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Literary Diegesis, Fiction and Philosophical Discourse in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit

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*Literary Diegesis, Fiction and Philosophical Discourse  
in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit.  
A Case Study*

**Abstract**

The article explores the relationship between literature and philosophy through a single case study, namely the famous section of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* where the figure of Antigone is the protagonist. More precisely, the contribution aims at investigating the unprecedented effects that occur when philosophy gives voice to a literary figure. Trying to show how a real internal monologue is produced, whose statute is analysed with the tools of Käte Hamburger's, Dorrit Cohn's and Gérard Genette's narratology, the paper focuses on the way the fictionalisation, taking into account the structural difference between literary diegesis and philosophical discursiveness, gives Antigone back her freedom – freedom thanks to which philosophy can know itself in literature as in its other.

**Keywords:** Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Literature, Interior monologue, Fiction

The relationship between philosophy and literature has been a case of intimate – and intimately contentious – kinship since the days of the ancient quarrel. As is well known, this is a problematic field of study, which cuts across several traditions and perhaps questions the very status of philosophy. Instead of providing general definitions, the present contribution intends to analyse the linguistic register of the textual source under consideration, in order to verify if and how the philosophical register presents alterations when dealing with literature and incorporates the latter's peculiar diegesis. With respect to the contemporary debate on the subject, I would simply point out, by way of an approximate initial overview, that this field seems to be divided into three areas: the problem of philosophy *as* literature (i.e. the idea of philosophy as a literary genre or set of literary genres), of philosophy *in* literature (i.e. the possibility of finding philosophical ideas in literary texts), and of philosophy *of* literature (i.e. the idea of a philosophy that, as such, should aim at defining what is and what isn't literature)<sup>1</sup>.

Within the scope of this paper, I cannot engage with any of these perspectives, nor do I intend to propose easy solutions to difficult problems. On the contrary, if anything, I will consider a single case study, whose theme is a possible fourth area of investigation, namely the entry of literature *into* philosophy. In other words, in order to say something about the relationship between literature and philosophy, my proposal is to start from the question: what happens when a literary figure enters the discursive register of philosophy? The premise is simple and almost self-evident: a literary figure will have its own logic, which certainly cannot be immediately superimposed on the discursive register of philosophy, given that the latter speaks in terms of concepts. The question can therefore be clarified as follows: when the literary register and the philosophical register come together, are there, or are there not, novel hermeneutical effects in the behavior of the text itself?

For my case study, I will refer to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, this work contains multiple references to literary figures, and its proximity to literature has attracted the attention of several interpreters. In the first part, I will therefore try to outline the main perspectives on this topic, as well as their critical aspects. I will then turn to the analysis of perhaps the most famous figure in the entire *Phenomenology*, namely Antigone, who plays a central role in the first part of chapter six,

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<sup>1</sup> In order to get an idea of this extensive debate, I would like to refer the reader, among others, to the following contributions from different philosophical traditions: A. Danto, *Philosophy and/as/of Literature*, «Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association», 58, 1, 1984, pp. 5-20; R. Smadja, *Introduction à la philosophie de la littérature. La littérature dans les limites de la simple raison*, Honoré Champion, Paris 2009; G.L. Hagberg, *Introduction: Not “of”, “as”, or “and”, but “in”*, «Philosophy and Literature», 48, 1a, 2017, p. 5; D.Ph. Verene, *The Philosophy of Literature. Four Studies*, Cascade Books, Eugene (Oregon) 2018.

devoted to the spirit. This is, of course, an almost inexhaustible theme, within which I intend to pinpoint a specific issue, namely the similarities and differences between Hegel's philosophical Antigone and the textual locations of its source, Sophocles' *Antigone*. I will focus on the reasons why Antigone seems to become, in the *Phenomenology*, a kind of figure of thought, which on the one hand suffers from its literary origin, but on the other hand emancipates itself from it. This degree of emancipation, this hint of freedom, may be a symptom of a certain excess of the literary figure that is also found in its philosophical transformation. Finally, I will try to show how this relative excess of the literary figure – the difference between literature and philosophy which is unquestionably there, regardless of specific definitions – is signalled by the presence of a typically literary diegetic tool which, perhaps inadvertently, appears in the philosophical discourse, laying the foundations of a true fictionalisation.

As mentioned, I intend to propose neither definitions nor easy solutions to a difficult problem; if anything, by following step by step what happens in conceptual discursiveness when it welcomes a literary figure, I will suggest that the philosophical register is also effective when, by engaging with what is other than itself, it divests itself of its presumed autonomy. As has been observed, from this standpoint the interweaving of literature and philosophy seems to give rise to a veritable «experience of thought»<sup>2</sup>.

