A friend in need Is a friend indeed: Tom Paulin's rescuing of Antigone's afterlife

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CHAPTER 22

A Friend in Need Is a Friend Indeed: Tom Paulin's Rescuing of *Antigone*'s Afterlife

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Although seemingly understated, it is quite tenable to argue that all tragedy in Sophocles' *Antigone* begins to unravel via the concurrent introduction of the notion of φιλία (*philia*). In fact, in the first dialogue between the two sisters, Antigone and Ismene recall the detrimental events preceding the play's action by referring to *philia* twice: Antigone asks Ismene 'καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ᾽ αὖ φασι πανδήμῳ πόλει κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀρτίως; ἔχεις τι κεἰσήκουσας; ἢ σε λανθάνει πρὸς **τοὺς φίλους** στείχοντα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;' (*Ant.* 7–10) ('And now what is this new edict that they say the army general has decreed to all the city? Or does it escape you that evils are being sent over by our enemies against our **friends**?'), to which Ismene answers that 'ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδεὶς μῦθος, Ἀντιγόνη **φίλων** οὔθ᾽ ἡδὺς οὔτ᾽ ἀλγεινὸς ἵκετ᾽ ἐξ ὅτου δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν ἐστερήθημεν δύο, μιᾷ θανόντοιν ἡμέρᾳ διπλῇ χερί' (*Ant.* 11–14) ('To me, Antigone, no word of **our friends** has arrived—bringing neither joy nor despair—since the moment we both got robbed of our two brothers, having perished on the same day by a double blow'). At this initial stage, then, *philia* seems to function as a trope that, first, acts as a catalyst triggering the action in *Antigone*, and, second, allows one to delve deeper into the main thematics of confrontation prevalent in the whole play. Antigone's clear-cut distinction between φίλος ('friend') and ἐχθρός ('enemy') points towards this direction. Her indirect mentioning of Creon by calling him στρατηγός ('army general'), along with perceiving his κήρυγμα (*edict*) as identical to τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά ('the evils [sent] by our enemies'), underscore Antigone's understanding of *philia* as a site of difference and conflict, and, on a larger scale, disclose the predisposition of the Sophoclean play towards unreconciled dualities. To quote George Steiner:

> [Antigone is the] only one literary text to express all the principal constants of conflict in the condition of man. These constants are fivefold: the confrontation of men and of women; of age and youth; of society and of the individual; of the living and the dead; of men and of god(s). The conflicts which come of these five orders of confrontation are not negotiable. Men and women, old and young, the individual and

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> the community or state, the quick and the dead, mortals and immortals, define themselves in the conflictual process of defining each other. ([1989] 231)

All the above *loci* of irresoluble conflict are personified in the play in the faces of Creon and Antigone. As for the logic behind such binary elucidation of tragic conflict, it presupposes the formula that 'Antigone *is* what Creon *is not*, and *vice versa*'. What follows is that Antigone can share her *philia* only with those that, in the first place, don't have anything to share with Creon, her self-confessed archenemy. Hence, it would be fair to say that, in Sophocles' tragedy, Antigone understands the world, and acts accordingly, by following an absolute etiquette of 'friend *versus* enemy'.

What I would like to consider in this chapter is the possibility that this strict Antigonean divide between what amounts as φίλος and ἐχθρός, going together with a desire for self-definition via the sketching of the 'other' as enemy, does not only happen to inform numerous readings of *Antigone* based on binary oppositions (like Steiner's), but also dynamically affects the contemporary reception of the Sophoclean play. What it will be suggested is that this predominant 'either-or' strategy, leading to the emergence of two mutually exclusive groups, that of 'friends of Antigone' opposed to that of 'enemies of Antigone', manages to transcend the originating contextual framework of the eponymous tragedy, since it is found present in subsequent theatrical reimaginings of the tragic story. Thus, given the assumed fertile ground for picking sides afforded by the classical source, what I would like to discuss at length next is a peculiar instantiation in the history of classical reception of *Antigone*, where the exact same pattern of 'friend or foe' is being followed. The place of interest is (Northern) Ireland, and the time is the largest part of the twentieth century, namely the period that we now euphemistically call 'The Troubles'.

Given such spatiotemporal transposition, certain questions arise regarding the applicability and development of Antigone's transgressive story within Ireland's historical timeline: in what manner, and to what extent, has Sophocles' *Antigone* been appropriated as a mythic paradigm and equivalent to Ireland's contemporary affairs? Or, to put it more bluntly, what were the exact sociocultural imperatives 'for Antigone to walk forth and state her *non serviam* to the Irish establishment?' (Murray [1991] 129). As these queries hint, in order to trace the expediency of Antigone's ἔχθρα (*enmity*) with Creon in relation to Irish politics, one must locate first an originating point of reference concerning the moral authority of the play in respect of Ireland's literary tradition.

