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SPECTRAL PRESENCES AND ABSENCES IN ANNE CARSON'S *ANTIGONICK*



ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the ways that the visual and textual features of Anne Carson's *Antigonick* present a particularly spectral reading of the body within Sophocles' tragedy. Carson's translation materially conjures spectral absences and presences in a way that establishes itself as a posterior physical monument to its ancient predecessor and furthermore captures the corporeal questions posed by Sophocles — such as, how might we conceptualise with the embodied aftermath of the sexual union of incestuous bodies? How are we to deal with the bodies which use themselves as weapons against the state and which violate both social and political codes? In a tragedy whose action pivots around the status of the body of a brother, the misplacement of the body of a sister, and whose crises stem from instances of the misplaced body parts of a father and mother, the presence and treatment of the bodies lurking about the text of Carson's ghost world is central.

IN A STAGED READING OF *ANTIGONICK* performed at the 2012 Louisiana Literature Festival, Anne Carson prefaces her translation of Sophocles' tragedy with a short introduction entitled "The Task of the Translator of Antigone".¹ With this titular nod to Walter Benjamin's pivotal essay on translation,² Carson situates herself within the canon of translation theory when she declares that her job is to carry over the character of Antigone and her "problem" from Greek into English. She concludes her introduction with the announcement, "Dear Antigone, I take it as the task of the translator to forbid you should ever lose your screams". Thus broadcasting her mission to bring these screams into English, Carson's translation incorporates non-traditional typography, illustration, and paper to offer up a new visual and readerly experience of Sophocles' tragedy. Carson designates her task as one of protecting Antigone, both as character and as text, from vocal oblivion.

The paratextual Benjamin reference invites us to consider what sort of "translation" we find in *Antigonick*. This paper uses the term "translation",

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1. Carson (2012a).
 2. Benjamin (1923).

partly out of deference to Carson's own self-designation as "the translator" and the book's cover text, which reads "TRANSLATED BY ANNE CARSON".³ Furthermore, the author operates in agreement with Charles Martindale, that translation is an act of interpretation and "a saying in other words, a constant renegotiation of sameness-within-difference and difference-within-sameness."⁴ Insofar as *Antigonick* includes additions and augmentations that are not based on the literal language uttered by Sophocles' characters, it still enacts the gesture of "saying in other words" as well as saying in other media.

The visibility of Carson — and Robert Currie and Bianca Stone, the illustrator and designer of the book — in the translation does not mean that *Antigonick* is not a translation. Venuti writes that English-language translation theory had developed a critical interest, around the start of the twentieth century, in moving away from a discourse of "invisible" translators: he argues that the field displayed an interest in "poems that were translations as well as translations of poems",⁵ but argues that this disposition was ultimately marginalised in subsequent translation discourse. Carson's translation, whose semi-transparent vellum pages play with the very notions of transience and visibility, certainly falls into this category of a poem that is also a translation. Furthermore, *Antigonick* functions as a cross-generic, multimedia manifestation of Sophocles' tragedy that endeavours to translate not only text but also a cultural history of *Antigone*: what Carson translates is therefore not logocentric, nor is the translator invisible, in the sense that she treats both Sophocles' *Antigone* as well as its reception history as her objects of translation.

There is, of course, a tension that emerges from the generic disparity between Sophocles' text as a dramatic script, and Carson's translation, which is an emphatically material art-book. Carson transforms a text written for the stage into a book that, in many ways, challenges the possibility of staging. David Wiles, three years before the publication of *Antigonick*, writes that the dominant tension facing the field of translation theory in 2008 — especially as it pertains to performance and dramatic translation — is no longer the "estrangement vs. familiarization" dichotomy: in its place, Wiles argues, emerges the "translator-as-poet" situated in opposition to the "translator-as-dramaturg".⁶ Although the primary aim of this paper is not to situate Carson's *Antigonick* within a wider discourse on developments in translation theory, I do argue that *Antigonick* collapses this division that Wiles identifies. On the one hand, *Antigonick* presents an extreme poeticisation of the Sophoclean

3. Carson (2012b), cover.

4. Martindale (1993) 86.

5. Venuti (1994) 187.

6. Wiles (2007) 363.

Greek language:⁷ beyond the poetry of Carson's language generally, each page of *Antigonick* can be isolated from the book and read as an individual poem, and its particular typographical orientation nearly invites us to do so. On the other hand, the book itself, when read, presents an individual choreographic performance through the interplay of text and image for the reader; the book's metaphorical staging is enabled and amplified by its material features in the process of reading. *Antigonick* seems, furthermore, to function as an answer to H.D.'s call for a classical scholarship that challenges itself to dethrone verbal comprehension as the pinnacle of the discipline. Thus H.D. invites us to do something with and to Greek:

I know that we need scholars to decipher and interpret the Greek, but we also need: poets and mystics and children to re-discover this Hellenic world, to see *through* the words; the word being but the outline, the architectural structure of that door or window, through which we are all free, scholar and unlettered alike, to pass.⁸

The authorial presence of a scholar, a mystic, and a child can all be felt in *Antigonick*, for as we flip through the pages — pushing and peering through their semi-transparency, we too, as H.D. commands, “see *through* the words”.

