SHEILA WATSON'S "ANTIGONE": ANGUISHED RITUALS AND PUBLIC DISTURBANCES

Valerie Legge

> ". . . a man must have order among his own if he is to keep order in the state."
> "If men live at all, my father said, it is because discipline saves their life for them."
>
> (Sheila Watson, "Antigone")[1]

> Sunrise,
> accept this offering,
> Sunrise.
>
> (Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony)[2]

When a kingdom is afflicted with pain and sickness, a powerful magic is needed to heal its people and its land. In Sheila Watson's anguished narratives, often a wounded character is chosen by fate to initiate a ceremony in order to restore a sullen people to some semblance of order.[3] In the intricate family ro-mance of *The Double Hook*, the self-absorbed figures of Watson's dying hinterland have forgotten the importance of a communal offering, an offering which their ancestors had recognized as essential if their relationship with nature and the community was to remain harmonious. The chaos that follows Mrs. Potter's death forces her son, James, to assume rather reluctantly the role of the chosen one. After killing his fisher mother, James begins to accept responsibility for himself and for others who are dependent on him. It is his inheritance to bring back the fugitive rain to the sterile land of Dog Creek.[4] With the rain comes recognition and redemption as James and the others begin to accept what formerly they had rejected.[5]

In "Antigone" Watson, through an already established story, explores the movement toward recognition and redemption as well as several other subjects pervasive in Canadian literature. She juxtaposes a desire for order and stability within institutions, communities, and government against an ominous threat of madness and anarchy. This creates tension as single-minded characters like Antigone and Creon are torn between personal desires and obligations and an equally strong sense of civic duties and responsibilities. Placed in a double bind, Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's lover, feels impelled to comply with Antigone's disruptive acts of defiance and transgression. Together Haemon and Antigone perform a strange ritual that Creon has forbidden—the burial of a sparrow on the institution grounds. This act questions the distinction between madness and sanity, complacency and complicity. Other subjects which Watson explores through the appropriation and reshaping of a classical myth are: discipline as a covert form of power; the shadowy line which exists between vague sites of safety and danger; the problems created by prohibitive measures such as borders and boundaries; the ambivalence of nature as a walled paradise and an unruly wilderness; the importance of ritual, whether as poetry, prayer or performance; and the turmoil created by fugitives who shift precariously between statis and movement.

Through the antagonistic figures of the paternal Creon and his obstinate niece, Watson constructs a literary paradigm which deconstructs the commonly held assumption that community and government in Canada are peaceable and orderly. Her narrative also challenges the notion that our leaders are morally beyond reproach.[6] Creon's kingdom, poised at the edge of the Dominion between the Pacific Ocean and British Columbia's hinterland, is far from placid. And the benevolence of its ruler is called into question by the "barred windows" of the institution, the sinister presence of "inmates" pacing up and down "in straight lines", and the guards "with guns."[7] Historians such as S.M. Lipset, W.L. Morton and J.M.S. Careless and literary critics such as Robin Mathews and Northrop Frye suggest that Canada's conservative character is related to an anti-or counterrevolutionary tradition, the result of our country's history of allegiance to Britain. Because of our imperial beginnings and the continuation of our close ties with the mother country, Canadians are believed

to have a greater acceptance of limitations and boundaries, a greater respect for politicians and public authority, and a greater obedience to the law. [8]

However, not infrequently, our literature presents a very different and opposing picture of the Canadian character as "outrider,"[9] and of an "other" political tradition which is revolutionary and disruptive. In "Antigone" a daring and stubborn young woman challenges the state, transgresses the law of the land, and directly defies the orders of the ruler. And it is the same young woman who dares to venture outside of Creon's closed world. As Haemon points out rather ironically, "it takes only a few impertinent newcomers in any community to force open cupboards which have been decently sealed by time."[10] Like Sophocles' tragic heroine, Watson's Canadian incendiary has "gone [the] way/ To the outermost limit of daring/ And [has] stumbled against Law enthroned."[11] Her strange act of transgression disturbs the public peace in Creon's kingdom and undermines the notion of peace, order and good government.