Pondering about such association, it is indeed striking that *Antigone*'s 'first major impact in Ireland was marked by way of its non-appearance' (Harkin [2008] 292–293). The first Irish adaptation of the play to emerge on Irish soil was planned to be staged at the newly founded Abbey Theatre in Dublin on January 29, 1907. The Abbey, a *nationalist project* envisioned to become Ireland's National Theatre by its founders Lady Augusta Gregory and W.B. Yeats, had commissioned Lady Augusta's son, Robert Gregory, to come up with a version of Sophocles' play, so that Yeats's wish that one day he could 'hear Greek tragedy spoken with a Dublin accent' (Macintosh [1994] 62) would eventually be granted. However, in a rare occasion of failed nepotism, Robert Gregory got usurped, and instead of an Irish *Antigone*, 'the audience were treated to Synge's masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World*' (Arkins [2010] 54).[1] As for the second Irish writer who sought to stage *Antigone* and saw his efforts turn futile, is no other than W. B Yeats. Yeats, right after translating and staging Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in December 1926, 'thought of making a version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but did not for some reason;[2] instead he produced his version of *Oedipus at Colonus*, in September 1927' (Suzuki [2000] 47). Yet, it seems that *Antigone* never slipped Yeats' mind: what we get instead of a theatrical adaptation, is a 16-line poem named 'From the Antigone' serving as the concluding piece of his *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) collection. Interestingly, in 'From the Antigone', Yeats' attention is cast on a notion customarily juxtaposed against *philia* in classical scholarship, that of ἔρως (love). Lacking knowledge of Greek,[3] Yeats uses Sir Richard Jebb's translation of the Sophoclean tragedy as guidance, and 'translates' the third stasimon of *Antigone* (781–805):

> Overcome—O bitter sweetness,
> Inhabitant of the soft cheek of a girl—
> The rich man and his affairs,

1 Synge's play has nonetheless proved iconic in Ireland's theatrical chronicles. Considered to be a loosely based, parodic version of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Macintosh [1994] 98), it succeeded in generating violent riots on its opening day from an enraged audience, the majority of which was leaning ideologically towards the Nationalist cause, due to its apparent staging of scenes of profanity.

2 One wonders whether the immense success of Jean Cocteau's *Antigone* (1922) had any role in Yeats's inhibition to complete his version of the tragedy.

3 Although not trained in ancient Greek *per se*, Yeats' deep and multifaceted relationship with Hellenism is indisputable. Two meticulous studies on the topic are Arkins (1990) and Liebregts (1993).

> The fat flocks and the fields' fatness,
> Mariners, rough harvesters;
> Overcome Gods upon Parnassus;
>
> Overcome the Empyrean; hurl
> Heaven and Earth out of their places,
> That in the Same calamity
> Brother and brother, friend and friend,
> Family and family,
> City and city may contend,
> By that great glory driven wild.
>
> Pray I will and sing I must,
> And yet I weep—Oedipus' child
> Descends into the loveless dust.

Once again, within an Irish scheme of classical appropriation, Antigone's name has gone missing. In the final stanza of the poem, Yeats refrains from addressing Antigone directly, as he opts for the periphrastic 'Oedipus' child'. Such choice is not accidental:

> In the last three lines of 'From the 'Antigone' (…) the poet-speaker calls her not by her own name of Antigone, but 'Oedipus' child', who 'descends into the loveless dust'. He thus effectively sums up the life of Antigone and at the same time encapsulates her a symbol of *philia*, a term which encompasses not only her devotion to her dead brother seen in *Antigone* but also that shown to her father Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* (Suzuki [2001] 133).

Yeats uses the patronymic 'Oedipus' child' to emphasize Antigone's loyalty to all members of her family and to highlight the efforts Antigone had made to hold the curse-stricken Laius family together. Transcending the events depicted in *Antigone* and the female heroine's unfaltering insistence in performing the funeral rites for the corpse of Polyneices, Yeats' 'From the Antigone' also alludes to the female heroine's *philia* gesture towards her wretched father in *Oedipus at Colonus*, together with her agonizing attempts to stop the ἔχθρα ('enmity') between her two conflicting brothers. Ironically enough, although Yeats's poem is a 'translation' of the Chorus's 'encomium on Love', the *philia* that Antigone shares with her loved ones emanates in between the lines of the poem. Likewise, Yeats acts a φίλος ('friend') of Antigone, 'praying', 'singing', and 'weeping',

as Antigone proceeds to meet her fateful death. Mourning becomes Yeats' token of friendship to Antigone.

Moving forward from these two distinctive failures to stage *Antigone* for the first time in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century,[4] one needs to leap over a few decades until one can bump into Antigone again. Curiously, Antigone's applicability to Ireland's affairs is again not expressed in dramatic terms, since it is not on the theatrical stage but in the debate chamber where Antigone's name is once more rendered relevant. The time is October 1968. The place is Queen's University, Belfast. As for the speaker, his name is Conor Cruise O'Brien, a politician and academic historian, who 'from the 1960s until around 1985 was the most famous Irish intellectual in the world; in the 1970s and eighties he was also the most ardent and influential opponent of Irish Republicanism in the South' (Wallace [2015] 45).[5] O'Brien, being invited to give a public lecture in front of the Queen's University student body regarding the then growing Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland, becomes the first to introduce Antigone as a political analogy of the Northern Irish *status quo*. What is more remarkable, however, is that O'Brien's argumentation perceives Antigone in a rather negative light, since O'Brien is not convinced as to whether Antigone's defiant stance against a supposedly unjust law could prove a viable solution to the set of problems tantalizing the North during this period. O'Brien provides a reading of the Sophoclean tragedy, in which Antigone's self-sacrificial martyrdom is understood as a mythic paradigm and equivalent to the political events of the time in the North of Ireland. Nevertheless, as it will be shown next, in this indeed peculiar case of classical reception, O'Brien openly rejects Antigone, and by doing so, he firmly stands as an ἐχθρός ('enemy') of hers.