In this paper, I work through the text and images to suggest that *Antigonick* renders the bodies of its characters as engaged in a dance of competing presence and absence, and thus the translation forces us to revisit and reexamine the precarious and interstitial bodies within Sophocles' drama. Carson's *Antigonick* conjures spectral absences and presences in a way that resonates with the corporeal questions posed by Sophocles, such as, for example, how might we conceptualise with the physical, embodied aftermath of the sexual union of incestuous bodies? How are we to deal with the bodies which use themselves as weapons against the state? How are we to deal with bodies, then, that violate both social and political codes?⁹ *Antigonick* begins to answer these “body questions” that Sophocles' text establishes, and furthermore, the book sets itself up as a posterior physical monument to its

7. This “poeticisation” has been noted in various reviews by Steiner (2012), Stokes (2012), Anderson (2013) and Scranton (2014), who uses the term *translation* only in scare quotes. In its place he uses his own metaphorical description of what *Antigonick* is; if not a translation, then “a perfect example of how boldly Carson can shape antique shards into a disco ball incandescent with freak genius” (10).

8. Doolittle (n.d.).

9. For the irony of Antigone's suicide, and thus her prioritisation of her brother's body over the bodies of a future husband and children (an irony which is predicated on her parents' incest), see Johnston (2006) 182. For more “body questions”, see Robert (2009) 416, which discusses the centrality of the body to the crises in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

ancient predecessor. As Carson reminds the reader over and over again, the text of *Antigonick* itself is haunted not only by the misfortunes of Oedipus and the body of Polyneices, but also by the entire history of receptions of *Antigone*; and thus the translation explores the issues of embodiment in Sophocles' text as well as in its own relation to that text.

In a tragedy whose action pivots around the status of the body of a brother, and whose crises stem from instances of the misplaced body parts of a father and mother, the presence and treatment of the bodies lurking about the text of Carson's ghost world is central.¹⁰ My aim is to look at how the material characteristics of the text activate the ghostliness in Carson's translation of *Antigone*. In the first section, which is titled "Spectral Presences", I discuss *Antigonick's* engagement with a strand of performance theory that establishes tragedy as a haunted genre. I then offer analyses of some of the spectral bodies within Bianca Stone's illustrations, and I argue that the translation makes a project of indicating to the reader that the multitude of Antigone receptions has rendered Sophocles' play as a ghostly and distended entity. I conclude the "Spectral Presences" section with a discussion of the precarious status of certain bodies within *Antigone*. The second section, "Spectral Absences", also opens by situating *Antigonick* within performance theory and focusing on the ways in which the material reification of Carson's book is predicated on the absence of the embodied actor. The rest of this section focuses on textual concerns within the translation, including the typography, the language, and the characters. Finally, I use Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion of the sparagmotic act of restaging classical drama to characterise *Antigonick* as a simultaneously dismembered and re-membered text, thus rendering the book itself a spectral presence.

SPECTRAL PRESENCES

The ghostly embodiment which haunts the pages of *Antigonick* can be detected to some degree in all materialisations of the tragic genre and, furthermore, in all theatrical performance. Marvin Carlson describes theatre as generically "obsessed always with things that return, that appear again tonight".¹¹ Characters, utterances, and events return to the stage from an ambiguous elsewhere implied by the dramatic script, in a gesture that renders

10. On the linking between the bodies of Oedipus and Jocasta to Eteocles and Polyneices, see R. Gibbons and C. Segal (2003), ad loc. 163-66: "Sophokles again uses the contrast of one and two and the language of mutuality to interweave the death of brother by brother with the incestuous union of Oidipous and Iokaste".

11. Carlson (2001) 15.

the actor, the language and the performance venue “haunted, and that haunting has been an essential part of the theatre’s meaning to and reception by its audiences in all times and all places”.¹² The physical space of the theatre, according to Carlson, functions as a site whose “ghostliness” and “sense of return”¹³ permeate the performance of a dramatic script. Patrice Pavis indicates that this “sense of return” applies not only to the theatrical space, but to the audience’s eyes, ears, memories, and even temporality: “The representation, or performance, is not, or at least not only, spectacle; it is rendering absence present, presenting it *again* to our memories and our ears, to our temporality (not only to our eyes)”.¹⁴ Carson’s *Antigonick* seems to capture this ghostliness that Carlson describes in its creation of presence out of absence, all inside the physical ‘body’ of the book itself; *Antigonick* requires no instantiation of its performance to communicate the haunted aesthetic to the reader. Carson takes this theatrical atmosphere — “the most haunted of human cultural structures”¹⁵ — and infects her text with it. In this way, *Antigonick* generates the spectral theatrical mood within the material of its pages, allowing the translation both to transcend and trouble the logocentric expectations of translations of ancient drama.¹⁶

More specifically, the presence of ghostly or transparent bodies emerges most literally in Bianca Stone’s interspersed illustrations. The drawn bodies in the translation offer a marked contrast to the boldness and heavy visibility of the written words: these images, unlike the fixed and static letters represented in the written text, are intermediate and illusory, mobile and ephemeral. Because of the semi-transparent surface on which the illustrations appear, there is no stability to their placement within the text. The words of the translation become visible through the bodies, but the complex dynamic of word and body is reversed from its position in the theatre: in dramatic performance, the body’s presence is continuous, while words emerge from that body, then dissolve and disappear as the play progresses. *Antigonick* offers an inversion of this, where the words are endowed with solidity and the bodies instead float around them, both occupying and then floating away from them, like shape-shifting spectres.

