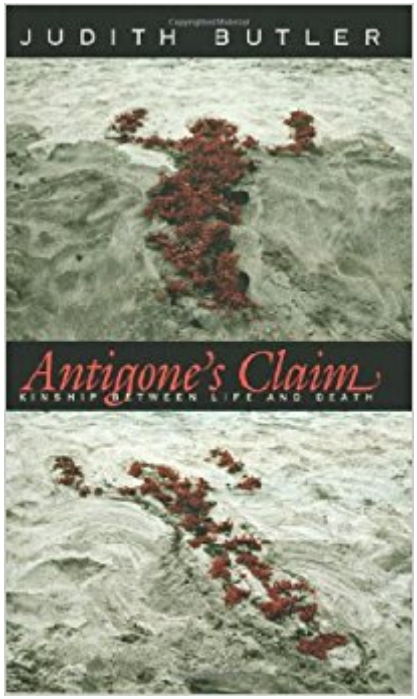
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Antigone's Claim



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Synopsis

The celebrated author of Gender Trouble here redefines Antigone's legacy, recovering her revolutionary significance and liberating it for a progressive feminism and sexual politics. Butler's new interpretation does nothing less than reconceptualize the incest taboo in relation to kinshipÃ¢â ¬â ¢and open up the concept of kinship to cultural change.Antigone, the renowned insurgent from Sophocles's Oedipus, has long been a feminist icon of defiance. But what has remained unclear is whether she escapes from the forms of power that she opposes. Antigone proves to be a more ambivalent figure for feminism than has been acknowledged, since the form of defiance she exemplifies also leads to her death. Butler argues that Antigone represents a form of feminist and sexual agency that is fraught with risk. Moreover, Antigone shows how the constraints of normative kinship unfairly decide what will and will not be a livable life.Butler explores the meaning of Antigone, wondering what forms of kinship might have allowed her to live. Along the way, she considers the works of such philosophers as Hegel, Lacan, and Irigaray. How, she asks, would psychoanalysis have been different if it had taken AntigoneÃ¢â ¬â ¢the "postoedipal" subjectÃ¢â ¬â ¢rather than Oedipus as its point of departure? If the incest taboo is reconceived so that it does not mandate heterosexuality as its solution, what forms of sexual alliance and new kinship might be acknowledged as a result? The book relates the courageous deeds of Antigone to the claims made by those whose relations are still not honored as those of proper kinship, showing how a culture of normative heterosexuality obstructs our capacity to see what sexual freedom and political agency could be.

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Customer Reviews

Butler is interested in Antigone as a liminal figure between the family and the state, between life and death... but also as a figure, like all her kin, who represents the non-normative family, a set of kinship relations that seems to defy the standard model... one senses in Butler's interest... homage to those who have lived, or have tried to live, and to those who have died 'on the sexual margins.' (Georgette Fleischer The Nation)Antigone's Claim is a work of intricate and detailed analysis of enormously difficult material. Butler masterfully leads us to... a newfound theoretical activism within the political domain. (Maria Cimitile Hypatia)Brief but powerful and provocative nook. (Shireen R. K. Patell, New York University Signs)Thought-provoking and politically provocative... Bulter joins the great philosophical tradition which grapples with the ancient tragedy of Sophocles. (Ido Geiger Hagar: Studies in Culture Polity Identities)

The celebrated author of Gender Trouble here redefines Antigone's legacy, recovering her revolutionary significance and liberating it for a progressive feminism and sexual politics. Antigone has long been a feminist icon of defiance. But what has remained unclear is whether she escapes from the forms of power that she opposes, since the form of defiance she exemplifies also leads to her death. Butler argues that Antigone represents a form of feminist and sexual agency that is fraught with risk. Moreover, Antigone shows how a culture of normative heterosexuality obstructs our capacity to see what sexual freedom and political agency could be.

