

ANTIGONE STOPPED IN BELFAST: STACEY GREGG'S ISMENE

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The repetition of historical and literary paradigms is not necessarily farcical but there is an unavoidable tendency towards farce in a situation in which an acknowledged tragic conflict is also read as an anachronistic-aberrant-picturesque one. This reading conspires with the 'modern' interpretation of the North as a place undergoing in microcosm the international phenomenon of the battle of extremes between the terrorist and the rule of law, to restate the problem as [...] deriving from an 'anachronistic' base.

-Seamus Deane, *'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea'*

The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact.

-Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

The future belongs to ghosts.

-Jacques Derrida, *Echographies of Television*¹

Borrowing paradigms from classical mythology does something more than just restate a problem originating from an anachronistic foundation (Deane 1985:55): it allows a story to be retold in a new light in the present. With a two-fold movement between the original and its restatement in the present, Stacey Gregg's *Ismene* (2007) typifies a contemporary mode of loose adaptation of Greek tragedy. This mode of adaptation fills in the *lacunae* that arise in the temporal disjunctions of this narrative and translates them into the affliction of contemporary struggles in Northern Irish society today. Gregg attempts to embody and 'reclaim the materiality of experience' from the 'abstractions' (Zajko & Leonard 2006:2) of inherited, conventional literary traditions, and clichéd political writing. To this end, the Belfast-born playwright radically transforms the founding myth of *Antigone* into a ground-breaking loose adaptation at the same time as she acknowledges her indebtedness to a variety of influences stemming from a genealogy of 'Greek Tragedy appropriated by Irish writers'². Her attempt to renegotiate a way around that legacy of Greek tragedy is to link it to the present social *troubles*³ in Northern Ireland.

In fact, Gregg states on the cover of her unpublished typescript⁴ that her version is 'written in response to' a crime which took political dimensions: the murder of Robert McCartney on January 2005, outside of *Magennis's* Bar in the centre of Belfast, a murder which was allegedly carried out by members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. According to the claims of the deceased's sisters, the perpetrators had mercilessly abandoned their ferociously stabbed brother and his friend for dead, and in cold blood went back to the pub, locked the door, conducted a forensic clean-up operation in which evidence and CCTV footage were removed, closed the doors and said: 'Nobody saw anything; this is IRA business' (Chrisafis, *The Guardian* 2005). No ambulance was called. Instead, the two men were picked up by a police patrol. McCartney died in hospital and his friend Devine survived. By putting up posters and appearing on national television, the McCartney/*Antigone* sisters, Catherine, Paula, Gemma, Claire, and Donna along with Robert's partner Bridgeen, sought to fight not for revenge but for justice: they asked witnesses to come forward and provide information to the police in relation to the

incident. The family had lost another brother/son who had committed suicide in the past. Coined 'the McCartney case', the incident and the wave of reaction it caused exceeded the boundaries of the country by bringing European Parliament and White House condemnation and by provoking unprecedented international outrage. For speaking out forcefully against the IRA, the McCartney family has ever since been subjected to a campaign of violence, isolation, and intimidation to keep silent and not proceed with the investigation of the crime. What started off as a pub brawl and ended as a Republican crisis, was a resurfacing of an environment of cover-up, lies, and deep-rooted hatred among the Northern Irish community: 'I can't live in a community where it is perfectly acceptable to murder an innocent man and still walk around freely,' (Sullivan, *The Washington Post* 2005) Paula McCartney said echoing *Antigone's* claims.

The compelling storyline written in two acts and ten scenes, combines a distinctive interest in experimentation with theatrical form with a language that has strong Belfast roots. It also offers a timely microcosmic examination of a dysfunctional family living within an inoperative society between the present and the past, documenting the lives of men and women of her native city. Creon, Ismene, Tigs, Paul, Haemon, the Chorus, Ian, the police, the *polis*, bystanders, paramilitaries, and two middle-aged women, May and CrazyAnnie, form the nucleus around which Gregg works out a clutch of immediate, personal, cultural, and historical problems. Taking Sophocles' *Antigone* as a foundation and grafting it on an up-to-date domestic drama of raw murder and casual violence perpetrated by Creon primarily, Gregg invents a new medium of dramaturgy which goes beyond the confines of plot, aesthetic and structure of the original. For this she withdraws bold 'conscientious objector' Antigone (McDonald 2007) -from now on known as Tigs- from the nominal centre, and replaces her with her sister *Ismene*, as a counter-figure and not just as a foil to Antigone. In fact, the name 'Antigone' is called only in moments of indelible contingency, when May says 'Someone has to sort Antigone out' (28) or when Ismene admonishes Tigs for 'mess[ing] with the boys' (43). By focusing on the misconstrued character of Ismene as the most 'silenced, despised figure in the critical tradition' (Goldhill 2006:141), Gregg displays a fascination with the female figure who has been overshadowed by the dynamism of her sister and decides to re-present her in a new light. What caused so much controversy between Conor Cruise O'Brien and Tom Paulin⁵ more than three decades ago, now becomes an occasion for a reappraisal of Ismene and one which urgently poses the incendiary question that Simon Goldhill expresses in his essay 'Antigone and the Politics of Sisterhood'⁶: 'why must Antigone (Tigs) reject her sister in order to bury her brother?' (2006:159).

This is 'Post Agreement Northern Ireland' assuming the representation of a 'non-specific' community in terms of religious affiliations as 'neither Protestant nor Catholic' (*Ismene* 1). Yet the gripping drama wrestles with lofty concepts such as fate and deceit and mundane ones like computer games. The plot centers around the titular heroine Ismene, 'a tall, self-assured' working-class 'blonde' woman 'in her late twenties' (*Ismene* 10), who returns home from work after hearing from 'the *polis* on the way up' (10) that her two brothers Paul (Polyneices) and Ian (Eteocles) are dead. Yet, nobody knows how they were killed. Her surviving teenage sister Tigs (Antigone) undertakes to investigate the crime thoroughly, following the suspicious forensic efforts of their lowlife 'heavysset' (4) 'big man' (61), uncle Creon, who 'always' tries 'to do' his 'best' (60). Opting for a Lacanian perspective, the world the characters inhabit stretches 'beyond *atē*' across 'the boundary between life and death' [*cette limite de la vie et de la mort*]⁷ (Seminar VII 263,305), whose distinction by the end, will establish the paradox that, perhaps 'the most disturbed psyche' in the play 'may actually' be 'that of the protagonist' (qtd. in Žižek 2001:68).