The first of Stone’s illustrations¹⁷ that appears within *Antigonick* intro-

12. Ibid. Cf. Williams (2006) 188 on “the call from the past, from the crypt” at stake in an alternative performance tradition, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine*.

13. Ibid., 1-2.

14. Pavis (1998) 398, italics my own.

15. Ibid.

16. Wiles (2007) 363-366.

17. Excepting the illustration which precedes the cover page.

duces this ghostly corporeality immediately after the prologue. The image (fig. 1) represents two bodies on the verge of breaking their hand-hold.

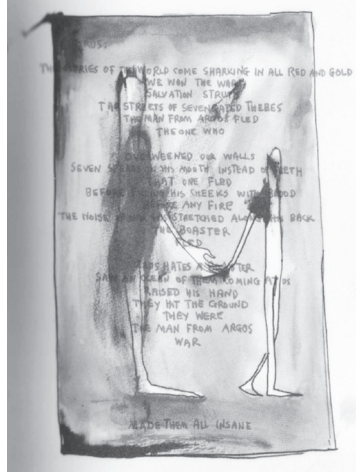


Figure 1, *Antigonick* pic. 1.

These two figures float atop a macabre red, white, and black backdrop, and parts of their bodies appear effaced with black ink. Through this image, we can partially read the first choral speech, and the text suggests that the ghosts of Antigone and Ismene lurk above and between the words of the Chorus, haunting them like ghosts. The Chorus announces in their parodos,

WE WON THE WAR
 SALVATION STRUTS
 THE STREETS OF SEVENGATED THEBES¹⁸

but the sketchy and blood-stained rendering of Antigone and Ismene cautions the reader that this victory itself is polluted by the children of Oedipus; we are meant to feel their presence as we try to read through their semi-transparent bodies. Brown's commentary on the first episode notes the presence of Antigone in the audience's imagination, even while Antigone is excluded from the scene: "Antigone is not named in this act, but is by no means forgotten, and the tension between our knowledge of her role and the ignorance

18. Carson (2012b) 5. The pagination I offer is my own, because *Antigonick* excludes page numbers. I begin the numbering on the page that includes the cast list at "1", continuing on numbering the recto pages and naming the verso pages, for example, "1v." I exclude the vellum pages in my numbering. I name the first vellum illustration, which sits before the cover page, "i," and start numbering from 1 on after that.

displayed by characters and Chorus makes for constant suspense and dramatic irony".¹⁹

The reader, of course, has the option of reading the choral speech through the image or flipping the page to expose the text. But even when the reader chooses the latter, the bodies remain in the reader's peripheral vision, as they haunt the left side of the page. The text invites us to continue our gaze because the bodies fall into a sketchy, faded frame on the verso page. Chrissy Williams elaborates on the layout of the pages: "The left-hand always starts with either a blank page or a mostly blank page showing the occasional ghost of a rectangle, the suggestion of an empty frame or comics panel".²⁰ The consistent blankness of the recto page (a spectral absence) and the presence of the empty frame — itself an evacuated, ghostly space — indicate that Stone's illustrations are not only meant to be looked at, but also looked through, flipped back and forth: the bodies' presence is mobile and shape-shifting. The *parodos* becomes literally overshadowed in one moment, and then haunted in the next, by the prologue.

The black blurring that is visible on the two forms in this image suggests an intentional effacement of the characters' corporeality. The impulse to see the body, which accompanies traditional theatrical experience,²¹ is both thwarted and complicated: the reader is denied full view of these bodies, yet can gaze through them. This obscuring effect could also be described as engaging with Antigone's performance history and its early performance context, as an attempt to generate the darkness or shadows in which a fifth century Athenian might have gazed upon the sisters; Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood reminds us, "At the very beginning of the play the audience saw two women in the dark, in a place which... is beyond the courtyard's gates, and thus a place where they ought not to be".²² Below their feet in Carson's translation appear the words "MADE THEM ALL INSANE",²³ masked by a wash of evocative red colouring, which visualises the fact that the war and the incest bubble boldly below the bodies at play.

The next illustration, which falls after the line "MADE THEM ALL INSANE", presents five bodies whose forms are less shadowy and abstracted, but whose heads are replaced by cinderblocks (fig. 2). Stone's illustration flirts with the visibility of the body here, fluctuating between revelation and re-veiling, transparency and opacity. The cinderblocks that replace the Cho-

19. Brown (1987) ad loc. 162-331.

20. Williams (2012).

21. See Hall (2004) 51-89.

22. Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) 138.

23. Carson (2012b) 5.

rus' heads emphasise the fact that we as readers gaze not only at surfaces but also at transparencies. This absurd surrogate for the tragic mask instantiates a moment of dual presence and absence. The cinderblock is structured from heavy material (while also vaguely resembling a cartoon version of Greek columns), yet it constructs an empty void, and thus insists upon its simultaneous materiality and vacuity.

