It may seem odd to start a chapter that will focus on the use of classical themes and texts in the French theater of the 1940s with a pair of quotations on T. S. Eliot’s lasting flirtations with the incipient French-inflected fascism of Charles Maurras and orthodox communism (Ackroyd 1984: 41, 76, 143; Shantz 2004). Yet what becomes clear to any observer of modernist culture in Western Europe, and particularly in England, France, Italy, and Spain, is the predominance of two cultural phenomena: the rise of neoclassicism and the rejection of bourgeois liberal society from both the right and the left. And while these two cultural phenomena were not identical, they are all but impossible to separate. For, as we shall see, the appeal to the classics in this context

1. Maurras himself never became a full-fledged fascist but was closely allied with nationalist forces that supported European fascism, and many of his younger followers went on to join explicitly fascist movements (Kaplan 2000: 5, 13, 17).
2. The futurists, the dadaists, and the surrealists were all critics of the commodification of culture, but rejected the return to the classics. By the same token, Giraudoux and Cocteau both wrote plays on classical themes but were revolutionaries of neither the right nor the left.
is, in almost every case, the appeal to a timeless universal against which the tawdriness of the fallen present stands to be judged. It is the appeal to a sublime transcendence whether through the will to power, the coming revolution, or some other, more individualized form of revolt. Thus Eliot at the end of the Wasteland, a poem ventriloquized by Tiresias himself, speaks of “These fragments shored against my ruins,” the shards of tradition as a bulwark against the forces of disintegration.

The commodification of culture and the rise of market- and media-based democracies gave rise to a widespread sense of disenchantment among the writers, thinkers, and artists of the early twentieth century. That disenchantment was most generally responded to by a call for either a reactionary return to the hierarchies of the past, a nihilistic fascism, or some variety of socialist revolution, and often by a bewildering blend of all three (e.g., German national socialism, Spanish Catholic fascism, Italian futurist imperialism, Stalinist “socialism in one country”). The reification and rationalization of advanced industrial capitalism, in which standards of value vanished before ruthless quantification, and all that had seemed solid either melted into the air or lay shattered on the fields of Verdun, produced a widespread sense of alienation and a desperate search for authenticity. The rejection of a world based solely on exchange value led to the search for a transcendent standard in which aesthetics, politics, and tradition would be as one. We are left with the image of Ezra Pound writing his Cantos while making radio broadcasts for Mussolini, moving from the beautiful evocation of the Odyssean nekúia in Canto I, to the indictment of usury in Canto XLV, to the support of Italian fascism.

In this environment, the classics for the great modernists ceased to function primarily as objects of philological and historical inquiry and came instead to serve as timeless myths or universal monuments. As Eliot says in his famous text on Vergil, “What is a Classic?” (1944):

In our age, when men seem more than ever prone to confuse wisdom with knowledge, and knowledge with information, and try to solve the problems of life in terms of engineering, there is coming into existence a new kind of provincialism which perhaps deserves a new name. It is a provincialism, not of space, but of time; one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devises which have served their turn and been scrapped, one for which the world is the

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property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares. The menace of this kind of provincialism is, that we can all, all the peoples on the globe, be provincials together; and those who are not content to be provincials, can only be hermits. If this kind of provincialism led to greater tolerance, in the sense of forebearance, there might be something to be said for it; but it seems more likely to lead to our becoming indifferent, in matters where we ought to maintain a distinctive dogma or standard, and to our becoming intolerant, in matters which might be left to local or personal preference. (1957: 69)

The classical texts of Greco-Roman antiquity, Vergil in particular for the later Eliot, were to serve as the sources of this standard and dogma. They were transformed into allegories of the present rather than historical estrangements, ideal modelings of transcendence rather than critical genealogies (Michon 2003: 123; Witt 2001: 235; Freeman 1971: 48; Higet 1949: 520–40; Grossvogel n.d.: 18).

Fundamental to any study of the classical tradition in Europe during this period is Mary Ann Frese Witt’s *The Search for Modern Tragedy: The Aesthetics of Fascism in Italy and France* (2001). Witt traces in detail the ways in which the classical heritage, as interpreted through Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, was called upon to provide new models of purity and grandeur in response to what was widely seen as the dissipation of bourgeois modernity. Theorists such as Georges Sorel, Edouard Berth, and Charles Maurras in France, as well as writers and critics such as Gabriele D’Annunzio, Luigi Pirandello, and Giuseppe Prezzolini in Italy, sought in Dionysian violence a cathartic antidote to the decadence of the bourgeois, Enlightenment order. They sought an ideal Nietzschean balance between the Apollonian forces of order and Dionysian transcendence in both art and politics (Witt 2001: 3–10).

Tragedy was the preferred genre of this classical *risorgimento* as it was theorized first in Italy by D’Annunzio as well as others close to the fascist movement and later in France (Witt 2001: 32–134). In his 1933 *Nietzsche*, Thierry Maulnier, a disciple of Maurras, following a line of interpretation first put forward by Mussolini himself in his 1908 essay on the German philosopher, argued for the revival of a French tragic tradition that was grounded in Mediterranean culture. Such a renewed

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4. While the Italians were the first to theorize this classical revival, following what they saw as the “Mediterranean” side of Nietzsche, the French were the first to put the revival into practice with their outdoor production of ancient tragedies in the theater at Orange in the 1890s (Witt 2001: 37–39).
tragic form would eschew the compromises of both traditional moral systems and bourgeois bonheur (“happiness”) in favor of a tragic grandeur that was beyond good and evil (Witt 2001: 138–46). This Nietzschean position became the norm in French dramatic thinking of the period and was adopted by both the left-leaning Sartre and Camus and by those with more right wing ties such as Jean Anouilh and Henri de Montherlant.

Maulnier’s roommate at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Robert Brasillach, was another disciple of Maurras. As Witt explains, for these two fiercely intelligent and deeply alienated young men, the rejection of bourgeois liberalism and the embrace of classical culture were inseparable from one another.

From their teacher at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, André Bellesort, they had received an induction to right-wing ideology through training in and admiration for the Mediterranean tradition of classical humanism as the central foundation of French culture. Although he was initially drawn toward Charles Maurras’s cultural-political movement, the Action française, Brasillach eventually rejected its conservative royalist-Catholic tenets to explore the newer revolutionary movements. [. . . ] Like Maulnier, Brasillach approached fascism through aesthetics, unlike him, he came to support it in politics. (Witt 2001: 148–49)  

In fact, Brasillach went on to become a prominent collaborationist cultural critic during the occupation. The editor of the pro-fascist newspaper, Je suis partout, in which the names and addresses of Jews and members of the resistance were printed in his front-page column, he was also the sole writer to be executed by the Free French government after the liberation (Kaplan 2000: 32). Appropriately, Brasillach began his career with a book on Vergil (1931), celebrating his “Mediterranean genius” in the approved Maurrassian style. His last work was a collection of translations from Greek poets in the days before the liberation of Paris, a book that featured strong pro-German sentiments (Kaplan 2000: 9–10, 71). His own theatrical output was small, centered on the figures of Seneca, Racine, Corneille, an anti-Semitic rendering of Bérénice, and Joan of Arc (Kaplan 2000: 40–41). He remained a figure of controversy, and admiration to some, even after his death. The preface

5. Is it an accident that it is the mention of this word that leads Anouilh’s Antigone to resolve on death? See below.
6. See also Kaplan (2000: 3, 278).
to his plays, which make up one volume of his complete works, was composed by Jean Anouilh (1963), and they were edited by Maurice Bardèche, his brother-in-law. The latter, a literary and film scholar of no small repute, was the intellectual godfather of postwar European neo-fascism and the first person to deny the holocaust in print (Shields 2004; Witt 2001: 162; Kaplan 2000: 3–6, 220).

The involvement of Anouilh may come as a shock to those who are accustomed to viewing his *Antigone* as an inspirational piece of Resistance theater in which the idealist Antigone gives her life in defiance of the cynical dictates of a disillusioned Creon (Fazia 1969: 22; Archer 1971: 18–19). Yet, as we are arguing here, and as we shall see when we examine the play in more detail, the realities of the situation were a good deal more complex. *Antigone* was, in fact, very well received by the occupation authorities, and Anouilh worked without interruption throughout the war (Marcel 1959: 101; McIntyre 1981: 42; Witt 2001: 220–21, 227–28; Leonard 2005: 105–6). Moreover, Brasillach himself, following in the footsteps of Maurras, had explicitly admired Antigone and compared her to Joan of Arc—both of whom were the subjects of plays by Anouilh—noting that each possessed “the ‘fascist’ qualities of youth, insolence, and devout patriotism” (Witt 2001: 185, 219; compare Fowlie 1960: 119–20). The borders between resistance and collaborationist aesthetics were, in fact, porous and the writers often shared many of the same ideological and artistic assumptions as well as theatrical institutions (Kaplan 2000: 30–31; Leonard 2005: 217). Such well-known themes as the absurd, the rejection of traditional bourgeois morality and religion, and the necessity for radical self-creation can be found in both the work of fascist writers such as Drieu la Rochelle and Christian Michelfelder and in the leftist existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus (Witt 2001: 177–80, 194, 238). These themes are as a much a part of *L’étranger* as they are of *Les mouches* and *Antigone* (Marcel 1959: 101; Fowlie 1960: 116).