The political problem around which Gregg exposes today's *realpolitik*, merges through the Ancient Greek values underlying the original to become what Foucault designates as 'the politics of ourselves' (2007:190). Following the murder, out of the seventy witnesses in the pub, none has come forward with a full account of what they saw. Most tell the family they were in

the toilet at the crucial moment. So many people have said they were in the small toilet at the time, the cubicle is now known as 'the Tardis', associated not with its real-world meaning but with a *Time-And-Relative-Dimensions-In-Space* –condition, something between a time capsule and a sci-fi spacecraft that can transport its occupants in any time and space⁸. The crime committed against the McCartney family as a whole, is an example of a 'modern problem' (Deane 1985:55) anachronistically deriving from the blurring between reality and illusion whose *mise-en-scene* of national recollection on TV appeared to achieve what the witnesses, the police, and the Sinn Féin had failed to accomplish: to bury the case, and in burying it, over-expose the suspension of justice and law. As Gregg's Tigs (Antigone) protests,

People are already forgotten about it. That's exactly the problem, forgotten like a selective forgetting elephant in a china shop forgettin only what's handy. Remember this remember that- what about yesterday? Why aren't people asking questions? Don't they want to know? Who did it? Ulster says maybe, we'll see what suits us. Tiocfaidh Ar Maybe. (Ismene 25)

Gregg's loose adaptation restages the processes of this burial by exposing its ramifications on a psychological and social level, addressing the way tragedy informs contemporary debates about cultures of silence, memory and oblivion, national identity, subjectivity, and the representation of reality, in the tradition of Mathews' contested boundary between the fictive and the real. Through her version, the writer invites us to revisit a familiar crime-site which, as Jean Baudrillard notes, simultaneously 'murder[s]' reality and 'exterminat[es]' 'illusion' (2002:i). Like the seventy or more silent witnesses of *Magennis's* pub, the society co-responsible for covering up the case, the characters inhabiting *Ismene* are caught between past and present, reality, lies, and guilt. I want to demonstrate how Gregg's interpretative strategies give expression to this capricious ambivalence, -that 'battle of extremes' Deane refers to (1985:55)-, in order to scrutinize the intimate relationship between reality and illusion and explore the mass of responses to a history of political, primarily, violence. In *The Perfect Crime*, Baudrillard-like Gregg/Tigs/the McCartney sisters- turns detective in order to investigate a crime which he hopes may yet be solved: the 'murder' of reality. In a world of appearance, image, and illusion, Gregg (like Baudrillard) seems to be suggesting that reality disappears although its traces continue to nourish an illusion of the real. To solve the crime would be to unravel the political and technological processes, to penetrate into an examination of vital aspects of the social and cultural life of the advanced democracies in our century: issues such as the 'residual structures of gang rule, poverty, poor men's health', drugs, rape, and 'suicide' in the North. The revealing discussion between Paul's ghost and May is one of the most succinct examples of the social pressures exerted upon that society: 'Paul: [...] So what's yer poison? Overdose? That's Aunty's fave. A very female way to go apparently. Statistically. Men go for the gun or hanging' (*Ismene* 27)⁹. The tantalizing ambiguities that Gregg interrogates, de-historicize modern life in Northern Ireland as one of 'traumatic' display and 'renewal' (Massumi 2006:213), where lies co-exist with the desire to find out the truth, memory with oblivion, the dead with specters of the living, where 'nothin's changed' and still people feel 'they don't live like'(22) they used to.

Gregg has made sure the ensuing tragic enigma follows after an aptly grotesque visual shock, which conjures the apex of impending depravity, has been staged first: by going against the conventions of Greek tragedy she inserts the scene of the two brothers' mutual killing on the first page. The predominant image she creates before a single word is uttered by the central characters, is one of a post-modern wasteland: the '*nondescript*' interior of a claustrophobic '*family*' back '*room*' '*in a poor state; stained*' with '*bare floor[s]*' and '*old paint*' surveys the bleak detritus of discarded objects such as '*stale pizza boxes stacked in corners*', '*an ashtray*', '*a CD player*', '*a table and a few odd chairs*'(2). In its centre,

Two eighteen year old brothers, **Paul** and **Ian**, sit side-by-side on the floor playing a computer game. Both are expressionless. The game gets heated. Paul giggles hysterically, then intermittently. Ian joins in. Ian stubs out his cigarette and pulls out a gun. Paul looks at it, and grins from ear to ear.

Ian: Ye ready?

Ian shoots Paul.

He leans over the body, looks at it tenderly, and kisses the body's head.

He sits back and sighs.

He looks at the screen and hits a few buttons incredulously.

Ye still managed to beat me, ye shite.

Smiling, he shoots himself in the eye.

Blackout (2).

The imagined visual impact of the opening scene of the siblings' unbridled suicide pact emulates, or, to use a more suitable verb from computer-science terminology, duplicates Sophocles' *μι- θανόντοιιν ! μέρ³ διπλᾶ χειρί* (Σοφοκλής 14:36) (*on one day, by their hands dealing mutual death*) as the embedded myth of Polyneices and Eteocles' fatal duel. It also carries out an interesting critique between the (traumatic) spectacle, theatre, media, reality and illusion. In such terms, 'nondescript' (*Ismene* 2) reality has quite simply vanished under the deadly glare of mediated 'real time', (family) history, and memory. Paul and Ian's mutual killing, as it is conducted, on the verge of a murder and a suicide, high-tech gadgets and traditional weaponry, is driven by a virtualization of the imperfections of human life and the world they desire to escape from. By eliminating each other they eliminate both the world in virtual reality and reality itself. With an ironic *paronomasia* between 'sorry' and 'story' (16), Topsy May, the character that operates as a sort of prophet in the place of blind seer Teiresias, confides to Haemon that she 'happens' to 'know' why and how the two brothers 'wanted to fuck it all up'(16). This riddling 'perfect crime' 'without' an apparent 'motive' (Baudrillard 2002:1,27) baffles the family members and disrupts the community left behind to solve it.

In Scene Two, 'a slight 16 year old' Tigs (Antigone) makes her appearance. 'With headphones on and a look of a goth', she does not express the tragic *pathos* of her ancient predecessor but instead, 'squat[ting] over the bodies' (*Ismene* 3) of Paul and Ian, she silently captures the macabre in her camera. The anonymous man who 'lingers at a distance behind her', is the only one to identify the sepulchral sight with a supernatural demise: 'Tragic. Awful shame. An awful mess. Ah well' (3). As soon as he expresses his *sympatheia*, the desire to return to the simple, quotidian pleasures 'a wee cup of tea' can offer is larger than his survey in black humor: 'I'm sure someone'll be along to sort these boyos out soon. Not like they'll be going anywhere fast, like?' (3).

Young Tigs performs the ritual of her brothers' burial through a graphic post-mortem examination, which echoes the physical disfigurement of Robert McCartney as reported through the media. Moving between theatre and cinema, media reports, real-time and real-life crimes, the event taking place re-imagines stylized moments of raw violence incorporating many themes and aesthetics that have become hallmarks in 'Tomb Raider'(5) or Quentin Tarantino's and Michael Haneke's films¹⁰. Tigs mourns for the death of her siblings by closely observing their anatomical injuries:

Tigs: Fuckin weird.

How long have ye been lying there? Hm? God, look at the state of youse two.

She gets down and looks closely at Paul's face. One eye is missing where the bullet passed through. She sticks her finger into it.

That's mingin Paul. Euk. Sticky. And what happened to yours?

Or by intervening where necessary:

She takes Ian's eye out of its socket, and puts it in Paul's. She rummages in her bag again, pulling out keys, sanitary towels, make up etc until she finds a piece of chalk. Carefully, she traces round the bodies and hunches back down.

Hope you're wearing clean pants Paul...

She sighs, removes his arm, wraps it in a plastic carrier bag and puts that inside a sportsbag.

