

Cut and Dried: Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes*' Appropriation of Sophocles' *Antigone*

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Abstract

Sophocles' *Antigone* is a dramatic text that has stood the test of time since its first production in 441 BCE. It has also perpetuated a grandiose position in the history of western literary canon because of its openness and liability to emblematic interpretation. Antigone's defiance to the civil law initiates the conflict with the king. Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), is a retelling of *Antigone* with an unpronounced intention to shed more light on Irish and world reality. In fact, Heaney shares an acknowledged tradition of classicism appropriation with other fellow Irish writers which emerged early in the twentieth century. Though this version is untransparent to particular political occurrences, the idiom sounds particularly Irish. Further, despite the fact that Heaney's text celebrates the enduring value of Antigone, it does not wholly acquit her of playing havoc with hearts and home for scattering a handful of dust over the corpse of her unfaithful brother. Heaney's text leaves the audience with an ambiguous feeling that she is as unyielding and as menacing in her way as Creon. In spite of the fact that Heaney's text is a re-visitation of the classical play, one can claim that it is an innovative derivation of the adapted text. Furthermore, it meets Linda Hutcheon's three qualifications of creative adaptation;

recognition of the informing text, groundbreaking and interpretative relevance to a different temporality, and finally an intertextual dialogue with the initial text.

Keywords: Greek tragedy, Irish drama, classicism, adaptation, intransigence.

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ملخص البحث باللغة العربية

لا خلاف عليها : قراءة نقدية لاقتباس سيموس هيني Seamus Heaney لمسرحية سوفوكليس أنتيجون *Antigone* فى مسرحية مراسم الدفن فى طيبة *The Burial at Thebes*.

استمرت مسرحية أنتيجون للكاتب المسرحى اليونانى سوفوكليس فى مداعبة خيال النقاد والكتاب والجمهور ودارسى الأدب منذ ظهورها على خشبة المسرح لأول مرة عام 441 قبل الميلاد. واكتسبت المسرحية مكانة راقية فى تاريخ الآداب الغربية عامة والأدب اليونانى خاصة؛ بسبب قابليتها للتفسير الرمزي وقدرتها على الانفتاح على ثقافات أخرى، ولسهولة استخدامها كمنصة درامية لعرض كثير من القضايا المتنوعة. واعتاد كثير من الكتاب المسرحيين عبر العالم على فعل ذلك سواءً بالترجمة أو الاقتباس أو حتى عن طريق استعارة بعض التقاليد المسرحية اليونانية منها وإغفال البعض منها. وقد أقدم العديد من كتاب المسرح الأيرلندى على اقتباس الأعمال المسرحية اليونانية القديمة منذ مطلع القرن العشرين وحتى يومنا هذا لاعتقادهم فى قدرة المسرح الإغريقى على

المساعدة فى إيصال الرسالة المسرحية بأقتدار. وتُقدّم هذه الورقة البحثية تحليلاً لترجمة الكاتب المسرحى الأيرلندى سيموس هينى لعمل مسرحى جديد بعنوان: (مراسم الدفن فى طيبة) اعتماداً على نص أنتيجون وماذا اكتسب العمل الجديد من النص القديم. وكيف أعاد المؤلف تقديم العمل المسرحى وشخصية أنتيجون فى ضوء أحداث عالمانا المعاصر. كما يقدم البحث تحليلاً لظاهرة الاقتباس من أعمال أخرى خاصة الكلاسيكية منها، وكيف ينظر النقاد على هكذا أسلوب فى تقديم أعمال جديدة.

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Appropriating Greek literary dramatic sources by Irish playwrights, is a practice that developed early in the twentieth century and has maintained its momentum in the twenty first. The ancient Hellenic works upon which these adaptations are based are the extant tragic works of Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles who had lived in the fifth century BCE. The most frequently adapted tragedies from this distant past are Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays and *Medea* by Euripides. Notwithstanding, Greek tragedies themselves most probably borrowed their plotlines and characters from Greek civilization mythologies that featured in epic works such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* written by Homer. Marianne McDonald contends that ancient Greek tragedy of the fifth century BCE is a

sort of literature which worked towards inventing and building a city– state national identity (McDonald, 2000, p. 16).

Though the myth itself emerged from Greek oral tradition, recent versions of the character of Antigone depends not on historical Greek mythology, but mainly on Hellenistic drama. In fact, myth is usually employed to serve a number of objectives; explain reiterative natural occurrences, recount actual fact, or signify an enduring human truth (Highet, 1976, p.520). Given the fact that Antigone cannot be a reoccurring natural phenomenon, most probably, due to this definition, she was either an emblem of a universally human truth or a figure that endured in history for long. Therefore, she amounts to an iconic mythological figure that is rooted in history. Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), which is the chief focus of this research paper, is obviously a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone* with an intention to illuminate local and world truth. Though it is distinguished in style, it echoes the attic text in its structure and content. The classical play's diverse themes remain relevant to our time despite the fact that it was fundamentally conveying a political message that was particularly fit to its day. One can state that the play was produced at a moment when Athens was undergoing a process of change towards embracing more democratic ideas on the sociopolitical

levels. It sounds logical that Sophocles might have chosen to write a play based on a myth borrowed from the Greek cultural history to alert the Athenians against the disastrous consequences of coping with rulers like Creon or even endorsing the decisions of someone like Antigone in her rejection of civil obedience as well. Sophocles simply wrote a play that describes a society in flux; moving forward from the rule of divinity to the rule of reason and mind. Seamus Heaney's main point in *The Burial at Thebes* is not to present a literal adaptation of the play, but an update and extension of a vehicle that maintained its relevance to our society and world at large.

The aim of this research paper is: to investigate how the fascinating character of Antigone has intrigued playwrights, troubled critics, and inspired artists over time, to trace the shift of the play's interpretation in Heaney's text *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), and to explore the persistent viability of such ancient tales. Furthermore, there will be an attempt to understand the interworking of the adapted text and its points of departure from or verisimilitude to the original work. Not to mention that my interest in reading this play is mainly textual and not by any means technical. Additionally, this research paper combines the intended textual examination of the play with an endeavor to comprehend

the nature of the phenomenon of appropriating literary texts not only in Irish, but also in contemporary drama in general. Also, the researcher will be guided by Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, inter alia, in analyzing Seamus Heaney's adapted Play *The Burial at Thebes* (2004) and understanding his attempt to take advantage of the notion of intertextuality or binary construct in literature. The definition of the term 'adaptation' used in this research paper– which is a reconstruction of a formerly designed plot or narrative outline, to be assessed, and judged as an independently self-sufficient entity and in its interconnection with its precedent prototype– gives rise to a claim that adaptations are more used and brought into play at times of change, fluidity and instability. Similitude and comparability offer a touch of comfort, reassurance and understanding. However, an adaptation should stir and elicit an inquisitive reconsideration through its dissimilarity.