### 1. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* and its *Gestalten*. A literary turn?

In the specialist reception of the *Phenomenology*, the strategies used to reflect on its relationship with literature are largely based on three types of considerations: 1) the proximity of the *Phenomenology's* structure to a literary genre, mainly identified with the novel, but also with drama in its double guise of tragedy or comedy; 2) the copious, indeed ubiquitous presence within the Hegelian text of implicit or explicit references to literary figures, which would make literature a privileged tool for philosophical argumentation; 3) the peculiar *style* of the *Phenomenology*, characterized by the insistence on puns and the conscious and substantial use of rhetorical figures.

As for the first point, following in the footsteps of Josiah Royce<sup>3</sup>, who was the first to associate the structure of Hegel's work with literary works such as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* or *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, it was Jean Hyppolite who credited the comparison between the *Phenomenology* and the *Bildungsroman*, referring to the former as the «novel of the philosophical formation»<sup>4</sup>. This *topos* has become so commonplace that it is frequently evoked in textbook presentations of the *Phenomenology*; in these cases, perhaps the reference to the familiar literary dimension also has the advantage of encouraging students to face the legendary difficulty of the Hegelian work. Precisely because this part of Hegel's reception is now so commonplace that it has become almost naturalised, it is difficult to take notice of its originally paradoxical character.

Indeed, although this comparison is extraordinarily suggestive, how is this classic of the philosophical tradition a novel of formation of the spirit? In this sense, in fact, evidently despite the heuristic character of the analogy, Hyppolite added that the *Phenomenology* «is not a novel, but a work of science»<sup>5</sup>, whose unfolding, unlike a literary work, follows its own internal necessity. Beyond any consideration of the teleological development of Hegel's argument, Hyppolite clearly referred to the peculiar legality of the philosophical register, in respect of which the idea that «philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts»<sup>6</sup> can be seen as instructive, though not comprehensive.

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<sup>2</sup> C. Duflou, *Les aventures de Sophie. La philosophie dans le roman au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, CNRS Éditions, Paris 2013, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1919, pp. 147-156.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1946), trans. by S. Cherniak and J. Heckman, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1974, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1991), trans. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 3.

Hyppolite's reminder is a challenge that cannot be merely dismissed, and which nevertheless risks promising more than it actually delivers if it is not substantiated by textual analysis. Some contributions, even in the recent debate, have tried to identify the structure of the *Phenomenology* with a literary genre, often yielding illuminating speculative insights by comparing Hegel's text with the novel, tragedy, comedy or epic<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, even the most significant studies that focus on the *Phenomenology* in its literary dimension have failed to deal with one issue, namely the specificity of the discursive register of philosophy; it does not seem accidental, in fact, that scholars resort to phrases such as «quasi-literary form»<sup>8</sup> or «quasi-fictional narrative»<sup>9</sup> with respect to the textuality of *Phenomenology* – expressions that betray the presence of a difference without, however, bringing it into focus.

As for the second strategy, it aims to enhance the prominent role Hegel attributes to the literary dimension, not only by focusing on individual literary figures<sup>10</sup>, but by dealing with the consideration of literature as an object of philosophical reflection. In concentrating on the analysis of individual characters, however, the attention often tends to dwell on their meaning alone, so that the focus according to Berel Lang is always only on «*what* is asserted there, not the *how*»<sup>11</sup>. Extending the scope to the relationship between philosophy and literature in general, while starting from the *topos* of the *Phenomenology* as a *Bildungsroman*, in a seminal contribution, Robert Pippin shifts the focus of the analysis to theoretical aspects. In order to show that artistic representation in general, of which poetry constitutes an exemplary expression, is indispensable to the life of concepts, he also addresses the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, where literature is indeed the object of study. In his concluding remarks, Pippin returns to the text and the way in which Hegel, in the final pages of his 1807 work, incorporates and modifies the verses of Schiller's *Freundschaft*.

Hegel's citation of Schiller (already itself a kind of expression of *Freundschaft*) and his alteration thus serve an appropriately double purpose. The citation gives evidence for the indispensability of the living, aesthetic dimension of experience for any philosophical account of norms, all on the theory of conceptual and intentional content alluded to above, and the alteration, one might say, likewise gives evidence that the completion and *Aufhebung* of aesthetic representation by philosophic reflection is just as indispensable<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> There are several studies that indirectly or tangentially touch upon the question of literature in the *Phenomenology*. The following is a specific selection of those that focus explicitly on the association between the Hegelian work and a literary genre: A. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, chapter 1, "Hegel's Novel. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the Problem of Philosophical Narrative", pp. 11-41; D. Thouard, *L'épos spéculatif. La Phénoménologie de l'esprit comme Iliade et comme Odysée*, in *Hegel: Zur Sprache. Beiträge zur Geschichte des europäischen Sprachdenkens*, ed. by B. Lindorfer and D. Naguschewski, Gunter Narr, Tübingen 2002, pp. 231-246; G. Garelli, *Pensare per figure. Hegel e la Phänomenologie come romanzo dello spirito*, in *Teoria del romanzo*, ed. by L.A. Macor and F. Vercellone, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2009, pp. 169-187; A. Barba-Kay, *What is Novel in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit?*, «Hegel Bulletin», 2, 2019, pp. 277-300; I. Boldyrev, *Die Ohnmacht des Spekultativen. Elemente einer Poetik von Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"*, Brill/Wilhelm Fink, Paderborn 2021; for a perspective that tries to show how Hegel's attempts to write as if he were style-less or the zero degree of style is betrayed by the novelistic literariness of his own work see also M.C. Rawlinson, *The Betrayal of Substance. Death, Literature and Sexual Difference in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Columbia University Press, New York 2021.