Looking awful bloody sorry for yerself now Paul.

Ian, Ian, Ian.

Paul, Paul, Paul.

How're your brothers Tigs? Dead.

Stiff upper lip. Ha. Stiff everything. (3-4)

Tigs's bizarre mourning rituals get interrupted by the arrival of a middle-aged and 'benign looking' Creon who has come along with the 'nameless and faceless' (1) Chorus, a group of 'heavies and hard tickets' (4) accompanied by a random woman. On the stage notes, Gregg explains that the Chorus' function is to be alternately active and passive, adapting themselves according to the situation, sometimes as 'victims', and 'on-lookers', and, towards the end of the play even as 'oppressors'(1). Throughout the play, it is obvious that they function as an example of the role of the witnesses in McCarthy's case.

When Creon finds Tigs dancing around the bodies of Paul and Ian, the urgency to take care of the situation 'before the peelers' (5) come, is sinister. Creon's conversation through his mobile phone with the Cleaners is insinuated by a passive Chorus. Like in Mathews' version, they are Creon's accomplices:

CREON: Hello Chicken? Y'alright mucker? Aye...aye

CHORUS: Aye/ aye/ y'alright mucker?/ wouldn't believe what's happening/ here/ now/

aye/ not joking/aye/ serious/ need a –

Deus ex machina/ -y'know?/ aye/ yer joking?/ I'm serious

CREON: Not sure what's happened but looks like/ like Paul maybe pulled the /

Aye Ian and all...but then who did the other-?

CHORUS: don't know the other half/ of the story/ murder who did what/ make it look like/ aye exactly/ what's the story?/ boys/ who did the other? pigs ear anyway/

scene out of Tomb Raider/
 drugs?/ o dear o dear
 at the end of the day/
 at the end of the day (5)

The missing part of the story which drunk May holds, is revealed to Haemon as a familiar plot:

May: But I may as well tell ye a story. Ahem. There were two brothers-
 this is an old one, -there were two brothers who found themselves at
 battle with each other at the city walls. When they lay dying, one lay
 within the city's walls, the other outside. One was buried a hero, but the
 King ruled that the other body was to be left outside the walls to the
 carrion. (16)

Alongside May's counter-narrative of the fraternal fate 'dealing mutual death' (Sophocles 16:161), Gregg emphasizes Sophocles' *διπλᾶ χερί* (Σοφοκλής 14:36) as well as cleverly illuminates the background of the Theban myth in which an important detail is often overlooked: Polyneices went against Eteocles because he tried to usurp the power of kingship that he and his brother were supposed to share. As a result of this betrayal, he led the foreign arms of his wife's land against his own city. The two brothers were killed by each other. In its modern appropriation, Ian acts as a surrogate assassinator with the consent of his brother, performing a kind of active euthanasia, and then takes his own life. Despite effective similarities through difference, the transition from kingship to kinship, models a potential metaphor for kinship based on an affinity and unity in death, in line with Antigone's suicidal wish. Motivated by the power of blood (Cavarero 27), Tigs' conversation with Paul's spirit, tests the former's loyalty and love towards her own blood and kin as an act of sanguine exchange: 'my blood. I want to--', 'squeeze it out- a transfusion', '--want to go with you' (*Ismene* 11). Yet, it is an attachment to blood that, as Judith Butler observes, is iterated not as 'a bloodline but something more like 'bloodshed' (*Antigone's Claim* 4).

Although *Ismene* does not merely lament the brothers' loss as based on hatred and rivalry, Gregg repeatedly returns to the question: what matters 'who did the other?' when both are lost? Creon's ironic invocation of a *deus ex machina* to solve the mystery of 'the other half of the story,' does not prevent him from guessing that Paul is to blame for the killing. We, as readers-spectators-witnesses know it was Ian who was the first to pull the trigger. But who, Gregg asks, initiated the tragedy and who will put an end to it? More importantly: will the witnesses who are familiar with 'the other half' of the story, come forth and name those responsible?

Before we explore these important questions, the relationship of Tigs to Creon tests and redefines the limits of kinship, community, and identity that Greggs is interested in. Acting as a father-figure in place of Tigs's dead father, Creon is concerned with the teenagers' deviant behavior ('please stop pretending you've selective hearing'(6)), her awakening to sexuality ('-out with that Neil fella with the ponytail?(6)), her weight ('There's more meat on a chicken bone than those legs'(6)), even feels 'sorry for missing' her birthday: 'I was, - busy' (7). Yet, it is Tigs' mother she has taken after and not her father:

CREON: [...] ye remind me of yer poor oul ma with her selective hearing
 and her pretending to hear you selectively when she heard
 plain
 well the first time what you said like a sleekèd cat. (6)

Creon '*who loves an audience*' interrupts his protective interrogation of Tigs to recount an incident about a lady setting mouse traps in her shop and 'one legged Jimmy' carrying a Spar bag with the dead mouse inside (7). The preceding pictorial force of the solitary and shrewd felineness of Tigs offsets a new imagery of 'big' 'rat traps all metal iron maiden like and buckles'

(7) and mice like dogs, emphasizing a steadily escalating sense of foreboding acted out in the detailed scenes of entrapment and torture between the strong and the weak which amuse the Chorus: CREON: ‘...is it hurt? Hurt missus, he says, it’s fuckin dead’. CHORUS: ‘Hahah/ good one/ is it hurt/ hahah/ just see wee Jimmy’s face/ Not beg Jimmy either’ (7). In metaphorizing the work of violence through the disturbing image of a mouse getting caught in a trap and trails of blood ‘like as the wee skitter hopped it off’ (7), this passage serves two functions. It both recalls the crucial link between human and beast, between nature and culture as illustrated in Paulin’s Ode to Man¹¹ and also resembles the semantic associations obsessively recounted by myth and poetry in the verse of Donald Davie’s poem ‘Creon’s Mouse’:

The absolute endeavour was the catch;
To clean the means and never mind the end
Meant he had not to chasten but to scotch
The will he might have managed to amend.¹²

The portrayal of Creon as ‘the King of rats’(53) and ‘a rat with nine lives’(57), expands further the homology of human bestiality as that which Derrida terms ‘the figure of monstrosity’ (*Glas* 1990:175) as well as foreshadows his own entrapment.