The multiple versions of *Antigone* that made their way to world literature “has become part of the play's meaning and can be understood to constitute a guarantee of the work's classic status” (Heaney, 2004b, p. 415). The more the play is borrowed, the more traces, meanings and accretions it has from world cultures. Berthold Brecht, Jean Anouilh, Athol Fugard, Alexander Wajda

and four other Irish writers have adapted the play in the twentieth century. Heaney asserts that appropriating the classics is needful because “consciousness needs co-ordinates, we need ways of locating ourselves in cultural as well as geographical space” (Heaney, 2004b, p.419). In fact, “nowhere in modern times has the defiant Antigone, been embraced more ardently than in Ireland” (J. James, 2004. p. R3). Throughout the twentieth century and prior to Seamus Heaney’s translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, there are four other precedent adaptations of the play in Ireland. As usual, those adaptations employ the classical text as a platform to debate particular and specific local Irish sociopolitical concerns. Brian Arkins proclaims in his scholarly work, *Hellenizing Ireland: Greek and Roman Themes in Modern Irish Literature*, that since 1875, Irish writers’ have appropriated classical Greek drama in three guises: first, verbatim or metaphrase translation and that may have led to mistranslation of idioms and disregarding the spirit of the original text. Secondly; substantially maintaining the core plotline but with possible additions or deletions of some details. Thirdly; relocation of the action with its major events, and incidents to a different context in the modern world. That can be termed ‘loose adaptation’ (2005, p.146). Further, two more features characterize Irish

adaptation of attic drama. There is a significant emphasis on the plays of Sophocles and on the themes of acknowledgement and recognition and there is a noticeable appearance of Greek dramatic women especially Antigone and Medea. As for the nature of appropriation, it seems that most of the Irish writers fall into Arkins' category number three. That is to say, they transpose and relocate the motifs and characters of the Hellenic drama to a different modern context with new debates, and concerns.

Linda Hutcheon argues in her far ranging book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), that adapted literary works are in themselves repetitions with variances which supply the audience with what she calls the comfort of ritual merged with the excitement of surprise (p.4). Simply, she is connoting that an adapted work is recognizably cut- and dried and marvelously imbued with atypical shades of meaning. Furthermore, she puts forward a point of view that advocates "adaptation as adaptation" so as to move beyond the faithfulness to the source text discourse. Apparently, her approach is simply an attack upon adaptation-studies establishment. The reason for rejecting the temptation of fidelity is a pronounced tendency to look at adaptations as cultural artifacts. Furthermore, she argues that discussing adaptation in line with any fidelity discourse perspective necessarily produces

an inconstantly invalid hierarchy. Thus, the new product becomes a second hand version of the original text. On the contrary, an adaptation should be valued for its own sake. Despite the fact that an adaptation usually originates from another source or text, it should not be discredited as a derivative or be underestimated in a hierarchy (Hutcheon, 2006, p.9). She states that an adaptation draws upon an adapted text rather than an original. Additionally, she asserts that adaptations are by nature palimpsestic and that the appeal of adaptation lies in reworking or rewriting a prior tale and changing it at one and same time. Adaptations are repetitions with variation and not replicas (Hutcheon, 2006, p.4). Hence, they are intentional, extended and deliberate re-visitations of prior works. They, she continues, are utilized in certain contexts for different reasons.

Thomas Leitch argues that due to Hutcheon's hypothesis "every story that is adapted is also adapting in a Darwinian sense, struggling to survive by replicating itself with changes to accommodate altered circumstances" (Leitch, 2007, p.250). Therefore, adaptation has a discrediting hidden power that can rectify established fallacies or controversially cultural understandings in a certain society. In fact, Hutcheon's book resonates with the work of Julia Sanders who contends that

adaptation is a sophisticated ubiquitous process. While, the former insists that an adaptation, though second, cannot be secondary, and that it is a derivation without being derivative, the later insists that adaptation is a type of collaborative work that occurs across time, language and culture (Sanders, 2013, p.47). However, both agree that adaptation is all about evolution and change. In fact, both approaches may be seen as echoes of Roland Barthes' remark that:

we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture (Barthes, 1977, p.146).

Though, adaptation to Linda Hutcheon can occur across diverse genres and media, nevertheless, it has to meet three qualifications; acknowledgement of a source text, exhibition of novelty and insightful interpretation pertinent to a different context, and eventually the new product should evidence a kind of outstretched intertextual engagement with the initial text. (Hutcheon, 2006, p.35). A brief usage or in passing reference to or borrowing from other sources is a kind of allusion and cannot

be regarded as adaptation. Indeed, Linda Hutcheon, examines adaptation in two modes; as a process and as a product. She states that it is “no accident that we use the same word—adaptation—to refer to the process and the product” (Hutcheon, 2006, p.7). As a product, an adaptation must not maintain an entire loyalty to its source text, otherwise issues of plagiarism and copyright may arise. Conversely, it should be creatively dissimilar and maintaining the original text core features at one and the same time. The process of adaptation is an act of retrieving and reemploying while trying to shed more meaningful lights on a prior text. Novelty is the benchmark of value. Adaptation in general is in itself an addition to the history of the adapted text and adds to its meaning and understanding. Furthermore, she states that intentionality or the reasons behind resorting for adapting a specific text in a certain context are as important as art itself and therefore, should be investigated by scholars so as to unveil the unseen layers that might have instigated the reproduction of the source tale.

Irish writers usually adapt ancient canonic works to question and take issue with the convictions and hypotheses that their societies take for granted. Irish dramatic adaptations have an implicit potential to serve and propagate what critics call a

nationalist cultural agenda together with pointed commentary on sociopolitical issues and concerns. They usually do that by concurrently invoking two historical and temporally contextual periods; the former in the remote past and the latter in the ongoing present. Such new adaptations of older plays usually try to strike a balance between a bygone setting and a present one. The ability of the newly adapted texts to evoke classical time-honored plots and themes and establishing a sort of relevance to modern or contemporary local or world events can be simply termed binary temporality.

Bhabha argues that ambivalent temporality occurs when the people of a certain nation have multiple or mixed feelings or conflicting reactions toward some objects or events. This sort of ambivalence arises from rivalry among values, traditions, convictions and practices of two or more incompatible cultures – one of them at least is not completely nurtured in the same society. Ambivalence is usually manifested in a common sense of uncertainty. Hence, adaptation sounds sometimes captivating when it reflects the postcolonial dilemma of having a hybrid identity and dual sensibility at one and the same time. Adapted texts are always trying to strike a balance between the grandeur of antiquity and the ‘seemingly’ unquestionable experience of

modernity. Though not all endeavors of appropriation of classical literature handle their two associative contexts with the same degree of accomplishment, yet all may possess the ability to cross-examine the obscurity and ambiguity innate in the twofold formulations; classical and modern, divine and civil, real and fictive and at last individual and global (Bhabha, 1990, p.294). This reflective paper is exploring the continuing endeavors of contemporary Irish writers such as Heaney to inventively and innovatively take advantage of this binary construct.

In fact, many critics have stated forcibly that modernity is by no way compatible or in tune with tragedy and that modern and contemporary adoption of classical themes and dramatic plots is a fruitless venture and toil. The reason for that proclamation is that the different nature of present-day creative sensibility is no longer spirited by the literary ideas of Hellenic age. Additionally, our modern and contemporary contextual scene is entirely different and that ancient classical myths seem to be a distorted representation of bits and pieces of life every time they appear on a stage (Steiner, 1961, p.323). Modern and contemporary readers and audience may not be able to take the classical taste to the full.