It is in this fraught political and ideological context, then, that we must examine the extraordinary flowering of classically inspired theater in the France of the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, over a dozen leading French playwrights produced works on ancient or mythic themes in these two decades (St. Aubyn and Marshall 1963: 9; Freeman 1971: 49–50). The Parisian stage became a virtual reincarnation of the theater of Dionysus in fifth-century Athens, even as gangs of communist and

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7. Thus the last theatrical piece Brasillach saw, the night before the August 19, 1944 Communist-led insurrection in Paris, was Sartre’s *Huis Clos* (Kaplan 2000: 71).
fascist sympathizers fought in the streets, the surrealists issued their manifestoes, and a young Jacques Lacan published his dissertation and began clinical work.

The commercial theater in France during the early part of the twentieth century had been dominated by the Théâtre du Boulevard. With the emergence of figures like Giraudoux and Cocteau in his Antigone, however, there develops a new experimental theater with both high artistic ambitions and a strong classicizing bent. This movement sought in antiquity both a universal style and a truly French idiom, one grounded in a shared Hellenic and Latin culture and in France’s own classical theatrical tradition as embodied by Corneille, Racine, and Molière. It sought in the classics a bulwark against the commodification of daily life and the uncertainties of European culture in the aftermath of World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Great Depression (Contat and Galster 2005: 1259–60; Boucris et al.: 1998: 35–36; Brée and Kroff 1969: 3, 6–23; Grossvogel n.d.: 18). In the paradigm of classical Mediterranean tragedy, it hoped to find a cleansing catharsis if not Baudelairean “luxe, calme, et volupté.”

In this chapter, I will look at three emblematic uses of antiquity in the French modernist theater: Sartre’s Les mouches, Camus’s Caligula, and Anouilh’s Antigone. All had a significant impact on subsequent literature and thought, and are essential to understanding the context in which first Lacan, and later Derrida and Foucault wrote. Unlike the later postmodernist uses of antiquity we shall be examining in the remainder of this book, all three of my modernist examples are drawn from the realm of dramatic spectacle rather than analytic investigation. As opposed to being ways to historicize the subject, antiquity for these writers represents a field of imaginative and allegorical possibilities. We become Antigone and Creon, Orestes and Electra, Caligula and his assassins. Antiquity becomes a way of re-presenting the present.

1. Les mouches: The Tragedy of Freedom

Being an individual human being is not like being an individual peach. It is a project we have to accomplish. It is an autonomy we forge for ourselves on the basis of our shared existence, and thus a function of our dependency rather than an alternative to it. (Eagleton 2003: 162)

I wanted to deal with the tragedy of freedom as opposed to the tragedy of fate. In other words, the subject of my play could be summarized as follows: “the way a man comports himself in the face of an act he has
committed, for which he assumes all the consequences and responsibilities, even if the act otherwise horrifies him.” [. . . ] I wanted to take the case of a man who is free and yet situated, who is not content to imagine himself to be free, but who frees himself at the cost of an exceptional act, however monstrous it may be, because he alone is able to bring to it this definitive liberation in relation to himself. (Sartre 2005a: 76–77)

In Sartre’s *Les mouches*, the Furies of Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* have become flies feeding upon the bloodguilt of the people of Argos for the death of Agamemnon. In it, the existentialist philosopher combines a variety of versions of the Electra-and-Orestes myths, including those of Sophocles and Euripides,8 to create a meditation on the cost of freedom and responsibility (Contat and Galster 2005: 1265). The choice of an ancient setting was in many ways natural. Sartre’s acquaintance with the ancient world was anything but superficial. His knowledge of Latin and Greek was excellent. He had won prizes in translation at the lycée and during his preparations (hypokhagne and khagne) for the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Nor were these forays into philology merely academic exercises of only transitory significance; the ancients in general and ancient drama in particular would continue to be of interest to Sartre throughout his adult life. We know, for example, that he reread the works of Sophocles while in a German prison camp at the beginning of the war shortly before the composition of *Les mouches* (Cohen-Solal 1987: 51–53, 66, 158).

There is nothing surprising, then, in the fact that Sartre would turn to ancient tragedy for the theme of his first commercially produced theatrical work, nor that his last play would be an adaptation of Euripides’ *Trojan Women*. Yet, while Paris in the early 1940s was awash in neoclassical tragedies and productions of the ancients, Sartre’s play was no neo-Aristotelian drama in the manner of Giraudoux or of Cocteau’s *Antigone* (Contat and Galster 2005: 1262–63). In the occupied Paris of 1943, it was intended as a call to arms, but one that, owing to its classical “disguise,” was able to clear the German censors with little difficulty.9

8. Thus, as in Euripides’ *Electra*, Clytemnestra is portrayed as in many ways a sympathetic and caring mother who regrets the murder of Agamemnon. See Act 1, scene 5 (Sartre 2005b: 19).

9. The whole question of how and why the French theater continued to function under the occupation and whether it was a tool of that occupation, a center of resistance, or, more likely, an unstable and constantly renegotiated mixture of both, remains a source of bitter controversy (Witt 2001: 16, 190). It is, however, a matter of record that Sartre sought and received permission from the Resistance to have *Les mouches* performed in occupied Paris (Contat and Galster 2005: 1268).
At this remove, the political resonances of the portrayal of the people of Argos as complicit in their subjection to the tyranny of Aegisthus seem unmistakable. The flies feed on Argos’ bloodguilt. They represent the Furies of self-repression inflicted by the citizens upon themselves in the recognition of their own jouissance at the death of Agamemnon (Sartre 2005b: 5, Act 1, scene 1). The flies thus function as an allegory of the way in which many in France submitted to the guilty pleasure of fascist occupation.

Jupiter: As for the people of Argos, the next day, when they heard the king howl in pain in the palace, they didn’t yet say anything, they lowered their lids as their eyes rolled back in pleasure, and the whole town was like a woman in heat. (Sartre 2005b: 7, Act 1, scene 1)

The sadistic pleasure of the act is complemented by the townspeople’s enjoyment in their submission, in their own reduction to an instrument of Aegisthus’ power. Accordingly, Jupiter describes one townsman’s listening to the king’s final agony in terms that directly recall sexual penetration:

Jupiter: You are old enough to have heard them, those massive screams that circulated through the streets of the city. What did you do?

Old Woman: My husband was in the fields. What was I able to do? I locked my door.

Jupiter: Yes, and you opened the window to hear better and you leaned over on your elbows behind the curtains, panting, with a strange tickling sensation in your loins. (Sartre 2005b: 7, Act 1, scene 1)

In this passage, the town is allegorized as giving itself over to the jouissance of power, to the enjoyment of its own subjugation (Copjec 2002: 213, 216–17; St. Aubyn and Marshall 1963: 19–20). The sexualized citizenry melts into the position of the object.

11. Compare the following statement by Inès to Garcin in Huis clos on occupying the position of object in relation to the gaze of the other, “Tu es un lâche, Garcin, un lâche parce que je le veux. Je le veux, tu entends, je le veux! Et pourtant, vois comme je suis faible, un souffle; je ne suis rien que le regard qui te voit, que cette pensée incolore qui te pense” (“You are a coward, Garcin, a coward because I want it. I want it, do you hear me, I want it! And yet, look at how weak I am, a breath; I am nothing but the gaze that sees you, but this colorless thought that thinks you”) (Sartre 2005e: 126, scene 5).
12. As Mary Ann Friese Witt reminds me (per litteras), “This sexual aspect could be
Les mouches, which was first performed in 1943 in occupied Paris, is in many ways an allegory and biting satire of the Pétain regime and the hypocritical ideology of guilt and repentance it sought to impose on its defeated populace. As Sartre himself acknowledged, the play directly ridicules the government of Vichy and those who collaborated with it and with the occupation. It shows them reveling both in the slaughter of Agamemnon (prewar France) and in their guilt over that slaughter. Orestes from this perspective can be read more easily as a hero of freedom and of the resistance than as a Mycenean Greek or a character from an actual fifth-century tragedy (Sartre 2005c; Sartre 2005d: 82–83; Contat 2005: xxiv–xxvii; Kaplan 2000: 28; St. Aubyn and Marshall 1963: 7). Les mouches is, in short, a very contemporary work and in no way an historical reconstruction. As Michel Contat observes, “Conceived as a play lauding the spirit of resistance by founding itself on a philosophy of freedom, Les mouches had nothing Greek about it except the reference to the myth” (2005: xxiv).

Nonetheless, the play is more than a simple cryptogram to rouse the resistance (Leonard 2005: 219). It is also a profound intertextual and philosophical meditation. It may not be completely Greek in spirit, but it borrows elements from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, while being a direct response to the classicizing theater of the period and a treatment of Sartre’s own philosophical concerns. The flies, as Sartre’s evocation of the Furies, are not only symbolic of the shame and guilt, the profound sense of original sin that the Pétain regime sought to foster in Vichy and occupied France, they are also figurations of the people of Argos’ own bad faith (Sartre 2005b: 5, 8–10, Act 1, scene 1; 54, Act 2, tableau 2, scene 8). They thus form part of Sartre’s larger philosophical critique of the routine processes by which subjects delude themselves and so becomes unable and unwilling to assume the burden of their acts, and hence to exercise a meaningful, positive freedom (Sartre 1943: 85–90, 616–23; St. Aubyn and Marshall 1963: 17). The flies on this reading metaphorize the problematic of resistance in general, on the ontological and existential level, rather than merely embodying a more narrow and immediate political concern.