The setting in "Antigone," the third in a cycle of four Oedipus narratives, is the semi-mythical kingdom of New West minster, a strangely solitary site of sickness and inertia.[12] There on the banks of the Fraser River surrounded by madness and wilderness, Antigone is chosen to remind Creon of man's ancient kinship with the chthonic world of darkness and death. In an enlightened world of modern medicine and psychiatry, the old healing ceremonies have been replaced by secular practices such as the ritual administration of sedatives and the imposition of rules.[13] Under Creon's panoptic supervision the power of nature and the existence of darkness have been suppressed.[14] In *Discipline and Punish*, a study of the whole technology of power over the body, Michel Foucault traces the history of the prison as a punitive and disciplinary institution. He writes,

> There are two images, then, of discipline. At one extreme, the discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution, established on the edges of society, turned inwards towards negative functions: arresting evil, breaking communications, suspending time. At the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid,

> more effective, a design of subtle coercion for society to come.[15]

Haemon describes his father's hospital as a prison and his father as an agent of discipline and punishment. It is Foucault's second more covert form of power that Creon exercises over his patients. Through medication, surveillance and physical restraints, he attempts to confine their madness to the perimeters of the institution. Creon believes it is his responsibility to alter and recondition the deviant nature of his patients. The members of his own family are also subject to rules and regulations. They are not permitted to talk to the patients and no person has a right to interfere with public property.

Creon's desire for control over people and property, though well-intentioned, indicates a rational masculine response to the world. In *The Newly Born Woman* Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément relate the distinction between property and gift to the difference between the masculine and the feminine: *"Propre, a masculine association, is translated as Selfsame: oneself. It has overtones of property and appropriation. It also means 'proper', 'appropriate', and 'clean'."*[16] *Likewise "[t]he feminine is that which resists boundaries, acts of appropriation and colonization: The woman must circulate, not be put into circulation."*[17] Lewis Hyde makes a similar distinction in *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. Hyde associates property with ownership and fixity and gift with relinquishment and mobility.[18]

Creon's suburban hospital constitutes a fragment of a world that he longs to view as fixed, orderly and well-maintained. He has conditioned his subjects to respond in a manner that he considers appropriate. In a very clinical and enclosed world, he attempts to draw a line between what he perceives as the sane world of the family and the sickened spaces of his disturbed patients. Within the walls of his kingdom and the circle of his family, he tries to tame, to domesticate, even to deny nature. His failure to recognize the strange multiplicity of man and nature has led to a split within his own family. Unwilling to confront the tensions that exist, he naively forbids his people to perform the proper rituals which might provide solace or renewal. He discourages Helen's provocative displays of sexuality and Atlas' irrational behavior. And he fails to anticipate Haemon's attach-

ment to and complicity with Antigone. His treatment of patients and family contributes to Antigone's deliberate decision to violate the rules of the kingdom.

The ceremonial burial that Antigone performs disturbs Creon for it is an overt sign of opposition and resistance. In essence she is saying no to his kind of subtle tyranny. "Things have to be buried, she says. They can't be left lying around anyhow for people to see."[19] Unlike the other inhabitants of the kingdom who are unable or afraid to speak out, Antigone rejects Creon's notion of a sedated and subdued community. She demonstrates her opposition through the staging of a subversive ceremony on the hospital grounds. Affirming the possibility of another existence outside the walls, Antigone offers through her performance a vision that threatens the stability of Creon's highly regulated regime.

Disruption is initially imaged in the narrative through the delusions and the aberrant behavior of several of Creon's more afflicted subjects whose proximity to nature and chaos is observed by Haemon. In response to the heat of the day and due to her own lack of inhibition, Helen walks naked around the grounds; Atlas eats the very dirt he stands upon; and Kallisto, thinking she is a bear, growls and paws at the earth. Haemon also remembers the desperate gestures of Diktynna and Artemis "shaking the bars" and "tearing up paper and stuffing it through the meshes."[20] These were all things which Haemon was not supposed to see. Despite his authoritative stance, Creon is often as powerless to prevent his son from witnessing these events as he is to control his patients' acts of self-indulgence. And now Haemon is bearing witness to a more serious breach of conduct.

However as Haemon comes to discover, "from the seeds of eternal justice come madder flowers than any which Pan [the gardener] grew."[21] This first person narrative eventually reveals that Antigone, with her obsessions and her flaming magnolia blossoms, is madder than Creon or his patients. In "Antigone," as in "Brother Oedipus," Watson explores the collision that results when extreme rationalism confronts unrestrained passion. Mythical figures like Antigone, Oedipus in "Brother Oedipus" and Daedalus in "The Black Farm" are all characterized by excess, whether it is passion, persistence or individualism. The result in

each case is an oblique perspective and, subsequently, turmoil within family, community and/or state. Watson often uses madness in her narratives to signal atrophy and to indicate a need for change.