The French philosopher and writer Julia Kristeva argues that texts usually have reciprocal and interrelational dependence on each other in terms of meaning, interpretation and understanding. It is this sort of interworking between akin or concomitant literary texts that usually affect the recipient's interpretation of the text. It is intertextuality that establishes this interconnectedness between texts and that gives rise to associated perceptions and comprehension in unrelated texts. Since intertextuality is an intellectual, literary and sometimes nonliterary (digital media and performances) discourse strategy employed by creative writers and innovators, hence referencing adds one or more layers of depth to the new product or text. Simply, intertextuality occurs when a creative writer adopts, borrows, adapts, translates or appropriates an earlier text or part of it in a new product and when the reader gets engaged in referencing one work in reading and understanding another. It usually does not take a formal or academic form, but it can be generated via a number of manifestations such as referencing, allusion, translation or quoting. Referential intertextuality occurs when a text uses isolated periscopes and fragments from a prior one, whereas, the employment of similar structures and patterns in quintessential texts is defined as typological intertextuality. However, one claims

that non-permanent primacy is short-lived and is no assurance for authority or good caliber. Therefore, it is beneficial in this piece of research to explore, among other relevant issues, not what literary texts usually lose in adaptation or/and translation, but more importantly what they rather obtain, gain and secure.

Matt McGuire (2018), argues that Heaney had always resorted to various myths; Irish, European, pre-Christian, medieval and Renaissance to conceptualize the past and to reallocate the future co-ordinates. Heaney's adaptation of *Antigone* in *The Burial at Thebes*, says McGuire, made use of what T.S. Eliot had called:

The mythic method and which he defines as 'the art of holding a classical safety net under the tottering data of the contemporary'. If, for Eliot, the mythic method was part of a reactionary disavowal of modernity, for Heaney it belongs to a more progressive political and aesthetic agenda (2018, P.1).

McGuire simply places Heaney's work within the unfolding critical context of new modernist scholarship. In this sense, we can view the play as a contemporary work of art written in response to the legacy of modernism. Furthermore, he argues that Irish literature,

so far, did not do its homework concerning a number of significant political events in the history of modern Ireland and that *The Burial at Thebes* can help us understand how Heaney reemployed Eliot's mythic method in an attempt to finish only a part of that unaccomplished business. In fact, Heaney had always regarded myth as an energizing rather than a restraining tool of creativity. The idea of mythic method appeared for the first time in a review Eliot wrote on *Ulysses* in 1923. Eliot writes:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is using a method which others must pursue after him. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history...Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art (cited in McGuire, 2018, p.6).

It seems that modern Irish literature has to reconcile with its subsequence or dispassion. Eliot is suggesting that writers should use the mythic way to make ancient and modern works bear upon each other. The phrases he uses make the present sounds inferior to the virtuous past. Hence, the mythic method is not a

diversion from truth but, a looking glass to re-scrutinize it. It is connected with the urge to disclose the value in the commonplace and the unremarkable. It also enables the writer to generate a lens of double vision through which the recipient can redirect his contemporary experience. It is here that a sort of a critical distancing could be achieved to retreat and disengage from the immediacy of the temporaneity to explore the latent designs and patterns of historical continuum. The deployment of the older classical text in its spirit, pattern or structure or even utilizing fragments of its soul and body into a modern product of the same genre is expected to transpose the grandeur of its philosophy, aesthetics and dramatic traditions to the latter and which look sometimes deficient in these characteristics and lacks its profundity. Indeed, Heaney was aware of the notably impressive position *Antigone* has occupied in World and Irish political discourses and he intended to make the best use of it.

Given the fact that the conflict in *Antigone* is triggered by Creon's decision not to grant Polynieces burial rites owing to family relatives, Antigone retorts– in the original text translated by Richard Jebb at the end of the 19th century and which formed Heaney's point of departure in appropriating Antigone– by eloquently giving voice to her view of the whole conflict. She

answers back to the king's proposition of returning hate for hate by assuring him that darkness cannot dislodge light and that she will meet the forces of hate with the power of love. They say:

CR. A foe is never a friend—not even in death.

ANT. 'Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving. {Line 523}

CR. Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, if thou must need love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me. (Sophocles, 1904, p.145).

Line 523(spoken by Antigone) in this version is known to have put forward her definitively conclusive statement on the whole issue. It turns out to be not only brotherly loyalty, but also a whole commanding credence that defines her political standpoint towards state authority, the nature of her character, and her high-principled spirit of the virtue of love over the sin of hate. To Heaney, this line is an interpretative essence of the character of Antigone who refuses Creon's whole value system of allegiances and the either/or mind set in favor of a superior and more elevated dictate of love. In opposition to Hegel's popular point of view that the conflict in *Antigone* is between two 'rights', Jebb's translation of the play inspires Heaney that Antigone's resistance of what

Hegel calls Creon's universally ethical order of the state reveals a higher order of common good; an innate loving disposition that can overstep family and state.

Sophocles' interpretative line has become more appealing to Seamus Heaney for two reasons. First, it has moderated the character's confusion created by her contradictory utterances in some situations and second, it has expanded sympathy for Antigone since her honorable motives were underlined. Sophocles' line 523 justifies the title of the classical text, awards Antigone a noble cause for her stance and a catchy declaration that can fit in similar or other contexts. Consequently, she has become an advocate and champion of many domestic and world issues that are broader and farther reaching than her own. This definitive revamping of the nature of her act from being a sort of family commitment to a kind of righteous care has greatly influenced the response to *Antigone* in the age of modernity and after. However, her contradictory language made the partisan reading of the play grow in strength especially in post trauma periods thus inspiring voices from all range of thought. Though Heaney is quite aware of the ambiguous nature of Antigone's character, he could not disengage himself from the temptation of Sophocles' emphasis on the principled care beyond Antigone's

act and which relocated her act from the particularities of the kinship to the general horizon of all humanity. Heaney's *Antigone* tells Creon that: "Where I assist /with love, you set at odds" (Heaney, 2004, p. 24). She insists that her love-based act is opposed in form and content to his hate- instigated mentality and nature.

The first production of Sophocles' original play *Antigone* goes back to the fifth century BCE, and most probably in 441, in the wake of the war against Thebes. Antigone, the daughter of King Oedipus and Jocasta becomes aware that her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynieces are killed for being obliged to fight on two different sides of the clash. Creon, her uncle and the newly seated king decides to punish Polynieces by denying him appropriate burial rites since he was leading a foreign army against his country town. Since denying the dead burial rites was an offence to the gods, Antigone believes that her brother's corpse is entitled to a proper burial and cannot be left out on the battlefield to decay in the open air and that the king is breaching a divine law. She decides to bury him by herself to preserve his soul and is therefore caught in the act while she is performing an emblematic burial rite over her brother's corpse. Therefore, she is accused of disobeying the royal decrees and breaking the civil

law of the land and is condemned to death. She is confined alive in a tomb and is left to die on her own despite the fact that she is engaged to the new king's son, Haemon. Creon, her antagonist, following a warning from an oracle, repents and retracts his accusation to Antigone of being disloyal, however, it is too late. By that time, Antigone has killed herself and is followed by her fiancée and his mother who commit suicide upon hearing the news of Antigone's death. The play ends when the king's loneliness becoming full-bore. Many critical readings of Antigone's insistence on burying her brother note that the whole attitude of the heroine materializes a process of self-mourning, the legacy of family guilt, a feeling that she is dangled between life and death and finally an indication of her own death.

