(114) "These people in bardo (the Tibetan Buddhist transition chamber between death and a new life) will not be condemned to rehearse their mistakes for eternity, if indeed they learn lessons offered from their past lives"(McDonald22). While Antigone was protesting against the abuses of the world and the new police state under which they were constantly under surveillance -clearly Bush's America after 9/11/2001-, Harold is more interested in mediating than fighting: "ANTIGONE: You should look for me fighting in a revolution. HAROLD: Look for me meditating in a monastery." (128) "Each has different approaches to the world: Harold thinks the world can be changed

through meditation, whereas Antigone opts for defiance and revolution"(MacDonald23). While this piece invokes some of the injustices caused by political conflict worldwide, Harold and Antigone cannot agree on right action: Antigone accuses Harold of meditating too much, while Harold finds Antigone full of rage. Now, Antigone chooses to "honor her ancestors" and her "traditions", a Japanese twist to "honoring the unwritten laws of the Gods, as the Sophoclean Antigone did"(MacDonald23).

Sometimes, they hear Irene, Antigone's sister, in the world above reciting tragedies about murdered children by fictitious weapons of mass destruction, a mushroom cloud from Hiroshima, mustard gas, and war rationing, economic sanctions-and trying to get someone to help her. She narrates the problems of their family's incestuous origin, a father who, "gouged his eyes out for his crimes of unnatural sex and parricide" (123) and two brothers named Eteocles and Polynices, killing each other for no given reasons.

Irene reports on and gives perspective on the world situation; she knows about the abuses, including the Japanese in America in concentration camps during World War II, besides the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with Americans dropping atomic bombs that targeted civilians. Then she cites Treblinka, an infamous Nazi concentration camp in Poland, together with the racial atrocities of Bosnia and Cambodia. Irene, whose name means peace in Greek defends peace at any price and does not defy the law in the way Antigone does: IRENE: We have the right to live. Some things are bigger than you. There is a time to wait and a time to act. You must be patient."(120)

In the meantime, the books in the underworld (the bardo waiting room) that still have blank pages at the end consume Antigone and Harold's attention. They even find all the warm things they have written about one another: They have books that tell them about themselves, books of fate and human effort, and blank ones for the future. Antigone reads about one friend who left her comfortable house to strike out on her own.

Nevertheless, their future is not to remain in the underworld but to return to that other world to go "back to Red again" where, "they will live out their own destinies, where history is saturated with blood, constantly staining human actions red again and again"(Martin86).

As the *Antigone Project's* last play wraps up, Irene reminds us of the very specific Greek way of seeing tragedy and its endless cycles of familial violence:

IRENE. You were right. The damage done to human decency, democracy, and rational thinking is too great. There is no turning back. We live in lies and racial profiling and threats disguised as freedom speeches, and no one will help me bury your paleness and Harold's bloody red. The city is under high security alert, the color red. Red City. Red in my house. Red human history. (125)

Miyagawa uses the disintegration of history, as a series of distinct occurrences with unique qualities, as a device. In *Red Again*, Carol Martin argues, "Miyagawa flattens the temporal depth of history into an eternally recurring present making it seem like we are being swallowed by the violent and unjust repetitions of history. Miyagawa's Antigone is both burdened with and hopeful about history. History's stories repeat themselves even as there is the possibility of something new being written on the white pages of the future"(86).

ANTIGONE. I know right now how it feels like all violent acts and atrocities in human history are converging and happening in one instant. I know it feels like that instant is a loop and it plays and plays and never stops. Red, again and again. But there is white in these books. Irene, please hear me. (126)

In an interview, Miyagawa clarifies that the ashes and blood of history and the possible purity of a future yet to be written, "comprise the continuum of hope and despair for Antigone in *Red Again*...That Antigone is female, that her actions take enormous courage, that she risks her own life, and that she is finally recognized as being right when Creon loses everything makes the basic narrative about both despair and



hope"(25). Though nothing changes, political acts remain important. Irene reminds us that Antigone will always be here to remind us.