Moreover, while Sartre’s inspiration for Les mouches can be shown to derive from a variety of sources and was part of the larger neoclassical revival discussed above, it is also a very specific and pointed response to Giraudoux’s Electre (Contat and Galster 2005: 1258–61; St. Aubyn and Marshall 1963: 8–10; Marcel 1959: 179). It was in the

related to Sartre’s (unfortunate) tendency in writing about collaboration after the war to equate collaborators with feminized homosexuals who found jouissance in submission to the power of the occupiers.”
latter that the term *mouches* was first used of the Furies (Giraudoux 1982: 600, Act 1, scene 1), although not in a sustained fashion but merely in a passing ironic sense. In many ways, the difference between Giraudoux’s pesky coquettes, whom the gardener refers to as “flies,” and Sartre’s bloodsucking insects, feeding on the guilt of Argos, stands for the larger divergences between these two plays. It will be worth our while to take a moment to examine more closely how these two authors treat this same mythic complex, both to reveal the originality of Sartre’s text and to give a better sense of the neoclassical context in which he, Camus, and Anouilh were working.

There is in fact a sense in which Giraudoux’s work, while both a tragedy and a profoundly sophisticated work of art, remains an aesthetic vehicle of ironic distraction, rather than engagement. Where Sartre’s Orestes will reject any notion of bourgeois or domestic contentment, including the opportunity to “teach philosophy or architecture in a large university town” (Sartre 2005b: 12, Act 1, scene 2), Giraudoux’s gardener, who corresponds to the farmer in Eurpides’ *Electra*, declaims that even amidst the murder and mayhem of tragedy, “life’s sole aim is to love” (1982: 640, Entracte). Clearly, this statement in the context of the play as whole cannot be taken as a straightforward declaration of fact. Yet it is anything but merely sarcastic. The irony is perhaps best caught in the following speech by Electra. In it, we see both a denunciation of bourgeois happiness as hypocrisy and resignation, a move which is common to all the texts we are examining in this chapter, and the simultaneous evocation of that happiness as offering a moment of utopian deliverance, however compromised it may be:

Spouses, sisters-in-law, mothers-in-law, all of them, when their husbands in the morning no longer see anything through their swollen eyes but purple and gold, it’s they who rouse them, who offer them coffee and hot water, the hatred of injustice and the contempt for meager happiness [*bonheur*]. [. . .] And they watch their awakening, And the husbands, even if they have only slept five minutes, they have regained the armor of happiness, satisfaction, indifference, generosity, appetite. And a patch of sunlight reconciles them with the blots of bloods. And a bird’s song with all the lies. (Giraudoux 1982: 651, Act 2, scene 3)

Electra’s contempt is manifest, but the attractions of happiness, generosity, sunshine, and bird song are not so easily to be discounted. The choice between a fierce hatred of injustice and a resigned contentment
is not straightforward in Giraudoux’s eyes. It is, instead, further problematized at the play’s end. There Electra’s insistence on “truth” and “justice” so incapacitates Aegisthus that he is unable to lead the resistance to an army of Corinthian invaders with the result that the city of Argos is sacked. Her justice leads to destruction.

A bit of bad faith, in the end, may not be more than we can stomach, as Giraudoux the professional diplomat knew only too well. Thus, where Sartre’s Orestes will offer Argos the possibility of liberation through a single authentic act for which he assumes full responsibility, Giraudoux’s Electre offers truth as a purification, but also as a massacre. The latter’s encounter with antiquity presents neither a call for political resistance nor a means of radical self-transformation, but rather exemplifies an ironic and sophisticated resignation. Nothing could be less Sartrean (Contat and Galster 2005: 1262), and Les mouches is not only a riposte to its predecessor but also a rebuttal.

This intertextual dialogue, in turn, is key to understanding the nature of Sartre’s relation to antiquity in the play. The encounter with the ancients, for him as well as for Giraudoux, is not a moment of estrangement from the present. Les mouches is in fact best read as a response to its own political, aesthetic, and intellectual context, far more than as an encounter with the otherness of antiquity in the manner of the post-structuralists. Indeed, for all its classical machinery, Les mouches, like many of its neoclassical counterparts, is self-consciously and ironically anachronistic (Contat and Galster 2005: 1274).

We can point to a number of examples. First, although the play is set in Greece, the father of the gods is referred to by his Latin name, “Jupiter.” The one time “Zeus” is invoked, he represents Orestes’ lingering belief in the possibility of a moral absolute, before the discovery of his own freedom. Zeus is prayed to as a transcendent principle that could reveal to Orestes the nature of the good, le Bien, at a point, however, when he already finds himself beyond good and evil (“À présent je suis las, je ne distingue plus le Bien du Mal” (“At present I am worn out, I no longer distinguish Good from Evil”), (Sartre 2005b: 38, Act 2, tableau 1, scene 4). To the extent that he represents a firm distinction between these poles, the Zeus addressed by Orestes is opposed to the cynical and conniving Jupiter, the “god of the flies and of death,” who works hand in glove with Aegisthus to keep the people of Argos enslaved to their guilt (Sartre 2005b: 3, Act 1, scene 1; St. Aubyn

13. Compare the beggar’s description of Orestes in Giraudoux’s play, as one whose real life was to “smile [. . .] to laugh out loud, to love, to dress well, to be happy” (1982: 644, Act 2, scene 1).
Marshall 1963: 11–12). Yet, Jupiter in fact is nothing more than brute nature, the realm of being-in-itself (Sartre 2005b: 63, Act 3, scene 3), to use the vocabulary of *L'être et le néant*, which was written at the same time as the play (Cohen-Solal 1987: 185). He only has meaning to the extent that human beings grant it to him. Gods and kings are a way for people to avoid looking at the emptiness inside themselves, a figuration of bad faith (Sartre 2005b: 45–51, Act 2, tableau 2, scenes 5–6; Curtis 1948: 10).  

Aegisthus has power from Jupiter only so long as the citizens of Argos recognize it, only so long as they remain enmeshed in the warm bath of guilt in which they languish and luxuriate. As Electra says, “They love their ill, they need a familiar wound that they carefully cultivate by scratching it with their dirty nails” (Sartre 2005b: 35, Act 2, tableau 1, scene 4). Thus, when Orestes prays to Zeus he asks for a sign of whether he should accept his fate with “resignation and abject humility.” Jupiter then produces one by having a boulder at the mouth of the cave shine with a miraculous light. But Orestes refuses to accept it as intended for him, and in the moment of that refusal he first becomes both truly Orestes and truly free, “The light [. . . ]? It’s not for me; and no one any longer can give me orders” (Sartre 2005b: 39, Act 2, tableau 1, scene 4). One will search in vain for an analogous passage in Sartre’s ancient or neoclassical predecessors. 

This is an antiquity that never existed, but one clearly constructed to be a reflection of the present. Witness passages such as Act 2, tableau 1, scene 1, where a mother admonishes her son before sending him off to attend the rites of the dead. He is told to be careful of his tie, to be “good and [to] cry with the others” (Sartre 2005b: 24). Self-inflicted guilt and bourgeois conformity are central topics in this text and obsessions of the period. They were hardly the concerns of Aeschylus.

In a similar vein, Sartre portrays Orestes as under the care of a Skeptic *paedogogus*, although the *Oresteia* is set in the Mycenaean period.  

He also compares the learning of the *paedogogus* to that of the travel

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14. There is a slight inconsistency concerning this matter within the play. In Act 2, tableau 1, scene 3, when Electra dances to prove that the dead have no hold and that the people of Argos need not live their lives sunken in shame, Jupiter utters a spell and a boulder, which had blocked the entrance to the cave, rolls noisily against the steps of the temple. This causes the priest to say, “oh cowardly and too easily swayed people, the dead avenge themselves.” The crowd promptly returns to a state of naive credulity (Sartre 2005b: 32). This would seem to be an example of what Lacan would later term “the answer of the Real”: a contingent encounter that is provided with a *post hoc* logical consistency and hence meaning (Žižek 1991: 29–30; 1989: 170–71).

15. As David Wray observes to me, this is not per se different from Euripides’ inclusion of characters using sophistic rhetoric in tragedies set in the Homeric age.
writer Pausanias from the second century CE (Sartre 2005b: 11, Act 1, scene 2). As in the case of Jupiter, this is no character from an ancient tragedy. Indeed, the *pédagogue* represents more the smug enlighten-ment self-assurance of Madame Bovary’s petit bourgeois apothecary, Homais, than the skeptical philosophy of Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus, or any of their disciples. As the *pédagogue* says of the people of Argos:

How ugly they are. See, Master, their waxy complexion, their hollow eyes. They are dying from fear. That’s the effect of superstition. Look at them; look at them. And if you need any further proof of the excellence of my philosophy, consider then my rosy complexion. (Sartre 2005b: 25: Act 2, tableau 1, scene 1)

The complacent self-assurance of this bourgeois, academic philosopher may well be a worse form of delusion than the self-abasement of the people of Argos. The freedom that this philosophy offers, like that of the neo-Kantianism that dominated the French academy when Sartre was a student, is purely negative and abstract (Sartre 2005b: 11–12, Act 1, scene 2; St. Aubyn and Marshall 1963: 16–17). It is not the freedom of a concrete individual, rooted in a particular situation, which Sartre advocates. It is not that of one who performs an act for which he or she is ready to assume the consequences, and for whom those consequences, however heavy, are the signs of that freedom (Contat and Galster 2005: 1262; Marcel 1959: 186). It is instead a form of bad faith.