<sup>8</sup> A. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, cit., p. 15

<sup>9</sup> A. Barba-Kay, *What is Novel in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit?*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Apart from the endless literature on *Antigone*, to which I will refer in the course of the contribution, one can mention, by way of example, that on Rameau's nephew, a figure who appears in Chapter VI, section a) Culture and its Realm of Actuality.

<sup>11</sup> B. Lang, *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style. Literary Philosophy and the Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford-Cambridge (MA) 1990, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> R. Pippin, *The Status of Literature in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. On the Lives of Concept*, in *Inventions of the Imagination. Romanticism and Beyond*, ed. by R. Gray, N. Halmi, J. Handwerk, M. Rosenthal, K. Vieweg, University of Washington Press, Seattle-London 2011, pp. 102-120, p. 120.

In this context, textual analysis serves to highlight the ambivalence of the relationship between the literary element and philosophical discourse, which on the one hand needs the aesthetic dimension, but on the other hand, by transforming the latter's mode of being, goes beyond it.

The third strategy, instead, focuses purely on the textual form, on the «metaphorical, enigmatic, equivocal, double, allusive, and disguised formal structures» that punctuate the prose of the *Phenomenology*, as has been noted<sup>13</sup>. In this sense, such a strategy also brings us back to the paradoxical character of the form of the *Phenomenology*, which seems to be a «*rhetorica contra rhetoricam*»<sup>14</sup>. Setting aside the more general goal of showing the literary character of the text, I will focus on the specific expressive register of the philosophical discourse as well as on the aesthetic depth of the individual figures<sup>15</sup>. In the light of this approach, in the context of this contribution I will use this third strategy, also drawing on the narratology put forward by Käte Hamburger, Dorrit Cohn and Gérard Genette.

## 2. *Antigone: from character to figure of thought*

In the incipit of the sixth chapter of the 1807 work, dedicated to the dialectic of ethics in Greek culture – in other words, to understanding the mode of being and the contradictions of the Greek *polis* – Antigone plays a central role. Together with references to other tragedies, such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Seven Against Thebes*, the story of Antigone is not only an iconic and intuitive example, but is almost incorporated and transformed by the philosophical text. Without going into the details of the Hegelian vision of tragedy and of Greek ethics, here I only want to point out one aspect: up to a certain point, Hegel offers a faithful rereading of the Sophoclean text.

While seemingly harmonious, ethics conceals contradictions in its immediacy. In contrast to human law, which is the law of the *polis*, of what is public, of the Olympic deities, divine law is that of piety hidden in the depths of the family, the law of the Chthonian deities, the law that is unwritten as opposed to written. An ethical subject recognises itself in only one of these two laws, without knowing that the law visible to every person, depending on their gender-dependent position, is constitutively linked to the other. Human law and divine law are, in other words, the *recto* and *verso* of the same body, with respect to whose amphibolic constitution, however, the subject of immediate ethics is constitutively blind. Precisely because the subject is reflected in the side that is visible to it, they do not see the other one. The contrast between Antigone and Creon is thus exemplary of the contradiction that smoulders at the heart of *ethos*, and which is led to deflagration by the clash between the two. By acting, in fact, the subject also intervenes on the side that was unknown to them. Action, therefore, ends up bringing out the latent contradiction, thus also leading to the demise of the acting subject.

The conclusion of the dialectic of ethics lies in the fact that, while consciousness, by acting ethically, believed it was achieving its own victory and the defeat of the other side, in truth the collapse of one side is as such the defeat of both: they cannot be separated. For this reason, the tragedy exemplifies both the end of the ethical individual and the collapse of the entire ethical edifice. Antigone does not survive Creon, and Creon will never again be what he once was, since he is destroyed by the tragic