Tigs will engage in an outspoken dispute over the uncaring manner with which Creon handles the situation, proving she has no qualms calling him even ‘a dipstick’, a derogatory term which she will soon deny by repeating: ‘nothin’ (8). Creon will respond by threatening her with physical punishment (‘you’re goin to be feelin the back of my hand’ (8)) and urges her to remain silent (‘sssssh now’s not the time’, ‘we’ll talk about it another-’, ‘enough of your lip’, ‘do you hear me?’(8)). Accusing him of disrespect towards the corpses, she will reassert her untamed nature by demanding to know what action Creon will take (‘What are ye goin to do with Paul and Ian? What’s going to happen? (8)) both with the bodies of her two brothers and with the case of their murder:

Tigs: I want to talk about it now. I’m speaking at you in all my teeny
angsty adolescent rage whinges now now now but you’re too busy
anecdotin over a corpse to even see me/

Because there is neither a public proclamation to forbid the burial of one of the brothers nor the sense that her uncle is a man of public supremacy, Creon and his *aide de –camp*, the Chorus, suspiciously ‘clean the means’ (Davie 24) of murder by carefully ‘*lift[ing] only ‘Ian’s body and remov[ing] any evidence with forensic attention to detail*’. At the same time a female Chorus member is chosen to perform the gender-specific mourning ritual by praying and leaving ‘a flower where’ his ‘body lay’ (9) before the police arrives at the crime-scene. Creon ‘leaves a tenner on the chair’ (10) for Tigs, a symbol of their lack of communication. As the father-*figure in lieu* of the father, Creon is regarded as naturally responsible for taking care of the burial of his dead nephews. But Tigs’s adolescent angst proves too wise and too prophetic for her age: ‘to lose one nephew is unfortunate- [...] –but to lose two is just careless-’(8), she cries and soon ‘*splutters at her own joke*’ leaving Creon ‘*embarrassed*’ (9). There is a sense that Creon is suspected of being linked to their mysterious death, a sense which is accentuated by the Chorus’ compliant tone. Clearly siding with Creon, they appeal to Tigs for mercy (‘just think of your dead ma for once’ (9)), understanding, solidarity, and co-operation:

Chorus: (*Sang*) Listen to your Uncle, Tigs
Listen to your Uncle
Your uncle Creon’s right
We’ll have to stick together
Close the ranks
Till we know what happened

Why he did it
 Brother against brother
 It's not right
 It's not fucking right
 No one's claimed responsibility
 Don't want the peelers sniffing round us. (9)

because, as Creon argues, should the police get involved, the 'boys' would 'be cut up/ they'd be scundered so they would. They're men now, not boys. No more wetting their keks and getting a strawberry poke for it' (9).

Whereas Creon's assertion renders the two brothers' sameness as characteristic of their relationship, the vocabulary he uses subordinates their role as liminally occupying a state between boyhood and manhood. Here, the dialogue is emblematic of Creon's abuse of authority while it contests constructions of masculinity as acted out in the brothers' double fratricide, between Creon and the family, between the Chorus and the *polis*.

Tigs: Here, ye not talking Paul? Uncle Creon. Why're ye leavin Paul?
 What d'ye mean ye only take yer own? Wait you old slaphead- (10)

As regards Paul's corpse, Gregg adopts a comparable position to Sophocles and his portrayal of Polyneices' cadaver: she posits its status as the left-behind, the disrespected, humiliated and neglected corpse in order to polarize a series of relationships and connections to it. Gregg allows Paul's *psyche* to perpetually wander around as 'the specter of the unburied' (Agamben 2007:91) haunting the memory of the living like 'an unbearable reality' (Žižek 2001:69). When Haemon, (whom Gregg has transformed into a policeman investigating the case, reminiscent of Mathews' Heman as the Head of the Secret Police but not quite the same) visits Tigs, it is the discovery of the two brothers' corpses and Paul's abandonment that the two lovers discuss. Clearly siding with Tigs' fight for the truth, Haemon shows distrust towards his father who would 'do less harm on a desert' (13):

Haemon: Creon and his tiny little turf and drugs war.
 Jesus, what now?
 They must be lookin after their own,
 takin' Ian. Leaving Paul to peelers.
 I don't know. But Paul's lot are still
 sayin they know nothing. I don't
 understand, what's he doin? Why
 tamper with the bodies? (13)

The fated body of Paul(yneices) summarizes the issues which inform the action as well as the role of femininity vs. masculinity, the radical adolescent spirit of Tigs juxtaposed to Ismene's low-profile suffering. It also prepares the scene for a significant breakthrough: the (re)appearance of Ismene and the imagined resurrection of Paul. Paul's scandalously abandoned body, like Polyneices and McCarthy's body, takes centre stage in the tragic machinery. Its prominence mirrors a multitude of oppositions, between love fostered by an attachment to a blood relationship whose 'thicker' (21) 'blood' has 'stained' 'the water' (13) and the *logos* of the guilty *polis* in which the rotten body will reflect the disintegration of the *polis*.

In Gregg's version thus, a body is declared as the object of the tragic rivalry and contest. That body is a *corpse* denied a proper burial and tomb. It is also a body which was once a living *soma* (Cavarero 17) animating an immortal soul (*psyche*). In an inverted tragic way, it is Paul's reanimated *psyche* that begs Tigs not to 'mourn for' him (*Ismene* 10), as soon as sister and

dead brother are left on their own. Through a series of inflections, appearances and disappearances, absences and presences which blur the line between reality and illusion, Paul's spirit haunts the memory of Tigs and returns in moments of crisis to be revealed selectively to May and Tigs but not Ismene. Only in the end, when Ismene will have reached self-realization and the truth will have been unmasked, will his spirit manifest itself to her, as a kind of a sibling reunion and reconciliation. In a symbolic burial practice, Tigs keeps a part of his body every time he becomes lifeless and hides it in her bag, as a token of his evanescent corporeality and her naïve desire to preserve it.

As part of the theme of appearance versus disappearance, Gregg employs Ismene's character as that central conventional figure of conservative compliance for whose sake she will attempt to reclaim a new space for recovering her fame. In this, Gregg takes over from Mathews' ambiguous figuration of Ismene: 'Do you know who I am? Chorus: None of us knows who you are. None of us. Go away. (Mathews *Antigone* 1984:59). Either as a product of ignorance or misinterpretation, Gregg's title and diction is rewritten as a connotation of sympathy towards Ismene's less assertive sensibility without undermining Tigs' (*Antigone*) assertive nature. This important turn in the plot may also be seen to constitute a kind of theatrical or semiotic crisis: will the new version change the tragic end? In this respect, Haemon asks wise May: 'Is this [the story] where everyone dies?'(16) Or will it just save Ismene from oblivion and misinterpretation by presenting her in a new light? The possibilities of different endings and altered destinies will predominate our reading of the play, especially in the context of a post-political exploration. The intriguing aspects of these questions reinforce an interesting collaboration between politics and theatre to re-write *Antigone* forming new, urgent, and possibly more revealing conclusions: 'Haemon: Don't tell me [that story] now.' 'I'll save it', May promises.

