



UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
CENTRO DE COMUNICAÇÃO E EXPRESSÃO
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS

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Colin Murphy's #ANTIGONE: Audio Drama and the Contemporaneity of Greek
Tragedy

Florianópolis
2026
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Colin Murphy's #*ANTIGONE*: Audio Drama and the Contemporaneity of Greek Tragedy

Dissertação submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Estudos Literários e Culturais.

Orientador(a): Profa. Dra. Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos.

Florianópolis

2026

Ficha catalográfica gerada por meio de sistema automatizado gerenciado pela BU/UFSC.
Dados inseridos pelo próprio autor.

Gonçalves, Ronei Lucas
Colin Murphy's #ANTIGONE : Audio Drama and the
Contemporaneity of Greek Tragedy / Ronei Lucas Gonçalves ;
orientadora, Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos, 2026.
92 p.

Dissertação (mestrado) - Universidade Federal de Santa
Catarina, Centro de Comunicação e Expressão, Programa de Pós
Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários,
Florianópolis, 2026.

Inclui referências.

1. Inglês. 2. Antigone. 3. Audio Drama. 4. Greek
tragedy. 5. COVID-19. I. Bastos, Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier.
II. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Programa de Pós
Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários. III.
Título.

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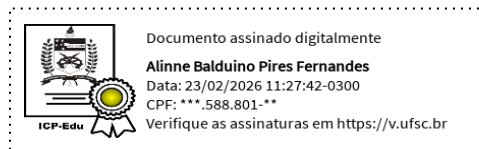
O presente trabalho em nível de Mestrado foi avaliado e aprovado, em 13 de fevereiro de 2026, pela banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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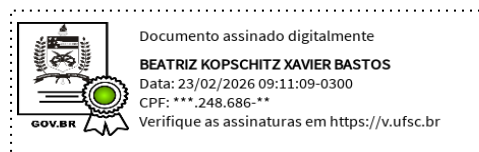
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Coordenação do Programa de Pós-Graduação



Orientador(a): Profa. Dra. Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos

Florianópolis, 2026.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor José Roberto O'Shea. Without his generosity and support, my admission to the *Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês* at *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina* would not have been possible. Since I first entered college, there has been no one I have looked up to more than him at the university.

I am profoundly grateful to the two UFSC professors who have most significantly influenced my academic trajectory: Dr. Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos and Dr. Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes. Professor Beatriz advised me with patience and unwavering dedication throughout my Master's experience, doing everything within her reach to support the progress of this research. Her actions consistently reflected a sincere commitment to my academic growth, offering opportunities more generous than I could have hoped for. Working under her supervision was both a privilege and an honour. Professor Alinne, for her part, taught classes that were so engaging and stimulating that they reinforced my desire to be part of PPGI and NEI – *Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses*. I hold both professors in the highest regard for their exceptional professionalism and moral integrity.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the following professors for their valuable lessons and guidance: Dr. Paul Delaney from Trinity College Dublin, Dr. Eugene McNulty from Dublin City University, Dr. Mayumi Denise Senoi Ilari from *Universidade de São Paulo*, and Dr. Flávio Augusto Desgranges de Carvalho from *Universidade Estadual de Santa Catarina*.

I am also grateful to FAPESC – *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Inovação do Estado de Santa Catarina* – for awarding me a scholarship, without which I would not have been able to carry out this research with the necessary dedication. Additionally, I acknowledge the Emigrant Support Programme of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, via NEI, as well as the Consulate of Ireland in São Paulo and the Embassy of Ireland in Brazil, PPGI and PROPG, whose support allowed me to undertake an unforgettable study trip to Galway in 2025.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend Alexandre Schwinden Garcia for inspiring and supporting me. And last, but not least, my love, Marisa Santana Santos, for being by my side at all times and effortlessly making me feel so happy. With her, life feels like a beautiful dream.

*[...] That in the Same calamity
Brother and brother, friend and
friend,
Family and family,
City and city may contend,
By that great glory driven wild.
Pray I will and sing I must,
And yet I weep — Oedipus' child
Descends into the loveless dust.*

— William Butler Yeats,
A Woman Young and Old

RESUMO

Esta dissertação examina o mito de Antígona e a contemporaneidade da tragédia grega em *#ANTIGONE*, de Colin Murphy, peça radiofônica transmitida pela primeira vez em 2023 na *Newstalk*, uma estação de rádio irlandesa. A investigação baseia-se em estudos críticos da *Antígona* de Sófocles e da tragédia grega, na história das adaptações irlandesas da peça, em teorias recentes acerca da adaptação de clássicos da Antiguidade a contextos contemporâneos, no teatro radiofônico e nas consequências políticas e culturais da pandemia de COVID-19. A análise histórica, contextual, formal e semântica desenvolvida neste estudo demonstra que *#ANTIGONE*, de Murphy, revitaliza a tragédia grega e a torna contemporânea e instigante ao reconfigurar experimentalmente o mito de Antígona na linguagem própria da política e dos meios de comunicação atuais. Ao fazer isso, a peça transforma uma narrativa clássica em uma reflexão impactante sobre os desafios impostos pela pandemia de COVID-19 e pela atual crise de refugiados no Ocidente. Por um lado, a Antígona de Murphy personifica refugiados que atualmente são tratados como cidadãos de segunda classe sob governos autoritários; por outro lado, sua representação de Creonte faz o mesmo por políticos que buscam expandir seu poder às custas dos mais vulneráveis. Ao “ressuscitar” Antígona e Creonte na Irlanda em tempos de pandemia, Murphy tanto estabelece uma ponte entre o antigo e o contemporâneo quanto reafirma a vitalidade duradoura da tragédia grega como um marco para a abordagem de novas crises. Além disso, este estudo sustenta que a escolha de Murphy pelo teatro radiofônico contribui para tornar a tragédia grega atual e envolvente, uma vez que o formato de notícias urgentes de *#ANTIGONE* intensifica a sensação de imediatismo e espontaneidade da peça, produzindo ressonâncias culturais potentes à medida que os ouvintes constroem ativamente o drama em suas mentes por meio de paisagens sonoras.

Palavras-chave: Antígona; tragédia grega; pandemia de COVID-19; Colin Murphy; drama radiofônico.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the myth of Antigone and the contemporaneity of Greek tragedy in Colin Murphy's *#ANTIGONE*, a radio play first broadcast in 2023 on Newstalk, an Irish radio station. The investigation is grounded in critical works on Sophocles' *Antigone* and Greek tragedy, on the history of Irish adaptations of the play, on recent theories on the adaptation of ancient classics to contemporary contexts, on audio drama, and on the political and cultural consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The historical, contextual, formal, and semantic analysis developed in this study demonstrates that Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* revitalizes Greek tragedy and renders it contemporary and compelling by experimentally reconfiguring the Antigone myth within the language of present-day politics and media. In doing so, the play transforms a classical narrative into a resonant reflection on the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and on the ongoing refugee crisis in the West. On the one hand, Murphy's Antigone embodies refugees who are currently treated as second-class citizens under authoritarian governments; on the other, Murphy's Críon does the same for politicians who seek to expand their power at the expense of society's most vulnerable people. By "resurrecting" Antigone and Creon in pandemic Ireland, Murphy both bridges the gap between the ancient and the contemporary and reaffirms the enduring vitality of Greek tragedy as a framework for addressing new crises. Furthermore, this study contends that Murphy's choice for audio drama contributes to making Greek tragedy feel and sound contemporary and compelling, as the breaking-news format of *#ANTIGONE* heightens a sense of both immediacy and spontaneity, generating powerful cultural resonances as listeners actively construct the drama in their minds from soundscapes.

Keywords: Antigone; Greek tragedy; COVID-19 pandemic; Colin Murphy; audio drama.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In Ireland, Greek tragedy has often been reimagined. Indeed, more than twenty Irish authors have “translated, produced, or adapted over two dozen Irish versions of Greek tragedies” along the twentieth century (Younger, 2017, p. 1). One such tragedy is *Antigone* by Sophocles (441 BC), whose well-known plot tells the story of a young woman who dies in prison after breaking the law and burying her brother Polynices, who, in turn, had conspired against King Creon and been killed in combat. In this tragedy, Creon acts to maintain order and unity in his kingdom, forbidding the burial of Polynices, while Antigone, guided by a “passionate feeling of what is due to her brother, to her race”, confronts Creon and his unjust edict, claiming her deed (Kitto, 1990, p. 127).