Tragedy for Sartre, then, offers not a way of thinking about history, of estranging the formation of the subject through an encounter with the intimate other of Greek history and culture per se, as will be the case for the poststructuralists, but rather it functions as a sublimation of the present into the realm of the timeless so as to imagine a single act of transcendence: Orestes’ murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (Fowlie 1960: 172). That act, moreover, far from abstracting Orestes from the realm of the concrete and the immediate, will root him in it (Aronson 1980: 181–82). He seeks through it not an abstract or negative freedom, but a form of embodiment: “I hardly exist: of all the ghosts that gnaw through today, none is more ghostly than I.” He is not the fated avenger of Agamemnon’s murder found in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, but a strictly contingent one who, through coming to recognize that contingency, his “thrownness” in Heideggerian terms, thereby

gains the means to come to a real and substantial freedom (2005b: 37, Act 2, tableau 1, scene 4).\footnote{For an excellent analysis of Sartre’s complex relationship with Heidegger, see Renaut (1993).} Freedom and authenticity consist not in the denial of our “thrown”\footnote{See \textit{Being and Time} I.6, “To Dasein’s state of Being belongs throwness; indeed it is constitutive for Dasein’s disclosedness. In throwness is revealed that in each case Dasein, as my Dasein and this Dasein, is already in a definite world and alongside a definite range of definite entities within-the-world. Disclosedness is essentially factical” (Heidegger 1962: 264).} nature—of our temporality, our finitude, and our intersubjectivity—but precisely in their assumption (Sartre 2005a: 77; Zuckert 1996: 46; Silverman 2000: 34).

Orestes: Listen, all these people who tremble in their darkened rooms surrounded by their departed, suppose that I assume all their crimes. Suppose that I wish to merit the name, “stealer of remorse,” and that I take on myself all their guilt [. . . ]. Say then, on that day when I will be haunted by regrets more numerous than the flies of Argos, by all the regrets of the city, will I not have become your fellow citizen? Will I not be at home among your high bleeding walls, as a butcher in his red apron is at home in his shop among the bleeding beeves he has just skinned. (2005b: 40, Act 2, tableau 1, scene 4)

Yet that assumption is always immediate and existential, it does not engage history as a profoundly decentering, impersonal process (Eagleton 1996: 56–57). It is, in a word, dramatic. The double murder of Aegisthus and Clytemenestra produces a moment of ecstatic freedom. Orestes and Electra for a brief instant are united in a \textit{jouissance} of blood. Orestes declares:

\begin{quote}
We are free, Electra. I seem to have brought you to birth, and I have just been born with you; I love you and you belong to me. Yesterday I was still alone and today you belong to me. Blood unites us doubly, for we are of the same blood and we spilt that blood. (Sartre 2005b: 53, Act 2, tableau 2, scene 8)
\end{quote}

Yet this momentary clearing that the authentic act inaugurates, this rupture in the consecrated order of things (Marcel 1959: 187), immediately becomes the site of determination as the consequences of that act are genuinely assumed. Electra retorts, “Free? I certainly don’t feel free. Can you make it that all this has not been? Something happened and
we are not free to undo it” (Sartre 2005b: 53, Act 2, tableau 2, scene 8). But this is precisely the essence of freedom and the authentic act. The member of the resistance who assassinates a Nazi official not only remains an assassin, but may well cause the death of countless innocents in reprisals, as Sartre himself recognized (2005d: 82–83; Kaplan 2000: 46). Yet it is only in the willingness to assume those consequences, to recognize and accept them, that the possibility of real self-determination in the broadest and most philosophical sense becomes possible (Marcel 1959: 183). As Orestes says in response, “Yesterday I walked aimlessly on the earth, and thousands of paths fled beneath my feet. [. . .] Today, there is only one and God knows where it leads: but it’s my path” (Sartre 2005b: 53, Act 2, tableau 2, scene 8).

At the end of the play, Orestes is able to offer freedom to the people of Argos through his willingness to assume their responsibility for avenging the death of Agamemnon. He thereby transforms the abstract and academic freedom that characterizes the *paedogogus*’s philosophy into an embodied act. His “crime” becomes the grounds of a potential collective liberation (Fowlie 1960: 171), but one that we have little reason to believe will actually occur, given both the passivity and bad faith of the Argive populace and the radically individualistic nature of freedom as Sartre has Orestes define it. On the one hand, the people of Argos, as we have seen from the beginning, maintain a profoundly sensual cathexis with their guilt and oppression. Their wound is their object of desire. Orestes’ acceptance of his crime, of its naked criminality without seeking the excuses of law or shame, is precisely what they cannot accept (Sartre 2005b: 69, Act 3, scene 6). On the other, Orestes’ act of situated freedom, while grounding him in the world of concrete historicity, immediately alienates him from the very community to which it is addressed (Aronson 1980: 183).20

The free man is “an exile,” someone who has ripped a hole in the order of things, who has refused the reigning realm of positivity in the name of a situated act of negation, but who can rely on no canons of nature or of existing morality to justify his action (Sartre 2005b: 64–65, Act 3, scene 2). His act and the world exist in a relation of strict opposition, not as part of a complex network or system of situated differences. Consequently, that act’s negativity is almost instantly recuperated in the realm of the Sartrean “in itself,” the inert existent. As Electra herself notes, this is a freedom that is all but indistinguishable

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19. On Electra’s inability to assume her act and her need for the cathexis of guilt embodied by the Furies, see Sartre (2005b: 59, Act 3, scene 1) and Aronson (1980: 182).
20. See also Champigny (1982: 44–45).
from its opposite: “Can you make it that all this has not been? Some-
things happened and we are not free to undo it.” Orestes offers to the
people the possibility of their own political and existential liberation,
but he cannot offer it as anything more than a pure negation, which
they are unable and unwilling to accept, lest it be reintegrated into
the reigning realm of positivity, and become just another form of bad
faith. This is perhaps what Michel Foucault had in mind when he later
referred to Sartre’s “intellectual terrorism” (Macey 1993: 429). We are
faced with the stark choice of meaningless but free self-responsibility,
through knowing crime, or bad faith, self-deception, and sensualized
slavery.

In the end, Orestes’ act becomes a triumph of the individual will
rather than a true, collective, political act, and this is, of course, the
ground on which Sartre’s play rejoins the terrain of his modernist and
neoclassical confrères: for there is nothing in the act itself of killing
Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, or in the logic of the act, that necessarily
distinguishes it from an analogous gesture of revolt deriving from a
fascist orientation. In itself, this is no necessary condemnation: for it
was not the revolt per se that was unjustified but the authoritarian and
genocidal regimes that ensued. Sartre’s recognition, however, of this
fundamental ambiguity at the heart of his philosophy of the act would
lead him, first, to the failed attempt to produce an ethics based on the
ontology of L’être et le néant (Contat and Galster 2005: 1272; Aron-
son 1980: 181; Marcel 1959: 179), and later to his own idiosyncratic
embrace of Marxism in La critique de la raison dialectique (Renaut
1993: 153). In the end, in the absence of a transcendental law or prin-
ciple, it was the turn to history and not just historicity that would be
called to judge. In a world beyond good and evil, the project of radical
self-fashioning, of an ethics of self-creation, could, it seems, have no
other ground (Renaut 1993: 218–19).

Indeed, as different as the two approaches may be, and as stark as
the opposition between them may have been painted by Foucault and
others, both the modernists and the postmodernists find themselves
addressing a very similar set of questions: What kind of ethics is pos-
sible? What concept of the self’s relation to itself is possible in a world
that no longer offers transcendental guarantees? How do we offer
resistance to the forces of identity, homogenization, and commodifi-
cation, to all those forces that in Lacan’s words ask us to cede on our
desire? How do we distinguish our acts of resistance from those of our
fascist brothers? Where the modernists seek to answer these questions
on the level of the act, the postmoderns will answer them on the level
of the concept (Macey 1993: 33; Foucault 1994cc: 764–65): through a systematic interrogation of the construction of the basic categories of subject, self, and other that make the act possible. Where the modernist model is that of dramatic display, the postmodern will be that of analysis, the *essai*, and the subversion of the sovereign subject.

2. *Caligula*: The Logic of the Absurd

You never believed in the sense of this world and you deduced from that the idea that all things were equivalent and that good and evil were defined as one wished. You supposed that in the absence of all human or divine morality the only values were those that ruled the animal world: violence and trickery. You concluded from this that man was nothing and that one was able to kill his soul, that in the most outrageous adventures the task of the individual could only be the quest for power, and his morality, the realism of conquests. And in truth, I, who believed I thought as you, hardly saw any argument with which to oppose you, except a violent desire for justice that, in the end, seemed to me as little reasoned as the most immediate of passions. (Camus, *Lettres à un ami allemand*, 1965a: 240)

Men too secrete the inhuman. In moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspects of their gestures, their pantomime void of sense renders ridiculous all that surrounds them. A man talks on the telephone behind a glass screen, we don’t hear him, but we see his pointless mimicry: we ask why is he alive. This discomfort before the inhumanity of man himself, this incalculable fall before the image of what we are, this “nausea” as a contemporary author calls it, is also the absurd. (Camus, *Mythe de Sisyphe*, 1965b: 108)