In Watson's fictional world, institutions—familial and communal—which are highly structured, closed and hierarchically organized, become arenas for explosive confrontations. Initially offering sanctuary to afflicted individuals, these institutions turn inward on themselves and eventually become prison-like or hermetic; the same spaces that once offered refuge sooner or later evolve into more sophisticated sites of confinement; and these closed spaces become increasingly punitive, restrictive and mechanical like the "depths inside a clock."[22] During such moments of stress and change, ritual and ceremony acquire a newly complex significance. Formerly these actions contributed to the discipline of individuals and to the creation of orderly states. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault suggests that "disciplines are techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities . . . . one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique."[23] Creon erroneously views regularly administered discipline and medication as a patient's "passport to happiness."[24] In Watson's fictions, while officially sanctioned agents within institutions (i.e. parents, physicians) continue to utilize ritual as a means of restraint, unofficial agents or outriders like Antigone and Uncle Daedalus in "The Black Farm" move to the periphery to subvert ritual and to create explosive moments of dissension within frugal systems.

Power politics plays a role in Watson's narrative just as it played a role in the original Oedipus myth and in the Greek text. In Sophocles' classical drama, Ismene, Antigone's timid and fearful sister, pleads with Antigone to abandon her mad plan to defy Creon's order that their brother's body remain unburied, and that his remains provide carrion for crows.[25] She counsels Antigone, "we are women; it is not for us/ To fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we."[26] Despite her sister's warning, Antigone contravenes the King's edict and carries out her "true duty"[27]—her natural obligation to perform the proper rites of burial. For this revolutionary act, she is punished with death.

In Watson's "Antigone," which has a mythical as well as a Canadian context, the natural responsibility of the individual is

demonstrated by a far stranger funeral rite than the burial of an outcast brother—here it is shown by the interment of a sparrow and a "bruised magnolia blossom"[28] on the grounds of a mental institution. Antigone's rebellious action, which challenges Creon's insane edict that no one is entitled to an inch of public property, suggests a collision between nature and society, and the privileging of an individual over a community leader. For obeying her own personal code of justice—"the holiest laws"[29]—Antigone goes unpunished. Creon, who in his role as a civil god has been known to have punished severely other unruly subjects and even disobedient family members, "simply turn[s] away"[30] from Antigone. In the final showdown between ruler and subject, a man weary with responsibility and burdened by power is silenced. However, behind Watson's contemporary narrative lurks the memory of the older narrative with its dysphoric ending and its final fearful spectre of a woman sealed within a cave for her acts of civil disobedience. Throughout this more modern narrative, however, Creon appears terribly ineffectual and his peaceable kingdom is revealed eventually as highly illusionary. As Haemon initially observed, while Creon was "busy setting his kingdom to rights,"[31] there were these "occasional outbursts of self-indulgence"[32] which posed a threat to his "whole establishment." [33]

In Watson's Oedipus narratives, fugitive gestures or acts of excessive individualism are necessary for renewal, because the establishment itself which is a lifeless construct has "no mercy. It is a fiction, not a living thing."[34] Antigone, like Oedipus, recognizes that "[o]nly the living have mercy."[35] Any attempts to reshape one's world through radical acts of defiance against man or fate exact a high price for those who "bother their heads" about the three R's—"recognition, rejection, and redemption."[36] In "Brother Oedipus" the mother acts as the agent of discipline and restriction. Like her anxious brother Creon, Jocasta prides herself on her singularity whereas her afflicted son, like Antigone, is intensely aware of the fragmentation of human existence. Acknowledging the power of the mother, Oedipus is content to settle for bouts of covert drinking and daily skirmishes he knows he is forever destined to lose.

However, unlike the complacent Oedipus, Antigone rejects hostile passivity, resignation or surrender. Her collision with Creon and her rejection of his closed community are anticipated

early in the narrative as Haemon recognizes the possibility of upheaval in his father's troubled kingdom. Haemon admits that despite Creon's attempts to "maintain an atmosphere of sober commonsense,"[37] he most often fails to yoke completely his "stubborn and moody"[38] people. Antigone's blatant resistance to Creon's autocratic rule is also implicit in her mythical name. In pursuit of a higher justice, she refuses to yield to the restrictive demands of fate or to the orders of the paternalistic Creon. An obsessive desire for what she perceives as right impells her to seek refuge from Creon's world.