A close look at Ismene, the central character of Gregg's adaptation, comes through the accounts of the other characters in the play, shifting in constant flashbacks. Having made a swift appearance in scene two only to disappear soon after, she re-emerges clearly in the third scene of the play in the past time. Up until then, it is through conversations we gather information about her:

Tigs: You know Iz. So bloody strong. Away to get the milk for tea. Strong
 strong strong like an amazon. I could never be that...
 -just coldness
 seems to come hand in hand with it. (12)

Haemon and Tigs call her a 'survivor' and 'an aliver' (12) while the theme of patient suffering is ominously counterbalanced with hints at a traumatic past that changed her life irreparably. 'Poor Iz' has become cold and strong since 'those bastards, dirty curs with dicks instead of brains/' 'took' 'away' her innocence. The presumption that the perpetrators of Ismene's sexual violation belong to a gang coercing the *polis* into intimidation is identified with those responsible for the removal of Ian's body and the exposure of Paul's one to the police. In an inauspicious dialogue, it is clear that the masculine gang is pinpointed as the Chorus who act as accomplices of Creon's orders:

Paul: [...] - ...and they won't put them
 Away for it. A rapes not a rape if its one of the boys. When
 it comes to the boys or the polis they're all the same and
 no one believes a girl like... (28)

Before the revelations concerning Creon's dubious nature come to light, Gregg brings Ismene to a particularly delicate female zone where her ability to overcome the trauma of rape is both sublimated into an expression of maternal love and devotion towards her kin and into a self-

protective toughening up. While ‘somethin’s hardened in her’, Ismene becomes the mother who still finds a channel of releasing her concentrated discomfort in love:

Haemon: She still loves, Tigs. She loves you. You’re her baby sister.
 You’re her baby. ‘member how she used to look after us
 all when she was barely
 a child herself?’ (13)

Polarizing fragility and the urge for survival, purity and corruption, innocence and experience, love and the traumatic memory, Ismene becomes part of a newly based sibling relationship whose contours are challenging. Towards this complex vacillation, the depressing scenario of the family tragic existence in the present freezes momentarily in order to actualize an arduous voyage backwards to the age of innocence, laughter, curiosity, life, and happiness in the ‘Land of Youth’, a place where sickness and death do not exist. Picturing Ismene ‘aged about thirteen’ (17) lullabying her siblings with the Irish myth of *Tír na nÓg*¹³, the state of idyllic, untainted, pure existence is counterbalanced with allusions to the tragic ending of famous romantic myths and dramas of unconsummated love, from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* to Haemon’s and *Antigone*’s scene of mutual suicide in the cave. It also adumbrates the tragic ending Tigs and Haemon will share. Towards an understanding of the union in love and death that is beyond the grasp of the childish imagination and yearning for a happy ending, the tragic end of innocence is stressed through the scene of Ismene’s rape. Gregg performs a wider critique of power relations and struggles by stretching the topography of the mythic place beyond the edges of the map, replicating the colonial borders at the threshold of history, culture, and society in Ireland. It also foreshadows the original theme of *Antigone*’s suicidal desire to unite with her brother Polyneices through death and juxtaposes it to Ian and Paul’s mutual killing.

The formulaic structural devices that shape Gregg’s allusions in relation to romantic and domestic tragedies seem to resemble those deployed in *The Riot Act* in relation to the Troubles. An example of that would be the opposition between Creon as paternal/‘masculine’ and Tigs (*Antigone*) as ‘feminized’, a gendered patterning of the conflict that we have already noted in Paulin (portrayed as a conflict between unionists and republicans). Similarly, the love of Haemon for Tigs might be construed as merely a variant on the mythical tale of *Tír na nÓg* or the romantic *Romeo and Juliet*, as a *love-across-the-divide*-device: both Ismene and *The Riot Act* metaphorize this predicament (the son forced to choose between a forward-looking love for the Other and filial loyalty) into a kind of Oedipal dilemma.

From the memory of a carefree childhood, we are back to the room with ‘*Paul’s body in the half dark*’ and silent Tigs meticulously preparing ‘*millions of cornered beef and brown sauce sandwiches for a funeral*’ (20). In this long fourth scene that reiterates the original sisterly debate of Sophocles’ *prologos*, Ismene and Tigs will come to face each other in front of their brother’s corpse. In a series of retrospective scenes, Ismene acts as a mother-figure who struggles with her teenage sister’s immaturity (‘O come on Tigs. You’re sixteen. Start growing up.’(20)), with the personal legacy of their parents’ death which threatens to infect ‘this family’ with ‘the same disease’ (25), and with an abusive father who ‘fucked himself over’(22). By blending sentimentality with hard-edged realism, these private conflicts are memorably crystallized in Ismene’s monologue that gathers in it the excruciating fragments of her family past:

Ismene: She gestures to her nice work clothes.
 She takes a dirty knife from the table and wipes it up her
 sleeve.
 There. That’s all that needs. It’s all a wee show.

Look at this aul house and the getting up early to the porridge ma made you cut it like a slice of cake even the birds wouldn't eat it/ the smell of diesel remember? A diesel engine dying a death, our wee diesel coughing into the morning on the choke. I feel the ice on the inside of the windows when I wake in my own flat sometimes, think I'm back there...here. (22)

The familial pressures to which she is further subjected, concern the sister's relationship to Creon and Haemon. In this, Gregg's Ismene appears not so radically opposed to Sophocles' Ismene:

Tigs:[...] You're not my ma.

Ismene: No but I'm your sister which is nearly as bad.

This is so old Tigs. Start acting your age. Creon does his best, he puts ye up doesn't he? If you wouldn't stop winding him up. He's enough on his plate with Haemon. What a fucking black sheep.

As a policeman, Haemon occupies another plane entirely compared to his father. His profession, demanding from him to safeguard the rights of the citizens and the security of the *polis*, brings him into conflict with the natural family law operating between himself and his father, as well as between himself and Tigs: 'if [Haemon] was going to be careful he wouldn't have joined the force' (21), Tigs argues. Living in a state of permanent contingency, the possibility of him getting hurt even by his own father is essentially threatening: 'Tigs: Creon would never-?', 'Ismene: No no I know. Just mean it can't be easy' (21). Creon is obviously a man who contrives to overlook the force of the state's law by inventing his own illegitimate rules to which all are secretly bound. All except his own son and his niece. He is also a father who could even go against his own son, even though Ismene dismisses the possibility, guessing that, 'Blood's thicker than water' (21). Still, Ismene assures Tigs that despite all this, she is on her 'side' (21) and she deplores the turn the events have taken even though they were predetermined to end that way:

Ismene: Everyone knew they were on to Paul and his freelance tricks. Even Creon was gettin twitchy. Now look, they're their own worst enemies, and a brother not even granted rest in death. Eejits. (21)

Ismene's movements towards charting her identity against the backdrop of the original representation of Sophocles' Ismene, proves more complicated than it seems. Her plea towards Tigs to 'forget about it' because 'sometimes life's too short to spend dwelling on-' rekindles Tigs' resentment:

Tigs: There hasn't even been any dwell! How can you live
with it Iz? How can you sleep at night when everytime
the door goes I think it'll be our Paul or Ian, in fresh
clothes, back to ask what the frig's going on, why we
don't talk about it what's taking so long? (25)

As a result, Tigs 'acts her age' and undertakes the *κινδύνευμα* (Σοφοκλής 42:40) to 'bury' her 'dead' as a familial duty to 'mum and da' who would 'have just stood by' (*Ismene* 25). The

resulting dispute turns impassioned and physical, forcing Ismene to 'grab Tigs by the hair' and slap her in order to prevent her from doing that dangerous 'something'(26):

Ismene: Are you daft wee girl? Did you not hear me? Are ye
awayin the head? You're goin to get hurt. Dead. You
can't help him. And it's you'll be next if your not careful
d'ye hear me?