Heaney's appropriation of Sophocles' *Antigone* seems to have originated from a desire to combine political expressiveness and poetry together in a newly borrowed version of the Theban old work. Tom Kilroy describes *The Burial at Thebes* and its relationship to its prototype saying:

It is best, I think, to look upon *The Burial at Thebes* as a contemporary poet's possession of a classic in which he makes something new and personal out of the material, writing, in effect, a play for our time. As you would expect,

it is beautifully written, filled with lines of arresting pity and the exchanges of sister and sister, niece and uncle, father and son, have a true freshness to them. It is, however, worth looking at the relationship of the new play to its original (2004, p.59).

The core plotline of *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), but not the specific details is obtained from the previously mentioned classical Hellenic myth. The action is triggered in the morning of a sunny day, in the aftermath of the confrontation between the two brothers who killed each other in the conflict, with an encounter between two members of the ruling family; Antigone and her sister Isemene. Antigone says:

Isemene, quick, come here!
What's to become of us?
Why are we always the ones?
There's nothing, sister, nothing
Zeus hasn't put us through
Just because we are who we are—
The daughters of Oedipus.
And because we his daughters
We took what came, Isemene,
In public and in private,

Hurt and humiliation–
But this I cannot take.
No, wait.

Here's what has happened.

There's a general order issued
And again it hits us hardest.
The ones we love, it says,
Are enemies of the state.

To be considered traitors– (Heaney, 2004, p.1).

The conversation between both of them functions as a classical prologue to the play and to prepare the audience for the rest of the action and conflict. Though, Heaney follows Sophocles in the early main lines of the myth, he makes a major character–like Antigone– delivers the prologue instead of a minor character as is the tradition in Greek plays. The resonance of the genuinely heartfelt, complaining, and protesting lines of Antigone to her sister Isemene reflects the beauty of Heaney's poetry and which unveils the authentic feelings of the protagonist. One feels that there is even poetry in the colloquial speech of the characters. The conversational exchange between Antigone and Isemene creates a context for past events and prepares the audience for what may take place in the near future. The play reflects, among

other concerns, the conflict that occurs not only within individuals but also within societies. There is also a sort of ambiguity whether women should make a political public appearance or not. Isemene puts it as follows: “we’re weak where they are strong...We must do as we’re told” (Heaney, 2004, p.5). The two dissimilar stand points of both Antigone and her sister, Isemene, represent two antithetical societal currents that exist side by side: The one that tends to protest and the other that prefers to conform to the status quo seeking peaceful life. From the moment the world started to rediscover and resurrect the interest in *Antigone*, it became a dramatic platform to investigate the truth of reality.

What gathers significance right from the start of the play is the fact that the two young ladies are the daughters of Oedipus. Sophocles’ audience would certainly have been familiar with the elements of the mythology. Antigone is aware that her brother breached the town social contract, but she puts brotherly love over the civil law. Antigone, says Seamus Heaney:

is surely in thrall to patrimony, connection, affinity and attachment due to descent, to longstanding, to inherited instinct and natural tendency, and for her all these things, have been elevated to a kind of ideal of the spirit, an enduring value (2004b, p.413).

Creon, on the contrary, places state law over logical passion and is left isolated at the end. The conflict is now between Creon and Antigone, and what Hegel calls “the day light gods of free and self-conscious, social and political life... (Versus) Instinctive Powers of Feelings, Love and Kinship” (cited in Heaney’s *Title Deeds*, 2004b, pp.413–414). The irony of Creon’s edict is that “he expects to rule even over Antigone’s emotional loyalties” (P.Tait, 2010, p.357). To the king, the two sisters are nothing but bloodsuckers and “two vipers spitting venom at the throne” (Heaney, 2004, p. 24). He even continues to show wrath at this reckless young woman who defies his masculinity and is trying to make him look like a woman, as he believes. Antigone comments on his attitude saying: “But all Creon can see is a crazy girl/He must get rid of” (Heaney, 2004, p.40). His rule, like his sense of masculinity, is built on ‘nerve’, he says (Heaney, 2004, p.10).

Despite the fact that the play seems to be a family opposed to the law (civil and divine), the more profound truth is that reason itself is the loser and that good judgment and wisdom can only repair the damage. Further, though reason is a victim, we cannot ignore the fact that passion conquers the inner zones of the psyche in the case of Antigone. P.Tait claims that, “it is a logocentric culture that denies the potent destabilizing force of

emotions in society” (2010, p.358). Antigone is accused of taking a stand against the state for just personal convictions. Instead of staying within the realm of expressing sorrow and shedding tears on the destiny of her brother to keep the society united, she took a stand against the king’s edict and maintained the catastrophe of the unlucky Oedipus family. Similarly, Creon’s irrationality over Antigone’s disobedience may make us call his sanity into question, Peta says. Feeling that his masculinity and state control is challenged by a woman makes his blood boil and pushes him to the verge of madness. That means that many of his decrees evolve from excess emotions. These, sometimes, leave their impact on thoughts which turn out to manifest themselves in social conduct or political moves. Emotions–ignited thoughts and lack of self–reflection can be politically and socially destructive.

Since Sophocles’ *Antigone* has always been employed as a vehicle for subversive messages, therefore the mythic method can inspire us to understand *The Burial at Thebes* within respectively Irish setting and frame of reference. Therefore, “It is unsurprising that Heaney would redeploy the mythic method as a way of illuminating the aftermath of the Troubles and the fraught process by which post–conflict societies seek to come to terms with their traumatic past” (McGuire,2018,p.10).He believes that the most

irresistible correlation between the classical myth of Antigone and the political eventualities of modern and contemporary Ireland has to do with the presence or absence of women in the political and public spheres of the post conflict Irish nation state. Therefore, it is noticeable that Heaney's play, unlike the translations he resorted to, intensifies and amplifies the gender roles of the Greek play. When Antigone is caught providing symbolic burial rituals to her murdered brother, and fetched before the king, it is hard to decide why the king is infuriated. Heaney lets Creon vent his anger in four full lines to underline what McGuire calls, "the gendered nature of Antigone's offence" (2018, p.10). The king asks angrily, "But flaunting that defiance in my face /Puts her beyond the pale. Who does she think/she is? The man in charge? / Have I to be /The woman of the house and take her orders?" (Heaney, 2004, p. 22). In fact, the king's utterances are imbued with such disregard and negligence for women. Again, he says "No woman here is going to be allowed/To walk all over us. Otherwise, as men/ We'll be disgraced. /We won't deserve the name" (Heaney, 2004, p.31). Even Antigone herself, he tells Haemon, is, "a woman that is no good" (Heaney, 2004, p.30). The mythic method, says McGuire, motivates us "to reread such lines in light of the invisibility of women within mainstream political

debates about the aftermath of the Northern Irish conflict” (2018, pp.10–11). This critic argues that Women’s disrespect, marginality and disregard is out of tune with the obvious female presence in the negotiations between Ireland and London especially in the Good Friday Treaty of 1998. Additionally, it might be a protest against excluding women from the arguments about how to deal with the legacies of the clash. *The Burial at Thebes* gave Heaney the chance to raise the issue in the face of all attempts to exclude or silence female voices in the wake of the Troubles.