The pattern is set: for the modernists, antiquity will serve as an allegorization of the nature and cost of the authentic act. Implicit is the assumption that there can be no authenticity without revolt, without a refusal to accept the universe as bequeathed to us. This is as true for Sartre’s Orestes as it is for Camus’s Caligula. The problem, of course, as Camus acknowledges in his fourth “Lettre à un ami allemand,” is that it is just as true for the fascist’s will to power as his own humanist revolt. Each perceives the inhuman and the contingent as not merely accidental but as a necessary part of the human. The act is precisely a gesture of remaking the world that at once acknowledges this facticity, the thrown nature of human existence, and takes it as the ground of its own self-construction. The question is what kind of construction shall that be. As the First Patrician in *Caligula* says of the numerous rapes,
thefts, and murders that he and the other aristocrats have suffered at the hands of their artist emperor, “Are you going to put up with this? As far as I’m concerned, my choice is made. Between running the risk and this intolerable life of fear and impotence, I have no hesitation” (Camus 1962a: 32, Act 2, scene 1). *Caligula*, then, poses the question of whether it is possible to make a response to inhuman cruelty in an absurd world that is not itself simply a mechanical, and thus ultimately inhuman, reproduction of the already given. In a world beyond good and evil, who is more deluded, Caligula or those who finally assassinate him? Thus, in both its subject matter and philosophical atmosphere, *Caligula* is a play that is very much typical of French theater in the 1930s and 1940s as well as of the ideological and political complexities and complicities of its historical context (Freeman 1971: 38–39, 48). And while Camus himself was more directly involved in the resistance than Sartre, he too had no difficulty publishing during the occupation and was considerably less convinced of the morality of executing Brasillach and other collaborationists than were Sartre and de Beauvoir, owing in part to his opposition to the death penalty (Todd 1996: 284, 292, 394–95; Kaplan 2000: 74, 195–98, 216–17). Lines had to be drawn, but the question was always where and how?

What is most important to note from our point of view, however, is not the individual and perhaps accidental ideological complicities that necessarily occur in any conflict, but the larger theoretical concerns and how they relate to the uses to which antiquity was put by the modernists as opposed to their poststructuralist successors. For the central point to observe is that so long as contingency, historicity, and facticity are viewed as the simple dialectical others of the subject, as that which ultimately must be overcome in a higher synthesis through the authentic act, then real history cannot emerge. The past can only be an allegory of the present’s will. This distinction is crucial, for there are numerous overlaps and points of contact between the poststructuralists and Camus and Sartre, not the least of which is a common affinity with Heidegger whose own Nazi past was never explicitly renounced (Renaut 1993: 35). As we shall see, then, when we come to Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault, they too seek to elaborate a post-Nietzschean ethics of self-creation, to seek a good beyond all socially recognized goods. But that moment of self-creation is never simply opposed to the given, is never simply a break with the past or an assumption of contingency, but it is also a moment of enjoyment, an acknowledgment of the erotics of power, that simultaneously creates itself and gives itself over to that contingency. Foucauldian “power and knowledge,” the
Derridean “signifier and signified,” the Lacanian “Real and Symbolic” are never opposed to each other as subject and object, being and negating (l’être et le néant), but instead exist as a series of “folds” (Foucault), “knots” (Lacan), “exchanges” (Lacan), and “disseminations” (Derrida). The imagery here is important. Rather than a series of oppositions, which ultimately mirror each other and place a premium on identity (le même), poststructuralist metaphors emphasize networks, interdependence, complex systems, overdetermination, and difference. History from the poststructural view, therefore, is never simply an allegory of the present, its re-presentation, but always its intimate other, the opaque kernel that lies at its heart and operates its dispersion (Žižek 1991: 36). It is only by coming to terms with that otherness qua otherness, that a genuine ethics of self-creation, a real spiritual practice, an authentic politics can be formulated that is not predicated on either the eternal reproduction of the same or its dialectical complement, the annihilation of the other.

Camus’s *Caligula* is, then, anything but a straightforward historical drama. It is a high stakes existential wager that combines a careful reading of Suetonius with deliberate, calculated distortions of Roman history. Published in 1944 and having debuted as an immediate hit on the Paris stage in 1945, *Caligula* in many ways reflects the introspection of post-occupation France and is a clear meditation on what Witt terms “fascist aesthetics” through the pursuit of the absolute (Freeman 1971: 35–36).

Moreover, while Camus’s direct knowledge of classical culture was less than Sartre’s—he had no Greek—he too had an abiding interest in antiquity, even writing his thesis for his *Diplôme d’études supérieures* in philosophy on Augustine and Plotinus (Todd 1996: 98). The play owes its origins to a 1934 university course, which Camus took in Algiers, on the Roman emperors. In it, he read Caligula’s biography by Suetonius in the original Latin (Todd 1996: 52, 64). Nor was this, in fact, his first exposure to the topic. We know that Jean Grenier, Camus’s philosophy professor in his final year of the lycée (1932) and a lifelong influence, had spoken of Suetonius’ *Life*...
of Caligula and Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy to the young student on several occasions. We also know from an early essay of Camus’s appreciation of Grenier’s Les îles, which itself features a distinctly Nietzschean reading of the Suetonian text (Camus 1965c and 1965d; Quilliot 1962: 1740–41; Freeman 1971: 50–52). Given this background and the atmosphere of neo-Nietzschean classicism that dominated the French theater of the thirties and forties, the creation and production of Caligula could hardly be considered a surprise.24

The earliest notes for the play date from 1937 and it went through repeated drafts before the first published edition in 1944 (Quilliot 1962: 1733; Todd 1996: 352). A revised edition was subsequently published in 1947 and the play underwent a final revision in 1958.25 The Suetonian life of this most depraved of emperors clearly struck a chord with Camus’s deepest interests, and he would even go so far as to sign his satirical articles in Combat using the nom de plume, Suétone (Grenier 1987: 119–20).

Caligula, like both Orestes and Antigone, rejects bourgeois happiness in favor of an uncompromisingly logical, but ultimately inhuman pursuit of a transcendence of the existing order of things (Camus 1962a: 78, Act 3, scene 6). This pursuit is not irrational but beyond the scope of humanity as commonly understood: “I am not mad and in fact I have never been so reasonable. Simply, I suddenly felt a need for the impossible. Things as they are no longer seem satisfying” (Camus 1962a: 15, Act 1, scene 4). Caligula is not insane, but rather he alone unites the dream of a radical transcendence with the power to bring it about (Camus 1962a: 24, Act 1, scene 9). He represents precisely the force of an implacable logic in an absurd universe that knows no transcendental ground. In that universe, all human actions become ontologically and thus morally equivalent from a metaphysical perspective (Todd 1996: 297; Sprintzen 1988: 75; Curtis 1948: 30–31). As Cherea says, Caligula must be killed “since he cannot be refuted” (Camus 1962a: 35, Act 2, scene 2).

24. Camus’s early writings are also suffused with a sense of Mediterranean humanism and its roots in the classical world. See L’envers et l’endroit (1965e) and Noces (1965f).

25. The 1958 version is now considered the definitive one and forms the basis for the text published in the Pléiade edition (1962). Our primary concern is with the play as published in 1944 and produced in 1945, thus when it was contemporary with Sartre’s Les mouches and Anouilh’s Antigone. While variants should be noted, for our purposes their significance is limited. As Sprintzen observes, “The last two major revisions, those of 1947 and 1958, do not radically alter the structure and dynamics of the play” (1988: 66). What is most significant to observe is that Caligula remained a figure of fascination for Camus from at least 1934 to 1958 as did the Nietzschean context in which the initial encounter with Suetonius and the emperor occurred.
It is precisely this point concerning the emperor’s perverse logical rigor to which Gabriel Marcel refers when he writes that *Caligula* is “purely and simply the theatrical transposition of the absurd man as he is defined in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*” (1959: 165). Marcel has in mind passages such as the following, “[in a passion for the absurd] there must be an unjust, that is to say logical, mode of reasoning. It’s not easy. It’s always simple enough to be logical. It’s almost impossible to be completely logical” (1965b: 103). Caligula is precisely the “unjust,” logical man, who reasons all the way to the end, who does not balk at the consequences of his conclusions. Of course, the resemblance between the play and Camus’s more formal exercise in “absurd reasoning” is in no way accidental.26 Camus had not only written *L’étranger, Le mythe de Sisyphe*, and *Caligula* all at the same time, but he had initially hoped that Gallimard would publish all three simultaneously as his “three absurds” (Todd 1996: 241, 261, 274–300).

Nonetheless, the three texts are not identical. Indeed, while Camus clearly identifies himself with the passion of the absurdist hero in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, most critics would be loath to claim that there is a similar direct identification with Caligula (or for that matter with the affectless and ultimately murderous Meursault).27 Nonetheless, that identification is precisely what is at stake in Marcel’s notion of *Caligula* as the theatrical transposition of *Le mythe*. Moreover, the problem of this identification with evil or with the criminal is precisely the very one noted in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section from the *Lettres à un ami allemand* (“And in truth, I, who believed I thought as you, hardly saw any argument with which to oppose you”). In this collection of fictitious letters, which were clandestinely published during 1943 and 1944 in resistance periodicals and then collected after the war, Camus tries to clarify what separates the resistance fighter from his Nazi counterpart, not on the basis of nationality, but in terms of foundational ideological and philosophical assumptions. Nonetheless, as the above quoted passage indicates, the difference can seem surprisingly small. In a world denied all transcendental guarantees of meaning and value, Camus the absurdist can do no more than oppose an irrational “passion for justice” to the cold-eyed logic of his fictitious Nazi interlocutor, a logic that is, as we have seen, the distinguishing feature of both the absurdist hero of the *Myth of Sisyphus* and of Caligula himself (Freeman 1971: 47–48).