I haven't finished this extremely short text yet. It was originally a small series of lectures. Basically, Butler critiques Hegel's and Lacan's appropriations of Antigone (both the play and, especially, the character) to represent a certain ideal. She summarizes rather lucidly both Hegel's and Lacan's positions. Of course, the problem with both Hegel and Lacan is that they are so dense and (often) obscure that, like Nietzsche, they get appropriated left and right themselves. So understanding what they *really* ever meant is always slippery. But Hegel and Lacan are familiar territory for Butler. She's no Classicist, and she's upfront about that. I think she does a phenomenal job highlighting the ultimately untenable postion(s) Hegel and, to a lesser extent, Lacan assume in relation to Antigone. I haven't finish yet, but Butler is certainly setting up her own "feminist" reading. It's not concerned with "what the Greeks thought" the way classical scholars (by definition) often are. Rather, she's

clearly relating Greek tragedy to the modern world in response to the past 300 years of (post)enlightenment thinking. A more recent text that also deals with a lot of this material is The Antigone Complex by Cecilia Sjoholm - if you're interested.

Antigone's revolt lives on! As Butler says herself in the introduction, she is not a classicist and has no desire to be one. This book is about the intellectual/artistic legacy of the figure of Antigone and the political and philosophical implications of her performative resistance to state power. Having taken a seminar in 1998 with Butler on the very topic of Antigone, I can assure you that the author is well aware of the ambiguity of Sophocles's play. As Butler demonstrates, this ambiguity is what has driven so many diverse interpretations by major thinkers such as Hegel and Lacan and playwrights like Hoelderlin and Brecht. Butler insightfully analyzes the critical-artistic tradition that has developed since Sophocles and helps to demonstrate this tradition's continued relevance in the present day--in any case where individual desire conflicts with the institution of the state as it functions to set the parameters of the normal or acceptable in society.

Judith Butler's study of Antigone, over the course of these 3 lectures, yields important and timely insights about how we might understand kinship and love in today's society. Her analysis of Hegel, Levi-Strauss, and Lacan is impressively rigorous. A must read for anyone interested in liguistics, structuralism, feminism and contemporary questions about political belonging.

This is a terrible book. This is I think the worst monograph I have ever read. Miss Butler cannot write English; moreover, she apparently cannot read Greek. Anyone who has taken the trouble to read the Antigone in Greek and translate it (as I have) would know immediately--to drop into the cistern of academic language for a moment--that The Antigone is an "unstable text" We don't even know what many lines mean. The first line "O koinon autodelphon Ismene kara" is untranslatable.If you try you get something like "o common self sister head of Ismene" So we know that it hasto do with kinship. But how do you write about kinship in Antigone with utter lack of humility as Miss Butler does without even knowing what the first line means? We have no idea how this play was received nor do we have any idea what it was intended to be "about". Miss Butler is entitled to her fantasies I suppose but in common with most current academics her fantasies are built on ignorance. Can she scan even the stikamuthia much less the choral odes? Does Miss Butler have any idea what "deinos" can properly mean in Attic Greek? Most importantly, has she given ANY attention to the Greek particles in the text? Does she know how they function or rather does she have the remotest

idea how they function? Does she even know Denniston's work? Greek is a language in which words can have a broad range of meaning--a study of character is very difficult even for a great man like Jebb or a fine scholar like Charles Segal. Does she really understand how "polis" and "oikos" contend with each other? No she doesn't. Robert Penn Warren stopped teaching when he realized his graduate students could not recite or scan an English Sonnet. Miss Butler could easily have been one of his students. But her chutzpah knows no bounds. She brings her interpretative ignorance to a language she does not know. I know that modern academics like to write essays without any recourse to evidence. No one has any business doing interpretive work on Antigone if they do not know Greek. Miss Butler might take the trouble to learn it--who knows it might improve her English---NOT! For people seriously interested in reading the Antigone--I suggest Sir Richard Jebb's Greek English text with commmentary or Andrew Brown's more recent literal translation (with Greek and Commentary)

Judging from the reader reviews on this website, Judith Butler has yet again succeeded in provoking the outrage of several diehard and blue-in-the-face classics scholars. Those classicists who feel outraged by her work might consider her illuliminating comments on HÃƒÂ¶lderlin's own translation of Antigone, translations that themselves were received as scandals in their time and that continue, like Antigone in Butler's view, to provoke critical thought. If you think Antigone belongs on the shelves of a dusty library, you might as well leave this book alone, since here she's haunting queer bars and dining at the most interesting and vital family meals imaginable, where queer sons and daughters struggle together with their just as queer parents to figure out how it is that we might say our word to a world that persists in ignoring what it is that we have to say.

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