Tigs: Cold bitch you don't care, I'm deaf to your caterwauling

Ismene: How dare you.
I care so much I can't get it off my stomach from noon
till night and can barely tell day from night. Please Tigs.
Let it go. (26)

At the end of this scene, Tigs leaves the house 'grabbing the sports bag with' Paul's 'limbs' (26) in it, leaving Ismene on her own. Gregg endorses a separation between the sisters that will be reflected in the episode of Paul's raising from the dead soon after Tigs has left carrying parts of his body. Because Ismene occupies the rational realm of the living that is impenetrable to host the spirit of the dead, she cannot see through the materiality of the corpses yet, unlike Tigs who is able to go past the confines of substance and communicate with the disembodied, reanimated soul of her brother. Paul's incorporeal consciousness returns from the state of *rigor mortis* to elucidate the circumstances and the motives of the brothers' indecipherable death with irony and humour. To May's inquisitiveness, Paul responds with sarcastic straightness:

I was standing there, waitin to be punished by me own brother and we just
thought, fuck it. Do you need more? I says to him, go on, do it properly
'stead of fartin about with kneecaps. Didn't realize he'd take it to
heart...They only took Ian's body so nobody'd figure it out---open a can of
worms Creon could do without. But ye hear enough whispers and do enough
standin in the shadows and you'll learn most of the world's dirty secrets. (27)

Given the story of the killing and Creon's family history, Creon is prefigured as accountable for a deception concerning the murder of Auntie Annie's illegitimate child and his abuse of power in the community. When Ismene, jokingly, likens May's restless anger to 'a wee suicide bomber', May's riposte comes with a revelation: 'Not my style deary, not my style. Not like Creon. Don't like to take innocents down with me' (39). Through an intermittent projection of the theme of filicide and the malevolence of patriarchal rule, of innocent victims and perpetrators, the references to Jackie and Ismene's aborted fetus¹⁴ are caught up in Annie's *Medea*-like apocalyptic aphorism: 'We've all murdered our children' (39). Such dramatic underscoring, effectuates the interchangeability of confessions from Ismene and May who reciprocate the sententious tone of their traumatic experiences by repeating: 'we've murdered all the children' 'and our women' (39). As a kind of exorcizing of the ills of Creon's sexist and criminal nature, the women share a powerful moment of mourning for their losses while at the same time plotting to kill him in the same way he 'is killing them' (40). But Ismene is resistant to joining forces with the two women reminding them- like Tigs before them -that 'Uncle Creon has done his best, by so many round here. You should show some respect' (40).

Gregg's portrayal of Creon's corruption and illegitimacy is coordinated with a preeminent critique of the legitimacy of the law of the *polis*. This parallelism gains momentum in the climactic scene of Tigs' cross-examination when the Chorus switches to the role of the interrogator, only to recede later when three policemen and Haemon arrive to take over in the investigation procedures. Fluctuating between the voice of a man often supported by 'multiple voices' and the 'noticeably' 'feminized' 'vocal'(33) tonality once the police appear, the male

Chorus performs the probe admonishing Tigs not to ask questions: 'We ask the questions' (30), they caution instead. But Tigs stands firm and demands to know: 'where are the witnesses?'(30). In an anguished debate concerning the ownership of the dead bodies ('we/ look/ after/ our/ own (33)) and the drive behind their 'collateral damage' (31), Gregg's text challenges notions of kinship, law, power as well as the Chorus' impossible aptitude to *sympathy*: 'Tigs: You bastards. At least show some fucken compassion' (31). During the inquiry, the Chorus will attempt to distort the truth by accusing Paul of instigating the crime and by provocatively boasting to control the fate of the bodies in life and death. Defying the threats and ultimatums, Tigs insists on her claims for justice:

Chorus: Be careful.
 Tigs: I'll talk, just watch me, you can't do (anything)-
 Chorus: anything could happen
 Tigs: I know things, names. My eyes have been open and I've
 been behind the door.
 Chorus: Stupid girl
 Tigs: listening, gathering. I hate you.
 Chorus: we'll hurt you.
 Tigs: I want to know. I have no loyalty to you, you can have
 my blood. (32)

This resistance, the force of which here is entirely predicated on the basis of kinship, is conveyed as a fidelity to the sanctity of her two brothers' blood¹⁵. The theme of mourning is central to an understanding of *Ismene*, since the dramatic action begins with and stems from Creon's denial to hide Paul's corpse. This negation implies a prohibition of mourning like in the original play, a prohibition that posits Tigs between mourning and melancholia. The defiant sister is caught between the two, owing to her love for her brother Paul and her youth. What is more, the violent urges with which she verbalizes her wrath, determination, and dedication, are symmetrical to the degree of this attachment:

Tigs: not Ian not Paul.
 I want to know why.
 I want to know how.
 I want to know why. I want peace for him. I want the world
 to know and I'll talk about it and I'll make everyone talk. Till
 the words are all over you. Till you can't move. I'll scrape
 every last one of youse out and rape you for Paul and
 Ian's sake, for my Da. Ask Creon if you don't think I will.
(33)

Ultimately, the menacing drama of revelations reaches its climax when the police interrogate the Chorus as witnesses, asking the assembly to answer the following: 'What is your name?', 'Where do you live?', 'Where were you on the night of January 31st this year?', 'Who are you?', 'Why don't you speak?', 'What did you see?' (33). By stoning and lynching, the scene is resonant with Mathews'and Paulin's versions of the myth, where the *polis* (the Chorus) is established as the society which bolsters both the law and its fractures. It also mirrors meta-theatrically the lack of transparency and the environment of cover-up and deceit following the McCartney case to whose repercussions the whole tragedy responds. Both the explicit

reference to the date of Robert McCartney's murder above and the following excerpt, signal that the Chorus acts as the mouthpiece of the witnesses in *Magennis's* pub:

Woman: I am bystander number three. I was in the toilet I didn't see anything.

(Chorus: [simultaneously] I was in the toilets I didn't see anything)

I don't see anything. I no longer feel anything. I can't hear you. I don't hear myself cry. I wake up sometimes and expect to see someone in the doorway, but they aren't there.

The light begins to fade.

Chorus: (*joining in, reciting, as though from a script*)

We weren't there. We didn't see. We were in the toilet. He had it coming. You don't squeal on your own. We don't talk to you. We stare at the wall and hide in silence. I have a family. I kiss my wee boy on the head every night when I tuck him into bed. We didn't hear anything. We don't speak/ We won't spill/ We can't squeal/ We can't see.

(34)

The mingling of the real and the mythical, formulates an uncanny embodiment of a chameleon-like Chorus who alternately evolves by adapting to every crisis, either as the bystander, spectator, and silent observer, or as the authoritarian persecutor and bully, like Mathews' one-man Chorus. An illustration of this arbitrary, oxymoronic flexibility is laid out in the passage below, soon after the termination of the interrogation scene, where the Chorus is adjusted into the split, conflicted consciousness of the community, in fact inhabiting the ethos of a binary disposition:

Ismene: What happened?