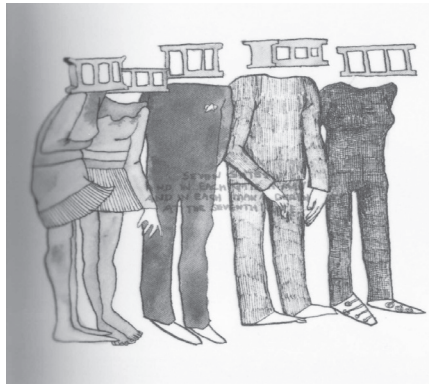


Figure 2, *Antigonick* pic. 2.

In her adaptation of the prologue and the parodos, Carson thus signals that *Antigone* has undergone a kind of interpretive rupturing and scattering, and she presents the text as a ghostly reassembly of something dismembered by its own history. Her translation wastes no time in impressing upon the reader that the tragedy and its characters have been stretched and disjointed through a multitude of receptions that have incorporated themselves into the corpus of *Antigone* itself.²⁴ Antigone opens the prologue with reference to one of her Hegelian receptions, which also references Sourvinou-Inwood's reading of Sophocles' tragedy, when she says to Ismene, "WE BEGIN IN THE DARK AND BIRTH IS THE DEATH OF US".²⁵ She both internalises and performs her Hegelian reading, as is indicated when Ismene later chides Antigone, "QUOTING HEGEL AGAIN".²⁶ The cover of *Antigonick* liberates the *Antigone* from Sophocles' authorship alone, thus acknowledging the text's status not as singular and static, but rather as disjointed and dis-

24. For Antigone's discussions of her receptions see Carson (2012b) 17 (Hegel); 17-18 (Lacan), 33 (Brecht). For the texts to which she refers, see Brecht (1949), Butler (2000), Hegel (1986) and Hegel (1992), and Lacan (1992).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

seminated. Carson calls her text a translation of something that is associated with Sophocles, but she does not lend primary ownership of *Antigone* to the tragedian alone. The text on the cover reads (fig. 3):

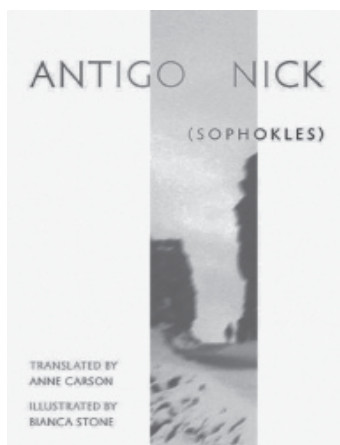


Figure 3. *Antigonick* cover.

In offering this ambiguously parenthetical rather than explicitly authorial credit to Sophocles, the cover seems to suggest that Sophocles is neither the owner nor the primary source of the *Antigone* that Carson presents. Sophocles is granted only an abstract, bracketed association with the *Antigone*: the absence of a preposition before “SOPHOKLES” denies Carson’s reader an explicitly defined relation between the tragedian and the *Antigone*. Thus *Antigonick* announces to Carson’s readers that what she translates is not Sophocles’ *Antigone* alone: she is translating the Antigones of Hegel, Brecht, Lacan, Butler, and others. Between the cover’s reluctance to name Sophocles as “author” and the repeated emphasis on the various receptions of *Antigone* as figure and *Antigone* as a dramatic script, Carson presents a dismembered text, which — in the new corpus of *Antigonick* — simultaneously meets and disrupts the reader’s expectations of familiarity with the preceding *Antigones*. Carson presents a text not solely Sophoclean, but one which more closely resembles a Frankenstein’s monster, assembled of various receptions and interpretations.²⁷

Yet in the midst of all of this fragmentation and augmentation of *Antig-*

27. Cf. Steiner (1984) 8, for an introduction to the theatrical reception history that has participated in the elevation of *Antigone* as the pinnacle of artistic achievement between c.1790 and c.1905. Cf. Mee-Foley (2011) 1, and passim, for an account of international theatrical receptions of Sophocles’ play, transmuted to address specific cultural, national, and social concerns distinct from the play’s original context.

one, and despite the fact that *Antigonick* de-authorises Sophocles, Carson's poetical gestures are still consistent with the Antigone character that is familiar to readers of Sophocles' text. This Sophoclean Antigone, residing somewhere between life and death, comes fully into herself, Carson seems to say, through the process of fragmentation and interpretation that has occurred in her lively and enthusiastic reception history. For the body of Sophocles' Antigone is fragmented into a paradoxical duality of living and dead, and Teiresias articulates that she becomes a spectral presence as a result of Kreon's punishment: ἀνθ' ὧν ἔχεις μὲν τῶν ἄνω βαλὼν κάτω / ψυχὴν τ' ἀτίμως ἐν τάφῳ κατὰ κείρας.²⁸ Her double occupation of categories — living and dead, burier and buried — speaks to her infectious disruption of politics; Butler describes Antigone as a figure who represents “that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed”.²⁹ The liminality of Antigone's physical body and her social identity — fragmented between life and death — functions as a source of pollution for the rest of the narrative's social and political fabric.