In “The Posthuman and Irish Antigones: Rights, Revolt, Extinction” (2022), Natasha Remondou notes that the poem “The Prison Graves” (anon, 1918) is one of the earliest connections between Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Irish history. The poem, which has raised questions regarding human dignity, mourning and fundamental rights, was a response to the death of Irish Revolutionary Roger Casement (1864-1916). Remondou highlights that a certain “proclivity for nationalist martyrdom” has become a feature of Irish history since the Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War (2022, p. 227). This helps to explain why the myth of Antigone speaks so much to the Irish audience, once Antigone, with her courageous deed and rightful claim, might be read as a martyr herself in Sophocles’ play.

Since 1984, a significant number of Irish playwrights have written their own versions of *Antigone*. Some of them are Aidan Carl Mathews (*The Antigone*, 1984), Tom Paulin (*The Riot Act*, 1984), Brendan Kennelly (*Sophocles’ Antigone*, 1986), Conall Morrison (*Antigone*, 2003), Nobel Prize Winner Seamus Heaney (*The Burial at Thebes*, 2004), Owen McCafferty (*Sophocles’ Antigone in a New Version*, 2008) and Darren Murphy (*X’ntigone after Sophocles*, 2022).¹ With their plays, these playwrights provided their audiences with critical commentary about issues that were pertinent in contemporary times, while also connecting readers and audiences to Sophocles’ time.

¹ Interestingly, the character of Antigone has exerted a particular fascination mostly over male dramatists.

Adding to this canon, Irish playwright Colin Murphy places *Antigone* in pandemic times with *#ANTIGONE*, written for the radio and first broadcast at Newstalk in 2023 (still available at GoLoud's streaming service).² In Murphy's play, *Antigone* is a refugee in Ireland and *Creon* is *Críon*, the first female prime minister in the history of Ireland and the head of a military government. *Críon* has decided to close the borders of Ireland and to ban the burial of immigrants whose corpses are lying on Irish beaches. The conflict in *#ANTIGONE* has the pandemic of COVID-19 as its backdrop. The COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020 and had huge impact on global politics, economy, arts and, above all, on people's lives. During the pandemic, leaders around the world, in order to contain the spread of the virus, were impelled to adopt strict policies and social distancing measures (Sandford, 2020), which included the wearing of masks, curfews, lock downs and even border closures (Pladson, 2020). While some defended these policies (Barron, 2020), others contested them, claiming for their individual freedoms and rights (McKelvey, 2020), such as the freedom to come and go and the right to seek refuge (Jordan; Shear, 2023).

The author of *#ANTIGONE*, Dublin-born writer Colin Murphy, holds a degree in Political Science and writes primarily on Irish political history, adopting mostly the documentary genre. His first play, *Guaranteed!* (2013), which addressed the Irish government's controversial response to the global financial crisis of 2008, represented a watershed moment in Ireland's self-recognition in the twenty-first century. Murphy's stage plays include *Bailed Out!* (2015), *Jack Duggan's War* (2015), *Inside the GPO* (2016), *Haughey/Gregory* (2019), *The Treaty* (2021), *A Day in May* (2022), and *The Asylum Workshop* (2023). His work for radio further comprises *Roger Casement's "Apocalypse Now" – Africa & 1916* (2016), *Hamlet, Prince of Derry* (2020), and *The United States Versus Ulysses* (2021). *#ANTIGONE* (2023) is his most recent play.

By examining Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* and discussing its content, form and relationship with history and context, this thesis enquires how an ancient classic can still feel and sound contemporary and compelling when brought to present times and adapted into a piece of audio drama. In this investigation, *#ANTIGONE* is examined as audio-drama in the light of the social and political developments related to the

² Link for accessing *#ANTIGONE*:

<https://www.goloudplayer.com/episodes/antigoneY2E2ZDMwMzc5NzUyNmRkN2I1MDU4NTJjM2QxNDQ1MjM=>

crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as of the history of adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* in Irish theatre. Therefore, this research aims to offer a structural and contextual analysis of *#ANTIGONE*, discussing the adaptation of a Greek tragedy into a twenty-first-century piece of audio drama.

In the second chapter of this research, I summarize the plot of Sophocles' *Antigone*; outline the form of Greek tragedy; discuss the conflict between Antigone and Creon; write about the myth of Antigone and its resonance in the West, commenting on canonical adaptations of *Antigone*; provide a historical account of the adaptations of *Antigone* in Irish theatre, drawing parallels between the plays and the social-political contexts in which they were produced; and offer some information about Murphy's life and work, including his views on *Antigone*, audio drama, and his creative process.

In the third chapter, I present a brief history of audio drama, describing its codes; discuss Tim Crook's notion of the imaginative spectacle (1999); explore the contemporaneity of audio drama, considering particularly how this genre speaks to pandemic and post pandemic times; review politics of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and cultural effects, including on theatre; and discuss recent theories of adaptation of ancient classics for contemporary times.

In the fourth chapter, I examine *#ANTIGONE* in order to investigate how the myth of Antigone is updated therein, considering the play's form, genre and plot, while drawing parallels between the play and its context to discuss the issues addressed in the play, and why *#ANTIGONE* shows us that the Greek tragedy and the conflict between Antigone and Creon can still feel and sound contemporary and compelling. This investigation considers the trade-offs embedded in Murphy's choices regarding the depiction of Antigone and her dispute with Creon in a present-day setting.

Finally, in the conclusion chapter, I revisit my research problem and confront my hypothesis, proposing further research on the topic.

The hypothesis tested in this research is that Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* makes Greek tragedy feel and sound compelling and contemporary by updating the myth of Antigone in an experimental way and in a genre that provides an engaging experience to the audience: audio drama. The myth of Antigone is further mythologized in *#ANTIGONE*: here Antigone is an Irish refugee confronting Críon and her policies in pandemic times. Antigone sounds like a young Irish woman

standing for her rights, while Críon sounds like an old prime minister blaming minorities to expand her power. This portrayal of Antigone and of her conflict with Críon comments critically on events related to the pandemic of COVID-19 and the current treatment of refugees in Europe. By updating the myth of Antigone in such an experimental way, while also preserving the form of the Greek tragedy, Murphy engages the audience in a dialogue between the present and the past, revealing how Greek tragedy still speaks to us and our times. The audience also has an engaging experience because the audio drama genre, which privileges emotional and thought-provoking stories, requires an active participation of the audience in imaging the dramatized action.

The primary object of study in this research is a recent radio play written by an acclaimed Irish playwright who has placed Antigone in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, discussing contemporary issues such as authoritarian and anti-migration tendencies in Ireland and other Western societies. I believe that this research is meaningful because: a) radio plays are barely analysed in academia (Hendy; Froneman; Tolson, 2022); b) Murphy's work and *#ANTIGONE* have also been barely analysed; c) *#ANTIGONE* is part of a relevant Irish tradition of adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*; d) the pandemic of COVID-19 has generated immense social impact, not yet thoroughly understood; e) authoritarianism and anti-migration thinking have been manifested in recent times in many societies, including Irish and Brazilian; f) and *Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses* (NEI) of *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina* (UFSC) offers a privileged space for research on Irish literature and other areas in the field of humanities.

The method for research proposed in this bibliographical-based study is textual analysis. I understand the process of interpretation as the effect of a relationship between a reader and a text, and, consequently, the effect of a dialogue. My intention with this research is, then, to answer the questions that *#ANTIGONE* poses to me avoiding free associations but retaining enough independence to write an original analysis. While examining general and specific passages from *#ANTIGONE*, I resort to critical works on Sophocles' *Antigone* and Greek tragedy, on other Irish versions of *Antigone*, on recent theories on the adaptation of ancient classics to contemporary times, on audio drama, and on the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and political developments.

Greek tragedy was firstly discussed by Aristotle in *Poetics* (1984) and later revisited by twentieth-century scholars such as Anatol Rosenfeld (1985) and Albin Lesky (1996). In Greek tragedy, the world presents itself as autonomous; dialogue, exclusively, moves the dramatic action through a clash of intentions; each scene is merely a link, having its functional value only in the whole; time is the present; action is linear and the play ends when a clearly defined action comes to an end. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, action starts to rise when Antigone buries her dead brother Polynices, confronting Creon. This clearly defined action comes to an end when Antigone kills herself in prison, making Creon regretful of his choices. The narrative of *#ANTIGONE* follows a similar sequence of events.