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<sup>13</sup> J.H. Smith, *The Spirit and its Letter. Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel's Philosophy of Bildung*, Cornell University Press, New York 1988, p. 6; on this, cf. also H. Sussmann, *The Metaphor in Hegel's "Phenomenology of Mind"* (1982), in *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, ed. by J. O'Neill, SUNY Press, Albany (NY) 1996, pp. 305-328. Recently, a special focus on the Hegelian discursive register in the *Phenomenology* has emerged in two otherwise very different works: K. Pahl, *Tropes of Transport. Hegel and Emotion*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (Illinois) 2012, and R. Comay, F. Ruda, *The Dash – The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA)-London, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> J.H. Smith, *The Spirit and its Letter*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. D.Ph. Verene, *Hegel's Recollection. A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, SUNY Press, New York 1985, and G. Garelli, *Lo spirito in figura. Il tema dell'estetico nella Fenomenologia dello spirito*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2010.

event both as a man and as a ruler. It is both Creon and Antigone that we must think of when Hegel says<sup>16</sup>:

The achievement of public spirit is therefore transformed into its opposite, and the public spirit learns that its supreme right is supreme wrong and that its victory is instead its own downfall<sup>17</sup>.

From this point of view, in Hegel's reinterpretation, Antigone is the character who, more than any other, expresses heroic temperament as *pathos*. Not only because she unilaterally adheres to her law and, based on it, is consciously determined to act. Antigone, by honouring the law of mercy according to which she grants funeral honours to Polynices, also affirms her identity by appealing to a bond grounded in the naturalness of blood. Regarding the relationship between brother and sister as the ethical relationship *par excellence*<sup>18</sup>. Hegel perhaps takes into account the recurrence, in the Sophoclean text, of the adjective ὁμαίμος, which means “of the same blood”. What characterises the relationship between siblings is that only they are truly ὁμαίμοι, because only siblings share the blood of the *same* mother and father<sup>19</sup>. Antigone's ethical certainty, from this point of view, pursues the logic of the *same*.

For the purposes of this paper, it is worth noting that Hegel's Antigone seems to be placed, in line with the literary source, within the logic of the same. It is no coincidence, in fact, that what characterises Antigone's actions in verse 821 is her *autonomy*. Like Creon, she is unable to bend, like a tree, along with its *roots* (v. 714); Antigone would like to do everything herself: αὐτή. The logic of the same reveals that it responds to the law of what is only one's *own*, as shown by the etymology of her name, referring to the antiphrasis<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, it is in the name of αὐτός that all the events of Antigone's tragedy seem to take place: «her crime is not in transgressing contingent laws; Antigone is autonomous, a law unto herself»<sup>21</sup>, and that's why she results disruptive, even destructive. In her being fatally αὐτόνομος, αὐτόγνωτος, she reaches the point of self-destruction.

Nevertheless, by departing from the text and at the same time appropriating it, i.e. integrating it into the development of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel makes an unexpected move. The *Phenomenology*, in fact, seems to grant Antigone a further chance. Hegel's Antigone, in fact, acknowledges her own guilt:

Because we suffer, we acknowledge we have erred [*weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, daß wir gefehlt*]<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> For a reading that, contrary to the claim that Hegel would ultimately express theoretical empathy for Creon's ethical *pathos*, insists on the equal status of Antigone and Creon cf. S. Houlgate, *Hegel's Theory of Tragedy*, in *Hegel and the Arts*, ed. by Id., Northwestern University Press, Evanston (Illinois) 2007, pp. 146-178, pp. 154-155 in particular. On this point, Nussbaum also recognises the relative correctness of the Hegelian reinterpretation: cf. M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of the Goodness* (1986), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 63-67.

<sup>17</sup> I quote from G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by T. Pinkard, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, henceforth *PhS*. Before the semi-colon, I also quote the page number of the critical reference edition of the text in the original: G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by the Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften and by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Meiner, Hamburg 1968-, henceforth *GW: GW IX*, p. 258; *PhS*, p. 275.

<sup>18</sup> See *GW IX*, p. 258; *PhS*, p. 274.

<sup>19</sup> The main source of this *topos*, however, is to be traced most likely to a passage by Herodotus, III, 119, 4-7. On the meaning of the inimitable relationship between Antigone and her brother Polynices see I. Torrance, *Antigone and her Brother: A Special Relationship?*, in *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, ed. by S.E. Wilmer and A. Žukauskaitė, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2010, pp. 240-253.

<sup>20</sup> S. Benardete, *Sacred Transgressions. A Reading of Sophocle's Antigone*, St. Augustin's Press, South Bend (Indiana) 1999, p. 111.