From start to end, it is a play that focuses on burial. The whole conflict evolves from a burial denied by the king whose interest is the state security. He declares his position when it comes to the good of Thebes. He says:

Never to grant traitors and subversives

Equal footing with loyal citizens,

But to honor patriots in life and death (Heaney, 2004, p.11).

This triggers the resistibility of Antigone against the edict and initiates all action and deaths. Why Heaney did change the title while he is writing a translation of a tragedy? He answers back asserting that:

Putting 'burial' in the title signals to a new audience what the central concern of the play is going to be. But because it is a word that has not yet been entirely divorced from primal reality, because it recalls to us our final destiny as members of the species, it also reminds us, however subliminally, of the solemnity of death, the sacredness of life, and the need to allow in every case the essential dignity of the human creature. Wherever you come from,...the word 'burial' carries with it something of your *duchas* {dignity}.It emphasizes , in other words, those “Instinctive Powers of Feelings, Love, and Kinship” which authority must respect if it is not to turn callous , powers which will nevertheless also continue to inspire the one whom Cruise O'Brien called 'the trouble-maker from Thebes', (Heaney,2004b,p.426).

P.Tait wrongly believes that Heaney was attracted to provide a new translation of *Antigone* only because he was inspired by “its idea of burial rights arising from the emotional feeling rather than an attraction to a political interpretation” (P.Tait, 2010, p. 351). Though one cannot agree more with her on this point, but truth has another face to be seen. Though it is not the idea of conflict in the play that inspired Heaney to translate *Antigone*, he found it

a very appropriate platform to protest the crushing of all human and civil liberties in the name of state security, the clash of religions, the either/or coercive and humiliating rhetoric of Bush's administration and the loss of souls everywhere around us. Heaney writes:

One consideration, however, was weighing heavily in favor of a new start. Early in 2003, we were watching a leader, a Creon figure if ever there was one: a law and order boss man trying to boss the nations of the world into uncritical agreement with his edicts in much the same way as Creon tries to boss the Chorus of compliant Thebans into conformity with his. With the White House and the Pentagon in cahoots, determined to bring the rest of us into line over Iraq, the passion and protest of an Antigone were all of a sudden as vital as oxygen masks (Heaney, 2005, p.18).

Refusing to grant Polynieces a burial means that his soul will not rest in the world of the dead. Hence Antigone's protest is as political as it is anthropological. This new insight, says Heaney, gave him the chance to move the play away from the realm of civic and public debates and affinities that the play has transformed into. He wanted to "re- approach it as a work atremble with passion, with the human pity and terror it possessed

in its original cultural setting” (Heaney, 2004b, p.422). It is clear now that Heaney adopted Antigone’s protest against Creon to reflect and reveal his rejection of what was going on around him in the post 9/11 world. Commenting on the political suppositions in the play, P.Tait says: “while... the inferences to current politics after September 11th ‘sit there and speak for themselves’, he (Heaney) ‘had kept faith’ with the original event” (cited in P.Tait, 2010, p.358). Again, he was gearing the play to a more humane point of view. His recall of O’Brien description of the “Trouble maker figure of Antigone” and the defense of Ismene’s conciliatory position in addition to his implicit criticism of the political imprudence of Creon makes the play a call for peace in Ireland and around the world. By changing the title of the play, Heaney was at the same time shifting the focus of the play from narrow emotional motives of an individual, whatever he is representing, or used to represent, to a call to humanity to stop losing souls for no sound reasons all over the world. This is what he means by saying that, “...the passion and protest of an Antigone were all of a sudden as vital as oxygen masks” (Heaney, 2004b, p.414). Creon places civil law over family compassion and ends bereft when all his family members die or commit suicide after each other because of his bad decision. The

outcome is a dramatic work that the “ancients could well have entitled Creon, since Creon’s suffering weighs equally in the tragic Sophoclean scale” (Heaney, 2004b, p.414). Hence, Heaney asserts that all these deaths and other observations gave rise to the idea of changing the play’s title in his translation from *Antigone* to *The Burial at Thebes*.

The clash between characters who ground their decisions in different discourses (civil vs. divine) is seemingly one of the main themes of the play. The reference to Oedipus and his curse is early introduced in the prologue in the conversational communications between Antigone and Isemene. She Says: “There’s nothing sister, nothing/Zeus hasn’t put us through/just because we are who we are–/The daughters of Oedipus” (Heaney, 2004, p. 1). Shortly after, Isemene intensifies the presence of fate and the role it plays in their family, she says: “Think of the line we come from:/We’re children of Oedipus–/Daughters of the man/Who fathered us on his mother–/The king they drove from the city./No matter he did not know./No matter it was Oedipus/Brought his own crimes to light./...And now this last thing happens./The doom in our blood comes back/And brother slaughters brother–/The two of them, dead in a day ” (Heaney, 2004, pp.4–5).Heaney insists more than once to foreground the

workings of fate in the life of the Oedipal family by repeatedly referring to the strikes of fate against the family members .He writes: “Our luck is little more than a short reprieve/That the gods allow” (Heaney, 2004, p. 29).Despite all these references to Greek notion of divinity, Heaney’s play drifts away from the classical *Antigone* in its underlying political message. He finds a kind of parallel between Creon’s mind set and that of G.W. Bush, who regard their citizens different loyalty as against state security .When interrogated by Creon, Antigone tells him that , “ I never did a nobler thing than bury/My brother polynieces .And if these men/weren’t so afraid to sound unpatriotic/They’d say the same” (Heaney, 2004,p. 23).Heaney employs words like “terrorize” and “unpatriotic” to connote contemporary political events .Still, we have resonances from the Hellenic text as Sophocles’ society was going through a moment of transmission from divinity –based society to a more democratic one in which all convictions can live together.

In spite of women’s exclusion from public life then, they played in reality and in fiction a great role in the classical funeral rites with the intention of the writers in the later mode to underscore the plight and the great losses of war and struggles. The king’s decree concerning Polynieces’s burial indicates that

family ties are made subordinate to state matters and concerns. On the contrary, the same act of burial foregrounded how Antigone selfishly gave a special attention for the destiny of someone who was promptly set outside political and legal care of the state. Antigone also describes the nature of his political policy and, in this sense, Heaney is associating this to G.W. Bush's rhetoric of the war on terror of the first decade of the twentieth first century. She tells Isemene in a sarcastic tone that:

This is the law and order
In the land of good King Creon.
This is his edict for you
And for me, Isemene, for me.
And he's coming to announce it.
'I'll flush 'em out,' he says.
'Whoever isn't for us
Is against us in this case.
Whoever breaks the law,
I'll have them stoned to death (Heaney, 2004, p. 3).

Tom Kilroy asserts the association between Heaney's Creon and G.W. Bush's rhetoric of war on terror saying:

His Creon [Heaney's]... will be immediately recognizable to a contemporary audience, neo-puritan, sexist, power-hungry, with a mastery of the sound bite ("Whoever isn't for us is against us"). Maybe the current White House will be persuaded to read this play? Doubtful. This political layer in Heaney's text is all the more effective because it is achieved with great tact (2004, p.59).