A diachronic view of the myth of Antigone in Irish drama is crucial to evaluate Murphy's choices in the retelling of the story of Antigone in *#ANTIGONE*. George Steiner's *Antigones* (1986) offers a thorough analysis of the myth of Antigone in Western literature and arts. Tackling the origin of this myth in Ireland, Remondou (2022) and Kelly Younger (2006) investigate the relationship between the Irish and Antigone. Christopher Murray (1991), Marianne McDonald (2002), J. Michael Walton (2002), Aikaterini Gotsi (2012), Fiona Macintosh (2011), Erin B. Mee and Helene P. Foley (2011), and Janaina Mirian Rosa (2020) all write about former adaptations of *Antigone* staged in Ireland, emphasizing the role of contextualization in the retelling of the Antigone myth and accounting for its evolution in Irish drama.

In Geraldine Brodie and Emma Cole's book *Adapting Translation for the Stage* (2017), Jane Montgomery Griffiths and Caroline Bird discuss how adaptations of Greek tragedies can be compelling when brought to present times and presented to contemporary audiences. As well as an adaptation of an ancient classic, Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* is a piece of audio drama, a genre with its own peculiar form and features. *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* (1999), by Crook, enables listening to audio drama with an appreciation of technical and critical issues. Crook's latest book, *Writing Audio Drama* (2023), offers new perspectives for audio drama in contemporaneity. In it, he addresses "the boom in internet and online sound storytelling cultures" and advocates that audio drama offers "huge logistical advantages" and "gives the writer the power to fashion stories that are emotional, truthful and thought-provoking" (p. 2).

Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* tells an emotional story that provokes us to think about issues related to the pandemic of COVID-19 and the current treatment of

refugees in Ireland and Europe. These issues have been addressed and discussed in analytical and theoretical form in some recent books, such as *COVID-19 and Human Rights* (2021), edited by Morten Kjaerum, Martha F. Davis and Amanda Lyons, and *Exploring the Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Social, Cultural, Economic, and Psychological Insights and Perspectives* (2022), edited by Usha Rana and Jayanathan Govender. *Understanding the Politics of Pandemic Emergencies in the Time of COVID-19: an Introduction to Global Politosomatics* (2022), written by Mika Aaltola, explains how politics became entangled in public discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic, while *Toward a Future Theatre: Conversations during a Pandemic* (2022), written by Caridad Svich, examines the impact of the pandemic on theatre and considers its potential future developments.

This study was driven not only by an academic interest in the enduring relevance of Sophocles' work, but also by the conviction that *Antigone* and Greek tragedy offer a mirror through which societies may examine their own fault lines and envision possibilities for change. By situating #ANTIGONE within the broader history of Irish adaptations of *Antigone*, I hope to contribute to ongoing conversations about the role of theatre, especially audio drama, in reimagining new terms for freedom and justice. The questions that animate this research are, therefore, not only confined to the appreciation of the arts, but concern also the civic and ethical life we collectively share.

2 GREEK TRAGEDY; SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE*; *ANTIGONE* IN THE WEST AND IN IRELAND; COLIN MURPHY

2.1 SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* AND THE TRAGIC ELEMENT

Tragic art was created by the Greeks between the 6th and 4th centuries BC (Cánovas, 2017). This art form was born out of the spirit of sacred music and the combination of choral songs and ritual dances linked to the cult of Dionysus (Rosenfeld, 1985), “the god of wine, joy, exaltation and pleasure” (Cánovas, 2017, p. 145).³ Greek tragedy matured “until it reached its peak in the 5th century BC with the three great tragedians – Aeschylus (525/524 BC – 455 BC), Sophocles (497/495 BC – 406/405 BC) and Euripides (480 BC – 406 BC)” (Cánovas, 2017, p. 146).⁴

It is estimated that Sophocles wrote more than a hundred plays, but only seven have survived: *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *The Women of Trachis*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sophocles won more than twenty prizes for his plays during his lifetime, having been for nearly fifty years the most celebrated of Athens' playwrights (Cánovas, 2017). He died at about ninety years of age and on his tomb was engraved a siren, the emblem of poetry and song in Greek culture (Cánovas, 2017).

Antigone was first staged in 441 BC (Cánovas, 2017). It is one of the tragedies of the so-called Theban Trilogy, also composed by *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The narrative of the Theban Trilogy comes from Greek mythology, more specifically from the myth of the Labdacids. According to this myth, Laius, son of king Labdacus from Thebes, brings a curse upon himself and his family after kidnapping Chrysippus, son of king Pelops from Pisa (Cánovas, 2017). This curse is fulfilled when Laius is killed by Oedipus, his own son, who, for his part, gouges out his eyes upon discovering that he had killed his father and married his own mother, Jocasta. The story of Oedipus and his tragedy is portrayed in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (Cánovas, 2017).

With Oedipus incapable of exercising power, Creon, Jocasta's brother, takes over the throne of Thebes, reigning until Oedipus' children – Eteocles, Polynices,

³ Original: [...] deus do vinho, da alegria, da exaltação e do prazer.

⁴ Original: [...] até atingir seu apogeu no século V a.C. com os três grandes tragedistas – Ésquilo (525/524 a.C.–455 a.C.), Sófocles (497/495 a.C.–406/405 a.C.) e Eurípedes (480 a.C.–406 a.C.).

Antigone, and Ismene – reach adulthood. When this moment comes, Eteocles and Polynices agree to reign alternately each for a period of time. However, at the end of his term, Eteocles refuses to hand over the crown to his brother, prompting Polynices to attack Thebes from abroad. On the battlefield, Eteocles and Polynices kill each other, making way for Creon to return to the throne. This story is portrayed in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (Cánovas, 2017).

The events that unfold in Thebes following the return of Creon to power are revealed in Sophocles' *Antigone*. In the very first scene of the play, Antigone tells her sister Ismene that Creon has issued a "proclamation" that forbids the citizens of Thebes to place Polynices' corpse "inside a grave, wail over it or weep for it", adding that "anyone who does what he has now forbidden will be put before the people and by public stoning murdered" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 54)⁵. Antigone regrets her unfortunate condition in her conversation with Ismene, mentioning that there is nothing painful that she has not already seen (Sophocles, 2003). Right from the beginning, Antigone reminds us of the curse that runs through her family.

While Ismene thinks Antigone and herself should yield to Creon's will, Antigone thinks they should confront him, standing up for their family. Antigone states that it is not for Creon to keep her from her own, and that she considers noble to bury Polynices and then die. She says: "I will commit a holy crime, for I must please those down below for a longer time than those up here, since there I'll lie forever" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 56). For Antigone, there is nothing so bad as to be denied "a death with honour" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 57). By using words such as "noble", "holy" and "honour", Antigone presents herself to the audience as a heroine driven by high purposes.

The image of the Sophoclean hero, according to Lesky (1996), arises from the "unconditionality of her will. For Antigone there is no hesitation: with the firm decision to ensure her brother's burial, she steps onto the stage" (153, my translation).⁶ Antigone's unconditional will contrasts with Ismene's prudent attitude towards their predicament. The latter says: "I'm forced to act as I do, and I'll obey the

⁵ This translation was produced by Reginald Gibbons and Charles Segal and published in 2003 by the Oxford University Press. It belongs to *The Greek Tragedy in New Translations* series, edited by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. This series aims to recreate Greek tragedies in "the English of our times", offering contemporary readers "dramatic poems that convey as vividly and directly as possible the splendour of language" (2002, p. V). As Gibbons and Segal's translation of *Antigone* fulfils these aims, it has been selected for this study.

⁶ Original: [...] incondicionalidade do seu querer. Para Antígona não há hesitação: com a firme decisão de assegurar o sepultamento do seu irmão, ela pisa a cena.

rulers, for it makes no sense to do things that are futile” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 56). Ismene then calls Antigone “headstrong” and “foolish”, but, at the same time, recognizes she is “rightly dear” to her dear ones (Sophocles, 2003, p. 57). Therefore, Ismene condemns Antigone but at the same time recognizes her virtue.

When Creon steps onto the stage, he states that “the ship of state” is “upright again” now that he holds “all the power and the throne” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 61). He claims that the ship of state is what keeps Thebes safe and that it must sail upright. In his very first lines, Creon emphasizes his authority and the need for order. Then he proclaims his edict, declaring that Polynices’ body “must lie unburied, a corpse eaten by birds and dogs and torn to pieces, shameful for anyone to see” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 63). While Creon’s words sound cruel, they are also revealing of Creon’s pragmatism: under his rule, no one who attempts against the power of the state will be spared.