The year that O'Brien gave his lecture on Antigone, it also happens to be the year that 'The Troubles' are thought to have broken out—a tempestuous period in Northern Ireland taking sectarian and paramilitary dimensions and lasting for 30 gruesome years until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Naturally, the chief issue at stake during the conflict was Northern Ireland's hybrid constitutional status mirrored in the relationship between the Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist communities sharing the same territory in the North. Given the undeniable Protestant majority in terms of

4 It should be noted, however, that even if only a 20-year margin separates the two failed attempts, Gregory was planning to stage his *Antigone* in a pre-independent Ireland, whereas Yeats' *Antigone*—if it *had* emerged—would have done so in a newborn Irish Free State.

5 O'Brien's Catholic background proved pivotal for his outspoken Unionist views to be deemed controversial by a certain Republican majority in the South.

Northern Ireland's population, the Catholic community often regarded itself as a minority group being discriminated against manifoldly by the larger Protestant assembly. Nevertheless, although nowadays mostly conflated with partition politics and IRA's violent involvement towards the creation of an all-Ireland state, it is crucial to underline that the origins of the 'The Troubles' were somewhat different:

> The Troubles began not as part of a national questioning of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom as it has often been argued but because of the civil rights' marches of 1967–1969 and the violent responses to these by the RUC and the Stormont government. (Remoundou-Howley [2011] 126)

Taking cues from the above observation, on 5 October, 1968 (which means a few days before O'Brien's lecture) a Civil Rights march was planned to take place in the city of Derry[6] in Northern Ireland but was eventually banned and declared illegal. Regardless, a supposed number of four hundred protesters defied the prohibition and marched against gerrymandering, unemployment and housing discrimination. In reality, although the march was characterized by peaceful non-sectarian civil-rights demands echoing 'the civil rights movement in the U.S., [and] especially Martin Luther King's doctrine of passive resistance' (Roche [1988] 222), the principal issue engendering the protest was the asymmetrical authority that Derry's Protestant community was believed to unfairly exert against its Catholic counterpart in terms of political power, employment, and housing opportunities. Given the illegal status of the march, the peaceful protesters were violently confronted by the Northern Irish police (RUC), in a bold attempt to disperse them. Fast, chaos erupted leading to all-day battles between the police forces and the demonstrators. The fierce incident finished with Derry—a town about which most people in Britain knew little about—at the centre of media's attention, and with a general bitter aftertaste regarding the overzealous enthusiasm shown by the RUC.

Unsurprisingly, the political evaluation of the Derry mayhem lies at the heart of Conor Cruise O'Brien's delivery. The main feature of his talk involves an investigation on the limits of acts of civil disobedience, with O'Brien basically inquiring whether civil disobedience could prove an effective lever for social

6 The so-called 'slash' city going by the double name Derry/Londonderry—depending one's Nationalist or Loyalist affiliations. Unlike the rest of Ulster region, Derry's population was largely Catholic.

change in Northern Ireland. In fact, granted certain modifications and omissions, the content of O'Brien's speech was later on published in the *Listener* on 24 October, 1968, and then reprinted in his influential book *States of Ireland*, in 1972.[7] Extracting from there, we notice O'Brien paralleling the objectives of the Civil Rights movement to the immovable stance of Antigone, and by doing so, questioning the legitimacy of both parties' actions:

> Antigone's action was one of non-violent civil disobedience, the breaking of a law which she considered to be contrary to a higher law. The consequences of her non-violent action emerge in acts of violence: Antigone's own violent death; Haemon's turning of his sword first against his father Creon and then fatally against himself; the suicide of Eurydice, Creon's wife and Haemon's mother. A stiff price for that handful of dust on Polyneices. ([1979] 151)

Simply put, what O'Brien aims by bringing forth Antigone's example is to underline that any kind of protest or act of civil disobedience, even if it is meant to be peaceful, it can nonetheless always attract violence, and thus it should be *a priori* rejected. Especially, O'Brien's rather cynical mentioning of 'a stiff price for that handful of dust on Polyneices' cannot but be read against the occurring events in Derry. Tacitly linking Antigone with the Derry protesters, and Creon with the Northern Irish power structures, O'Brien proclaims:

> It was Antigone's free decision, and that alone, which precipitated the tragedy. Creon's responsibility was the more remote one of having placed this tragic power in the hands of a headstrong child of Oedipus. (Ibid.) […] *Without* Antigone, we could attain a quieter, more realistic world. The Creons might respect one another's spheres of influence if the instability of idealism were to cease to exist, inside their own dominions, a threat to law and order.[8] (Worthen [1995] 38)

In a way, O'Brien warns us that the Civil Rights marchers' 'innocent' insistence to protest notwithstanding the state's disapproval, runs the danger of generating unthinkable calamities in the long term. As he later explains:

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7 *States of Ireland* got published in the immediate wake of another (much more) traumatic event that took place in Derry, that of Bloody Sunday.