<sup>21</sup> C. Sjöholm, *The Antigone Complex*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> *GW IX*, p. 255; *PhS*, p. 272. The Hegelian interpretation of verse 926 has been seen almost unanimously as a stretch, a misunderstanding or even a «mistranslation» (A. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, cit., p. 55). I will only mention a few of the many critical readings that share this point of view. Patricia Mills notes that Hegel is «misrepresenting and adapting what she says to make it look as if she admits guilt» (P. Mills, *Hegel's "Antigone"*, in

Admitting to having made a mistake following the awareness of her own suffering, the heroine seems to begin to think of herself as the product of experience, an experience that introduces the unprecedented in place of the repetition of the same. No longer the curse that fatally leads back to the repetition of the same, but the recognition of a genesis which, instead of repeating itself, produces difference. In contrast to the naturalistic logic of the same, which passes from blood to fate, the Hegelian Antigone, even without the forces that would otherwise allow her to positively reconstitute herself, finally acknowledges that she is different from what she was at the beginning. In taking responsibility for the consequences of the events that have altered her certainties, she values her own conditionedness. In contrast to the characteristic of tragic *pathos* – that is, the fact of always being the same – the Antigone of the *Phenomenology*, according to a trend that assimilates her to phenomenological figures whose certainty is substantially modified by experience, finally shows herself to be a different woman.

I would like to emphasise the significant difference between this reformulation and the Sophoclean text: the latter, indeed, cannot have escaped Hegel, who, at the end of chapter five, had quoted verses 456-457 of the tragedy *verbatim*<sup>23</sup>. In her last oration before Creon, in the Sophoclean tragedy, Antigone only says that, if her misfortune were right by the gods, she would be willing to suffer acknowledging to have sinned (i.e. to have committed ἀμαρτία); Antigone adds, however, that if those who condemn her were in error (ἀμαρτάνουσι), she would wish them to suffer no less than what she has unjustly suffered. The last part of this appeal, which ends up being an accusation, must certainly be considered her last word. The first part, which is more concessive, is in fact placed within a hypothetical proposition that only denounces the possibility that she might be mistaken, which seems to be a rhetorical device to enhance her claim to be right. In the *Phenomenology*, on the other hand, the rhetorical ambiguity of that oration is transformed into an unambiguous acknowledgement of guilt that the Sophoclean heroine nowhere admits to.

Let me explain in more detail. At the end of an oration in which she alone seems to celebrate her marriage to death<sup>24</sup>, Hegel seems to acknowledge Antigone's merit in having gained awareness of her own faults; in other words, Hegel's Antigone is conscious of the transformation brought about by experience. Escaping the naturalistic logic of the same, Hegel's Antigone finally recognises herself as weakened by the otherness to which experience has exposed her. In acknowledging the consequences of events that have altered her certainties, she values her finiteness and, perhaps, her own vulnerability<sup>25</sup>. In this way, however, it seems that Antigone is no longer a literary figure, but has become a figure of thought. Although indebted to its source, Hegel's Antigone seems to emancipate herself from Sophocles. If this hypothesis is plausible, though, a further issue opens up. The chance of transformation that Hegel attributes to his Antigone as a philosophical figure, in fact, exceeds the possibilities of ancient subjectivity as he himself seems to envisage it, namely marked by one-sidedness and inability to bear otherness.

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*Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by Ead., The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park (Pennsylvania) 1996, pp. 59-88, p. 70); Jocelyn Hoy notes that, with respect to Hegel's reformulation, Sophocles' Antigone «actually says something quite different» (J.B. Hoy, *Hegel, Antigone, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece*, in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. by K.R. Westphal, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2009, pp. 172-189, p. 181). Christoph Menke, defines Hegel's version of v. 926 of *Antigone* a «forcierte Auslegung» (Chr. Menke, *Tragödie im Sittlichen. Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit nach Hegel*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1996, p. 95). More recently Allen Speight, also focusing on the difference between the hypothetical proposition of the original and the causal proposition of the Hegelian text, returns at greater length to the difference between the original text and its reformulation in the *Phenomenology* in *Heroism without Fate, Self-consciousness without Alienation. Antigone, Trust and the Narrative Structure of Spirit*, in *Interpreting Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. Expositions and Critique of Contemporary Readings*, ed. by I. Boldyrev and S. Stein, Routledge, London-New York 2021.

<sup>23</sup> See GW IX, p. 236; PhS, p. 251.

<sup>24</sup> On the “marriage of death” see D. Cairns, *Sophocles: Antigone*, Bloomsbury, London-New York 2016, pp. 106 ff.

<sup>25</sup> For a reading that insists on this aspect, cf. K. Pahl, *Tropes of Transport. Hegel and Emotion*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (Illinois) 2012, pp. 60 ff. I have already dealt with this aspect in my contribution [---]

The inconsistency of the alternative ending of the phenomenological figure inspired by *Antigone* risks being at least twofold. On the one hand, in relation to the textual source; on the other, also in relation to the context of the philosophical reformulation, where Hegel intends to show the intrinsic causes of the decline of the *polis*, which are ultimately rooted in the type of subjectivity it produced.