At first, the chorus do not contest Creon’s power and his decision. The chorus, composed by old citizens of Thebes, say: “no doubt you have the power to use any law in dealing with the dead or us the living” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 63). Rosenfeld (1985) explains that the chorus is the representative of the Polis – City-State – and “mediates between the individual and cosmic forces, opening the closed organism of the play to a wider world, in social and metaphysical terms” (p. 40, my translation).⁷ So, it is through the commentary of the chorus that the audience can learn about how the people of Thebes feel and view the action that is being performed onstage.

The news that Polynices has been buried is delivered by a guard who steps onto stage right after Creon’s proclamation of the edict. The guard is hesitant and shows fear of Creon. He says: “here I am – most unwelcome, I know. Against my own will, too” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 65). Shaken by the news, Creon displays some level of paranoia and megalomania. He says: “for a long time in this city, men who barely can put up with me have raised a secret uproar, [...] they haven’t kept their necks under the yoke – as justly they should have done – and been content with me [...]” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 66). In this passage, Creon manifests insecurity in his preoccupation with maintaining authority.

⁷ Original: [...] medeia entre o indivíduo e as forças cósmicas, abrindo o organismo fechado da peça a um mundo mais amplo, em termos sociais e metafísicos.

Next Creon threatens to kill the guard if he does not find the person who has performed the burial of Polynices. For Creon's surprise, the guard returns moments later accompanied by Antigone, his niece, announcing that she was the one who had performed the forbidden funeral. At this moment, the chorus shows sympathy for Antigone, reminding the audience of the curse that runs through her family. They say: "O unfortunate child of your unfortunate father" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 70). Creon questions Antigone to make sure that she had known she could not have buried Polynices, and Antigone confesses she did know about the prohibition. Then she claims her deed for the first time by saying: "I admit I did it; I do not deny it" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 73).

Antigone claims her deed unequivocally. Previously, in her initial dialogue with Ismene, she had already said that she would hate her sister even more if she kept quiet and did not proclaim Antigone's deed to everyone (Sophocles, 2003). When handing Antigone over to Creon, the guard says: "she did not at all deny it" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 72). When confronted by Creon, Antigone proudly admits her deed, explaining why she buried her brother:

It was not Zeus who made that proclamation
To me; nor was it Justice, who resides
In the same house with the gods below the earth,
Who put in place for men such laws as yours.
Nor did I think your proclamation so strong
That you, a mortal, could overrule the laws so
Of the gods, that are unwritten and unfailing.
For these laws live not now or yesterday
But always, and no one knows how long ago
They appeared. And therefore I did not intend
To pay the penalty among the gods
For being frightened of the will of a man
(Sophocles, 2003, p. 73).

Antigone posits under what sign she is fighting and suffering: "she answers to the great unwritten laws of the gods" (Lesky, 1996, p. 156, my translation).⁸ Backed by these laws, Antigone defies Creon's unjust edict and, alongside the gods, she exercises her right to bury and honour her dead brother. Butler (2000) argues that Antigone's agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honour Creon's command, and "yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of

⁸ Original: [...] ela responde pelas grandes leis não escritas dos deuses.

sovereignty that she refuses" (p. 11). This means that she assumes the voice of the law (of the gods) in committing an act against the law (of men).

Antigone asserts to Creon that if she dies before her time she counts that as a "profit" and that her fate is "in no way painful" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 73). The chorus celebrate Antigone's fierceness, saying that "she does not know to bend amid her troubles" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 73). Creon, in turn, calls Antigone "insolent" and announces that she "will not escape the worst of fates" no matter her blood relation with him (Sophocles, 2003, p. 74). Antigone answers back saying that she is gaining "glory" and the people are only afraid of Creon. In a beautiful line, Antigone places herself on the side of love: "my nature's not to join in hate but to join in love" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 76). By siding with love, Antigone positions herself as the heroine of the story, relegating Creon to the status of villain.

Creon orders his men to take Antigone and Ismene inside the royal house. A moment before Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's fiancé, steps onto stage, the chorus foresee that "a moment will come when what is bad seems good to the man whom some god is driving toward ruin" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 81). The chorus seem to speak about Creon's inability to recognize what is right, anticipating his fall into misfortune. Lesky (1996) argues that in Greek tragedy such a fall into misfortune must indeed "arise from a failure in the sense of the human inability to recognize what is right and obtain safe guidance" (p. 29, my translation).⁹

At first, Haemon declares loyalty to Creon. He says: "father, I'm yours. And as your judgments are both good and upright, then I'll follow them" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 82). Creon states that he will not be seen as false to his own word and will indeed kill Antigone. He fears that Thebes will strike in revolt due to Antigone's rebellion. Creon pragmatically says: "if those I've raised and kept become rebellious, then those outside the family will become so, even more" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 83). For him, "there is no greater evil than lack of rule. This is what brings cities to ruin" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 83). Creon's remarks seem so sensible here that the chorus agree with him.

Haemon, nevertheless, talks about "good sense" and warns his father of Antigone's popularity. He says: "I hear what's in the shadows – How the city mourns for this girl, and how she of all women least deserves the worst of deaths for the most

⁹ Original: [...] ocorrer de uma falha no sentido da incapacidade humana de reconhecer aquilo que é correto e obter uma orientação segura.

glorious of deeds" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 84). Haemon then tries to dissuade his father by claiming that "even a man who's clever should feel no shame in learning things – however many they are – and in not keeping himself so tightly strung" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 84). He finally pleads: "let go of your anger, allow yourself to change" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 84). The use of the word "anger" to describe Creon's behaviour contrasts with the word "love" used by Antigone to describe her own behaviour.

Creon does not abide by Haemon's plea. He disdains his son for his age and declares that he shall rule Thebes for himself, not for anyone else (Sophocles, 2003). This sparks an argument between father and son. Haemon shouts: "if you were not my father, I'd say that you can't think" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 86). Creon answers back: "you slave of a woman" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 86). Their argument ends up when Creon orders Antigone to be killed in front of Haemon, prompting him to rush out off stage (Sophocles, 2003).

After sparing Ismene's life, aware that she had not participated in the burial of Polynices, Creon declares what he is about to do to Antigone: "I'll lead her out to some deserted place where mortals do not go, and seal her up, still living, in a tomb dug into the rock, with just enough to eat – for our expiation" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 87). Ironically, Antigone is sentenced to be buried after performing a burial; she is destined to die unmourned after performing mourning rites. Locked up in a cave, Antigone will not enjoy life in Thebes nor join her family in Hades (the underworld where the dead are). She bemoans: "Ah, unfortunate that I am – Neither living among those who are alive, nor dwelling as a corpse among corpses, having no home with either the living or the dead" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 92).

On her way to prison, Antigone cries that "she has not lived, that she has not loved, and that she has not borne children, and so that she has been under the curse that Oedipus laid upon his children" (Butler, 2000, p. 23). According to Butler (2000), Antigone's death is always double throughout the play: on one hand, it means the "unlived life" (p. 23); on the other, it is figured as "a kind of marriage to those in her family who are already dead, affirming the deathlike quality of those loves for which there is no viable and livable place" (p. 24). In fact, Antigone speaks of meeting her family in death as a reward: "as I go I hold strong hopes that I will arrive as one loved by my father, loved by you, mother, loved by you, my own dear brother" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 95).

When Antigone is already in prison, Creon receives Tiresias, the seer, in his royal house. Creon first shows appreciation for Tiresias' advice. He says: "I never shunned your thinking" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 99); [...] "I am a witness, from experience, to your services" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 100). Tiresias then proceeds to warn Creon about the situation in Thebes and the dissatisfaction of the gods: "Our altars and our hearths are filled with food brought by the birds and dogs from the dead ill-fated son of Oedipous! And this is why the gods still won't accept our prayers at holy sacrifice" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 100). Tiresias mentions Creon' stubbornness and a lack of prowess in his actions, and Creon proves to be indeed stubborn. He says: "not even then, from fear of pollution will I let this man be given burial" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 101).

Tiresias foresees Creon's fate, explaining why he is destined to be caught up in the same horrors he has imposed on others:

[...] you will not complete
 Many swift courses of the racing sun
 Before you yourself, from your own gut, will give
 One corpse for other corpses, in exchange,
 Because you thrust down there someone from here
 Above, dishonorably compelling her,
 A human spirit, to live inside a tomb,
 While here you're keeping someone who belongs
 Below—a body with no share of the gods,
 No share of a tomb, no holiness—and this
 Has nothing to do with you or the gods above,
 And yet by you, violence is done to them!
 And that is why the devastating late-
 Destroying ones, the Furies, who avenge
 Hades and the gods, now lie in wait for you,
 So you will be caught up in these same horrors
 (Sophocles, 2003, p. 102; p. 103).