8 Strangely, this second part of O'Brien's philippic against Antigone got excluded from its revised version in *States of Ireland* and can only be found in *The Listener* article.

> The subordination of Catholic to Protestant in Derry is a result of force and the threat of force. The condition of Derry may be thought of as one of frozen violence: any attempt to thaw it out will liberate violence which is at present static. ([1979] 152)

From what we can infer, then, O'Brien seems to advocate passive inactivity over decisive action recommending a Creonian-like doctrine of '*status quo* conservation' in relation to Derry's demographic politics, and, on a wider scale, Northern Ireland's institutional policies. O'Brien not only hierarchizes the fault between Antigone and Creon by basically stating that Antigone is more to blame, 'just because she *started* the duel first', but also goes one step further, recommending the ostracization of any potential Antigone-like figure from his imaginary ideal community, an idea reinforced by his 'without Antigone' statement.[9] Therefore, one can discern in O'Brien's argumentation a re-enactment of the 'friend or foe' pattern discussed earlier on: by denying his *philia* to Antigone (due to her dangerous 'idealism'), O'Brien automatically becomes affiliated with Creon (and his suitably realistic, 'spheres of influence').

What is more remarkable, however, is that O'Brien's argumentation takes in the end an unexpected turn, since he concludes his joint attack on Antigone and the Civil Rights demonstrators by pledging his alliance to Antigone's sister Ismene:

> The Disabilities of Catholics in Northern Ireland are real, but not overwhelmingly oppressive: is their removal really worth attaining at the risk of precipitating riots, explosions, pogroms, murder? *Thus Ismene*. (…) Antigone is very fine on the stage, or in retrospect or a long way off, or even in real life for a single, splendid epiphany. But after four years of Antigone and her under-studies and all those funerals (…) you begin to feel that Ismene's commonsense and feeling for the living may make the more needful, if less spectacular element in human 'dignity'. (Ibid. 152–153)

9 This 'better off without Antigone' attitude proves more concretized than it first looks, since the warning O'Brien makes regarding 'the troublemaker from the Thebes' is allegedly also signalled about a specific person directly involved with Irish politics, namely Bernadette Devlin McAliskey. McAliskey was only 21 years old when she rose as the leader of the Civil Rights marches, and she also was youngest MP in Ireland at the time. McAliskey, therefore, 'steps into a role which could have been written for her, a strikingly young and impassioned woman standing up against the oppressive, patriarchal institutions of Stormont and Westminster' (Roche [2009] 190–191).

Already in Sophocles' tragedy, Ismene's foremost reaction to Antigone when the latter shares with her the plan to ignore Creon's edict, is one of terror for the possible repercussions of conducting such an 'unlawful deed': 'ἦ γὰρ νοεῖς θάπτειν σφ', ἀπόρρητον πόλει;' (*Ant.* 44) ('And do you plan to bury him, when it is forbidden by the city?'). Hence, it appears that the majority of Ismene's inhibitions to follow Antigone's lead are not ideologically grounded, but rather stem from the fear of punishment by a higher authority. Taking also into account that in the end Ismene eventually sides with Antigone, one justifiably wonders what purpose it serves for O'Brien to provide a reading of the tragedy that sets the two sisters against each other.

Such consideration brings us to the second individual, whose embracement of Antigone's story as a metaphor for Northern Ireland's turbulent affairs remains to be examined, and whose direct involvement in rescuing Antigone's 'afterlife' has already been foreshadowed in the paper's title, Tom Paulin. For Paulin, to begin with, the motives behind O'Brien's celebration of Ismene's level-headedness are quite straightforward:

> [O'Brien], in recommending Ismene's common-sense he is really supporting Creon's rule of law. It is as though a future member of Creon's think-tank can be discerned hiding behind the unfortunate Ismene. Tragedy teaches no moral, but the analogy between the play and events in the North of Ireland shows us a terrible truth—neither Ismene, nor even Conor Cruise O'Brien, can prevent a civil war from happening. ([1987] 28)

At first glance, then, it becomes crystal-clear that Paulin's proposition regarding Antigone's applicability to 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland is a far cry from O'Brien's (expressed or concealed) political convictions. In fact, it would be fair to say that the only point on which the two Irishmen would ever agree is that, at the time of their debate, *Antigone* 'was a play that belonged in Ireland' (Paulin [2002] 166).