### 3. *The fictionalisation of philosophical discourse. Between appropriation and liberation*

Hegel's reformulation of verses 924-926 of Sophocles' *Antigone* thus seems to acquire a problematic character: it's as if those words, which the *Phenomenology* attributes to the philosophical Antigone, somehow stood out from their context. It is therefore necessary to insist on a textual clue which, albeit formal, tells us something of substance: in the original edition of 1807, the sentence «weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, dass wir gefehlt haben» appears in italics, without the introduction of verbs such as “to say” or “to think”. It is therefore not free indirect speech. Rather, it seems to be what Dorrit Cohn calls the «figural voice»<sup>26</sup>, or the voice of an internal monologue.

There is one last tentative explanation for the incongruity between the philosophical reformulation and the literary source of the passage. Hegel here is not reporting what Antigone says in Sophocles' text, but what his Antigone *thinks* to herself, and which therefore could find no place in the framework of the tragedy. In this way, the incorporation of a literary character into the philosophical text produces a veritable fictionalisation. According to a logic evidently borrowed from the novel – which was then in the process of becoming established – the dramatic figure, about whom we cannot know anything other than what it states, paradoxically achieves a fictional interiority precisely in its philosophical reformulation<sup>27</sup>. Even if that interiority would find its full expression in what has been called a stream of consciousness, characterised by a bumpy syntax that renders the disorderly and hasty churn of our thoughts, there is no principled distinction to be made between internal monologue and stream of consciousness.

The internal monologue is a diegetic technique that became established towards the middle of the 19th century<sup>28</sup>. This consolidation went hand in hand with a progressive autonomisation of the expression of interiority with respect to both third-person psychological narration and the expressive possibilities offered by drama. In *Tom Jones* (1749), for instance, the protagonist's monologues are usually correlated with states of strong emotional tension, which authorise the narrator to superimpose the inner voice, that of thoughts, on an actually audible voice, that is, on lamentations still close to those of the theatrical character, who can only express what they are thinking *out loud*. However, the monologue became progressively internalised and silent, until it was so solid that it could be alternated, almost without interruption, with dialogue and third-person narration, as would happen in Dostoevsky or Virginia Woolf. Lastly, the internal monologue is notable only for the passage to the first person and the present tense, announced *apertis verbis* or omitted, depending on the case.

This inner voice thus opens up Hegel's Antigone to the dimension of mediation and reflection. From this point of view, the premise of the reformulation of a modern Antigone in Kierkegaard's *The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama* seems to lie precisely in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*<sup>29</sup>. In contrast to the Sophoclean heroine, characterised by *pathos* and the

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<sup>26</sup> D. Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London 1999, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, K. Pahl also dwells on this point. In *Tropes of Transport*, cit., while referring to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in general, speaks of the peculiar Hegelian diegesis: «Hegel uses a philosophical version of the free indirect discourse [...]. Hegel presents the theories (or “certainties”) and insights of his protagonist/s by oscillating often imperceptibly between the protagonist's voice and the phenomenologist's voice» (*ibidem*, p. 11).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. D. Cohn, *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey) 1978, pp. 58 ff.

<sup>29</sup> For our purposes, it is interesting to note Kierkegaard's insistence on the act whereby philosophy puts words into Antigone's mouth: «I put words into her mouth, and yet it seems to me as if I abused her confidence; it seems to me as if she were standing reproachfully behind me, and yet it is the reverse – in her secrecy she becomes ever more visible» (S. Kierkegaard, *Writings III, Either/Or Part I*, ed. and trans. by H.V. Hong and E. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey), p. 143).



impulse to act without pondering, Kierkegaard's modern Antigone is one whose tragedy is first and foremost played out in the order of reflection. In Kierkegaard's reformulation of *Antigone*, in fact, the protagonist is the only one who knows her father's secret, just as Hamlet is the only one who suspects Claudius' secret; that secret, however, weighs doubly heavy on her, because, with an exponential increase in doubt, she does not know whether her father knows. In a very modern twist, Kierkegaard also introduces love into his *Antigone*: in Sophocles' *Antigone*, instead, «the passion of love in a romantic sense» between Antigone and Haemon has «no essential interest in itself»<sup>30</sup>. Consumed by the two opposing urges to safeguard the father's secret after his death and to share everything with the beloved, the life of Kierkegaard's Antigone «does not unfold like the Greek's Antigone; it is turned inward, not outward. The stage is inside, not outside»<sup>31</sup>.

In spite of the declared radical modernity of his Antigone, which could be based on the Hegelian reformulation we find in the *Phenomenology*<sup>32</sup>, the form chosen by Kierkegaard to investigate the reflection of the ancient tragic in the modern tragic is nevertheless rather unproblematic, as it reports the facts and the protagonist's states of mind in the third person. In other words, the mimetic aspect is entirely absorbed by the I who narrates in the first person, while Antigone is a pure object of the narration. In the only place where first-person lines are referred to, Kierkegaard makes use of the Sophoclean source, which is quoted correctly<sup>33</sup>. In Hegel's case, on the other hand, there seems to be real experimentation at play, even if, in all probability, it wasn't intentional. In the *Phenomenology*, in fact, the continuity between the present tense of the philosophical diegesis (analogous in this sense to the present tense of the historical present) and the present tense of Antigone's monologue brings out, rather than hiding, the difference between philosophical discursiveness and the figural voice of the literary character who speaks for herself.