Tiresias understands that Creon's mistake is placing Antigone, "someone from here above" and a "human spirit", inside a tomb, while leaving Polynices' corpse, "someone who belongs below", "a body with no share of the gods, no share of a tomb, no holiness", abandoned in the open. By emphasising Antigone's human spirit and a lack of holiness in the treatment of Polynices' body, Tiresias explains to Creon why his actions are wrong and violent to the gods. When he says that Creon will be "caught up in these same horrors", he implies that Creon will go through an ordeal similar to the one that Antigone has been going through. Cánovas (2017) contends that Tiresias is voice of the gods and represents religion in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

The chorus encourages Creon to listen to Tiresias – “Son of Menoikeus, be well-advised!” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 103) –, and Creon finally yields, changing out of necessity and against his will. He says: “Oh! This is hard – but I change my heart. I'll do it! One cannot fight against necessity” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 104). Creon decides to set Antigone free himself, rushing out of the city alongside his men. The chorus then exhorts Dionysus – the god whose cult is related to the origin of Greek tragedy – to show his presence, crying out: “You that lead the dance of the stars that breathe out fire, you that watch over the voices sounding in the night, child of Zeus, his son, show us your presence as a god (Sophocles, 2003, p. 106)

The death of Antigone is announced by a messenger. He describes Antigone's death this way: “[...] at the back of the tomb we saw the girl there, hanging by her neck in a noose tied of fine-woven linen”. In the sequence, the messenger tells that Haemon, distraught over the death of his fiancée, attacked Creon with a sword, ending up killing himself. The scene is also described by the messenger:

[...] the boy [Haemon]
Looks wildly at him [Creon] with fierce eyes and spits
In his face and without giving him an answer
Draws his sharp, two-edged sword, but as his father
Fled rushing out, the blow missed. Instantly
The boy, ill-fated and furious at himself,
Leaned over his sword, pushing it half its length
Into his side, and still in his senses, he wraps
The girl in the weak crook of his arm, pulling
Her close, and gasping he spurts a quick stream,
Blood-red drops on her white cheek
(Sophocles, 2003, p. 109).

Alarmed by the death of his son, Creon admits his flaws and regrets his “foolish heedlessness”. He bewails: “Here you see kindred who have killed and been killed! Oh my foolish heedlessness! [...] You died, you were torn away from us because of my foolishness, not yours!” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 111). At that moment, already devastated by the death of his son, Creon finds out from the messenger about the death of his wife, Eurydice, who had killed herself with a knife. The messenger blames Creon for the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice, saying: “yes – you were charged by the dead woman here with blame for this death and the other one” (Sophocles, 2003, p. 114).

As Lesky (1996) observes, Greek tragedies contain an event full of suffering. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Antigone's death precipitates the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice, casting Creon into the bitterest of regrets. Amid his torment, Creon even welcomes his death. He cries: "Let it come! Let it come! May it appear to me – That best of fates that brings my final day, the most perfect! Let it come! Let it come! So that I will not see another day!" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 115). In the last line of the play, the chorus sings about "good sense" and the gods: "Good sense is the first principle of happiness. We must not act disrespectfully toward the gods. Grand words of arrogant men, paid back with great blows, in old age teach good sense" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 115).

The essential and decisive element of the tragic, according to Lesky (1996) and other later authors, is the irremediable. In fact, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon and Antigone are so adamant about their choices that their fates become inescapable. On the one hand, Creon refuses to back down on the order of banning the burial of Polynices; on the other, Antigone refuses to obey Creon's edict and carries out her mission. At last, the laws of the gods are confirmed "by the sacrifice of Antigone, who considered them worthy of giving her life for them, and by the moral ruin of Creon, who fought against them" (Lesky, 1996, p. 158, my translation).¹⁰

2.2 ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION AND THE FORM OF GREEK TRAGEDY

Aristotle explained the form of the Greek tragedy when analysing Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. In *Poetics*, he defines Greek tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself", happening "in a dramatic, not in a narrative form" (1984, p. 2.320). This definition by Aristotle is essentially about form. Greek tragedy is the imitation of a serious and complete action, that is: an initial action is unfolded, and its consequences produce a serious story that is complete because there is a meaningful resolution. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, action starts to rise when Antigone confronts Creon by burying her dead brother Polynices. The conflict between Antigone and Creon generates serious consequences: Antigone is sent to prison and kills herself in there; Haemon kills himself after witnessing Antigone's death; Eurydice kills herself when

¹⁰ Original: [...] pelo sacrifício de Antígone, que as considerou dignas de dar a sua vida por elas, e pela ruína moral de Creon, que lutou contra elas.

she finds out her son is dead; Creon suffers from remorse in the end. This story is told in a dramatic form, that is: actors embody characters, and the action is driven by their dialogue.

Drawing on Aristotle's definition, Rosenfeld (1985) explains the form of Greek tragedy in more detail. Rosenfeld highlights that in this art form "the world presents itself as if it was autonomous, absolute, not relativised to a subject" (p. 27, my translation);¹¹ "the object is everything, to the point of disappearing in the theatre, completely, any mediator" (Rosenfeld, 1985, p.28, my translation).¹² This happens because "only the characters themselves appear in dialogue without interference from the 'author'" (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 30, my translation).¹³

Dialogue "moves action through a dialectic of affirmation and rejoinder, through a clash of intentions" (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 34, my translation).¹⁴ What is called "dramatic", in a stylistic sense, refers particularly to the "clash of wills and the tension created by a dialogue through which opposing concepts and objectives are expressed, producing conflict" (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 34, my translation).¹⁵ In Sophocles' *Antigone*, a clash of intentions is particularly evident in the conflict between Antigone and Creon: while she seeks to honour her family and defend her freedom, he strives to preserve his power and keep the unity of the kingdom of Thebes.

In tragedy, we witness the action originating in the present, as an "immediate expression of subjects" (Rosenfeld, 1985 p. 29, my translation).¹⁶ The dramatic action takes place in the present moment and is original: "each replica is born now, it is not a quotation or variation of something said long ago" (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 31, my translation).¹⁷ Time is thus "linear and successive like the empirical time of reality" (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 31, my translation).¹⁸ The future is "unknown; it springs from the present involvement of action which, in each presentation, originates as if it were for

¹¹ Original: [...] o mundo se apresenta como se estivesse autônomo, absoluto, não relativizado a um sujeito.

¹² Original: [...] o objeto é tudo, a ponto de desaparecer no teatro, por completo, qualquer mediador.

¹³ Original: [...] e isso se manifesta na peça pelo fato de "somente os próprios personagens se apresentarem dialogando sem interferência do 'autor'.

¹⁴ Original: [...] move a ação através da dialética de afirmação e réplica, através do entrechoque de intenções.

¹⁵ Original: [...] entrechoque de vontades e à tensão criada por um diálogo através do qual se externam concepções e objetivos contrários produzindo o conflito.

¹⁶ Original: [...] expressão imediata de sujeitos.

¹⁷ Original: [...] cada réplica nasce agora, não é citação ou variação de algo dito há muito tempo.

¹⁸ Original: [...] linear e sucessivo como o tempo empírico da realidade.

the first time” (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 30, my translation).¹⁹ The past, in turn, can only be revisited through the “dialogical evocation of characters” (Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 31, my translation).²⁰ Hence resources such as flashback and flash-forward, typically seen in the epic theatre and in cinema, are not seen in Greek tragedy.

Despite the lack of mediation and the predominance of dialogue, there are three epic elements in Greek tragedy: the prologue, the epilogue and the chorus. The prologue and the epilogue are, respectively, the introductory and closing sections of the tragedy. The chorus, as previously mentioned, is composed of a group of seniors that comment on the action performed. By means of these three epic elements, the tragedian exercises a lyrical narrative function, suspending the rigorous succession, continuity, causality and unity of action of the tragedy (Rosenfeld, 1985). The function is both lyrical and narrative as the prologue, epilogue and chorus express subjective impressions while contributing to the advancement of the dramatic action. The chorus in Sophocles’ *Antigone* indeed comments and interprets the action performed subjectively, opening the closed organism of the play to a wider world and suspending its unit of action.