Though the echoes of Bush's presidential rhetoric is obviously unconcealed, Heaney does not harm the dramatic balance between public and private conflicts in the whole play. Jamie James comments that the register of Heaney's Creon, might not appeal to the Irish ear, but is more familiar to American audience. He proclaims that the king like President Bush "sets forth his political version in a distinctively contemporary idiom" (2004, p. R3). Moreover, though Creon of Heaney's play has no imagination, he is trying by all means to keep public order at the expense of compassion and personal civil liberties.

Heaney is in a belief that the great many numbers of commentary and analysis that *Antigone* trails had dulled and blunted its original nature as a poetic drama. He wanted to write a translation of the play that "still kept faith with the ritual formality of the original" (Heaney, 2004b, p.426). Dramatic translations of

the kind used in *The Burial at Thebes* is usually a coupling device between the modern and ancient theatregoers and audiences. It helps the two modern and ancient texts and may be contexts exchange perceptions. Heaney's insistence to maintain the scene of the confrontation between Creon and his son in the play and his brilliant writing of the debate underlines the need for a more open minded and liberal set of values to suit the new generation in a changing world. Haemon tells his father that being older than him does not make him right. He says: "The rightness is what matters, not the age" (Heaney, 2004, p.32). When the confrontation intensifies between them with the king trying to impose his point of view on his son, the latter protests by telling the king that, "shutting me up still does not make you right " (Heaney, 2004, p.35). P.Tait comments on the generation gap between Creon, on one side, and Antigone and her fiancée, on the other side saying:

When he {Haemon} suggests that Antigone was only doing what any sister would have done, Creon will not listen and seemingly cannot hear that Haemon has sided with Antigone. There is a heated exchange between father and son. Why could only the youthful Antigone and Haemon foresee the tragic consequences of unforgiving decisions

by the state as embodied by an older generation? Again, this potentially held an inference about political dissention (P.Tait, 2010, p.357).

Heaney might be saying that rigidity and less tolerant value systems can lead to all kinds of problems. By underlying the horse-shoe perspective of the political leader, Heaney is no doubt relating Creon to all die-hard and unprogressive mentalities that are the cause of all evil though they can base their edicts in reason.

Heaney believes that the unfolding of world events after the bombing of the New York City twin towers in 2001, gave rise to a need for a new translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. One argues that Heaney's play has many digressional departures from the older text. In his endeavor to question the credibility and honesty of the motives of G.W. Bush, the president of the United States of America (2001–2009), in what the media then called War on terror, Heaney denounces his approach to world leadership and politics by drawing an analogy between him and Creon. He argues that the king's bullheadedness and intransigency in his conversational exchanges with Antigone, the guard, Haemon and early in his encounter with Tiresias are made considerably less poetical unlike the more passionate opening lines between

Antigone and her sister where we feel their weariness, panic, and fear. When Antigone justifies her act of burying her brother Polyneices in front of the king, since the divine law permits it, the king sounds like a guilty intransigent immature young man whose delusions about himself and his authority prevents him from seeing reality. She tells him that:

Antigone: ...There's no shame in burying a brother.

Creon: Your brother Eteocles also died in the war.

Antigone: My father's and my mother's son, yes, dead.

Creon: And dishonored, when you honor Polyneices.

Antigone: The dead aren't going to begrudge the dead.

Creon: So wrongdoers and the ones wronged fare the same.

Antigone: Polyneices was no common criminal.

Creon: He terrorized us. Eteocles stood by us.

Antigone: Religion dictates the burial of the dead.

Creon: Dictates the same for loyal and dis loyal?

Antigone: Who knows what loyal is in the underworld?

Creon: Even there, I'd know my enemy (Heaney, 2004, pp.23-24).

Unlike Antigone's shorter but more vigorous protests, and complaints, Creon with his rigid mindset, has a regular

unchanging form of conversational utterances that reflects his intransigence and inflexibility.

Creon, sees nothing but betrayal in Antigone's human act of honoring her brother's body and soul. She tells him that "there is nothing wrong in burying a brother". As Antigone sounds more convincing about the issue in question, the king's articulation of his ideas and thoughts reveals his inflamed ego, disrespect for others and self-conceit. His last utterance makes him look like an overanxious victim of his own dreadful decisions. He is also arrogantly insecure. Again, Creon's insistence that he would not permit someone else even if Antigone to dictate the law for him echoes G.W. Bush's famous quote during the 9/11 crisis that he is the leader and not anybody else. He says:

I'm the commander, see. I don't need to explain — I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the President. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation (Woodward, 2002, pp.145–146).

Many reviews of the play argue that Heaney is drawing a parallel between the rhetoric of Creon and that of G.W. Bush in his mulish

and perverse declaration of the war on terror. Creon's rhetoric in the play simply echoes the Bush Administration's language discourse that stated the determination of the States to launch the war under the watchword: "you are either with us, or against us". Reviews of the play called such associations, 'the Bushisms' of the play.

Sophocles' *Antigone* is, a work of art, that has endured and stood the test of time and Antigone, though fanatic, proud, and courageous protester, is an astonishing female character who follows the dictates of her conscience and stands courageously for humanity. In fact, It is not easy to decide which of the two chief characters—Creon and Antigone— is the antagonist and which the protagonist. Neither of them is innocent. Both have their human weaknesses and can amount to a tragic hero. Heaney writes:

The play had been translated and adapted so often, and have been co-opted into so many cultural and political arguments, it had begun to feel less like a text from the theatrical repertoire and more like a pretext for debate, a work that was as much if not more at home in the seminar room than on the stage. Tragedy for Aristotle had been the imitation of an action, but in the culture wars of the last

half century, Antigone had become an accumulation of issues .You didn't need to have read George Steiner's book on the subject to know how often the play or its heroine could be adduced in the cause of liberation movements of many different kinds , in the cause of civil disobedience, of feminist resistance to the patriarchy, of prisoners of conscience, and even, as we shall see , of law and order reactions to all these things (Heaney, 2004b,pp. 415).

In times of unrest and conflict, adapting writers laid their sympathies with Antigone, the defiant voice against the authority of the state. However, Heaney is rightly saying that Antigone has changed from a literary text to a democratic platform of opinions. Something like a Hyde Park corner where writers could use it to debate their issues. It turned into a constantly revisited canonical work of art that is used as a screen for displaying modern issues and concerns relevant or similar in some way or another to the classical original theme of conflict between Creon and Antigone. Surprisingly enough, Seamus Heaney states:

This became even more the case in Ireland after Conor Cruise O'Brien came back to the topic and published a famous revision of his earlier salute to Antigone as the

representative of human dignity, recommending instead to the northern Irish minority the peaceable compromise adopted by Isemene (2004b, p.419).