Paulin's ostensible head-to-head clash with O'Brien regarding Antigone's place *in* Ireland must have been unavoidable, especially if one considers how contrasting Paulin's upbringing is compared to O'Brien's. If O'Brien is once a rare bird because of his steadfast Unionist views despite his Southern Catholic roots, Paulin likewise happens to have an unusual background story:

> Paulin himself does not slot conveniently into the dividing categories so favoured in the North. He was born in England [but] he was raised in the North as a Protestant Unionist when his parents returned there; and in the late 1970s he changed sides, switching allegiances from his Unionist

> heritage, not so much to its Catholic counter-image as to a utopian vision of nationalist identity that would reconcile Protestant Dissenter and Catholic Republican. (Roche [1988] 222)

A poet, playwright, and polemical essayist, Paulin has held that his political views on the 'nationalist question' are founded on 'an idea of [Irish] identity which has yet not formal or institutional existence. It assumes the existence of a non-sectarian, republican state which comprises the whole island of Ireland' (Paulin [1987] 17). Doing justice to his double status as political commentator and artist, Paulin rebuts O'Brien in two corresponding forms; the essay and the theatrical play.

Starting with the essay, entitled 'The Making of a Loyalist', Paulin 'denounce[s] O'Brien's 'crude and straightforward Unionist reading of Antigone', according to which Antigone becomes responsible for 'all those funerals' leaving the Unionist state 'virtually absolved … and Creon's hands apparently to be clean' (Macintosh [2011] 94). 'The Making of a Loyalist' was first published in 1980 in Times Literary Supplement, and then included in Paulin's collection of essays *Ireland and the English Crisis* (1984). In there, Paulin weaves the psychological profile of O'Brien explaining how the deliberately Protestant education O'Brien received as a child from his father allowed his inherited Catholic allegiances to be tempered, and how such fusion permitted 'that rare figure, of the "objective" historian to emerge' […] the *engagé* intellectual who is also disengaged by virtue of his superior wisdom' (Paulin [1987] 25–26). Hence, by first elucidating how carefully O'Brien constructed his 'impartial' public persona, Paulin moves on undermining such devising, disclosing O'Brien's camouflaged partisan views:

> O'Brien loyalties are to the 'daylight gods', and he sees the political conflict in the play [i.e. a synonym for the existent polarization between Catholics and Protestants] as one of unequal values and unequal personal responsibilities. Creon, therefore, is both individual and instruction, yet he appears to be more an institution, while Antigone, like St Joan, appears as an individual ahead of her supporters. She is 'headstrong' and therefore more responsible because she can supposedly exercise choice. So Creon is rendered almost innocent by his immobile precedence, his simply being there. This is a severe distortion of the tragic conflict. (Ibid. 28)

In a nutshell, in 'The Making of a Loyalist' Paulin questions O'Brien's implied objectivity regarding the application of Antigone's eternal clash with Creon to Northern Irish politics. Instead, Paulin claims that O'Brien interpreted Sopho-

cles' play *falsely*, and by having done so, he advocates a certain political line regarding the socio-political situation in the North. To use Paulin's own words:

> O'Brien's target was Irish nationalism, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and the Northern Irish Civil Rights Movement, which he saw as responsible for the violent politics of Northern Ireland. He misinterpreted the play, and in doing a version of it I set out to try and prove him wrong. (Paulin [2002] 167)

Paulin explicitly announces that rescuing Antigone from O'Brien's interpretation has become his primary quest, and that the best means of defending Antigone is by placing her back in her 'natural habitat' and writing a play about her. Consequently, Paulin's adaptation is manifestly juxtaposed to O'Brien's reading of *Antigone*, to such a degree that probably it would have never been created if O'Brien had not insinuated the tragedy's relevance to 'The Troubles' in the first place. It is thus inferred that an alternative viewpoint on Antigone's applicability to Ireland's political conditions will be recommended in Paulin's play. His adaptation is a pursuit to vindicate Antigone and redeem her fame; a *philia* gesture towards Antigone readdressing the reception of her myth in Ireland. Finally, after a series of annulments and mishaps, it seems that a version of Sophocles' *Antigone* will eventually manage to hit the Irish stage.

Tom Paulin's adaptation of Sophocles' play is called *The Riot Act*.[10] It was first staged by the Field Day Theatre Company[11] at the Guildhall, Derry, on 19 September 1984.[12] Paulin's apparent *'pro* Antigone' stance dictates the redis-

10 The title of Paulin's play, apart from indirectly referring to Antigone's rebellious deed, also possesses a second meaning: The Riot Act was a decree that passed by the British Parliament in 1875 giving local authorities the legal power to disperse public gatherings of twelve or more people for fear of uprisings. The term is still used today in a figurative sense. To 'read someone the Riot Act' is to give someone a harsh warning for his disorderly conduct.

11 From its inception in 1980 and for the next fifteen years, Field Day Theatre Company produced many inspiring plays and released a series of pamphlets commenting on the arduous politics of Nationalist/Unionist struggle in Northern Ireland giving a distinct Northern voice to several divisive issues. Although essentially a touring company, the choice of Derry as the starting point for most of its productions was both a radical and strategic move going against the cultural and political centres of Belfast, and Dublin. Especially for Paulin's play, the choice to first stage *The Riot Act* in the city marked by the 1968 riots bears an undeniable symbolic significance.