Regarding the unity of action and the rigorous causal succession of Greek tragedy, Rosenfeld (1985) argues that each scene in it is both the cause of the next and the effect of the previous one, being “only a link, having its functional value only in the whole” (p. 32).²¹ This idea of the whole, in fact, had already been addressed by Aristotle. For him, a play is an organism in which:

All parts are determined by the idea of the whole, while the whole is at the same time constituted by the dynamic interaction of the parts. In this closed system everything motivates everything, the whole the parts, the parts the whole. Only in this way is verisimilitude obtained, without which the discharge of emotions by the emotions themselves aroused (catharsis) would not be possible, the ultimate goal of tragedy (quoted in Rosenfeld, 1985, p. 33, my translation).²²

For Aristotle, therefore, it is the form of Greek tragedy that makes an imitation of a serious action to be regarded as a credible art form capable of generating a

¹⁹ Original: [...] desconhecido; brota do envolver atual da ação que, em cada apresentação, se origina por assim dizer pela primeira vez.

²⁰ Original: [...] evocação dialogada dos personagens.

²¹ Original: [...] apenas elo, tendo seu valor funcional apenas no todo.

²² Original: Todas as partes são determinadas pela ideia do todo, enquanto este ao mesmo tempo é constituído pela interação dinâmica das partes. Neste sistema fechado tudo motiva tudo, o todo, as partes, as partes o todo. Só assim se obtém a verossimilhança, sem a qual não seria possível a descarga das emoções pelas próprias emoções suscitadas (catarse), último fim da tragédia.

discharge of emotions in the audience. Greek tragedy must thus be complete, that is: the world must present itself as autonomous; each scene must be merely a link, having its functional value only in the whole; action must be linear, and the play must end when a clearly defined action comes to an end. Indeed, this is the form of Sophocles' *Antigone*, a play that has spanned the centuries remaining relevant among spectators and readers around the world.

2.3 ANTIGONE'S CONFLICT WITH CREON AND THE PERPETUITY OF HER CLAIM

The conflict between Creon and Antigone is understood by Hegel, according to Butler (2000), as a conflict between kinship (Antigone) and state authority (Creon). While kinship is dissolved in the conflict, state authority emerges consolidating an ethical order based on universal principles (Butler, 2000). Thus, the conflict between Antigone and Creon and its outcome would be representative of a paradigmatic change in the way society organizes itself politically: from an order based on subjective principles and kinship authority to one that is based on universal principles and state authority.

Judith Butler is critical of Hegel's understanding of Antigone and of her conflict with Creon. She (2000) argues that opposing Antigone to Creon as the encounter between the forces of kinship and those of state power fails

to take into account the ways in which Antigone has already departed from kinship, herself the daughter of an incestuous bond, herself devoted to an impossible and death-bent incestuous love of her brother, how her actions compel others to regard her as "manly" and thus cast doubt on the way that kinship might underwrite gender, how her language, paradoxically, most closely approximates Creon's, the language of sovereign authority and action, and how Creon himself assumes his sovereignty only by virtue of the kinship line that enables that succession, how he becomes, as it were, unmanned by Antigone's defiance, and finally by his own actions, at once abrogating the norms that secure his place in kinship and in sovereignty (p. 6).

Butler's arguments are reasonable: Antigone does depart from kinship as her relations are all distorted because of Oedipus' incest. Antigone is, in fact, the daughter and at the same time the sister of Oedipus; Polynices is her brother, but also her uncle; Jocasta is her mother, but also her grandmother. Antigone does love Polynices devotedly, even to the point of saying that she would not sacrifice herself in

the same way for a son or a husband. Antigone is indeed called “manly” by the chorus, Creon and the messengers when she buries Polynices, and when she defies Creon. This does cast doubt on the way that kinship underwrites gender. Finally, Antigone does claim her deed assuming Creon’s language of sovereign authority, citing the eternal unwritten laws of the gods to justify herself. Creon, in turn, claims to rule for himself, adopting rather subjective than universal principles.

Walton (2002) considers that the conflict between Antigone and Creon is more than a confrontation between kinship and state. He argues that their conflict is a straightforward debate between “two human beings who happen to be on different sides in every possible way: one young, one old; one female, one male; one powerless, one in authority; both stubborn into death” (p. 22). For Walton, Creon represents “temporal power”, while Antigone represents “moral stance”, and their clash has a “fundamental nature” (2002, p. 17). It is the fundamental nature of the clash between both characters that makes it virtually impossible for the audience to detach themselves from whatever context they find themselves in. This is why *Antigone* is one of Sophocles’ plays which “might most invite a contemporary slant” (Walton, 2002, p. 15).

Steiner (1986) reinforces Walton’s notion of the fundamental nature of the Antigone-Creon’s conflict when he says that their contention serves to “initiate, exemplify, and polarize primary elements in the discourse on man and society” (p. 108). He argues that each of the great determinants of collision between Creon and Antigone – “between man and woman, between old and young, between the quick and the dead, between gods and mortals – is, in the final reckoning, non-negotiable” (1986, p. 276). Finally, Steiner points out that it is this “timelessness of necessary and insoluble conflict, as Greek tragedy enacts it, which invites us to assimilate the condition of man on this earth to that of the tragic” (1986, p. 277).

For Steiner, therefore, the fundamental nature of the Creon-Antigone’s conflict has to do with its universality: the conflict is between man and woman; old and young; quick and dead; gods and mortals. Creon and Antigone are, this way, representative of all these groups. The universality of the play also stems from the portrayal of a timeless conflict, which invites the audience to ponder about the very condition of man on earth. Paradoxically, it is the universality of Sophocles’ *Antigone* which allows the myth of Antigone to take on a local habitation and a temporal focus around a core of timely and spatial specificity: Antigone and Creon could be any man

and any woman anywhere in the world where there is an insoluble conflict in which morals and power are disputed. This is precisely, according to Steiner (1986), what gives the myth of *Antigone* “its supple durability” (p. 120). He states: “it was the permeability of the high myth to the pressures of political and social immediacy which ensured the great success of the play” (1986, p. 121).

Steiner also credits the durability of the Antigone myth to a) the elementality of the theme of the burial; b) the homecoming effect of prime myths. He (1986) states that the theme of burial “touches on elemental chords in private and public sentiment”, comporting “a wealth of semantic and symbolic values” (p. 114). *Antigone* constituted, in Steiner’s own words, “a pointed advocacy for the freedom of familial burial practices [private sentiment] at a moment when the state, under pressure of war and internal polemic [public sentiment], was seeking to control [...] private piety” (1986, p. 120). About the homecoming effect of prime myths and their durability, Steiner argues that there is an “underlying sense in which ‘initial’ and determinant Greek myths are myths in and of language, and in which, in turn, Greek grammar and rhetoric internalize, formalize, certain mythical configurations” (p. 135). Such configurations are made compelling “by the formality, by the narrative coherence, by the lyrics and plastic comeliness with which the Greek spirit invested the uncanny and the daemonic” (p. 125). Therefore, it would be in these prime myths that our consciousness would find its ever-renewed return “to the opaque comforts and terrors of its origins” (Steiner, 1986, p. 125).

McDonald also highlights the quality of Greek tragedy and Sophocles’ *Antigone*, mentioning the uniqueness of the play, its origin and the relevance of its theme to justify the perpetuation of the myth of Antigone in Western arts. She argues that Greek classics “are masterpieces in themselves” (2002, p. 39): in a translation one can simply “luxuriate in selecting words, and these masterpieces provide the structure and plot, in addition to effective imagery” (2002, p. 40). On *Antigone*, the character, McDonald (2002) comments that she is “the first voice raised in defiance of unjust law and this in a profound moment in the evolution of human conscience” (p. 51). She argues that “issues about human rights have everlasting relevance” (p. 52), and Sophocles’ *Antigone* is “the greatest play in western literature about the consequences of individual conscience defying civil authority” (p. 51).

Butler (2000) points out that Antigone defies the state with her deed and offers a repetition of defiance with her claim. Antigone’s claiming is then “an act that

reiterates the act it affirms” (Butler, 2000, p. 11). It is such a claim, delivered in the language of sovereign authority (the same used by Creon), that remains alive in language and is capable of being “reiterated in contexts and in ways that are not fully to be anticipated” (Butler, 2000, p. 24). Mentioning the case of those who experienced the mourning of spouses during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980’s, Butler illustrates how *Antigone*, for instance, prefigures a situation for individuals who experience “publicly ungrievable losses” (2000, p. 24).