The continuity of the verbal tense (the philosophical present and the present of the internal monologue), in a context that does not indicate the *referred* character of the monologue, clearly highlights the autonomy of the literary character's voice in the first person, which is thus emancipated from philosophical discursiveness. This hermeneutic effect tells us something about the status of literary language. Contrary to the belief that literary utterances are apparently the same as ordinary utterances, the language of literature possesses its own unbreakable internal logic, as Käte Hamburger has shown<sup>34</sup> and as Dorrit Cohn, in her wake and in dialogue with Gérard Genette, has further explored<sup>35</sup>.

What is it, however, that qualifies the internal logic of literary diegesis? The fact of being fiction, i.e. the fact of conveying, through mimesis or narration, the point of view of a fictional figure.

Even between the most objective narration, i.e. straight narration directed toward the presentation of a given state of affairs, and an even so concrete and vivid historical narration there runs the intransgressible boundary which separates fiction from the reality statement. However tautological this may sound, this boundary-line is fixed and established solely in that a given material becomes “fictionalized”: the persons in action are portrayed as being so “here and now”, and therefore as experiencing “here and now”, concomitant to which is the experience of fiction, of non-reality<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. by Th.M. Knox, vol. I, Oxford University Press, New York 1975, p. 564.

<sup>31</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Writings III, Either/Or Part I*, cit., p. 157.

<sup>32</sup> It is well known, moreover, that Kierkegaard's text was conceived in close dialogue with Hegel's theory of tragedy, at least with the thematisation of the difference between ancient and modern tragedy found in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. On this, cf. J. Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy. From Plato to Žižek*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, chap. 8, “Kierkegaard”, pp. 139-151. George Steiner even claims that Hegel's Antigone and Kierkegaard's Antigone are «inseparable» (Id., *Antigones*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1984, p. 66), and the subject was later taken up by J. Stewart, *Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2003, pp. 218-225.

<sup>33</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Writings III, Either/Or Part I*, cit., p. 159. The quoted verses are vv 850-852.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. K. Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature* (1957), trans. by M.J. Rose, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1973.

<sup>35</sup> On this, cf. D. Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, cit., pp. 117 ff.

<sup>36</sup> K. Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, cit., p. 151.

The intransgressible boundary that separates fiction from, in our case, conceptual discourse, as Dorrit Cohn specifies on the basis of Hamburger's work, consists in the openness of the mind of others, which only in literature is revealed by the narrator's words or the figurative voice the writer puts in the mouth of the characters.

In fiction cast, this presentation involves a distinctive epistemology that allows a narrator to know what cannot be known in the real world and in narratives that target representations of the real world: the inner life of his figures. This penetrative optic calls on devices – among others free indirect style – that remain unavailable to narrators who aim for referential (nonfictional) presentation<sup>37</sup>.

Only literature, in other words, can reveal the life of our intimate subjectivity, which is constitutively hidden from the eyes of others. This is why Thomas Mann thought of theatre as the «art of the silhouette [*Kunst der Silhouette*]»<sup>38</sup> and only saw the narrated subject as round, whole, real and fully shaped. Although it is «a highly ingenious means of producing fictionalization»<sup>39</sup>, this fictionalisation must not necessarily be understood as a kind of epiphany of the subject to itself; on the contrary, this inner speech, this internal language that accompanies every moment of our existence can also be that through which we hide from ourselves, a tool of dissimulation, as indicated by the expression used by Proust in *Le temps retrouvé*: «oblique discours intérieur»<sup>40</sup>. In any case, whether or not it is sincere, the internal monologue, where the character speaks in the first person and in the present tense, borders on pure mimesis, as opposed to pure narration in the third person.

Like the dialogic model that served as its model, monologic language did of course go through considerable changes as the realist tradition evolved: it became progressively less formal, more spontaneous and vulgar, even as it developed greater accuracy in reproducing dialects, jargons and personal idiosyncrasies. We will never know whether middleclass women in Austen's times talked to themselves as formally as they talked to each other; all we know is that Austen's women do. [...] Stylistically, at any rate, interior monologue is interesting only to the degree that it departs from the colloquial models and attempts the mimesis of an unheard language<sup>41</sup>.

Starting from this mimesis of an unheard language, a further observation on the functioning of the internal monologue allows us to appreciate a further effect. In addition to the change of verbal tense and personal pronoun, Genette notes that a central factor in distinguishing between free indirect speech or reported speech and monologue or immediate speech is the absence of a «declarative introduction», as is in the case of the words attributed to Antigone in the phenomenological text.