Antigone's defiance is described in an exasperated dramatic monologue wherein Haemon recalls his own strong sense of allegiance to Antigone. As they move at high noon between kingdom and wilderness, from rules to ritual, Haemon questions the wisdom of Antigone's actions and the validity of her arguments. Outside Creon's "walled paradise," Haemon and Antigone journey toward "the fugitive green"[39] world of nature. The river that they cross constitutes a border between a civil order within Creon's walls and a more tenuous existence in an area, as yet, unexplored by the narrator and his intrepid companion. Typographically this border indicates their departure from the realm of reason and their uncertain entry into an alien world of change and flux. Antigone asks "how often can we cross the same river,"[40]—a question posed many years ago by Heraklitos, a presocratic philosopher whose works are associated with fragmentation, obscurity, ambiguity and melancholy.[41] Haemon counters her query with a conventional reading of the philosopher's words: "However agile a man is, . . . the water slips away before him."[42] Antigone rejects this too easy explanation of eternal flux and posits instead a more paradoxical theory of permanence resulting from cyclical rituals of exclusion and return. As evidence, she alludes to the yearly migratory habits of the oolichans,[43] the continual cries of seagulls, and the circular movement of waters. Her view of eternal verities is conveyed through imagery of water as the source of life's renewal: "after all, one must admit that it is the same kind of water."[44]

Haemon reminds her that, because of their privileged position and the knowledge that they possess, they are somewhat removed from the waters below: "the unbroken curve of the bridge protects the eye from details of river-life."[45] Unlike an ear-

lier and perhaps unenlightened people, Antigone and Haemon are standing on "a new bridge," one that is stronger and more reliable than the flimsy catwalk of former times. Haemon's comments seem to imply that with progress, the gap between society and nature has widened. He promises that this firmer man-made structure will support them. Antigone is as contemptuous of the bridge—an image evoking connections and networks—as she is of Creon and his rules. She reminds Haemon that some men and women, scorning any kind of bridge, have risked death by walking or jumping into the waters below. Haemon suggests that Antigone identifies with these martyred outriders, these fugitive figures. Danger or fear of reprisal does not deter her from her mission. When Haemon, like Lot's wife, looks back over his shoulder to his father's world, Antigone reminds him that return is no longer possible, that "there's no coming back"[46] from the brink toward which they have been steadily moving.

The bridge which links the civilized kingdom and the unruly wilderness functions as a liminal or transitional place for Haemon and Antigone. Antigone believes that if they can escape across the bridge, they will live "forever on the far side of the river in the Alaska tea and bulrushes."[47] The bridge is also the site of Haemon's brooding narrative; it connects them ever so tentatively to Creon's world, yet it also acts as a portal or threshold that provides passage to another realm of existence. Likewise Haemon's story links the past with the present, and meshes myth with reality.

It is toward this "outermost edge of the world"[48] that Antigone moves centrifugally in order to live unhindered by Creon and his infamous edicts. This bridge crosses the Fraser River, a river found by Simon Fraser[49] but named some time later by David Thompson, two near mythical cartographers who felt impelled to explore beyond the limits of their known world. These historical allusions remind us of the newness of community in western Canada and of those who dared to enter the wilderness, to name the unknown. Like the bridge, the river is also a dividing line which signifies the boundary which Haemon and Antigone intend to transgress. Watson tells of "a [New World] myth that people who are born on the banks of the Fraser come back to that river to die."[50] The narrative seems to imply that, despite a desire to journey and explore, there is an equally strong impulse to

return to some source or center. Haemon's journey and journal are themselves rituals of discovery and discourse.

The kingdom that they have left behind and to which Haemon looks back with longing is synonymous with Creon whose word has become law. Unlike Haemon who has compassion for his father, Antigone unequivocally views her uncle as an authoritative guardian whose rule has diminished his people. She describes him rather contemptuously as a "bear tamer,"[51] intractable and domineering. Struggling to lead his afflicted people through a wasteland of mental anguish, Creon has denied them freedom and liberty. The well-being of the community has taken precedent over the happiness of the individual. Creon has come to epitomize the depersonalized establishment with its stabilizing and disciplinary agencies. Despite these failings, he is still viewed by Haemon as a man of common sense and control. When his subjects or family members defy him and ignore his orders, they are disciplined severely: by restraint or with instruments—a belt, a honing strap, a bedroom slipper. It is discipline, says Haemon, dispassionately echoing his father's words, that ensures order in the kingdom.