Carson infuses several areas of her translation with a sense of contamination and impurity, which are a necessary effect of another spectral presence: the unburied body of Polyneices. Robert Parker emphasises the significance in an ancient Greek cultural context of leaving a body unburied when he points out that purification cannot begin for the family of the deceased or the location of death until the proper disposal of the corpse is performed. Parker points to Sophocles' *Antigone* as a manifestation of cultural attitudes toward the treatment of corpses and the issue of pollution.³⁰ The manifestation of this pollution arises not necessarily from Kreon's denial of full funeral rites to Polyneices, but instead from the confusion of life and death that emerges as a result of leaving the body entirely unburied.³¹ As Carson's Teiresias puts it, reflecting on both the bodies of Polyneices and of Antigone: “YOU'VE MADE A STRUCTURAL MISTAKE WITH LIFE AND DEATH MY DEAR YOU'VE PUT THE LIVING UNDERGROUND AND KEPT THE DEAD UP HERE THAT IS SO WRONG”.³² The unburied corpse of Polyneices becomes a spectral presence for Thebes and a spectral absence for the underworld, because Kreon's edict to leave it unburied means that it functions as a source of ghostliness and haunting in both realms.

The atmosphere of haunting that Carson generates in *Antigonick* comes

28. *Ant.* 1068-69.

29. Butler (2000) 2.

30. Parker (1983) 38.

31. Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) 146-47.

32. Carson (2012b) 39.

accompanied by this sense of pollution as a result of the play's treatment of bodies; the presences are not only spectral, but also infectious. Addressing Haemon, Kreon describes Antigone as a *ἔλκος*, or a "festering wound that will not heal".³³ Carson's Tiresias, however, thrusts the infection back toward Kreon in his speech, implying that Kreon himself is the true *ἔλκος*:

TEIRESIAS: [TO KREON]
 YOU'RE STANDING ON A RAZOR. I HEAR THE BIRDS THEY
 'RE BEBARBARIZMENIZED THEY'RE MAKING MONSTER
 SOUNDS THE FIRES WON'T LIGHT THE RITES GO WADNG YOU
 KNOW MY TECHNOLOGIES YOU KNOW THE FAILING OF THE
 SIGN IS IN ITSELF A SIGN. FROM YOU A SICKNESS FROM
 YOU A SUPPURATION FROM YOU A SURFEIT COMES OUT
 UPON THE CITY. THIS PILE OF ROT THAT WAS THE SON OF
 OIDIPOUS

Figure 4, *Antigonick* p. 39.

Carson emphasises, expands, and layers Sophocles' *νοσεῖ*,³⁴ transforming the sense of infection from a single verbal instantiation, incorporating the sense of *πλήρεις*,³⁵ to a hissing, alliterated nounal tricolon in "A SICKNESS... A SUPPURATION... A SURFEIT". And while it is Kreon's mind, or *σῆς ἐκ φρενός*,³⁶ from which the disease comes in Sophocles' text, Carson's Teiresias directly cites Kreon himself as the source of the infection and emphasises it through her triple repetition of the phrase "FROM YOU". Kreon later adopts this vocabulary when he learns of Eurydice's suicide, as he exclaims:

O FILTH OF DEATH WHO CAN CLEAN
 YOU OUT O LAUGH OF DEATH YOU CRACK ME YOU
 CRACK
 ME OPEN YOU CRACK ME OPEN AGAIN.³⁷

Kreon is opened; he himself becomes a defiled wound. Carson thus identifies and amplifies the sense of pollution from the language of Sophocles' text, and in so doing, reveals that the infection has spread to and from the spectral presences of Sophocles' characters themselves.

33. Brown (1987) ad loc. 652.

34. *Ant.* 1015.

35. *Ibid.*, 1017.

36. *Ibid.*, 1015.

37. Carson (2012b) 49.

SPECTRAL ABSENCES

Whilst *Antigonick* insists upon its own material presence as object, this presence is predicated upon certain necessary spectral absences. One primary absence is that of the body of the actor. The actor is always absent yet implied by a dramatic script; *Antigonick*'s own visual materiality, however, precludes its possible embodiment, as elements of placement, design, and image defy conventional translatability from page to stage.³⁸ The liminality of Antigone's positioning in Sophocles' text is emphasised by the blurred image of a chasm on the cover of the book (see again fig. 3): a chasm between the white of the cover's background; a chasm between "ANTIGO" and "NICK"; a chasm between two rocky crags, where an out-of-focus figure invites the viewer to enter further into the chasmal and chiasmal space in which Antigone resides.

Edith Hall, in discussing the corporeal question in performance reception of ancient drama, reiterates Eric Bentley's observation that the presence of the body lies at the heart of the theatrical experience: "The immediate reality of theatre is aggressively physical, corporeal."³⁹ *Antigonick* seems both to preclude and to insist upon this bodily presence, presenting itself both as a theatrical script — where the body is necessarily absent yet anticipated — and as an artist's book, whose own corporeality is manifestly obvious. While I argue that Carson's *Antigonick* transcends the limitations of a logocentric script, her translation's visual ornamentation and stylisation necessarily lack "the body of the actor"⁴⁰: there is no physical body through which the text is verbalised to the audience, and if there were a body, it is unclear how that body would deliver the visual world presented by Carson, Currie, and Stone. The words — their layout, their visual impact — seem to demand the format of the page rather than the voice or presence of an actor. Where Bert States describes the performance of the mime as "essentially an act of defining an invisible world in terms of the visible body"⁴¹, in *Antigonick* we

38. Carson herself stages theatrical readings of *Antigonick*, so I do not mean to suggest that the translation *cannot* or should not be recited or spoken. Furthermore, Ianthe Demos staged *Antigonick* as a dramatic production in 2013 at Harvard University. My suggestion is rather that some of the features of the text do not lend themselves easily to the voice and the stage, just in the way that Harrop-Wiles (2008) 10-12 write that the phrasing, pacing, and typography involved in Ezra Pound's *Women of Trachis* all function to challenge and nearly deny the actors' ability to breathe while performing the script: the embodied hurdles exist for the performers but can be overcome.