Heaney is referring to 1972 when the Irish historian and intellectual Conor O'Brien emphatically declared that Antigone is a religious and ethical force in society, uncompromising by default and is as dangerous as Creon. Further, he claims that the only way to peace in Northern Ireland is submission to civil authority. Denouncing the violent factions and groups there, he proclaimed that Northern Ireland would be safer without the Theban trouble maker. In fact, Ireland, in the 1970s, was moving backwards and distant from the celebratory nonviolent disobedience act of the play and into the war like situation that took precedence to the opening lines. Heaney argues that this concern with the play as a platform and as an allegory made him reluctant to literarily adapt or translate the classical text. Heaney was simply looking for meaning and not language, a parallel modern text and not a translation in the narrow sense of the word. Hence, *The Burial at Thebes* remains an overflowing version rather than a literal translation of the classical text. Moreover, the situation in Northern Ireland has changed greatly at the time when he was commissioned to write the play in 2003. He writes:

Besides, conditions in Northern Ireland have changed. The allegory doesn't quite fit the situation that pertains there now, since what has been happening over the past decade is thankfully more like a squabble in the agora than a confrontation at the barricades. Nevertheless, if the local row has abated, the global situation has worsened... People in liberal democracies now find themselves forced to take a position on conflicts where God is invoked by both sides and where the great challenge that W. B. Yeats once posed for himself, namely, 'to hold in a single thought reality and justice' is the challenge faced by us (Heaney, 2004b, p.420).

One thinks that Heaney would have never missed out the politics of the play that built up accumulatively since its first production in 441 BCE. The idea is that the world in the first decade of the twenty first century was no longer concerned with what was going on in Ireland, but Ireland itself was looking back at the polarized world with surprise. The world political news and events after the 9/11 event, the forcing of the world governments by Bush's administration into an either/or positions with regard to war on terror and the crusade rhetoric of G.W. Bush to elicit the support

of his people were flooding the world media. Heaney still believes that:

Sophocles' presentation of the domestic and civic troubles of ancient Thebes has great staying power and in the midst of the after-shocks running through the post-september11th world his play still functions in the way Wallace Stevens said poetry functions, as the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality...It was possible to feel, for example, that there was something not so much Napoleonic as Roman about the images of the prisoners in irons being marched in front of the world to their cages in Guantanamo Bay. It was as if we were witnessing a triumph on the Via Apia. Respect for the *duchas* and dignity of the defeated had been set at naught (Heaney, 2004b, p.421).

Heaney is asserting that Sophocles' text is still enduring and appropriate to be summoned and used to illuminate the contemporary eventuality of the post 9/11 historical moment with its political eccentricities, issues of loyalty and disloyalty and violation of human and civil liberties. The reference to the Guantanamo camp images of the prisoners testifies to the change that has occurred in the liberal democracies pertinent to their

rivals. Bush's Administration, like Creon, turned the Guantanamo Bay prisoners into non-persons, fugitives who have no rights. As Creon puts it, "An anti-Theban prepared to kill/His countrymen in wars, and desecrate /The shrines of his country's gods" (Heaney, 2004, pp. 10-11).

Taking into consideration that Heaney's characters do not soliloquize about their inner thoughts and motives in a Shakespearean manner, his focus is placed on the meter of the poetry, the verse and the rhythm. Indeed, Heaney's text remains faithful to the Greek text as a whole. However, Neil Corcoran notes that while the play "is less transparent to specific political instance ...the idiom is markedly Irish" (cited in McGuire 2018, p.9). The play's opening scene introduces the more peaceful and less protestant Isemene of the two young ladies telling Antigone that "What I heard was enough. /Our two brothers are dead, /The Argos troops withdrawn/And the pair of us left to cope. /But what's next, I don't know" (Heaney, 2004, p.2). In fact, the vernacular register is used to decompose the pompous rhetoric of the insurgent politics. Heaney's aim is to make the speeches pulse with a ritual force. Furthermore, the newly used language in the play functions as a source of modern imagery, associative cultural and mythological allusions. They play no part in driving

the plot forward, though they shed more light on the tendencies and personal motives of the characters and the playwright's allusive features. He uses the three-beat-line in the opening lines of *Antigone* that made it easy enough for him to employ variations.

In fact, Heaney has sharpened the imagery of the language. As a poet turned playwright, he had always loved to work with shorter lines. In *The Burial at Thebes*, the heroine says things like, "Here and now, Isemene, /I hate you for this talk. /And the dead are going to hate you. /Call me mad if you like/But leave me alone to do it. /If Creon has me killed, /where's the disgrace in that? /The disgrace would be to avoid it" (Heaney, 2004, p.7). On the other side, Creon's longer phrase and sentence make him sound overwrought and high sounding in contrast to Antigone emotional short lines. However, Heaney's proud and bombastic king is a despotic ruler common in all historical eras. Creon first exchange is with the chorus who is most probably a composite of the elderly citizens of Thebes and who are there to council alertness to the king. He encourages them saying: "Solidarity, friends, / Is what we need. The whole crew must close ranks. / The safety of our state depends upon it. /Our trust. Our friendships. Our security. / Good order in the city. And our

greatness” (Heaney, 2004, p.10). The reference to Polynieces as someone who had killed his fellow countrymen calls to mind Irish and other civil wars with its aftermath, trauma, fear, and damage. It also sheds light on the reasons that lead someone to oppose his own country.

The majority of classical and literature scholars all over the world view Sophocles’ *Antigone* as one of the foundational texts of Europe’s theatre. Heaney’s *The Burial at Thebes*, follows in the footsteps of ancient Greek writers in regards to classical tragedy formal conventions. No doubt contemporary audiences anticipated them then to be present. Hence, Heaney’s play, like its classical antecedent, is structurally broken up into sections where each has its own type of language; poetry, blank verse, prose, or colloquial idioms and expressions. Indeed, the chorus of Hellenic tragedy used to be a crowd of fifteen men that were assigned many functions; they could dance, sing and connect play episodes together. In addition to singing in poetic language, they were granted the opportunity to interact and argue with other characters and sometimes to pass right-minded comments on events. Not to mention, modern playwrights find it very strenuous to transfer this large number of chorus to modern texts. They usually use one or two voices only and they let them pass moral

comments on the action and speak rather than dance. Heaney has actually cut short the presence of the chorus in his text. Modern audiences would not appreciate heavily recurrent reference to ancient Greek mythology that may have lost appeal to their post-modernist taste and sensibilities. Further, the chorus of Heaney's text are using an alliterative four-beat line that invokes proverbial wisdom. Creon's language is different. He sounds like a tyrant who is given to unanticipated release of strong passions. Heaney asserts that "moving in and out of the strict iambic is one way of signifying adherence to tradition and convention, but it also confers a certain dignity," (Heaney, 2004b, p.426). In *The Burial at Thebes*, the chorus represent society or the city's elders and Antigone accuses them of being afraid of Creon who is intent on taking revenge against his nephew. The chorus know for sure that the king is surpassing his dictate of jurisdiction which is a characteristic of tyrants.