12 The year of 1984 is with no doubt an *annus mirabilis* for *Antigone* in Ireland. Apart from Paulin's adaptation, Brendan Kennelly and Aidan Carl Mathews also produced two (Southern) Irish versions of Sophocles' play. Such triple achievement is quite remarkable given the previous long dry period.

tribution of roles that takes place in *The Riot Act*: 'set in Northern Ireland, Antigone is represented as a martyr of the Nationalist movement. As for Creon, he is made into a corrupt Unionist politician of the Thatcherite era' (Chou [2010] 5). Unlike O'Brien's Unionist interpretation of the play, this time Antigone is an upstanding Republican; she becomes 'the paradigm of our sympathies' (Ibid.), 'with right located firmly on her side and bureaucratic villainy on Creon's' (McDonald [2005] 127). The main premise of Paulin's version is that the action takes place in Belfast and Thebes simultaneously. To achieve this, Paulin infuses his text with historical allusions. For example, Tiresias' words, when advising Creon to change his verdict, echo Ireland's violent past:

> Now so much blood's been spilt
> There's none can call a halt
> To those thrawn and jaggy hates
> Deep-rooted in your state. (53–54)

Another similar point of interest is found in Creon's response to Haemon when the latter insists that Antigone must be freed. Creon's words mirror a main allegation concerning Northern Irish politics, where Northern Irish leaders keep on rejecting to share 'rule' with the Catholic minority:

> Or split my rule, then,
> With some king else? (39)

Generally, while the main plotline has remained faithful to Sophocles' 'original', Paulin concentrates on speech and infuses his dialogues with a distinct Northern dialect. A good example of this technique is derived from the Guard's contemplation whether he should go tell Creon that the corpse of Polynices was found buried:

> Sammy, you're a fool, you're a complete eejit—aren't you walking right into it? But then just suppose there's someone else gets there first and tells him? (18–19).

Paulin wants to create the effect that his play has resonance in the contemporary political context of Ireland, and so he not only focuses on *what* is said but also *how* this is said. As Worthen argues: 'Although Paulin's [version] generally accepts the narrative and thematic constraints of *Antigone*, he uses performed language to specify the play's political application to the present' ([1995] 28). So, the strategic introduction of typical Northern Irish vernacular arguably renders

the two main characters of the play as 'Irish citizens': Creon is both himself and a representative of Unionism; Antigone is both herself and a martyr of the Nationalist movement. Moreover, by 'manipulating the way the characters sounded, Paulin was able to suggest a number of connections that would be familiar parts of the cultural vocabulary of a local audience' (Doyle [2000] 178). Therefore, language in *The Riot Act* becomes the undisputable protagonist: not only do the thematics of Sophocles' *Antigone* become transposed to a Northern Irish locale via the inclusion of a particular Hiberno-English idiom, but, as it will be shown next, the unquestionable victory of Antigone over Creon in the final part of the play is also justified in terms of a special language that evokes Ireland, its troubled history, and its poetic tradition.

To give an example of how Paulin imagined all this to work, let me go back to his own words: 'I wanted Creon to be a kind of a puritan gangster, a megalomaniac who spoke alternately in an English public school voice and a deep menacing Ulster growl' (Paulin [2002] 167). On this note, Creon's speech at the beginning of the play imitates the rhetoric of Northern Irish politicians; 'we hear a verbal medley of the two reigning powers in Northern Ireland, Westminster and Unionism' (Roche [1988] 224).[13] The untrustworthiness of Creon's arguments is thus underlined by the mannerism they are presented with:

> Mr. Chairman, loyal citizens of Thebes, these recent months have indeed been a most distressing time for us all … For purely technical and legal reasons—kinship to the dead and so on—the office of king therefore devolves upon me … For my own part, I have always held that one of the soundest maxims of good government is: *always listen to the very best advice*. And in the coming months I shall be doing a very great deal of listening, sounding opinions and so forth … Thank you all for coming, and any questions just now? We have one minute. (15–17)

Paulin succeeds in ridiculing his Creon by making him talk as if in a press conference, whereas true politics have already been conducted behind the curtain. Yet, the parody persists. Introduced by the Chorus as 'The Big man' (15)—'an unmistakable reference to the Reverend Ian Paisley, the demagogue of the Democratic Unionist Party' (Roche [1988] 225)—Creon does not fail to mention that 'Zeus will support me here' (16), as if the Olympian was another

13 As McDonald explains: 'Westminster is England, which since 1972 has been dominant in Northern Ireland, and Unionism is the movement led mainly by Northern Protestants to keep Northern Ireland linked with England as part of Britain' (1997: 61).

member of his cabinet. Others have additionally found in Creon's speech 'an echo of the opening remarks in 1984 of the United Kingdom's incoming Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Douglas Hurd' (Jones [1997] 236) or even a semblance of Edward Carson's oratorical style (Szabo [2007] 172). All these innuendos combined sketch Paulin's Creon as enjoying a double posture compared to the archetypal Sophoclean one:

> So, whereas Sophocles' Creon is very much a Theban, Paulin's Creon serves in linguistic terms as an intermediary between the 'Thebes' we see before us on the stage and, apparently, an externally located locus of power, one which most dominates his discourse in his most public moments. Drawing analogies between this scenario and contemporary Northern Ireland does not require an over-active imagination. (Jones [1997] 237)

Nonetheless, attention must also be paid to Creon's more private moments, when he directly addresses the members of his family or gives orders to the guards. There, Creon opts for a more savage language, striped off those verbal embellishments dictated by political correctness:

> And this one [Ismene]—
> The sneaky, sleaked one—
> She lived in my house too (30)
> (...)
> Bring out the dirty bitch [Antigone]
> And let's be rid of her (42)

Paulin purposefully makes Creon talk in various tones and dialects depending on the given circumstance. Whereas in his initial speech he addresses all Thebes (or Ireland) in a sterile language resembling a Westminster bureaucrat, he then abruptly switches to a vulgar Ulster idiom. Like a true politician, Paulin's Creon is always mindful of the audience he has in front of him, and so he senses when is the proper time to utter the local dialect 'like a Unionist anxious to reassure those he represents by sounding the code words of the tribe' (Roche [1988] 224).

To move now to Paulin's characterization of Antigone, let us start with how Ismene responds to her sister's insistence to bury Polynices:

> Antigone: He's my own brother,
> And he's yours too.

> I can't betray him.
> Ismene: You're talking *wild*—
> It's Creon's order. (11)

Unlike Sophocles' version, where Ismene scolds Antigone saying 'ὦ σχετλία, Κρέοντος ἀντειρηκότος;' ('Unyielding girl, with Creon speaking against it?') (*Ant.* 47), Paulin puts instead the word 'wild' in Ismene's mouth, which is a word with a special positive usage in Ireland:

> This wildness is not a barbarism to be set over against civilization since the terms of these polarities have been too long co-opted by the British, casting themselves in the light of the bearers of civilization, order, rule, and moderation, and the Irish as the unkempt barbarians, who will not be tamed but Caliban-like insist on wallowing in the mud. The 'wildness' may be transvalued as exuberance, primitive earthiness, an integrity of body and soul that resists social integration or confinement within limits. (Roche [1988] 225–226)

The wildness[14] of Paulin's Antigone is not a synonym for anarchic action or a threat to civic order as Creon would like to believe. On the contrary, as her words unveil, it is a form of loyalty to her kin, and the extended family; a kind of tribal alliance with its own instinctive rules and unwritten laws:

> It was never *Zeus*
> Made that law.
> Down in the *dark earth*
> There's no law says,
> 'Break with your own kin,
> Go lick the state'
> We're bound to the dead:
> We must be loyal to them.
> I had to bury him. (27)

14 One also remembers W.B. Yeats's poem 'On a Political Prisoner' dedicated to the Irish female revolutionary Constance Markievicz. As the title of the poem implies, in the Easter Rising of 1916, Markievicz got imprisoned for her direct involvement in the Rebellion. Yeats writes about her in one of the poem's lines: 'With all youth's lonely wildness stirred'. Antigone's shares such 'wildness' with Markievicz, especially because both rebel women fall under the title of political prisoner.

This clash between the man-made laws of the *polis* and the natural laws of the 'earth' finds room for application in the Ireland that both Paulin and O'Brien have known. One just needs to replace 'Zeus' with Westminster and 'dark earth' with Irish ethos. More importantly, the above extract is crucial because at the end of the play, when Creon recognizes his mistake, he announces: 'All I want is the dark' (62). In the corresponding lines from Sophocles' tragedy Creon merely prays for his own destruction: 'ἴτω ἴτω, φανήτω μόρων ὁ κάλλιστ᾽ ἔχων ἐμοὶ τερμίαν ἄγων ἀμέραν ὕπατος' ('let it come, let it come, let it appear, the fairest of the fates for me, that brings my final day': *Ant*. 1328–1330). In *The Riot Act*, an explicit acknowledgement of Antigone's righteousness is superadded; Paulin's Creon wishes to become affiliated with Antigone's worldview which he previously denied.

Finally, Creon's admittance of defeat, as a result of the change of mind he experienced, is once again articulated by a reference to W.B. Yeats and of a poem he wrote about a political event crucial to Ireland's history. To illustrate how Paulin imagined this to work, I first would like to focus on the verbal exchange between the Chorus and Creon, moments after the latter has found out about the eventual double suicide of Antigone and Haemon:

> Chorus: It was too late
> you *changed* your mind.
> Creon: I *changed* it, but.
> Aye, *changed* it utterly.
> Son, what god was it
> That sent me *wild*?
> And, son,
> How ever did I harm you?
> How could I do that
> My own wee man? (60)

Now let us contrast the above extract with Jebb's canonical translation of *Antigone* (1903), from which Paulin (like Yeats) admits having drawn inspiration (Paulin [2002] 165):