26. Part 1 of *Le mythe* is entitled “un raisonnement absurde.”

27. Freeman (1971: 43–44) argues that Caligula represents a novel solution to the problem of the absurd by attempting to universalize the nonsensical relation between the self and world. In so doing, however, Caligula is simply being “completely logical.”
Caligula’s project is, in fact, to be completely and uncompromisingly logical “jusqu’à la fin” (“all the way to the end”): for what he has discovered in the death of his sister, Drusilla, is not personal loss, but the loss of meaning, the absurd (Freeman 1971: 37–38):

Caligula: I also know what you think. Such foolishness over the death of a woman. No, it’s not that. [...] That death is nothing, I swear to you; it is only the sign of truth [...]. It’s a very simple and lucid truth, a bit stupid, but difficult to discover and hard to bear.

Helicon: And what is this truth, Gaius?

Caligula: Men die and they are not happy. (1962a: 16, Act 1, scene 4)

The world, in short, is indifferent to the lot of human beings, and yet we cannot bear to face the absurdity of our desire that it should be otherwise. All of Caligula’s seemingly random cruelty is designed to drive home this simple pedagogical lesson:

Helicon: Come on Gaius, it’s a truth that one lives with quite easily. Look around. It certainly doesn’t stop them from enjoying their dinner.

Caligula: That’s because everything around me is a lie, but I want us to live in the truth. And I have precisely the means to make them live in the truth. For I know what they lack, Helicon. They are deprived of knowledge and they lack a teacher who knows what he’s talking about. (1962a: 16, Act 1, scene 4)

What Caligula’s violence threatens, then, is not just the senators’ lives and property, but the very possibility that those lives might have meaning (1962a: 34, Act 2, scene 2). This is why he, like the philosopher, must be killed: for he bears the most deadly virus of all, self-knowledge. The confrontation with the absurd is unbearable and yet liberating, not because it brings with it a sense of loss, but the final loss of loss (1962a: 105, Act 4, scene 13).28

Caligula, thus, like the Nietzschean theorists of neoclassical French tragedy, Maulnier and Brasillach, seeks purity (1962a: 102, Act 4, scene 13) and absolute clarity:

You see I have no excuses. Not even the shadow of a love nor the bitterness of melancholy. I have no alibi. But today I am freer than

I have been in years, liberated as I am from memory and illusion. (He laughs with real emotion.) I know that nothing lasts! (1962a: 106, Act 4, scene 13)

Caligula thus becomes a “god” by transcending the bounds of human reason and fashioning an identity that is beyond illusion and beyond sense, and thus is truly free (1962a: 69, Act 3, scene 2). What offends is not the enormity of his crimes, but their self-avowed absurdity. Yes, he is a murderer, a thief, a rapist. But these are normal instruments of policy throughout the world, whether in Stalin’s Russia, Hitler’s Germany, Srebrenica, or Abu Ghraib. Yet, however, horrible these acts are in themselves, they are always committed ostensibly in the service of a greater good. What makes Camus’s Caligula so powerful is the complete lack of pretence. His violence makes no sense and that is its point and what from one perspective makes it so liberating. It is grounded in the absurdity that is the ultimate foundation of the human condition. It offends not in its violence, but because it reveals that absurdity (Sprintzen 1988: 70–71). In point of fact, as Caligula himself observes, the enormity of his crimes pales in comparison to those committed in any so-called reasonable war:

Caligula: If you knew how to count, you would know that the least war waged by a reasonable tyrant would cost you a thousand times more than the whims of my fantasy.

Scipio: But at least it would be reasonable and the essential is to understand. (1962a: 36, Act 3, scene 2)

In the end, this is what makes Caligula such an attractive figure to Camus. He reveals the nakedness of power and in that makes a mockery of it. There is no justification for his crimes and hence no way to convince us of the reasonableness and the necessity of carrying them out (Todd 1996: 392).

For Caligula, like Orestes, true freedom is not the abstract liberty to make personal choices, but rather represents a fundamental and concrete breach with the existing nature of things. He seeks nothing less than to remake the universe, or at least our relation to it:

Caligula: And what good is there in ruling with a firm hand, how does this astonishing power serve me if I cannot change the order of things, if I cannot make the sun set in the East, suffering decrease, and men no longer die? (Camus: 1962a: 27, Act 1, scene 11)
Such a desire is madness, but only such madness can authorize the truly authentic act. Caligula is beyond good and evil, and from this position of the Nietzschean superman he sets out to teach the patricians the nature of their own subjection:

Caesonia: There is good and evil, that which is great and that which is base, the just and the unjust. I swear to you that all this will not change.

Caligula: My will is to change it. I will grant to this century the gift of equality. And when everything will be all flattened out, the impossible will finally be on the earth, the moon in my hands, then, perhaps, I will be transformed and the world with me, then finally men will not die and they will be happy. (Camus: 1962a: 27, Act 1, scene 11)

Only when there is nothing to live or die for, will death’s sting be lost, and the need for delusion transcended. Only in the recognition of the absurdity of our relation to the world does a radical self-transformation become possible. This is Camus’s and Caligula’s wager and the ground on which they meet (Camus: 1962a: 25, Act 1, scene 10).

Caligula, then, represents not a moment of self-estrangement, but precisely a hyperbole of the self that only the distance of antiquity permits. In Rome of the early empire, in the megalomania of the young emperor, Camus found the ideal conditions for a radical assertion of the self, an almost pure subjectivity released from all constraints. Caligula is free from the social and behavioral fetters that would have constrained the actions of even the most sociopathic contemporary Frenchman. At the same time, he operates outside the ideological categories that would have framed and interpreted even the emperor’s behavior in first-century CE Rome. This is not to say that Camus departs radically from his sources with regard to the basic plot. In point of fact, he follows very much the sequence of events in Suetonius, including the young emperor’s strange relations with his sister, his fixation on the moon, his fondness for contemplating himself in the mirror, and his assassination. The crucial differences are not in the specific actions or even the particular characters but in the explicit reflections on those characters’ motivations. Suetonius provides a chronicle of lurid depravity—rapes, murders, the abuse of senators and their wives. It is gossipy and sensationalistic. His emperor, though, has no inner world. Camus’s Caligula is one who has not only discovered the absurdity of man’s relation to the universe, but he is also one who is determined to follow
the consequences of that intuition to their logical end. He is not Suetonius’ madman but the hero of a particular vision of the absurd that the distance of antiquity serves to reveal. In the end, however closely Camus may hew to Suetonius’ line, however factual the account of Caligula’s crimes may be, this Nietzschean emperor will always necessarily be an allegory, rather than an estrangement, of the self.

3. *Antigone*: “Pour personne, pour moi”

M. Henri: My dear boy, there are two races. The members of one race are numerous, fertile, happy, a great wad of dough to knead. They eat their sausage, make their children, use their tools, count their pennies, in good times and bad, despite wars and epidemics, till old age sets in. These people are meant to live, everyday people, people you don’t imagine dead. And then there are the others, the nobles, the heroes. Those that one can easily imagine laid out, pale, a red hole in their head, one minute triumphant with an honor guard the next between two policemen as the case may be: the cream of the crop. Hasn’t that ever tempted you? (Anouilh 1942: 440, *Eurydice*, Act 2)

With her cult of youth and refusal to grow old, her resounding “no” to everything resembling bourgeois mediocrity and “happiness,” her ideal of “purity,” her notions of the superiority of her “race,” her courting of danger and death, her rejection of “politics” and law, and her guiding principle of irrationality, the character of Antigone reverberates with themes dear to French fascism since the 1930s. (Witt 2001: 226)

It is Caligula’s problematic pursuit of an absolute, a logic, that is beyond the compromises of bourgeois life that is also at heart of Anouilh’s *Antigone*. This last play, via Lacan’s reading of the Sophoclean original, will have the most direct influence on the postmodernist thinkers who will occupy us in the latter part of this book. It also presents the most direct challenge to them: for the play problematizes the difficulty of separating the earlier fascist pursuit of an absolute, beyond the bounds of bourgeois subjectivity, from the later postmodernist pursuit of a pensée du dehors. The latter concern becomes all the more troubling in light of the complicities, flirtations, and collaborations with fascism of postmodern icons like Maurice Blanchot, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, de Man, and Heidegger (Stoekl 1992: 173, 233–60). Nonetheless, the costs of avoiding these complicities must not be underestimated either. For what are the alternatives to maintaining some vision of a radical critique of the existing order, of enlightenment rationality and the bourgeois
economic model of man? Are we not then doomed to choosing between a suffocating positivist dystopia and a fascist utopian beyond? Are we not doomed to a choice between the impossibility of fundamental change—"Keep working: as for desire, better luck next time" (Lacan 1986: 367)—and a beyond that is not only beyond the pleasure principle, but directly embraces the death drive in the most literal and tangible sense? The rejection of a pensée du dehors as inherently authoritarian, if not homicidal, is also the surrender of thought itself as the radical project of rethinking the very concept of the human, the social, and the structures of power and domination they entail.

In many ways, such concerns seem far removed from the aesthetic world of Anouilh. He rejected the title of master thinker in favor of that of simple artisan (Fazia 1969: 28; Vandromme 1972: 17). In so doing, he sought to distinguish his work from that of both the fascists who claimed him (Witt 2001: 192–93, 216–17, 220–21, 227), and from the likes of Sartre and Camus with whom he was often compared (Grossvogel n.d.: 8–9, 12, 35n.3; Fazia 1969: 139). Yet, in spite of his modest claims, Antigone is no simple theatrical exercise. The fact is that Antigone, like many other of Anouilh’s characters, embraces a suicidal search for purity and an exacting rejection of bourgeois compromise. These twin traits place his work squarely in the middle of the ideological and aesthetic debates of the period (Grossvogel n.d.: 11; Vandromme 1972: 100, 109).