For Slavoj Žižek (2016), Antigone’s claim was formulated on behalf of all those who “are without a full and definite socio-ontological status” (p. 22), and, for this reason, she is a “proto-modern emancipatory heroine who speaks for all those excluded from the public domain, all those whose voices are not heard” (p. 21). Žižek argues that Antigone speaks, for instance, on behalf of the *sans-papiers* in today’s France, undocumented migrants who do not enjoy the same full citizenship that French citizens do (2016). He regards Antigone, therefore, as the voice of the voiceless, as a heroine for all those excluded from the public domain in contemporary times: she is the heroine of the *sans-papiers* in today’s France, but also the heroine of all undocumented migrants in the world, all refugees, all ethnic and religious minorities – in short, all individuals oppressed and excluded from public life.

The conflict between Antigone and Creon has been interpreted differently throughout time, but it has remained an ever-revisited object of study on the human condition and society. It can be read as a conflict between kinship and state authority; between temporal power and moral stance; between man and woman, old and young, gods and mortals, etc. The fundamental nature of this conflict, with its universality and permeability to the pressures of political and social immediacy, has contributed to the perpetuity of the Antigone myth in western arts and thought. The homecoming effect produced by prime myths, the artistic excellence of Greek tragedy, and the everlasting relevance of the theme of burial and human rights also help to explain the durability of this myth. Given these circumstances, Antigone’s claim, an act of reiterated defiance of authority formulated on behalf of those excluded from public life, has survived in language, making the character of Antigone a heroine of ancient and contemporary times.

2.4 THE MYTH OF ANTIGONE IN THE WEST

Regarding the constancy of *Antigone* in the Western repertoire, Steiner (1986) points out that:

Whenever, wherever, in the western legacy, we have found ourselves engaged in the confrontation of justice and of law, of the aura of the dead and the claims of the living, whenever, wherever, the hungry dreams of the young have collided with the 'realism' of the ageing, we have found ourselves turning to words, images, sinews of argument, synecdoches, tropes, metaphors, out of the grammar of *Antigone* and of Creon (p.138).

Steiner, therefore, advocates that *Antigone* has been revisited in Western arts whenever and wherever there were contextual conditions that, in Walton's words (2002), invited "a contemporary slant" for the myth of *Antigone* to speak (p.15). Robert Garnier, who wrote *Antigone, ou, La Pieté*, back in 1580, for instance, saw many "unburied bodies, fratricidal encounters, and the extirpation of ancient families" (Steiner, 1986, p. 138) during some dynastic and religious civil wars in the France of his times. Being "obsessed by the sense and spectacle of a society in dissolution" (1986, p. 139), Garnier found in Sophocles' *Antigone* the words and the grammar that allowed him to comment on what was happening in sixteenth century French society, validating the universal status of contemporary happenings with a classical drama.

Besides Garnier, countless other playwrights and writers have revisited *Antigone* to comment on their times and societies. Pierre-Simon Ballanche published his *Antigone* in 1814, when Europe lay at war. Ballanche's *Antigone*, which is a prose epic in six books, resonated the horrors of the Napoleonic wars. Walter Hasenclever published his *Antigone* in 1917, "inspired by world war and the *misère* of German cities on the eve of revolution" (Steiner, 1986, p. 138). *Antigone or The Choice*, a poem in prose from Marguerite Yourcenar's collection *Feux*, was published in 1936 and commented on the rise of fascism in Europe, portraying ideological war and police terror on the streets of Thebes.

Jean Anouilh and Bertolt Brecht adapted Sophocles' *Antigone*, respectively, for occupied France and Nazi Germany. Their versions have become so well known that many adapters, since the end of World War II, have used them as source texts as often as Sophocles' *Antigone* itself (Mee; Foley, 2011). According to Mee and Foley (2011), both plays, Anouilh's *Antigone* of 1944 and Brecht's *Antigone* of 1948, "redefine the central relationship between *Antigone* and Creon" (p. 43): while

Anouilh's play lays the ground for "a more sympathetic treatment of Creon", portraying "a more illogical and self-defeating Antigone" (p. 44), Brecht's lays the ground for a more "class and power" oriented treatment of the play (p. 44).

Anouilh's *Antigone* was first performed in Paris in 1944, before the liberation of the Nazi domination of France – which happened in 1945. The play caused immediate controversy. It has since then been interpreted as "both fascist and representative of the French resistance" (Mee; Foley, 2011, p. 44). Antigone is portrayed in it as an "immature heroine", described by Mee and Foley (2011) as "small", "sallow" and "thin" (p. 44). Creon, in turn, is "tired" and "has little interest in power or the ideologies of state but claims to feel compelled to take a practical governing role in difficult circumstances" (Mee; Foley, 2011, p. 44). According to Mee and Foley, the characters' flaws and volatility in Anouilh's *Antigone* suggest that "under occupied France, the struggle to define ethical and political issues became irrevocably blurred" (2011, p. 45). Productions that favour developing a new complexity for the conflict between Antigone and Creon have since then often drawn inspiration from this play.

Brecht's *Antigone* of 1948 emphasises "human greed and potential monstrosity" by staging the play's conflict among the members "of the ruling class, including the wealthy chorus of elders" (Mee; Foley, 2011, p. 46). Mee and Foley (2011) argue that what Brecht meant with his *Antigone* was to reveal how problematic "Sophocles' subtly ambivalent view of human capacity, national ambition and leadership was in the wake of the Second World War" (p. 46). Brecht's *Antigone* starts with a body swinging before a door, one of two sisters clutching a knife, and Gestapo men entering the stage. As Steiner recounts, deserters and soldiers separated from broken units in Nazi Germany used to be "strung-up on Berlin lampposts" and "any attempt to cut down their fly-blown bodies was punishable by instant execution" (1986, p. 143). It was this the context that informed Brecht with the starting point of his *Antigone*. His play, therefore, commented on the brutality of the Nazi regime, which, between 1939 and 1945, executed "269 women" for "crimes against the state" (Steiner, 1986, p. 143). Brecht's play has been revived and imitated less often than Anouilh's, but "its reinterpretation of Sophocles has coloured many later versions, which also borrow from Brecht's style of performance" (Mee; Foley, 2011, p. 47).

Another work that re-imagines Sophocles' *Antigone* within the historical context of Nazi Germany is Rolf Hochhuth's novella *Die Berliner Antigone* of 1958. Here the protagonist is Anne, whose brother has been hanged and his body consigned to dissection. In fact, this was a common practice during World War II in the anatomy departments of Berlin's teaching hospitals (Steiner, 1986). After retrieving her brother's body and giving him a loving burial, Anne is sentenced to be beheaded. Steiner highlights that Hochhuth's Antigone "not only inters Polynices at the cost of her own life: she literally substitutes her body for his [her brother's]. This is, according to him, Hochhuth's intensification of the established motif of joint burial" in Sophocles' *Antigone* (Steiner, 1986, p. 143).

Athol Fugard's *The Island* of 1973 makes, according to Steiner (1986), an essential addition to the canon of adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The play is set on Robbens Island, South Africa, where two prisoners, John and Winston, prepare themselves to present *Antigone* for the prison staff and its white guests. Mee and Foley (2011) argue that the visual representation is crucial to the message of the play: by miming the physical elements within the prison cell, such as the chains, the bars and even the wardens, the actors who play John and Winston portray the state's brutal treatment of prisoners without replicating the brutality and oppression of the apartheid regime in South Africa. What is seen "is not only the effect of the state's brutality on its political prisoners, but the political prisoners themselves" (Mee; Foley, 2011, p. 17), whose presence, materialised in black bodies, cannot be denied by the audience. Mee and Foley (2017) emphasise that *The Island* was in itself an act of defiance against the state, for it was illegal, under the yoke of the apartheid regime, to discuss the South African prison system openly.

Other recent adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* have been praised for their literary prowess and capacity to address contemporary issues. Anne Carson's *Antigonik* of 2012, published halfway through the Obama's administration of the United States, has, according to Dawn Tripp (2019), a subversive and distinctly modern torque, while portraying a woman's strategic resistance against a tyrannical state. Žižek's *Antigone* of 2016, for its part, imagines three different outcomes for the conflict between Antigone and Creon. Žižek's premise is, according to himself, that such a staging, intended to be "an ethic-political exercise" (Žižek, 2016, p. 24), confronts the audience "with a true Antigone for our times" (Žižek, 2016, p. 24).