However, Creon's power is an arrogant assumption. As the communal narrator of Watson's satirical-comedy "The Rumble Seat" concluded, "Information is no longer the perogative of the few."[52] Unlike the great Olympian gods, Creon is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. In fact, he is described in terms of lack, blindness and impotence. Unlike Zeus, the Lord of the Sky, Creon has "no thunderbolt"; unlike Poseidon, lord of the sea, he has "no trident"; and unlike Hades, god of the underworld, he has "no helmet of darkness."[53] Without the special powers of the immortals, Creon must rely on discipline and punishment. And his constant vigilance has caused problems within his own house. He fails to send Haemon away to boarding school to be disciplined and instructed in the ways of men. "[B]usy setting his kingdom to rights,"[54] he fails to heed "the weeds"[55] growing in his own garden. Fearful of chaos with which he deals daily, he engineers borders and boundaries and insists that they not be violated.

But they are violated by his subjects and by members of his own family. As an opposing agent, Antigone represents Creon's anti-mask. She is mythos-logos or feeling to his rational thought. Independent and stubborn, she scorns the state's and, by exten-

sion, Creon's reasoning. As "ex-centric,"[56] one who is both strange and estranged, Antigone possesses a fractured perspective. She refuses to be confined or defined by Creon or her family's past. Perhaps because of the scandals in her family's past, she feels she has a responsibility to shatter the silent complacency of those around her. Her performance is intended to undermine Creon's false sense of power and to question the status quo. Though plagued with doubts, she accepts a fugitive role in the text. Her ardent individualism propels her toward the periphery of Creon's world.

Haemon, the I/eye and voice of the narrative, has a dual function. As a participant in the family drama, he tries to mediate as peace-maker between Antigone (the heart) and Creon (the head); and as an emotionally involved narrator, he comments on the single-mindedness of both while expressing the traditional moral, religious and social attitudes of those within the kingdom. Despite his desire for conciliation, he is caught in a double bind, torn between loyalty to his father and love for Antigone. Like the Chorus in a Greek tragedy, Haemon stands somewhat apart from the action yet he is affected by it. Surveying the events of the past, he shifts uneasily from a retrospective position to the vantage point of the progressive present. He hints at the old scandals from his family's past but chooses to let his ancestral shades sleep. His narrative covers a period from high noon, when he and Antigone leave the kingdom, to the end of the day when they are intercepted on the fringe of the institution's grounds by Creon. Unlike his preoccupied father, Haemon is perceptive, understanding and deeply in love with Antigone. He is conscious that his love for this rebellious girl may have unfortunate consequences for him and his family. In fact, he regrets the power that his heart has over his head. He often disrupts his own bewildered monologue with the sorrowful refrain, "I should have loved Ismene."[57] Indeed, Antigone's sister would have been a less disruptive lover.

Unlike the unruly Antigone, Ismene is a blind idealist. At first she seems intuitive and more tolerant of reality than her upstart sister. However, affirming only a belief in beauty, she optimisticly closes her eyes to the reality of death and chaos around her. Her vision of the world is deficient for she refuses to acknowledge the carcasses of "rabbits hanging on iron hooks," the "coops of hens," "the living animals penned" and the "dead hanging

stiff."[58] Like Creon, Ismene privileges reason. She views the head as the site of knowledge. Memory does not contribute to her world view. For her, there are no traces of expelled fathers or desecrated brothers, no ancestral guilts with which to contend. Like her uncle, she is obsessed with the illusion of order and stability. While Creon institutes borders that are not to be crossed, Ismene likewise makes "diagrams to live by."[59] Her respect for restraint and her desire for a utopian world are suggested by the ambiguous chains of daisies that she weaves to wear around her neck—the same chains she throws playfully around Kallisto. For Ismene, beauty and restraint are yoked.

While Antigone and Haemon "know" that the world is flat and unstable, Ismene views the world as round, knowable and fixed. She sees it as a "tangerine"[60]—sensuous, organic, whole and comprehensible. Haemon links her with "the eternal patterns spied out by Plato" and his theory of perfect forms and ideals.[61] Unlike her doubting sister, Ismene is confident and content. She is not bothered by the plight of the inhabitants who are brought bound to her uncle's kingdom where they are held captive. Like the "dethroned Titans"[62] of Greek mythology, they are viewed as potentially disruptive and destructive subjects. Despite Creon's efforts and Ismene's blindness, nature frequently rebels and acts of pollution and impropriety are committed. Ismene, like her uncle, denies this other nature.