The Antigone not only enacts a pursuit of nobility and grandeur, squarely in line with Maulnier’s Nietzschean aesthetics as well as with Anouilh’s own quite conservative views, but it also directly thematizes that pursuit as the essence of the tragic form (Fazia 1969: 27). As the chorus says:

It’s clean, tragedy. It’s calm. It’s certain [ . . . ]. In tragedy, one is tranquil. First, one is among intimates. Everyone is innocent, in the end. It’s not because one kills and the other is killed. It’s a question of distribution. And then above all, it’s calm, tragedy, because you know there is no longer any hope, foul hope; you’re caught, you’re finally caught like a rat [ . . . ]. In a drama, you debate because you hope to escape. It’s ignoble, it’s utilitarian. Here, there is no justification. This is for kings. (Anouilh 1946a: 165–66)

Antigone’s regal rejection of all forms of compromise, her search for purity, which like that of Caligula is ultimately “a higher form of suicide,” is thus at one with the neoclassical vision of tragic aesthetics
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There is no negotiation, no compromise, no commerce between competing goods, no arguments offered in their favor. The tragedy of fate is both cruel and calm. Antigone serves simultaneously as a self-conscious allegory of the play’s own dramaturgical practice and of tragedy’s role as a permanent protest against the mediocrity of modern society (Gignoux 1946: 102).

Her position is, in fact, characteristic of Anouilh’s other mythical and semi-mythical heroines (Curtis 1948: 34). She represents a poetics of death. Thus, Jeannette in *Roméo et Jeanette* rejects both her father’s peasant vulgarity and her sister’s smug bourgeois conformity for the poetic suicide of wading into the ocean in her wedding dress (Anouilh 1946b). Similarly, in 1941’s *Eurydice*, the act of living does not affirm the value of existence but rather represents the loss of transcendent simplicity through the compromises entailed in daily life. Happiness becomes an alibi for vulgarity:

> Orphée: Live, live! Like your mother and her lover perhaps, with sweet nothings, with smiles, with forgiveness and then good meals, after which one makes love and everything is in order. Ah no! I love you too much to live. (Anouilh 1942: 468, Act 3)²⁹

Tragedy, however, offers a way beyond utilitarian impurity, beyond a happiness that can only be conceived as conformity (Fazia 1969: 29–33). The Dionysian stage serves as an ironic platform for the sublime. Antiquity in this vision becomes a means of simultaneously allegorizing the fallen nature of the present and of dreaming of its transcendence. Antigone’s singular act of refusal, her “non” to Creon’s offer of life on his terms, is not the defense of an articulated set of beliefs, principles, or commitments; rather it represents the dream of a return to a moment of pre-Oedipal purity, a dream in which the image of Antigone’s very antiquity symbolizes a lost childhood of the soul (Vandromme 1972: 61, 95). This is not Caligula’s fallen empire, but the vision of a tragic Hellas beyond the dreary compromises of Creon’s politics and Rome’s depravity.

In fact, Anouilh’s *Antigone* was one of various versions of the story, including an adaptation by Thierry Maulnier, that were staged during the war, both in occupied Paris and Vichy. The subject matter was anything but verboten and, like neoclassicism in general, was actively promoted by the occupation authorities (Steiner 1984: 147, 192–94; 29. See also Anouilh (1942: 465–66, Act 3, and 498–99, Act 4).
Witt 2001: 218–19). Nor did the Antigone’s fascist subtext go unnoticed. The clandestine resistance periodical, *Les lettres françaises*, in its review immediately stigmatized Antigone’s nihilism as the first step toward fascism, and on this basis it unfavorably compared Anouilh’s *Antigone* to Sophocles’. Anouilh’s play, however, received generally favorable reviews from the collaborationist press (Witt 2001: 227–28).

The differences between the two plays are in fact anything but trivial, even though on the level of plot the stories are essentially the same. The atmosphere and the stakes, however, are completely different. Where Sophocles’ tragedy is characterized by a complex interplay between the individual wills of Antigone and Creon, their traditional obligations to their families, genders, and the *polis*, and their religious obligations to the gods of Olympus and the underworld, Anouilh focuses almost exclusively on questions of the will. The unwritten laws of the gods of the Sophoclean underworld, the original play’s air of piety and mystery, are quickly disposed of. In their stead stands Antigone’s empty self-assertion, devoid of any communal sacral aura, a denuding which the modern play’s systematic anachronism—its allusions to coffee, automobiles, and the working-class status of the guards—only serves to underline (Anouilh 1946a: 137; Grossvogel n.d.: 18, 37n.1; Steiner 1984: 293).

The crucial passage in which this denuding occurs is worth citing at length. In it Creon first demonstrates the absurdity of Antigone’s religious and moral pretexts. He then asks why did she really defy his edict. Why did she sneak out in the middle of the night with nothing but a child’s toy bucket to scoop a few pitiful handfuls of sand over her brother’s rotting corpse? The passage is unparalleled in Sophocles’ text. And in many ways her response is typical of the period. If one were to pose the same question to Orestes in *Les mouches*, as he leaves the stage alone, assuming the burden of Argos’ guilt unbidden and unaided, abandoned by Electra and the people of Argos—“why did you slay Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, for whom did you do it?”—he almost certainly would have been forced to make the same answer, “Pour personne, pour moi.” He did it not for the people of Argos—they didn’t want it—but for himself, so he could be free.

Creon: Do you really believe in this burial according to regulations? In your brother’s shade being condemned to wander forever if no one throws a little dirt on the cadaver along with the formula of the priest. Have you already heard them recite it, the priests of Thebes, their formula? Have you seen these poor tired employees abbreviating
their gestures, swallowing their words, doing a slapdash job on one
corpse so they can move on to the next before lunch?

Antigone: Yes, I’ve seen them.

Creon: Haven’t you ever thought that if that was someone you
truly loved lying in that box you would start to shout immediately?
Screaming for them to be quiet, to leave?

Antigone: In fact, I have thought that.

Creon: And now you are risking death because I refused your
brother this ridiculous passport, this monotone mumbling over his
corpse, this pantomime which you would have been the first to be
ashamed of if I would have had it played? It’s absurd.

Antigone: Yes, it’s absurd.

Creon: Why did you make this gesture then? For others, for
those who believe in it? To rouse them against me?

Antigone: No.

Creon: Neither for others, nor for your brother? For whom
then?

Antigone: For no one. For me. (Anouilh 1946a: 177–78)

Antigone here lies bare, stripped of all religious, transcendental, or polit-
cical pretences. Later Creon will even demonstrate that both brothers
were traitors who plotted against their father and were little better than
common thugs. He doesn’t even know which corpse is which. His decree
was not based on virtue but raw political expediency (1946a: 187–89;
Vandromme 1972: 104–6). Antigone’s act, then, was an empty gesture,
devoid of positive content, at least as conventionally understood.

Antigone, however, admits the absurdity of her choice, just as Cal-
igula glorifies in his (Curtis 1948: 39; Gignoux 1946: 100–101). In the
end, she seeks to fashion an identity out of that absurdity. She does
not resign herself to it in the manner of Creon, but rather takes it as
the grounds for an aesthetics of existence, in which the embrace of her
own emptiness becomes the grounds of her subjectivity (Grossvogel
n.d.: 61n.2; Gignoux 1946: 109; McIntyre 1981: 44–45, 53–54). To
this extent, her position is no different from that of Sartre and Camus,
or for that matter of Lacan in the Ethics of Psychoanalysis and of the
late Foucault. Hers too is a post-Nietzschean ethics and aesthetics that
is beyond good and evil. What is different, however, is precisely her
refusal of difference, her worship of purity. This we find in neither Sar-
tre nor Camus, let alone their successors.

Camus’s Caligula, in fact, is not a tragedy in either the Aristotelian
or the Anouilhian sense. It presents neither a single completed action
leading to a catharsis of pity and fear, nor a regal sense of pure deter-
mination. The emperor’s assassination does not lead to the repose that
comes from the rejection of “foul hope,” but rather constitutes a first
and necessary step toward envisioning another kind of life, one that
goes beyond, but nonetheless incorporates, the insights produced in
Gaius’ pedagogy of the absurd. It is the first step toward the resigned
stoicism of Tarrou in *La peste*, a chastened philosophy that, while
rejecting all knowledge of transcendental values, nonetheless embraces
the other and affirms a will to resist the crush of death:

> With time I have simply perceived that even those who were better
> than others were not able to stop themselves from killing or allow-
> ing killing because it was part of the logic in which they lived, and
> that we weren’t able to make a move in this world without risking
> killing someone. Yes, I’ve continued to be ashamed, I’ve learned
> this, that we’re all in the plague, and I’ve lost my sense of peace.
> I search for it still today by trying to understand them all and by
> being nobody’s mortal enemy. I know only that it is necessary to do
> what is necessary to no longer be a carrier of the plague and that
> in this alone can one hope for peace or, failing that, a good death.
> (Camus 1962b: 1425)

The Camus of *La peste* accepts the messiness of existence, the necessary
heterogeneity that comes with life, without denying the suffering that
follows in its wake.