Chorus: They threatened Antigone/
They say it was Ian did it himself/ both of them/
What can that mean?/
Who said it?/ Who said what?
And why would they do that?/
That's awful morbid, does Creon know?
Tigs went alone/ went to ask them alone
Brave girl/ stupid girl (41)

By dissociating themselves from the guilt of the eyewitness through altering their moral direction, the Chorus can escape neither their errors nor their culpability, notwithstanding their belated metamorphosis. Still, the powerful language alludes to a wish whose actualization could bring about change in society as a whole:

Chorus: [...] / We won't put up with it anymore/ Don't want it
/neither will I/ neither will we/ I'm sick of it/ sick and sore.
/someone has to answer.
/-to ask the right questions too. we'll go to the papers.
Tell them everything we know/ put it all out. (41)

As a meditation upon the paradoxes of reality and illusion, truth and its masks, Gregg exposes the alienating consequences of social conformity by laying bare the depredatory effects of an

oppressive transparency of our social lives, of a relentless idolatry of our critical faculties, and of a withering definition of our sense of reality. The characteristic display of this drama of everyday life is substantiated in the final episode of Gregg's tragic version as an inversion of 'game and rite' 'merg[ing] in death' (Agamben 2007:90): thus, a game of snap becomes the occasion for Paul and Tigs to share both a moment of fraternal affection ('Tigs: I miss you, Paul. Like a fucking limb. SNAP') and facts about Creon who 'knock[ed off] baby Jack and 'let' Crazy Annie 'go down for it' (53). Undeterred by Paul's urge not 'to do it' (54), Tigs blows up the entire urban *oikos* of Creon, aiming at avenging her uncle by annihilation. Tigs and Haemon get killed. The scene of the explosion is represented as a fusion of an action film and a melodramatic finale that simulates the tragic romance recounted earlier in the myth of *Tír na nÓg* and transports the image of the brothers' mutual killing in the opening scene full-circle. Being the figuration of 'the fall' and the 'decline', Antigone 'marches toward the bottom and entrains with her, her whole family' 'including Haemon' (Derrida 1990:174). Gregg infuses the tragedy of the original suicide of Antigone and Haemon into a modern spectacle of misfortune:

Haemon lifts his radio and begins to call for help but the words stick in his throat. He removes his jacket and places it carefully over Tigs' body.

Haemon: Cheers da.

He pulls out his gun, kisses Tigs and then blackout.

Gunshot.

Radio static.

The Chorus become witnesses. The guns have disappeared. (55)

In front of this dire sight, the Chorus laments:

Chorus: (Sang) Awful shame, awful mess.
 Revenging her brother
 by killing the uncle
 the poor wee girl killed her love.
 Paid in blood, justice becomes revenge,
 all because two boys
 didn't want to play anymore. (56)

By ironic inflection, the text transforms the demise of the real into an art form. The final scene of the play discharges 'the furies' of Creon's 'demons' (60) and the community's share in the guilt by transferring the action into the metaphysical realm of the dead in co-existence with the living, inside a room 'littered with bodies, oozing blood' (57) and 'chalk lines' (64) which cannot be effaced because Creon cannot 'rinse' them 'out', cannot 'leave no clue' (64). While Creon is initially inept to the morbid sight of the material corpses and their ghostly, otherworldly transubstantiation, Ismene's contact with the dead is effortless.

As the tragic *pathos* intensifies through unburying Creon's evil past, so does the unmasking of truth expose a defenseless and vulnerable Creon who can clearly hear the voice of the dead, the noise of his shame: 'your boots fall off you like a child dressing up' (63). 'Blasted by the force' (63) of language, the allegations against him embroil Creon in a whole number of abominations that pierce his ears and make them bleed (64):

Paul: -YOU killed us both—

[...]

You know why Tigs got herself killed? You know why your own son joined the force? Same reason your wife could no

longer make you a dinner without her hands shaking on
the grater and her losing half her knuckles?

Creon's death, finally leads the community of both the dead and the living in peace: 'That's better. Tidy', Ismene affirms. By obscuring the borderline between reality and the hallucinatory state of fantasy, '*the Chorus hum a song of reconciliation*' to Ismene and all together accompany Creon on his funeral procession: 'It's time to go Creon. Give it up to Ismene' (64). The play ends with the Chorus' *exodos* addressing the only survivor:

Life is not tidy. It is uncertain.
We are all like you, hurting.
Fill the space of your aborted child,
Survive.
You will mother again Ismene.
You can bear the strain.
We must understand our men-kind
but accept there is no rhyme nor reason¹⁶.
You will foster love quietly
You will tidy
We will close the door after you,
Bring an end to revenge, if no solution. (65)

Whereas Derrida suggests that 'nothing should be able to survive Antigone's death' and 'nothing more should follow, go out of her, after her' because 'the announcement of her death should sound the absolute end of history' (Glas 1990:166), in Gregg's version, Ismene is the only figure that endures the catastrophe. She is that 'something' which 'remain[s] of it' (Baudrillard 2002:151) as a vital affirmation of life. That she is a female survivor and the sister of Antigone, consolidates her status as the new 'irony' (Derrida 1990:187) of the community¹⁷. She becomes the trope for the struggle of the violated, dominated, oppressed spirit who survives 'all catastrophes, all (down)falls, all carnages', and self-annihilation while at the same time 'remains invulnerable to them'(Ibid). Gregg discovers a new medium and fresh ways to write about tragedy and Belfast society producing drama that is not exclusively tied to the Troubles but where the brutality, the uncertainty, the misery, and the need to overcome them are present. By espousing a non-antagonistic approach based on peaceful resistance in the face of misunderstood Ismene, the play enters the Sophoclean terrain through an inverted orbit beyond the rhyme of reason, hope, and history to embrace living as an 'event'¹⁸ (Caputo 2006:87). Traditionally represented as the acquiescent recipient of injustice and violence, Ismene outlives her kin to keep on experiencing mortality at the juncture between the end of blood-shed and the reinstitution of humanity, 'on the far side of revenge'¹⁹.

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¹ The phrase coined by Derrida refers to a discussion on modern technologies and the power of the image. See Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. UK: Polity Press, 2002:115.

² Preceding Gregg's version, there are five more Irish plays-versions of Sophocles' *Antigone*, by Aidan C. Mathews, Tom Paulin, and Brendan Kennelly, otherwise known as the 1984 *Antigones*, with more recent re-workings by Conall Morrison (2003), and Seamus Heaney (2004). Gregg's statement on the cover of her unpublished typescript that her version is written in response to '...a tradition of Greek tragedy appropriated by Irish writers', refers exactly to these writers while at the same time it aligns her text with the golden Canon of this genealogy. Following Gregg's *Ismene*, another Northern Irish playwright, Owen McCafferty presented his version of *Antigone* in 2008. The complete Irish versions of Sophocles' *Antigone* are at the focus of my doctoral thesis tentatively entitled 'Palimpsests of *Antigone*: Irish Versions of Sophocles' Tragedy' (2010). On Irish versions of Greek drama see also Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton, eds., *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*. The University of Michigan: Methuen, 2002; John Dillon & Stephen Wilmer, eds., *Rebel Women: Staging Ancient Greek Drama Today*. The University of Michigan: Methuen, 2005.