The peace, order and good government of the kingdom is juxtaposed against a wilderness that exists openly without and covertly within its walls. Antigone is obviously alligned with this nature. Its intrusive presence is signified by the the madness of the inmates, by Antigone's quarrel with Creon, and by the sparrow that Antigone buries on the public grounds of the institution. This tiny and seemingly insignificant creature of nature represents the inexorable human spirit. It is symbolic of the possible power and perhaps also the probable defeat of the imagination by reason. Because of its association with the elements earth and air, the sparrow is equated with Antigone's personal code of ethics and her desire to transcend the restrictions and limitations of Creon's closed world. Its burial is a sign that Antigone mourns the death of the spirit, and regrets the sterility of Creon's autocratic world. However, it also evokes the notions of Christian lowliness and humility, traits that neither Antigone nor Creon

possess. In a more sinister context, the fallen sparrow may represent the underworld and the ancestral ghosts of Antigone's family "cupboards which had been decently sealed by time."[63] Unlike the sedate spectres of Creon's suburban asylum, Antigone's shades, or "ancestral loa,"[64] are restless and disruptive.

The kingdom of sedate souls which Creon rules represents an irrational order made to appear reasonable and orderly by Creon. Those characters that act up are forcibly restrained and destined to move through a stifling static landscape. In the "habitable world,"[65] the flat world on the right bank of the river, Creon provides his inmates with the false promise of sanctuary, a sanctuary that depends on structure and routine. In reality the institution is a closed and punitive world. There, under constant supervision, people are punished for any infraction of the rules. Their movements are mechanical and usually predictable with only sporadic moments of disruption. To ensure order, a "matron" and several "attendants" are always close at hand. The inmates are forced, like Kallisto, to wear regulation clothing ("a blue cotton dress") and to submit to regulation haircuts ("a cropped head").[66]

The possibility of freedom and carnivalization,[67] however, does exist at the grave site of a tiny sparrow and in Pan's extravagant garden where "mad[der] flowers"[68] grow. A somewhat sinister figure, Pan is frequently associated with a shadowy nature that exists between the walls and the fringes of the kingdom. Carrying a "hooked stick," he "moves as economically as an animal"[69] among the flower beds which he tends. On the domesticated grounds of the institution, the "deaf and dumb" gardener cultivates daisies, lobelia, and geraniums. At the extremities of the garden, he grows showy magnolia trees burdened with white blossoms which "brood" like Haemon over Antigone's covert ceremony. Close by, a monkey puzzle tree towers strangely above, its tangled network of branches angling around Ismene. As a liminal[70] figure who moves through the silent spaces between structure and chaos, Pan personifies a subversive nature whose existence neither Antigone nor Creon openly recognizes. He may also signify a form of power that stands silent between repression and revolution.

In an interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, Watson describes literature as a "violation" and an act of "transgression."[71] She insists that art, which has its genesis in ceremony, is not intended to be a "pacifier." Its power lies, in the case of "Antigone," in the writer's explosive use of myth, ritual and language. She says:

> I don't think words are innocent. Sometimes the impact of words on a reader is not what the writer expects at all. In that sense they are not innocent. The reader has a creative function which the words provoke. Words are not simple exchange. They are charged. They have all sorts of possibilities which may explode at any moment. . . . Sometimes there are books that one simply cannot read because they are too powerful, too disturbing.[72]

"Antigone," a charged and transgressive narrative, is a modern myth about a new world where men like Creon are no longer able to mend men's fates. The concluding dialogue between Creon and Antigone does nothing to resolve their dilemna or their differences. Yet she has managed, through her ceremony, to oppose Creon and to disturb the public peace. For at least a second time she has challenged and he has retreated:

> "This ground is public property, he says.
> No single person has any right to an inch of it.
> I've taken six inches, Antigone says.
> Will you dig the bird up again?"[73]

Although it appears that Antigone has won this round, nothing has really changed. However her ritual defiance makes change and transformation a possibility. For a moment, someone openly and fearlessly questions established authority. Through her actions, a fugitive young woman provokes, exposes and threatens to explode the old myths of knowledge as well as the new myths of progressive thinking that conceal the deep griefs of the people. Looking to the Bible, to philosophy, to liturgy, to his father's wisdom for reassurance, Haemon learns that knowledge as system is neither fixed nor eternal, that rules do not always heal. Recognizing the impotence of his father, Haemon turns to Antigone who advocates acts of revolution and active resistance to Creon and the state.

NOTES

[1] Sheila Watson, "Antigone," *Five Stories* (Toronto: Coach House, 1984) 51, 54.

[2] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Viking, 1977) 275.

[3] Sheila Watson's most recent publication *Deep Hollow Creek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992) also deals with a "people who are spiritually afflicted with Novembers of the soul" (89). Then into the community of Deep Hollow Creek comes Stella, a young school teacher who is reminded that it is her responsibility "to bring the olive branch, not to come into a community causing disturbances" (54).