In fact, there is an astonishing distinction between the poetic language of the chorus, Antigone and Isemene on one side, and the technical business-like blank verse of the king which appeals to the sense of fidelity, duty, responsibility, obedience and commitment to the civil rather than divine law on the other side. These are the phrases he uses to justify the edict he issued

against Polynieces, “ship of state”, “loyal crew”, “in the interest of all citizens” and, “Personal loyalty always must give way/To patriotic duty” (Heaney, 2004, pp. 9–10). Further, the guard’s earthy and Irish prose language and the occasional idiomatic Irish/English phrases offer another scope for the work and help build dramatic suspense, “I am the old dog for the hard road” he says, (Heaney, 2004, p. 12). In this regard, Heaney turns him into an observer and commentator on the action. He speaks from an advantageous position of someone who knows well what is going on in the land. He is a secondary voice of truth after Tiresias. The Guard’s seemingly comic frankness and Shakespearean sense of humor is used to reduce the intensity of the situation in the kingdom town. He tells Creon, “your conscience is what’s doing the disturbing” (Heaney, 2004, p. 15). He even intensifies his implicit criticism of the king’s actions by telling him that, “the judge has misjudged everything” (Heaney, 2004, p. 16). Another example of the formal conventions that Heaney borrowed is the quick one or two lines exchange between characters which is usually employed to highlight pivotal concerns and issues and to drive the action forward. The conversational exchanges between the guard and Creon is one example of that and there are extended examples of this formal feature in the play.

In fact, Heaney's utilization of the mythic method subscribes to the increasing debates about reemploying modernist techniques within the writing of the twenty first century. Derek Attridge argues that "any modernism after modernism necessarily involves a reworking of modernism's methods" (cited in McGuire, 2018, p.13). Hence, Heaney's play remolds the mythic method appropriated from Joyce. Stephen Wilmer asserts that the play does so by establishing a correlation between itself and the wider debates of the post-colonial theory. He claims that, "Heaney's play bears witness to the indelible marks of colonialism and oppression, and to the process of disengagement from it" (2007, p.230). Heaney, like Joyce, seems to have an ambivalent attitude that neither amounts to straightforward refusal of colonialism nor voice consent to the colonial rule of Ireland. But, Heaney was always keen not to have his art coopted by the rhetoric of the insurgent dissidents of North Ireland. In this sense, McGuire writes:

In *The Burial at Thebes*, this ambiguity manifests in a reluctance to judge the play's main protagonists. Heaney does not offer the audience easy solutions and as the action closes, it is the intransigence of *both* Antigone and

Creon that emerges as the root of this bloody tragedy (2018, p.14).

Post-colonial experience came to be literarily and formally articulated in the language and structure of modernism. Hence, Irish writing seems to still maintaining a remarkable place in the modern aesthetic history of post-colonial theory. The British question, in the light of the contemporary circumstances in the United Kingdom, still acts as an influential undertow in the political and cultural discourses of Ireland. It is surprising that a number of critics see in much of contemporary Irish literature, North and South, a positioning of Ireland as a cultural if not political entity in opposition to Britain in general and England in particular. Classical mythology becomes a particularly appropriate means of expressing such concerns, of allowing the subaltern to speak in G. Ch. Spivak's term. Writers resort to myth because it provides an aspiration to illuminate human life and truth. Therefore, *The Burial at Thebes*, "Might be thought of as a visionary play ...Heaney reminds us that as Northern Ireland goes forward, modernist aesthetics will continue to play a role in our attempt to bear witness to the past and, ultimately, to try and bury it" (McGuire, 2018, p.16).

How the Irish writer succeeds in communicating a persuasive vision of the connections between ancient core plot and present –day events. Indeed, Irish playwrights, possess at their fingertips a number of writing strategies to build up such affinity. This may include the employment of modern and present –day local, regional or world settings, Irish idioms and expressions, aligned and fragmented tales and plots, association and reference to present–day sociopolitical concerns and issues, and last, but not least blended and hybridized genres. The history of the reception of the adapted *Antigone* play in Irish theatre and drama indicates that the clearer the allusion, the better the challenge to the theatergoers to reflect on the core motif of the play. Though Heaney places a remarkable emphasis on the play’s theme, the structure to a great extent remains consistent with the original text. Additionally, there is no big difference in the essential plot lines or conclusion. *The Burial at Thebes* is broken down into a prologue, parados, six episodes, each and every one is separated by a traditional choral interlude, and finally comes the conclusion with the exodus. Tom Kilroy asserts that: “the good adaptation always sends you back to the original with insights and a need to begin reading all over again. Both of Seamus Heaney's versions of Sophocles do precisely that” (2004, p.59).

In conclusion, the phenomenon of literary adaptation is more common at times of change, fluidity and obscurity and when more than one culture are competing in a certain society. Irish writers have appropriated classical Greek dramatic texts in three ways; literal translation, preserving only the core plot outline and, by way of loose translation. Many critical readers are in the belief that modern adaptations of Hellenistic drama are diverse repetitions of cut and dried texts that provide modern audience and readers with the comfort of tradition integrated with the enthusiasm of surprise. Moreover, Irish dramatic adaptations usually propagate nationalist cultural agenda and try to cast light on Irish and world sociopolitical issues in their adapted texts. They do that by invoking two dissimilar frames of time; one old, the other modern and by implicitly encouraging the readers to practice textual referencing. Though, some reviewers argue that modernity is not in tune with classical notions of tragedy, other critical voices proclaim that antiquity is permeated with well tried, time-hallowed and unprecedented value and meaning and that this is usually transferred to the new text in the process of adaptation. Heaney's deployment of James Joyce's mythic method in *The Burial at Thebes*, is in itself an attempt to hold a safety net under the staggering face of the transient. According to Julia Kristeva,

adaptation is a kind of intertextuality which establishes interconnectedness between texts and creates all kinds of textual associations through referencing, allusion, translating or quoting. Heaney's reading of Richard's Jebb's translation of the classical *Antigone* has played a significant role in shaping his portrayal of the character in *The Burial at Thebes*. Again, his appropriation of Sophocles' play features a desire to synthesize political convictions with poetry in a newly written version of the Hellenistic text. In order to do that, he maintained the classical work plot outline, but not the specific details.

Heaney is in the belief that *Antigone* has become a platform for all kinds of debates and an accumulation of issues and that this has dulled the poetic and the dramatic edge of the tragedy. His change of the title is an indication to the new audience of refurbishing the concern of the play. This new facelift of the Greek text is a new call to value life, show respect to the solemnity of death and to find a room to the essential dignity of the human being and to his soul. Many reviews of the play argue that Heaney is drawing a parallel between the rhetorics and attitudes of both Creon and G. W. Bush in his mulish declaration of the war on terror besides passing comments on domestic issues in Ireland. Though, Sophocles' *Antigone* has stood the test of time, it is hard

to decide which of the two main characters is the antagonist and which the protagonist. Neither of them is innocent and both can amount to a tragic hero. In fact, Heaney did not miss out the political nature of the play which has built up accumulatively since its first performance in 441 BCE. Therefore, he intelligently geared the play towards illuminating contemporary truth on both Irish and world levels. Finally, *The Burial at Thebes* follows in the footsteps of ancient Greek tragedy in terms of formal conventions.

Irish playwrights will no doubt persist in stirring Greek dramatic materials as a meditative dramatic platform in Ireland and throughout the whole world. Critics believe that what is most fascinating in Greek drama is their vibes of eternity, their agelessness and immutability and that their appropriation becomes more captivating when their classical features and core qualities are invoked to connect with and relate to present-day eventualities and circumstances. In other words, the new work sounds more spellbinding when it manages to build up a binary temporality and association that intend to offer to the contemporary audience a lens through which to envision reality more clearly.

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