³ The term 'The Troubles' refers to the period of Irish ethno-political conflict that broke out during the 1960s and instantly took the above euphemistic title (the capitals are significant). The principal issue at stake during this turbulent phase, -which took political and paramilitary dimensions-, was the hybrid constitutional status of Northern Ireland reflected in the relationship between the Protestant unionist (self-identified as British) and the Catholic nationalist communities (self-identified as Irish) living together in the North after the latter had been discriminated against by the former as a minority group. The Troubles began as part of a national questioning of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. The subsequent decades of violence were initially provoked by the armed campaigns of both Irish republican and Ulster loyalist paramilitary groups. One such group, the Provisional Irish Republican Army, - otherwise known as IRA-, went on to promote a campaign between 1969-1997 whose aim was to reunite the North with the South, creating a new all-Ireland state, by ending the British rule in the North. The civil rights march in Derry, Bloody Sunday, the Falls Curfew, the imprisonment of paramilitaries in Maze prison, the hunger strikes, the Brighton Hotel bombing, are just a few

of the violent events which inscribed themselves as deep scars on the wounded face of modern Irish democracy. Gregg's text implicitly responds to the impact of this legacy in a post-conflict Northern Irish context.

⁴ I express my gratitude towards Stacey Gregg for her encouragement in my work and for happily entrusting me with the typescript of *Ismene* (2007) very recently, and while this project was reaching its open-ended conclusions. Early in 2010, I received an invitation to attend a workshop on play-readings of works by emerging writers inspired by classical drama organized by the Classics Department at Oxford University (June 2010). With a darkly comic reworking of *Antigone* set in contemporary Northern Ireland, written in response to the McCartney case, Cambridge graduate Stacey Gregg's first stage play was shortlisted for the 2006 Royal Court Young Writers' Festival – one of the leading forums for young playwrights living in the UK. Since then, she has been writing pieces for the Abbey Theatre and Rough Magic in Dublin, and the Tinderbox Theatre Company in Belfast. Her play *50 Ways to Leave Your Lover* was premiered in August 2008 at the Bush Theatre in London. She was one of the writers on the New Writing Programme at the London Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and is currently part of the prestigious BBC Writers' Academy. Her *Ismene* has been staged in various venues in the UK. The play is unpublished and further research remains yet to be conducted. I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to be part of this emerging research project.

⁵ Most famously, O'Brien was the first Irish intellectual to connect *Antigone* to the Northern Irish crisis when in October 1968 he gave a public lecture that was later published in his book *States of Ireland* (1972). In it, O'Brien condemned Antigone's act of civil disobedience as precipitating further tragedy and praised Ismene's stance, reflecting on the claims of law and justice versus the wish for peace-keeping. In what is among the most analyzed literary disputes in Irish literature, Paulin attends to 'some unfinished business' (Murray 1991:123) with O'Brien, in relation to his biased interpretation of *Antigone*. The expression of Paulin's radical antithesis to O'Brien's opinions was intended as a public repudiation of the latter's allegiance to the warring faction side as 'the reactionary equivalent of radical utopianism' (Paulin, *The Making of a Loyalist* 22). The condemnation of O'Brien's pro-Creon and pro-Ismene logic was taken up in Paulin's *The Riot Act* in 1984, a version that clearly canonizes Antigone and caricatures both Creon and Ismene.

⁶ I refer to Goldhill's essay in relation to the paradox he locates in the figure of Ismene: even though the theme of sisterhood becomes a metaphor for feminism, Ismene remains in the dark when it comes to her characterization. Goldhill indicates that the first lines of Sophocles' text ('ō koinon autadelphon Ismēnēs kara') should be read as a direct appeal from one sister to another to collaborate. Soon that appeal is set aside as Ismene attempts to fight Antigone's strong will. The comparison between Antigone-Ismene and the relationship of Electra to Chrysothemis is then seen as the sisterly attempt to embody a male model of heroism while the other (sister) is respectful towards limitations imposed upon female action and complies with social rules. Goldhill refers to Irigaray's and Butler's feminist readings of the play as responsible for having refolded the portrayal of Ismene as silenced through the Hegelian sister-brother bond. By neglecting that crucial facet of sisterhood, Goldhill suggests, Irigaray 'finds it easy to associate herself with the revolutionary resistance of Antigone' (159) while neglecting another figuration of feminist expression, that of the ordinary woman/sister. See Simon Goldhill, 'Antigone and the Politics of Sisterhood' in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*. Eds. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: 141-162.

⁷ See Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 262-3/305, where Lacan refers to the chorus' 'ektos atas' in support of his claim. Lacan will later explain that 'something beyond the limits of *atē* has become *Antigone's* good, namely, a good that is different from everyone else's': 270/315.

⁸ The 'real-world' meaning is synonymous with its Dr Who incarnation, the police telephone box in which Dr Who travels through time and space and whose interior dimensions are many times greater than its external ones.

⁹ The dialogue that opens up towards the end of the play between Ismene's dead brother Paul and their middle-aged neighbor May, underpins Gregg's preoccupation with the themes of violence, betrayal, loyalty, and complacency, but also dramatizes the social problems still rampant in post-agreement Northern Irish society.

¹⁰ Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke (*Benny's Video*, *The Piano Teacher*, *Funny Games*, *The White Ribbon*) is best known for his disturbing films where violence is used as a metaphor documenting the problems and failures of modern societies. From another point of view, Tarantino's cinematographic style opts for an aestheticization of violence (*Kill Bill*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*) blended with black humor and graphic images of death and revenge.

¹¹ See Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act*, London: Faber & Faber, 1986: 23-24.

¹² Donald Davie, *Collected Poems*, p.24.

¹³ The most popular of the 'Otherworlds' in Irish mythology and another version of Pythagoras' Land of Macarii or the Elysium.

¹⁴ See Brendan Kennelly and Eilís Ward, 'The Abortion Referendums' in *How Ireland Voted* (1992), edited by Michael Gallagher and Michael Laver. Dublin: PSAI Press, Folens: 1993: 134; Lisa Smyth, 'Narratives of Irishness and the Problem of Abortion: The X Case 1992. In *Feminist Review*, no.60, *Feminist Ethics and the Politics of Love* (Autumn 1998): 61-83.

¹⁵ See Derrida, *Glas*, 142/161, 143/162; see also 144/63, the part where Derrida discusses that the 'erection of the burial place would be feminine work [*l'oeuvre féminine*]'. Derrida further argues that 'every crime is a sexual and family operation' which underscores *Antigone's* sexualized position as a sister (*Glas* 173/195).

¹⁶ The line alludes to Seamus Heaney's famous closing verses of *The Cure at Troy*, a version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (1991). See Oliver Taplin 2004:145-168.

¹⁷ See also Luce Irigaray, 'The Eternal Irony of the Community', in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

¹⁸ I refer to Caputo's formulation of the following thesis (in a different/theological context): 'I love the possibility of the impossible, which is what I mean by God'. Caputo here responds to Derrida's theory of an event as an experience of 'events that happen to us; they overtake us and outstrip the reach of the subject or the ego. Although we are called upon to respond to events, an event is not our doing but is done to us (as it might well be our undoing). The event arises independently of me and comes over me, so that an event is also an advent.' Caputo counter-argues for a 'hyper-realism of an event'. See Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 4, 11, 88, 115, 175.

¹⁹ See Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes*. London: Faber & Faber, 1990:11.