As the example of Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses* shows, or the first three sections of *The Sound and the Fury* (successive monologues of Benjy, Quentin and Jason), the monologue does not have to be coextensive with the complete work to be accepted as "immediate"; it is sufficient, whatever the monologue extent may be, for it to happen on its own, without the intermediary of a narrating instance which is reduced to silence and whose function the monologue takes on. We see here the essential difference between immediate monologue and free indirect style, which are sometimes erroneously confused or improperly put together: in free indirect speech, the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the

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<sup>37</sup> D. Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, cit., p. 16

<sup>38</sup> Th. Mann, *Versuch über das Theater*, in Id., *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe. Werke – Briefe – Tagebücher*, ed. by H. Detering et al., vol. 14/1, *Essays I. 1893-1914*, ed. by H. Detering, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 2002, pp. 129-130.

<sup>39</sup> K. Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, cit., p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> M. Proust, *Le temps retrouvé*, Gallimard, Paris 1976, p. 251.

<sup>41</sup> D. Cohn, *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, cit., p. 90.

character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then *merged*; in immediate speech, the narrator is obliterated and the character *substitutes* for him<sup>42</sup>.

Pay attention to the last sentence: the character substitutes for the narrator, who is obliterated. If this is the logic of the internal monologue, it means that, when the latter is used in a philosophical text, the literary figure ends up exceeding the conceptual discursiveness that thought it could incorporate it. Ultimately, the *Phenomenology's* Antigone, having emancipated herself from the literary text to become a figure of thought, seems to live a life of her own even in relation to philosophical discursiveness. Is this not, once again, a symptom of the intransgressible boundary that separates the discursive register of philosophy from literary diegesis, as a discourse of fiction? But, if this were the case, would there not be a mutual exclusion between the literary register and the philosophical one? The irruption of the figural voice seems, for a moment, to shatter the continuity of philosophical discursiveness. However, this apparent rupture nevertheless denounces a fruitful exchange between literary diegesis and conceptual discursiveness, which can emerge precisely if and only if we investigate and differentiate the linguistic registers with their different legalities.

In my opinion, on the basis of what I have tried to show, this exchange takes place in two moments: firstly, there is a philosophisation of the literary figure; secondly, however, it is precisely this philosophisation that emancipates the latter from the grip of philosophy. I have already said, quoting a seminal study by Berel Lang, that one of the main limits of the philosophical analysis of literary works, or of the aesthetic dimension of the philosophical text, is the obliteration of its linguistic depth in favour of its meaning. This may also be the case with tragedy and with *Antigone* in particular: as we have seen, the Hegelian character becomes a real figure of thought. From this point of view, Olga Taxidou recalls that:

This *philosophisation* of tragedy, and in particular the work of Sophocles, creates one of the great stumbling blocks in the relationship between tragedy and philosophy. It implies an almost total disregard of formal issues (other than the ones pertaining to translation from classical Greek), and it tends to appropriate theatre discursively within philosophy. *Antigone*, mainly because of the attention the text has attracted, seems to suffer from this *philosophisation* more than most classical texts of Athenian tragedy<sup>43</sup>.

In the pages of the *Phenomenology*, however, a surprising reversal occurs. Just when the incorporation of Antigone into philosophical discursiveness seems complete, and the distance from Sophocles' heroine appears almost radical, Hegel gives her another chance, not only in her capacity as a figure of thought. Hegel, in fact, by giving voice to the interiority of that figure, restores her to fiction. That intransgressible boundary is also what protects, in the end, the peculiarity of Antigone, who in her figural and fictional aspect escapes the control of the conceptual realm. In contrast to Kierkegaard, who dream of spending a «night of love» with his «creation»,<sup>44</sup> Hegel seems to ultimately let her go, returning her to freedom.

In conclusion, my analysis aims to suggest one last inchoative hypothesis on the liaison between literary diegesis and conceptual discourse. The unsurpassable boundary that denounces the excess of the literary dimension over the discursive register of philosophy is, in the end, also the mark of the difference between philosophy and literature. It does not seem to me, however, that this gap leaves these two fields indifferent to each other: on the contrary, it binds them together. The link between literature and philosophy can become all the more intimate and amorous the more thought finds an opportunity to experience itself when this difference emerges: the philosophical register can

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<sup>42</sup> G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse. Essay in Method* (1972), trans. by J.E. Lewin, foreword by J. Culler, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY) 1980, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> O. Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, Edinburgh University Press, Throbridge 2004, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Writings III, Either/Or Part I*, cit., p. 153.

experience its own limit by exposing itself to the otherness of the literary register. Isn't this proof of the – forever fallible – possibility of knowing and finding oneself only in the other?