39. Bentley in Hall (2004) 62.

40. Hall (2004) 63.

41. States (1995) 25.

face the inverse performance scenario: an art-book that itself defines a *visual* world in terms of absent or problematic bodies. The emphatic absence of the theatrical body thus lies at the core of *Antigonick*.

While the cover of the book functions as *Antigonick*'s first announcement of its own ghostly presence, the text of the translation visually, rhythmically, and rhetorically conjures certain spectral presences as well. The text's unconventional typography and spare use of punctuation commit the translation to a strange mode of speaking. George Steiner condemns the typography as detrimentally monotonous and difficult: "The actual typography lacks all distinction; it borders on the illegible".⁴² Butler, in her reading of *Antigonick*, finds herself less alienated by the typography, and instead locates within it a sense of urgency, volume, and weight, all of which I argue contribute to the ghostliness of the text. Butler writes, "Every line of *Antigonick* is printed in boldface handwriting, emphatic, as if something urgent and excessive has to be loudly said".⁴³ Thus Butler helps to illuminate the fact that the letters — paired with the infrequent punctuation and the deadpan phrasing — make the words on the page read like a collection of epitaphs rather than spoken utterances.⁴⁴ Butler adds, "The lines often stand alone, as if broken off from the original text, stricken monuments", thus it seems that this grave, monumental tone infuses the translation with a macabre sense of belatedness or posteriority with each line (fig. 5).

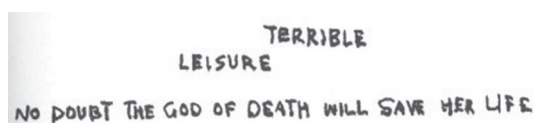


Figure 5, *Antigonick* p. 30.

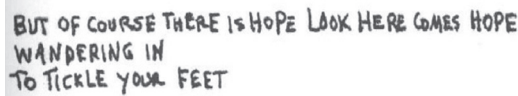
Rather than reducing the effectiveness of the translation, as Steiner suggests, Carson's monumental phrases employ their own presence to reference and conjure an eerie corporeal absence. If the words read like monuments, they possess a heavy presence, whereas the speakers of the words (the characters) become something less like incarnated bodies and something more like ghosts or memories; Carson's translation here flirts with the realm of *séance*. From her phrases, there emerges a summoning of simultaneous and codependent presence and absence: it is the weightiness of the words — whose bold, capitalised letters emphasise their presence — that indicates and

42. Steiner (2012).

43. Butler (2012).

44. See Day (2007) 33-34 and Tanner (1999) 158-64 on Greek epitaphs and reading as performance and activation of poetry.

even necessitates the absence of speaking bodies. The typography and lack of punctuation not only add a sense of gravity to the words, but also complicate the possibility of their utterance; it is difficult, for example, to imagine⁴⁵ how one might enunciate the Chorus' announcement in fig. 6:



BUT OF COURSE THERE IS HOPE LOOK HERE COMES HOPE
WANDERING IN
TO TICKLE YOUR FEET

Figure 6, *Antigonick* p. 21.

Furthermore, how might one conjure an image of the speaking body of Kreon? We are told that he arrives upon the scene in a “NEW POWERBOAT” — obviously technology belonging to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries — but his rhetoric oscillates between modern and antiquated registers (a device of Carson’s that seems to toy with the problem of the antiquarianisms employed by certain translators of ancient texts). When speaking to the Guard, Kreon’s speech is colloquial: he speaks in blunt phrases, like “WELL WE WHAT”; “SO FIND OUT”.⁴⁶ Yet when speaking to Haimon, suddenly Kreon plunges into antiquated English. Again, the translation more closely resembles a graveyard — each phrase or line of speech imitating epitaph — than a dramatic script. The body of the actor is absent from the text by logistical necessity, of course, but the text’s own particular mode of presence also heightens this bodily absence: the typography, punctuation, and phrasing alienate the possibility of the speech naturalistically emerging from acting mouths. Thus the combination of Carson’s bold, monumental lettering and her use of strange and inconsistent rhetorical registers ascribes spectral presences both to the words and to the characters themselves.

In addition to the strange corporeality represented in Stone’s figure drawings, her landscapes heighten the sense of eerie absence that haunts the book. Butler describes these as mysteriously evacuated: “What appears comes from some more modern time, but one that is already vacated, as if some living character had departed the scene not long ago”.⁴⁷ Just as in the images “something is gone, and something is caught, and vibrates still”, so too could we describe the bodies of Polyneices and Antigone. Carson portrays this vividly in her translation of the scene in which the Guard enters to announce to Kreon that the body of Polyneices has been illegally buried:

45. See Harrop-Wiles (2008) for discussion of the inscription of breath and other embodied performance within poetic and dramatic language.

