



INSTITUTE of
PSYCHOANALYSIS



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ENGLISH SPEAKING WEEKEND CONFERENCE 2025 PROGRAMME

Friday 10th October to
Sunday 12th October 2025

English Speaking Weekend Conference 2025

The figure of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, is the focus of the 2025 English-Speaking Conference. The final play in Sophocles’ Theban trilogy centres on Antigone, child of the incestuous union between Oedipus and Jocasta. The tragedy unfolds in the wake of civil war as Antigone resolves to bury her dead brother, in defiance of her uncle Creon’s prohibition. Sophocles’s play weaves together a number of psychoanalytic concerns: transgenerational trauma, femininity, the sibling axis, grief and the obstacles to mourning, masochism and death. Sophocles confronts us with the tragic consequences of turning a deaf ear. Our challenge now is to listen to Antigone, to hear her story, and what it brings to a contemporary psychoanalysis.

Organising Committee
Chairs: Rachel Chaplin & Anna Steeruwitz
Committee Members: Anastasia Apostolou, Jacqueline Bristow, Christine English, Katarina Julius, Niki Kern, Francois Louw

FRIDAY 10TH OCTOBER

6.00 PM to 8.00 PM

Institute of Psychoanalysis

Byron House
112A Shirland Road
W9 2BT

6.00 PM

Welcome

6.30 PM

Live Dramatic Reading of Antigone
Actor Isobel Hanson and Cast

8.00 PM

Reception

SATURDAY 11TH OCTOBER

9.00 AM to 6.00 PM

Regent's University London

Herringham Hall

Inner Circle, Regent's Park

NW1 4NS

9.00 AM

Registration

9.30 AM

Welcome & Introduction

President and Chair of Scientific Committee

Speakers in Dialogue

Angela Joyce and Joshua Durban, Chair Margaret Rustin

9.50 AM

Angela Joyce & Response

10.40 PM

Break

11.00 AM

Joshua Durban & Response

11.50 PM

Discussion

Angela Joyce and Joshua Durban, Chair Margaret Rustin

12.30 PM

Lunch

Speakers in Dialogue

Michael Parsons and Catherine Chabert, Chair Jan Abram

2.00 PM

Michael Parsons & Response

2.50 PM

Break

3.10 PM

Catherine Chabert & Response

4.00 PM

Discussion

Michael Parsons and Catherine Chabert, Chair Jan Abram

5.00 PM

Reception

Tuke Common Room

SUNDAY 12TH OCTOBER

9.30 AM to 1.30 PM

Regent's University London

Tuke Common Room

Inner Circle, Regent's Park

NW1 4NS

9.30 AM

Welcome

Speakers in Dialogue

Rosemary Davis and Denis Flynn, Chair Liz Allison

10.00 AM

Denis Flynn & Response

10.50 AM

Break

11.10 AM

Rosemary Davies & Response

12.00 PM

Discussion

Rosemary Davis and Denis Flynn, Chair Liz Allison

12.40 PM

Break

12.50 PM

Plenary

1.30 PM

Conference Close

ABSTRACT

Antigone's Passion

Catherine Chabert

Here is the evidence! Antigone is the heroic embodiment of the feminine Oedipus. For Freud, the girl has nothing to lose because whatever she lacks is already lost: there is only the castration complex, which never definitively ends. Whereas, for the boy, subject to castration anxiety, there is a radical end to the Oedipus complex. Perhaps Antigone can help us locate the reasons for this difference. The mechanism of displacement is a central driver of the tragedy. Antigone's oedipal conflict is not played out between mother and daughter but between her brothers who have killed one another. Antigone's passion for her father is displaced onto her brother and represented by the sacrifice of her life for him. Death is the ultimate castration.

Guilt undergoes a paradoxical transformation: Antigone is innocent but becomes a criminal, punished for her attachment to her dead brother. This is a melancholic response to loss and a master class in feminine masochism. To illustrate my argument, I will draw on a clinical case.

Parental Betrayal: Antigone and Pathological Mourning

Rosemary Davis

Antigone declares about the laws of state: "No one knows how they are born". In this paper my theme is the catastrophic consequence of Antigone's curiosity regarding the circumstances of her own birth. In English some say 'curiosity killed the cat' but Freud placed the epistemophilic instinct centrally in the structuring of the mind (1917b p327). Curiosity about origins suffuses our work as psychoanalysts and our children are failed if they cannot investigate their own provenance. When Antigone enquires of her origins, she hears a toxic story: "Your father is your brother. Your mother is your grandmother. You are the product of incest and murder": the two great transgressions. Jocasta's possible complicity and then suicide followed by Oedipus' cruel exclusion of her from the time and place of his death, leave Antigone unable to do the ordinary work of mourning (Freud 1917a). I argue this informs her desperate, fatal drive to have a proper burial for her brother, Polyneices. She remains immobilised in the liminal space, neither alive nor dead. Drawing on clinical material, I elaborate the catastrophe that can ensue from the unravelling of the story of origins, but also its essential part in the mutative analytic work of "turning ghosts into ancestors" (Loewald 1960).