> Chorus: Ah me, how all too late thou seemest to see the right!
> Creon: Ah me, I have learned the bitter lesson! But then, methinks, oh then, some god smote me from above with crushing weight, and hurled me into ways of cruelty, woe is me,—overthrowing and trampling on my joy! Woe, woe, for the troublous toils of men! (*Ant*. 1270–1277)

What we notice here is a crucial differentiation in the expression of regret from Creon. Whereas in Jebb's translation the Chorus accuses Creon of having seen the truth too late, and Creon accordingly talks of a bitter lesson learned, in Paulin's version the same passage seems to extrapolate into something bigger, since both the Chorus and Creon agree on a change of mind, which must be understood as a confession of a radical alteration in Creon's system of beliefs and consciousness. Apart from a mere annihilation to a state of nothingness that Creon undergoes in Sophocles' 'original' (Murray 1991: 228), Paulin's Creon seems to change profoundly and embrace Antigone's view.

This new mental state in which Creon finds himself not only contributes decidedly to the portrayal of Antigone as unquestionably coming out victorious in *The Riot Act*, but also 'Hibernicizes' the whole episode, so to speak.[15] The parallelism between the above passage and W.B. Yeats poem 'Easter 1916' is rather obvious: contemplating the (failed) Irish Republican uprising against British Rule on Easter Monday 1916, W.B. Yeats introduces the word 'change' seven times to commemorate the protagonists of the rebellion, some of whom the poet knew personally. By the word 'change' Yeats insinuates how the aura of revolutionary fervour transforms common people whom he beforehand used to avoid 'with a nod of the head / or polite meaningless words' to eternal emblems of a terrible beauty. And how, by the same token, an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of a perceived higher ideal—be it the burial of the dead or Irish Republicanism—demands commemoration. In the most famous last seven lines of the poem Yeats writes:

> I write it out in a verse
> MacDonagh and MacBride
> And Connolly and Pearse
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn,
> Are *changed*, *changed* utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

To conclude with *The Riot Act*, we are now in a position to appreciate better the effects of Paulin's strategic weaving of Irish literature and history into the

15 The 'Hibernization' of Antigone is not limited to the above instance but rather pertains to the whole narrative of *The Riot Act* 'painting the setting of the play green', so to speak. The introduction of a bunch of local colloquial expressions points towards that direction: 'aye, it's fixes' (35), 'Ismene, love' (9), 'aye, dust on the corp' (19), 'o'the whole pack o'ye' (22), 'that yap like this one' (27), 'hard-nosed bitch' (36).

play's narrative: 'since Creon's assertion "I changed it utterly" appropriates a crucial phrase from Yeats poem "Easter 1916" that refers to the impact of the 1916 Rising, we infer that Creon's Unionist viewpoint has altered to take account of the Republican position [embodied by Antigone]' (Arkins [2002] 208). Thus, by the end of *The Riot Act*, Antigone's self-sacrifice becomes another ring in the long chain of acts of resistance for Irish independence, and so Paulin's Antigone rightly 'joins in' the 'tradition of Republican martyrs' (Arkins [2010] 39).

To sum up, perceived from the angle of a chronological sequence of events regarding the history of reception of Antigone's figure in Ireland, Paulin overturns O'Brien's previous negative portrayal of the rebellious female heroine, recommending instead an approving stance of her transgressive deed in relation to Northern Irish politics. On this basis, Paulin acts as a *philos* of Antigone ensuring that Antigone's 'afterlife' is positively re-evaluated after O'Brien's denunciation. Consequently, starting with Robert Gregory's and W.B. Yeats's failed attempts to stage *Antigone*, moving to Sir Richard Jebb's involvement in making Antigone's travel to Ireland possible through his English translation of the tragedy, and, finally, evaluating the strictly black-or-white interpretations of Antigone's deed by Conor Cruise O'Brien and Tom Paulin respectively, one acknowledges that the registration of the Antigonean thematics in Irish collective consciousness does not ensue without its drama. As such, it would be erroneous to claim that any of the two recommendations examined in detail in this chapter regarding the application of Antigone's story in Ireland is fully neutral or unbiased. On the contrary, both readings allude to tangible historical occurrences, together with incorporating in their discourse deliberate allusions to Ireland's literary tradition.

This multi-layered Irish reception of Antigone's *exemplum* penetrates Ireland's historical milieu forcing, so to speak, Antigone to give up her comfortable mythological habitat and to acquire 'flesh and bones'. Within an Irish spectrum of classical reception Antigone is participant to 'The Troubles' in the North as well as in their reverberation in the Republic in the South. As Marianne McDonald has asserted: 'Ireland is Antigone, who in the face of insufferable odds, does not falter, but retains a sense of justice' ([1997] 58). From this standpoint, Paulin proves a true *philos* of Antigone, since he actively contributes to this dominant sketching of Antigone as an Irish Patron Saint of Justice. The forging of such interrelationship between Antigone and Ireland renders Paulin's re-envisioning of Sophocles' tragedy as central to the positive engraving of Antigone's name in Ireland's cultural memory and collective consciousness.

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