46. Carson (2012b) 9.

47. Butler 2012.

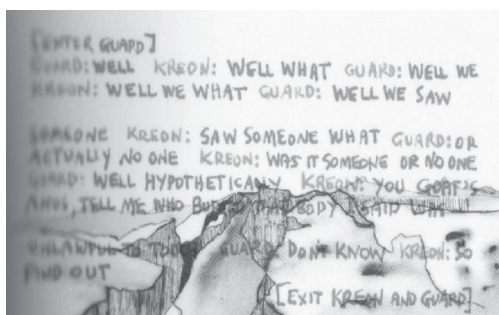


Figure 7, *Antigonick* pic. 22 over p. 39.

The Guard speaks only in incomprehensible stuttering fragments, and his inability to articulate what has happened indicates a problem posed by the body and the deed of Antigone: not only did he not see the actor of the deed (her body), but he also cannot manage to find language to describe the agent of the deed, as he grapples for a suitable expressive vocabulary but fails to find it. The Guard cannot determine or articulate whether Antigone is “SOMEONE” or “ACTUALLY NO ONE”, because he is haunted by her spectral absence from his consciousness and by the possibility of divine intervention. At this point, the Chorus-leader still maintains the possibility that the burial itself was a divine miracle,⁴⁸ further complicating the identity of the burier, and contributing to the sense of the “aura of the supernatural” which Brown describes in his commentary on Sophocles’ lines 249-58.⁴⁹ The Guard presents his anxiety at the fact that “SOMEONE” has invisibly occupied his space and performed the burial; he stammers as if having just seen a ghost, spooked and tormented by the uncanny feeling that a furtive, unseen, possibly supernatural body has stood in his presence without his awareness of it.

Carson’s Guard emphasises that the intellectual problem is not only who buried Polyneices, but furthermore, what *kind* of being performed the deed; this second scene clearly establishes the specialness and supernatural quality of Antigone.⁵⁰ Sophocles’ Guard shares this anxiety but expresses it differently from Carson’s: where Carson’s Guard struggles to express himself,

48. *Ant.* 278-9.

49. See Brown (1987) ad loc. 249-58 on the event’s “aura of the supernatural” and the confusion about the gods’ intentions regarding the corpse.

50. For Antigone’s infernal fury, see Brown (1987) ad loc. 603.

Sophocles' version of this character speaks verbosely and defensively in a tricolon crescendo that amplifies his claims of negation,⁵¹ which Kreon notes when he remarks, *εἶ γε στιχίζῃ κάποφάργγνσαι κύκλω / τὸ προᾶγμα*.⁵² Carson's Guard fails to put up borders around his fear or uncertainty: these sentiments spill out of the fragments in his speech. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the Guard begins his speech in a defense of himself,⁵³ denying his participation in the burial, but he later suggests that his inability to identify the doer makes him, in turn, the doer, along with the rest of the guards: *εἶς γὰρ τις ἦν ἕκαστος οὐξειρογασμένος, / κοῦδεις ἐναργής, ἀλλ' ἔφρευγε μὴ εἰδέναι*.⁵⁴ Thus the deed of Antigone casts the identity of the Guard into a realm of paradoxical duality. Not only is her body and identity charged with simultaneous liminality and layering — or as she puts it,

FOR I'M A STRANGE NEW KIND OF
INBETWEEN THING AREN'T I, NOT AT HOME WITH THE
DEAD
NOR WITH THE LIVING.⁵⁵

but her deed also infects the identities of others, making the Guard both doer and not-doer.⁵⁶ This confusion instigated by the event of burial and its effect on the characters is portrayed even in the language itself: Griffith notes that the language represents “a vivid representation of the guards' confused and apprehensive state of mind”,⁵⁷ instigated by the spectral absence of the actual burier. Just as Carson's Guard is haunted by the invisible and unidentifiable body of the burier, Sophocles' Guard becomes haunted with respect to his own identity and complicity when Antigone's burial act renders the guards both guilty and innocent.

Carson's addition of the character “Nick” also contributes to the intertwined drama of presences and absences within the translation. The text signals Nick's presence in the cast list: “Nick a mute part [always onstage, he measures things]”.⁵⁸ Despite this announcement, Nick himself⁵⁹ has no

51. See Griffith (1999) ad loc. 238-40.

52. *Ant.* 241-42.

53. *Ibid.*, 238-240.

54. *Ibid.*, 262-63.

55. Carson (2012b) 32-33.

56. For Antigone's “systematic fatality” and its implications for the internal world of the play and its characters, see Robert (2009) 413-14.