[4] In Watson's works, to be fugitive is to be alive to the world. Sometimes the fugitive is a natural element such as the rain; and other times it is a disruptive force or a particularly dynamic agent of change.

[5] The motif of the three R's—recognition, rejection and redemption—first occurs in Watson's short fiction in "Brother Oedipus" but as a theme it is also explored in *The Double Hook* and *Deep Hollow Creek.*

[6] See Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution* (Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1978).

[7] Watson, "Antigone" 49, 46.

[8] See S.M. Lipset, "Revolution and Counterrevolution: The U.S. and Canada," *The Revolutionary Theme in Contemporary America,* ed. Thomas Ford (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1965) 21-64. Lipset suggests that Canada's imperial connections to Britain have helped perpetuate in a North American nation a set of values having Old World origins and a conservation character. Some of these conservative, Old World values are: the paternalistic organization of institutions; reverence toward the clergy and the elite; greater respect for politicians; loyalty to monarchical institutions; respect for public authority; the importance of customs and traditions; an obedience to the law; and a greater acceptance of limitations.

[9] See Michael Ondaatje, afterword, *Tay John,* by Howard O'Hagan (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989) 265-72.

[10] Watson, "Antigone" 44.

[11] Sophocles, *The Theban Plays: King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone,* trans. E.F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958) 149.

[12] The other stories in the Oedipus cycle are "Brother Oedipus and "The Black Farm: which, with "Antigone," complete a trilogy, and "The Rumble Seat," which like the classical satyr-play, is a comic work. Watson's *Five Stories* also contains the elliptical "And the Four Animals." In "It's What You Say," Watson says that these stories "were written about the same time as *The Double Hook.* Three of them were published before *The Double Hook.* "The Rumble Seat" was written much later. It began as a satire on Pierre Berton's *The Comfortable Pew*" (164).

[13] In Watson's "Antigone," Creon is the head of a mental health institution. In "Brother Oedipus," the father is a doctor whose responsibility it is to "snip and sew together fragments of human life." Watson's own father was Dr. Charles Edward Doherty, Superintendent of the Provincial Mental Hospital in New Westminster. The family lived in an apartment in one wing of the hospital until her father's death in 1922. In "It's What You Say," *In Their Own Words: Interviews with Fourteen Canadian Writers*, Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan (Toronto: Anansi, 1984) Watson discusses her father and this early environment:

> I was brought up on the Provincial Mental Hospital in British Columbia on the banks of the Fraser River in New Westminster.... My father was the Superintendent, the doctor in charge. We lived right in the institution, in an apartment. That autobiographical fact underlies "Antigone." I didn't want to write about a mental hospital per se. I wanted to raise an essential question—what is madness?... We lived in a very disciplined environment. We had our own keeper, too, a Scots Presbyterian nanny.... We lived in a very clinical enclosed world. I suppose the father figure in "Antigone" is my own father. (165-66)

[14] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 195-228.

[15] Foucault 209.

[16] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: UP of Minnesota, 1986) 167.

[17] Cixous and Clément 53.

[18] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift; Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1983).

[19] Watson, "Antigone" 52.

[20] Watson, "Antigone" 49.

[21] Watson, "Antigone" 44.

[22] Watson, "Antigone" 49.

[23] Foucault 218. The history of the prison is viewed through an examination of the whole technology of power over the body. The earliest penal institution was equated with punishment, repression and spectacle. The modern penal institution which is panoptic emphasizes surveillance discipline.

[24] Watson, "Antigone" 45.

[25] Sophocles, *The Theban Plays*, "Antigone" 126-62.

[26] Sophocles, "Antigone" 128.

[27] Sophocles, "Antigone" 129.

[28] Watson, "Antigone" 50.

[29] Sophocles, "Antigone" 128. In Watson's "Antigone," "the holiest laws" are those of Nature, not heaven.

[30] Watson, "Antigone" 54.

[31] Watson, "Antigone" 44.

[32] Watson, "Antigone."

[33] Watson, "Antigone" 43.

[34] Watson, "Brother Oedipus" 15.

[35] Watson, "Brother Oedipus."

[36] Watson, "Brother Oedipus" 17.

[37] Watson, "Antigone" 43.

[38] Watson, "Antigone."

[39] Watson, "Antigone" 73.

[40] Watson, "Antigone" 45.

[41] See Heraclitus, *Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary by T. M. Robinson* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1987) and *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, ed. Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979).