Marianne McDonald points out:

Perhaps Antigone's lesson is that she should not be so much of a madwoman, as Irene pointed out, although she can still defend human rights, and perhaps Harold will learn compassion and humanity towards others even while meditating and in a convent: both are convinced they will find each other in their new lives. This is a love story about two admirable people; it ends with more hope than any of the plays in this project about Antigone: like Buddhism, it allows learning from one's mistakes and giving those in error another chance. (24)

Antigone has lent itself to numerous re-interpretations from Anouilh to Brecht to Malina. Reviewer Phoebe Hoban in the New York Times writes, "It has everything: incest, fratricide, co-dependency, betrayal, suicide and martyrdom...Sophocles' Antigone may have been born in 442 B.C., but, as the 'Antigone Project' demonstrates, she lends herself to reincarnation "(7-8). What is at the core Antigone's story? Carol Martin answers saying, "The Plays of the *Antigone Project* do address the ways in which we repeat ourselves in history, the ways governments enact racism even in the face of sacrifice of one's life to defend the country, legal systems that discriminate against women and abiding self-interest in the face of the need for ethical actions"(90). Antigone is primarily seen as woman who acts against the role assigned to her by history and/or society: "She acts in the public sphere and as such justly challenges the ways in which the public sphere is still governed by males, sexism, and racism. Powerfully, in all these plays when Antigone takes a moral action, it is for the benefit of everyone, not women alone. She is a woman acting as a woman but for the 'general good' and for the protection of the individual"(Martin90). What we make of her is also a part of what we make of ourselves both history and in the rapidly changing landscapes of national cultures.

McDonald emphasizes,

These new plays celebrate the potential of women to achieve glory, not in winning wars, but in following their conscience. They also show us victims, but at least all of them followed their passionate dreams. Should we take a stand as Antigone does when we see clearly that something is wrong? Or should we choose Ismene's part, and follow the leader? Will no one ever learn the lessons from their past, and how compromise benefits both cities and individuals? That choice of what to do is always yours. (25)

Not only did she attempt the impossible, but she herself seems impossible to label, and to define. Antigone's willingness to act upon her beliefs makes her an archetype of secular individualism and a metaphor that continues to be contemporary and relevant.

Lisa Schlesinger illustrates:

Dead in her cave, it's hard not to think of Antigone as a Christ-figure, possibly rising. In all of the plays there is a motif of rising: rising from the dead, rising out of the ashes, while we know from Sophocles' original narrative that she won't. The playwrights let Antigone's destiny remain open to interpretation, to wonder, to the imagination. Tragedy no longer has just one ending. *Antigone Project* demands we revisit her myth in light of our present circumstances. It also reminds us that to seek justice requires vigilance, constant renewal of the spirit, and the willingness to see anew. It moves us to rise out of the current of history and re-envision so that we may create new possibilities, new hope. (9)

Theatre attempts to give context to the myths of the ancient times so that we may see ourselves in those stories. Humankind continues to learn from the past, while repeating the mistakes of its ancestors. Whether it is ancient Greece, World War I, or post 9/11 America, the play's interpretations of Antigone reveal that while human tragedy seems everlasting and inevitable, one person can break the cycle by operating out of love and conscience. Antigone's moral policy and sacrifice will always remind us of our task for the future: to challenge and exceed limits while nevertheless maintaining our human rights, dignity, and voice.

## Works Cited

- Antigone Project: A Play in Five Parts* by Tanya Barfield, Karen Hartman, Chiori Miyagawa, Lynn Nottage & Caridad Svich. NoPassport Press, 2009.
- Foster, Verna A. Ed. *Dramatic Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends: Essays on Recent Plays*. McFarland & Company, Inc. 2012.
- Hoban, Phoebe. "Five Faces of Antigone, From Surfer Babe to Widow." *New York Times*. 27 October 2004, pp 7-8.
- Hutcheon, Linda. "In Defense of Literary Adaptation as Cultural Production." *M/C Journal* vol.10, no. 2, 2007.
- . *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.
- Kabatchnik, Amnon. *Blood on the Stage, 480 B.C., to 1600 A.D.: Milestone Plays of Murder, Mystery and Mayhem*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2014.
- Miyagawa, Chiori. "Interview with the author." 10 June 2007, pp 25-27.
- Martin, Carol. "The Political Is Personal: Feminism, Democracy and Antigone Project." in: *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works*. Edited by Sharon Friedman Jefferson. McFarland, 2009.
- Nicklas, Pascal and Oliver Lindner. Eds. *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation*. De Gruyter, 2012.
- Roth, Maya E. Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Schlesinger, Lisa. Preface to *Antigone Project: A Play in Five Parts* by Tanya Barfield, Karen Hartman, Chiori Miyagawa, Lynn Nottage & Caridad Svich. NoPassport Press, 2009.
- Söderbäck, Fanny (Ed). *SUNY Series in Gender Theory: Feminist Readings of Antigone*. State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Sommer, Elyse. "Antigone Project." *A CurtainUp Review* [www.curtainup.com](http://www.curtainup.com)  
Accessed 23 May 2017.
- Wilmer, Steve. "Women in Greek Tragedy Today: A Reappraisal." *Theatre Research International*, vol.32, no.2, 2007, pp.107-110.