57. Griffith (1999) ad loc. 264-67.

58. Carson (2012b) 1.

59. Nick's gender is ambiguous, but I use the masculine pronoun for reasons of practicality rather than interpretation.

lines and never receives any stage direction in the text to indicate his corporeality or presence until the final page, where Nick is not only mute, but invisible, too: his accompanying “illustration” (fig. 8)⁶⁰ is a blank piece of vellum — the only time this occurs in the entire text. *Antigonick* renders Nick as a literally absent body, a void, an invisibility, a ghost. The presence of Nick haunts the text when the phrase “nick of time” is invoked by the Chorus and Eurydike,⁶¹ but his supposed bodily performance — “measuring things” — can only operate within the mind of the reader: the text presents him invisibly. The absence ascribed to this character, whose name uproots and replaces part of Antigone’s in the title of the translation, evokes the most common theme in the definitions of the term “nick”: that of the void, an absence, a groove, or indentation. The *OED*’s entry on the meaning of “nick” conveys the sense of presence acquired from absence even within the word itself, since a “nick” is defined as “a notch, groove, or slit, cut into or present in something”.⁶² In titling her translation “*Antigonick*” rather than “*Antigone*”, Carson implies that there is an absence — a nick — woven into both the character and the play itself: the word “Nick” acts as an indentation into the name “Antigone”, and therefore acts as an insertion of absence. William Robert indicates that Antigone’s family history adds to her liminality and in turn places her in the nick:

Because she embodies incest, Antigone occupies this gap between nature and culture. In doing so, she spaces and thus displaces the nature–culture distinction that grounds kinship systems, preventing the correlative passage from nature to culture.⁶³

Robert’s explication of incest as emblematising a strange space “between nature and culture” helps to illuminate the juxtaposition of domestic and civilised imagery (houses, wedding cakes, table settings) and the sprawling



Figure 8, *Antigonick* pic. 33 over p. 52.

60. This scan of Carson’s text portrays the blank vellum atop the text.

61. Carson (2012b), 42 and 45.

62. “nick.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2013)

63. Robert (2009) 417.

natural landscapes that Stone provides, and moreover reminds us that Antigone is in the “nick” just as much as the “nick” is in Antigone.

Fischer-Lichte’s discussion of the process of staging classical texts enforces the notion that the hauntedness of *Antigonick* emerges not only from these absences, but also from the profound dismemberment that lies at the core of this kind of project. Due to the temporal and cultural distance between current reception projects and their ancient counterparts, Fischer-Lichte suggests, the staging process is troubled by the fact that the ancient text “is accessible not as a whole but only in its single parts and pieces”.⁶⁴ This challenge remains particularly applicable to *Antigonick* both on the level of translation, as well as with regard to the unique readerly performance that the material features of the book enable. Thus the source text is haunting to the translator in its spectral absence, and the translated or staged tragedy appears to its audience as a dismembered and re-membered corpus: “The performance can be no more than a sewing together of parts of a contemporary spectator’s clothes — sewing and sewing and sewing and never coming to an end”.⁶⁵ *Antigonick* displays a hyperawareness of itself as a reconstructed body, making a spectral and strange presence out of its necessary absence. Though Carson’s Chorus spookily warns Antigone, “YOUR SOUL IS BLOWING / APART”⁶⁶ — torn and scattered in the text’s countless and famous receptions — Stone’s images indicate that *Antigonick* sews her back together using her red and black thread (fig. 9 and 10).

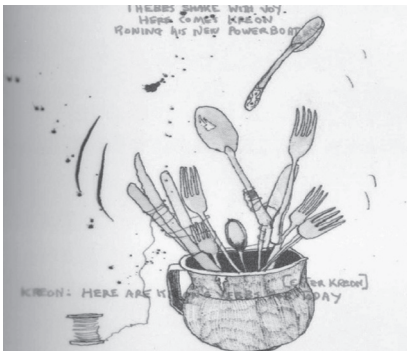


Figure 9, *Antigonick*, pic. 3.

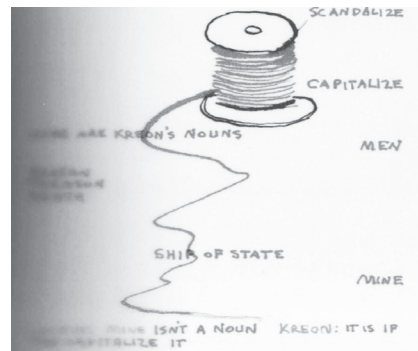


Figure 10, *Antigonick*, pic. 4.

64. Fischer-Lichte (2004), 341.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Carson (2012b) 55.

Before her aforementioned staged reading, Carson addresses Antigone, “Your plan is to sew yourself into your own shroud using the tiniest of stitches. How to translate this?”⁶⁷ In *Antigonick*, Carson indicates that she translates more than words, and she furthermore delivers the answer to her own question: where Kreon has put Antigone into the nick,⁶⁸ Carson sews the “nick” — absence, void — into Antigone when she names her translation “Antigonick”. She dismembers *Antigone* into text and image, cutting through the tragedy with Stone’s vellum illustrations, ripping it apart through spacious typographical placement; and she sews it back together into the material object of *Antigonick* using the red thread in the illustrations and the physical thread that binds the book’s pages. Thus the text’s spectral presences and absences call upon each other and trouble one other in a game of mutual excavation and ghostly occupation, illuminating the dynamic and discursive haunting that emerges from Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Carson’s *Antigonick*.

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67. Carson (2012a).

68. See *Ant.* 774, ἐν κατόσφυι. Brown translates κατόσφυξ as “cave” but notes that the word’s meaning is “lit. ‘an excavation’ rather than a natural cave”, ad loc.

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