ABSTRACT

Antigone: On Trauma and the Inability to Let Go

Joshua Durban

A striking feature of Antigone's character is her inability to let go of the past: her sense of loss, victimisation, injustice, and grievance related to her traumatic incestuous origins. This presentation will discuss the frantic holding on to "hard" ideologies and relationships, and to rigid splitting as an expression of an inherent inability to mourn--characteristic of children of incest, both real and phantasied. In such cases we often observe a preponderance of the death drive that is personified intrapsychically as a perverse superego with which a sadomasochistic pact is established. This attempt is often enacted in a disastrous way for these individuals and their objects. There is an underlying experience of deep confusion and extreme vulnerability which is a result of the collapse of the triangular Oedipal space into a bidimensional one. One might say that Death, in fact, becomes the third dimension. Since there is no space here for feelings or objects, there is no space to mourn, manifested as the subject's lamenting life and grieving unto death. Confusion, accompanied by intense anxieties-of-being, is defended against by rigid splitting and obsessive adhesive identification. Furthermore, this sense of primary confusion and extreme vulnerability creates an internal sense of homelessness and a desperate search for a home, even when it is a grave. These dynamics will be demonstrated with clinical material taken from the analysis of a five-year-old girl.

Punishment, reconciliation and compromise: clinical pictures of the Antigone

Denis Flynn

Sophocles' Antigone challenges us with urgent and difficult questions regarding punishment and reconciliation. I will argue that Antigone's tragedy results from the clash of two forms of remorseless inevitability. First there is the terrible punishment meted out to her by Creon. In the absence of depressive awareness, no reparation, no reconciliation or forgiveness are possible. There is only severity and cruelty. Second, while Antigone may retain her integrity in the face of Creon's inhumanity, is her moral stand itself driven by remorselessness? Bion writes that in relation to the Oedipus myth 'the pursuit of curiosity... at no matter what cost' (Bion, 1957, 2014: 131) inevitably leads to disastrous consequences. Forms of compromise may seem to offer a way out of this clash, but I will suggest that we should be wary of easy and flawed compromises, based on the denial of true awareness and understanding of the damage done. I will draw on case studies to explore these complex dilemmas.

ABSTRACT

Antigone: fate or destiny? How psychoanalysis might intervene to disrupt the burden of the previous generations' calamities

Angela Joyce

"You [Antigone] bear all the burden of my calamities..... children, curse bearers... a fate appalling" (Oedipus at Colonus)

This paper will consider the dilemmas a person might face in confronting the impact of the 'previous generations' calamities' – whether to submit to the seeming inevitable, a fate appalling, or take up the challenge with courage and perhaps foolhardiness, to disrupt the seeming inevitable, to become the author of one's own destiny. Referring to Christopher Bollas's distinction between fate and destiny, I will use material from a clinical case of an infant and her mother to examine the forces in the mother that seemed helplessly determined to inflict her trauma on her infant, and the potential in the baby to meet this and resist it. The psychoanalytic intervention over a period of 3 years addressed the predicament of the baby bathed in the milieu of her mother's calamities.

Who is responsible?

Michael Parsons

The character of Antigone, and the story we attach to her, are the imaginative creation of Sophocles. She was not a significant figure in her own right until Sophocles wrote the play that bears her name. It revolves around the opposition between her and Creon. Creon is a borderline personality, misogynistic, self-idealising and arrogant. He will do anything to avoid facing the truth about himself. Antigone is equally unyielding, but for the opposite reason. She is determined to keep her family story in focus and face the truth about her origins. That is why she has to bury Polyneices, regardless of the cost to herself. By doing this, she takes responsibility for her life. The irony is that she can only do so by committing an act that will lead to her death. To take responsibility for their lives is what psychoanalysts try to help their patients to do. Antigone is an iconic example of this, and her story has connections to other examples in today's world.

UPCOMING IOPA EVENTS



IJP Online Conference 2026

On Extreme Violence

Saturday 10th January



Edinburgh Conference

Turning a deaf ear: impediments to listening in the clinical situation

Saturday 13th June

External Conference



UCL Conference

Memory and its Vicissitudes

Friday 28th November to Sunday 30th November

**Book Stall Provided by Karnac Books
(Saturday Only)**