Similarly, *Les mouches* offers not the repose of the classical tragedy
of fate, but the unsettledness of human liberty. Orestes may depart
alone, but his freedom has been won only by assuming his relation to
others and by carrying that responsibility with him. Rather than an
ethics of purity, Sartre will embrace the necessity of having dirty hands.
Yet as the later play by that same name reveals (*Les mains sales*), the
embrace of our obligations to the other, of the political, never relieves
us of the weight of the existential choices we must make if we are to
assume the burden of authenticity, never replaces our ethical self-rela-
tion (Sartre 2005f). Whom we may love, whom we may kill, for what
we would choose to die, and for what we would choose to live—these
are questions whose burden must always be fully assumed and which
can never be answered in principle but only by the irretrievable act.
This is the tragedy of freedom: it only exists in the fabric of determina-
tions that binds us to the other, that creates us from our own necessary
impurities. We fashion ourselves from the very transgressions of our
immaculate essence. Thus, in the end, it is only in the recognition of the self’s necessary constitution in relation to the other, to history and hence difference, that it is possible to envision a self-fashioning that is not simply a triumph of the will. The creation of that self is predicated, not on the subjugation, but rather on what Lacan will call “the desire of the other.”

Antigone’s self-fashioning in purity, however, constitutes a pre-Oedipal narcissism that cannot be breached. Like Caligula, she rejects “happiness” and the bourgeois compromises that it implies (Witt 2001: 223):

> Creon: Get married quickly Antigone, be happy. Life is not what you think. It’s a water that young people let run through their open fingers without knowing it. Close your hands, close your hands, quickly. Hold on to it. [ . . . ] You are going to scorn me all the same, but to discover this, you will see, it’s the laughable consolation of growing old—life—it is perhaps nothing more than happiness [le bonheur].
> Antigone: murmurs, a confused look. Happiness . . .
> Creon: suddenly a bit ashamed. A poor word isn’t it?
> Antigone: quietly. What will be my happiness? What happy woman will little Antigone become? What economies will she have to make, day by day, to snatch away in her teeth her little shred of happiness? Tell me to whom will she have to lie, to smile, to sell herself? Who will have to die while she turns away? (Anouilh 1946a: 190–91)

In her world there can be no dirty hands. Antigone demands an absolute purity and will not cede on her desire: “I do not want to be modest and content myself with a small morsel if I behave myself. I want to be sure of everything today and that it should all be as beautiful as when I was little—or I want to die” (1946a: 193).

As in the case of Caligula and Orestes, real, substantial, freedom—as opposed to its pale abstract imitation in a bourgeois philosophy of rational choice, the consumerist calculus of economic man—can only be achieved through the act, through an intervention in the world that does not simply repeat the existing order, and hence has no prior justification in that order (Grossvogel n.d.: 35 n. 3). This is the existential and surrealist acte gratuit, every bit as much as it is the fascist embrace of the pure act en soi and pour soi (Marcel 1959: 103). Anouilh’s Antigone, therefore, unlike Sophocles’, performs her act for no one and
nothing other than herself (“Pour personne. Pour moi.”). It is her affirmation of the very absurdity of her act that renders her free while Creon remains a slave to the causal chain of contingency and utility that eludes his control. Antigone puts a stop to this chain through her “non,” but Creon, by assenting to the existing order, by saying “oui,” will never stop paying, will never remove himself from a system of exchange that always demands more (1946a: 183; Grossvogel n.d.: 21).

Here, then, we see the true function of Anouilh’s use of deliberate anachronism throughout the play: his allusions to cars, coffee, and cigarettes; the production in modern dress. Anouilh’s Antigone takes place beyond history, beyond the accidental determinations of sheer contingency, and so exists in a space where absolute freedom and tragedy can be envisioned and allegorized in the present. The price paid for this purity is a complete severance from history and consequential action. Where Camus in Caligula and Sartre in Les mouches recognize the price paid for freedom envisioned as the opposite of historical determinism, Anouilh wholeheartedly embraces this severance from history as the predicate of Antigone’s aesthetics of existence. Camus and Sartre in their succeeding works continue to search for an authentic mode of action in the world, and so continue to pose explicit problems of ethical agency and political action. Anouilh, however, will seek precisely to remain “un bête du théâtre.” Paradoxically, it is his Antigone that would have the most immediate effect on the postmodern turn to antiquity: it was impossible for Lacan at the end of the 1950s to pose the problem of the ethics of psychoanalysis, through a reading of Sophocles’ Antigone, without Anouilh’s version haunting the lecture hall as well.

4. Conclusion

In 1959, Jacques Lacan in his seminar would focus his attention on the Antigone and the ethics of psychoanalysis. This choice was motivated neither by simple antiquarian curiosity nor Lacan’s famed eccentricity. As he points out in his lectures, he is hardly the first to have observed the centrality, from at least the time of Hegel, of Sophocles’ tragedy to the ethical tradition in the West. Moreover, ethics in 1950s France was a fraught topic. A formal philosophical ethics was one of Sartre’s great unfinished projects, and in time became intimately associated with the latter’s increasingly close relationship with Marxism and the Parti Communiste Français. Moreover, the larger question of what
one owes oneself and what one owes others could not be broached in postwar France without also broaching the less abstract questions of one’s relation to the resistance and the occupation during the war. The question of the resistance, in turn, also necessarily brought into play one’s relation to the Parti Communiste, which had played a leading role, and therefore to both Marxism and Stalinism. The choice to read Antigone, then, with Anouilh’s play as well as the struggle to claim it for both the resistance and the collaborationists still fresh in mind, was in no way an innocent one.

Lacan, of course, does not baldly pose his question in terms of collaboration versus resistance, ideology versus authenticity, or Marxism versus fascism versus Gaullist nationalism. He asks instead, How can the subject pursue a good that is not simply a reproduction of the assumed range of goods sanctioned by the dominant ideology and therefore not an ethical choice at all, but a species of quietism and conformism? How can the subject pursue an object of desire, which is not recognized by society’s Symbolic norms, and hence beyond the economic calculations entailed by a strict adherence to the pleasure principle? In the process of posing these questions to the Antigone, he offers his own original reading of not only the play, but also of the good and its relation to beauty, thereby providing a forceful if largely oblique rebuttal to Anouilh through Sophocles. That rebuttal, in turn, takes a stand on the same ground as Orestes in Les mouches against the sensual cathexes of fear and bad faith that lead us ever to cede on our desire, without, however, Lacan’s endorsing Sartre’s ontology of the subject.

Indeed, for Lacan these questions of the subject, of the act, and of the beautiful can never be posed in the abstract or by themselves. They always necessarily entail the problematic of desire, and desire for Lacan, as we shall see, can be conceived only in terms of the subject’s relation to language, the Other, and the Real. In short, it is always already deeply intersubjective and social. My desire is necessarily the desire of the Other in both the subjective and the objective sense of the genitive. I desire both the Other and what the Other desires. I desire to be its desire. Thus the problem of ethics, as one of the desire for the good (le bien), can never be posed in abstraction from the pre-existing, historically determined set of obligations and expectations that define our relation to the Other and hence our desire for the Other. This interrogation of the constitution of our desire as the desire of the Other is in turn precisely the subject of Lacan’s eighth seminar, Le transfert or Transference, on his reading of the Symposium. It is this interrogation, moreover, that
fundamentally distinguishes the ethics of psychoanalysis from the final emptiness of Orestes in *Les mouches*, the murderous absurdity of Caligula, or the blind self-assertion of Anouilh’s Antigone. In the seminar on transference, the fundamental psychoanalytic relationship between analyst and analysand is reread in terms of that between Socrates and Alcibiades. The Platonic process of dialogue, self-testing (*elenchus*), and clarification as to the true nature of the object of our desire becomes the model for a psychoanalytic practice in which the ethics of not ceding on one’s desire becomes part of the larger set of relations between self and other, without which desire itself could not exist.

There is, in sum, a distinct difference between the modernist and the postmodern approach to antiquity, as exemplified in the different ways Lacan and Anouilh approach the *Antigone*. Yet the basic problem of how to formulate an ethics remains markedly similar: how does one fashion a relation of the self to itself, and so to others, that is neither a mere repetition of the dominant ideology, and hence an act of bad faith, or a cruel assertion of its impossibility. The post-Nietzschean, post-Marxian, and post-Heideggerian world of the existentialists on this level remains in many ways that of the poststructuralists as well. The answer for Lacan and for those who come after is not simply a return to antiquity, but a reading of antiquity as the intimate other, as that which structures our self-relation without ever being identical to it.

Central to this Lacanian endeavor is the turn to Plato and the focus on the Socratic form of question and response, proof and refutation, dialogue and desire. By the same token, it is precisely through his readings of the *Phaedrus* and the *Philebus* that Derrida, in turn, will make his response to Lacan and to the larger problem of the subject and its status in the history of western metaphysics. Lastly, it is the question of the relation of ethics to knowledge, to desire, and to the form of the dialogue that will structure Foucault’s own analysis of the *Symposium*, the *Alcibiades*, and Plato’s seventh letter, and hence his rejoinder, through these analyses, to both Lacan and Derrida.

There are, in fine, a series of definite, if complex and overdetermined, genealogical relations that can be traced from the concerns of the neoclassical tragic stage of Paris in the forties to the lectures given by Foucault at the Collège de France in the early 1980s. Those relations, however indirect they may be, pass explicitly through Lacan and Derrida. It will be the work of the rest of this book to make those relations as clear as possible, without reducing their complexity, and thus to define the central importance of antiquity in general and Plato in particular for understanding postmodern French thought.