[42] Watson, "Antigone" 45.

[43] The Indians of British Columbia called these migratory fish "candlefish," "lampfish" and "fathom-fish." When ill, the Indians would go to their sanatorium at the mouth of the Naas River, where they would live on oolichans until they were perfectly well again. In "Antigone" Kallisto brings fish sandwiches to what she believes to be a party on the institution's grounds.

[44] Watson, "Antigone."

[45] Watson, "Antigone."

[46] Watson, "Antigone" 46. See Bonheim Helmut, "He Didn't Look Back: Literary Tradition and the Canadian Short Story." *Queen's Quarterly* 89. 2 (Summer 1982): 398-403. Helmut examines how Canadian short story writers use narrative strategies or techniques which have their roots in older traditional forms. His discussion focuses on poetic closure or "the final, sweeping definitive [negative] statement" often found in early narrative poetry and fiction. These closing statement of denial and negation (i.e. "he did not look back") "constitute a topos of considerable appeal for the Canadian short story writer." Helmut suggests that this literary taboo against looking or turning back appears in classical mythology (the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice) and in Christian mythology (in Genesis, Lot's wife is warned not to look back as she flees the burning city). Looking back was supposed to have dreadful consequences. This mythical taboo survives in much milder form in the short story.

[47] Watson, "Antigone" 46.

[48] Watson, "Antigone."

[49] See *The Great Journey: The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser 1806-1808*, ed. William Kaye Lamb (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960). Fraser is the pioneer of permanent settlement in mainland British Columbia. In 1908 Richard McBride, the premier of British Columbia, unveiled a memorial column at New Westminster. This stood on Albert Crescent on a commanding site overlooking the Fraser River. A bust, executed by noted Canadian sculptor Louis Hebert, was later mounted on the column and unveiled on October 4, 1911. In 1958 British Columbia celebrated its centenary and the 150th anniversary of Simon Fraser's great journey. His trek was re-enacted as part of the celebrations.

[50] Watson, *The Capilano Review* 351-360.

[51] Watson, "Antigone" 51.

[52] Watson, "The Rumble Seat" 57.

[53] Watson, "Antigone" 43.

[54] Watson, "Antigone" 44.

[55] Watson, "Antigone."

[56] See Barbara Godard, "Ex-centriques, Eccentric, Avant-garde, *Room of One's Own* 8.4: 57-75. Godard uses the terms "ex-centric" to refer to women as a marginalized group, a submerged population group that has been excluded from a patriarchal, colonial society. In "The Lonely Voice," *Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles E. May (Ohio: Ohio UP, 1976) Frank O'Connor constructs a theory of characterization in modern short fiction. He suggests that the short story has "a submerged population group . . . outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society . . . romantic, individualistic, and intransigent" (83-93). Ex-centric evokes images of exclusion fromthe circle; it also suggests images of women as oddity or anomaly. She is both estranged from the dominant order and strange or alien in relation to it. Because of her peripheral position, she sees from a different vantage point; Godard suggests woman "tell[s her story] slant" (57). Women's "de-centred position allows, indeed ensures, that their gestures, language and writing will be ex-centrique, ex-perimential" (58). Godard believes that this ex-centricism has led to a "tradition of innovation in women's writing in Canada. Women have long been pioneers in new subjects, new forms, new modes of discourse" (58-9).

[57] Watson, "Antigone" 47.

[58] Watson, "Antigone" 46-7.

[59] Watson, "Antigone" 48.

[60] Watson, "Antigone."

[61] Watson, "Antigone" 48.

[62] Watson, "Antigone" 43.

[63] Watson, "Antigone" 44.

[64] See Watson's "The Black Farm" 38.

[65] Watson, "Antigone" 46.

[66] Watson, "Antigone" 50, 54.

[67] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge and London: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

[68] Watson, "Antigone" 44.

[69] Watson, "Antigone" 49.

[70] See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969) and *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (New York: Cornell UP, 1974).

[71] Watson, "It's What You Say," 157-67. In an earlier conversation with Pierre Coupey, Roy Kiyoota and Daphne Marlatt, *The Capilano Review* 8/9 (Fall 1975/Spring 1976): 351-60, Watson talks about the responsibility that comes with being human: "You're never innocent. You're compromised the minute you are born. Then there is the terrible responsibility for something like language which you can't destroy—the utterances which are going on around you if you pay attention to them—the responsibility for taking something into your consciousness." (360)

[72] Watson, "It's What You Say" 162.

[73] Watson, "Antigone" 54.