Mee and Foley (2011) remind us of that numerous versions of *Antigone* are still being written and produced, providing critical commentary on different societies of contemporary times. To illustrate their point, Mee and Foley mention some of these versions:

Antigone's Emigration, written and directed by the Syrian actor/playwright/director Jihad Saad, addresses violence and displacement in the Arab world and its effects on women; Miyagi Satoshi's *Antigone* in Tokyo mounted a pointedly female individual challenge to the political authority of a collective Creon played by multiple actors; in Victor Ardit's Greek production, Antigone questions the politics of the Left, asserting her independence from the ideology of her fellow Leftists by insisting on burying the body of a partisan sacrificed to internal disputes among the Left; and two productions of *Antigone* in Manipur, a police state in north-east India, have been used to articulate a regional identity that is distinct from, if not in opposition to, the 'national' identity and culture imposed on Manipur's citizens by the Indian government (Mee and Foley, 2011, p. 3).

Mee and Foley (2011) advocate that adaptations of *Antigone*, like the ones mentioned in the previous passage, continue to be made because of the continuous relevance of the play's theme (1) and the quality of the play's form (2). For them, if the story of Antigone is told again and again, it is because: 1) "certain human, social struggles repeat themselves at intervals in history, and a complex rich structure like the narrative of *Antigone* becomes – sadly – meaningful again and again" (p. 5); and 2) the tragic form "seems to have the capacity to give expression to the nature of catastrophe in each moment" (p. 5). In sum, Steiner, Walton, Mee, and Foley all acknowledge the constancy of the Antigone myth in Western arts and thoughts: a myth that appears and reappears in different moments in history and in different societies, proving itself to be both timeless and ubiquitous.

2.5 IRISH ANTIGONES

McDonald (2002) states that *Antigone* "may be the most popular play in Ireland in the twentieth century" (p. 42), while Macintosh makes the case that *Antigone* is Ireland's national play (2011). The Irish are this much drawn to the myth of Antigone, for Younger (2006), because of "their familiarity with her predicament" (2006, p. 149). She relates the oppression perpetrated by the English government and by Creon, respectively, on the Irish people and on Antigone. Macintosh (2011) echoes Younger by stating that Antigone has served "as an embodiment of feminine

resistance to colonial oppression" (p. 90). She adds that Antigone also embodies resistance to patriarchy, and emphasizes that in Ireland, as in ancient Greece, burying the dead is a "vital" ritual (Macintosh, 2011, p. 101).

Ironically, it was the English who brought Greek tragedy to Ireland. They thought, as McDonald (2002) posits, that the classics would offer "healthy examples of the governed accepting the power of government" (p. 37). The Irish, instead, would use this literature, with its democratic vision of Athens and emphasis on ethics, to feed their own subversive protests in the twentieth century, concealing "the direct statement of their desires behind the mask of Greek tragedy" (McDonald, 2002, p. 37). That was what playwrights as diverse as Synge, O'Casey, Murray, Heaney, Kennelly, Paulin, Friel, Carr and others did, setting up resonances from the Greek world to the Irish reality (Walton, 2002).

McDonald (2002) writes about the characteristics that distinguish Irish versions of Greek tragedy, such as:

allusions to Irish history; anachronisms; poetry; philosophy; folk sayings; humour; at times sexual explicitness and scatological language; references to drink and drunks; colloquialisms; literary allusions and wordplay; repetition of words; rhyme and rhythm; the use of music and song; references to a Christian God; rituals; prayers; a sense of mystery, the inexplicable, and the spiritual; memory; "ordinary" people rather than nobles; gravitation towards human rights and freedom; and struggles over or identification with the land (p. 79; 80).

Antigone, a play about human rights and freedom *par excellence*, became the favourite Greek tragedy of Irish playwrights in the twentieth century, but only in the 1980's. As early as 1907, however, W. B. Yeats had considered staging *Antigone*, once "he was naturally drawn to Sophocles, the tragedian of heroism" (McDonald, 2002, p. 42). Yeats' plans were shelved, though, and what survived of them were a few lines in his poem "A Woman Young and Old" from *The Winding Stair* of 1933 (Murray, 1991).²³ The lacuna of productions of *Antigone* in Ireland before and after Yeats is described by Murray (1991) as "strange" (p. 116). It is in fact curious to note that it took so long for *Antigone* to become Ireland's most popular play of the twentieth century.

The first three adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* staged in Ireland all date back to 1984: Aidan Carl Mathews' *The Antigone*, Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* and

²³ The final verses of this poem are the epigraph to this dissertation.

Brendan Kennelly's *Sophocles' Antigone*. In Ireland, the year of 1984 was important for human rights, particularly the rights of women. McDonald (2002) remembers that this was the year when "the divorce referendum was rejected, just after abortion rights had been rejected, and the year when the Criminal Justice Bill gave increased powers to the police" (p. 52; 53). Mathews, Paulin and Kennelly were then attracted to the Antigone myth "through an apocalyptic vision" (Murray, 1991, p. 129) of those political and social events. Each of these Irish playwrights, nonetheless, had a particular approach to drama and the Irish political situation.

In Aidan Carl Mathews' *The Antigone*, described by McDonald (2002) as "a postmodern collage of power politics" (p. 59), Antigone is imagined as a "hypochondriac resident of the proletariat's slums and a member of a degenerate acting troupe", who has been performing "the same role for millennia in a post nuclear contaminated prison state located in Thebes/Dublin" (Remondou, 2022, p. 224). At the first performance of the play, the audience was handed copies of the Criminal Justice Bill of 1984 that gave increased powers to the police, and the text of the bill was read at the end of the first act and during the intermission (McDonald, 2002). As Murray (1991) points out, Mathews' *The Antigone* is "the most political" of the three Irish Antigone versions of 1984 with its "focus upon repression" (p. 125).

Mathews' Antigone's crime is to paint the letter P, initial of Polyneices and Peteocles (her brothers), on walls. McDonald (2002) describes her as "weak" and "inarticulate", once she "lets others rant and rave about her" (p. 58). As "a quiet protester", Mathew's Antigone brought to Irish audiences' minds the many IRA hunger-strikers of Maze Prison (McDonald, 2002). At the end of the play, Antigone goes missing, to which Creon and Heman, here the chief of police, disperse the audience telling them to go home once there is nothing they can do. For Murray (1991), the self-conscious theatricality applied by Mathews in his Antigone serves to further the main theme of the play, namely "violence" (p. 58).

Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* uses the language of the Irish North to place us in its modern locale: while Creon, from his palace marked by "triangles" and "masonic symbols" (Paulin, 1985, p. 9), speaks like an intransigent unionist politician, Antigone, "victim of one-way communication" (Murray, 1991, p. 122), is sympathetic "in her defending of the rights of the individual and the family" (McDonald, 2002, p. 53; 54). The premise of this version is, in Murray's words, that "we are in Belfast and Thebes simultaneously" (1991, p. 120). The words of Tiresias also, according to McDonald

(2002), suit the Irish landscape of The Troubles' never-ending strife when he says: [...] "Now do much blood's been split / there's none can call a halt / to those thrawn and jaggy hates / deep-rooted in your state" (Paulin, 1985, p. 53; 54). Murray (1991) boldly affirms that the relationship between the myth of Antigone and the Northern-Irish situation is "the reason behind the whole enterprise of Paulin's version" (p. 122).

In relation to the political implications of Antigone for Northern Ireland, Paulin, according to Murray (1991), "attends to some unfinished business" with Conor Cruise O'Brien (p. 123). Notorious Irish diplomat, politician, writer, historian and academic, O'Brien had demonstrated sympathy for Ismene in his *States of Ireland* (1972), arguing that her "commonsense and feeling for the living" could make "the more needful, if less spectacular element in human dignity" (p. 159). For O'Brien (1972), the "disabilities" of Catholics in Northern Ireland were "real", but it was not worth precipitating "riots" and "murder" to remove them (p. 158). Antigone, "an uncompromising element in our being", was "as dangerous in her way as Creon" (O'Brien, 1972, p. 158), as she did not calculate the serious consequences of her actions. The same went with the young back then during civil rights movements in the 1960's and 1970's. With *The Riot Act*, Paulin responded to O'Brien with a play that portrayed Antigone as a rebel heroine and civil war in Northern Ireland as inevitable.

Brendan Kennelly's *Sophocles' Antigone* depicts Creon as Cromwell, "the man responsible for the murder of up to a quarter of the population of Ireland in the seventeenth century" (McDonald, 2002, p. 59). Sophocles' single reference to money in Creon's speech is expanded in Kennelly's version to a whole lamentation, making money an issue as important as power. For McDonald (2002), this emphasis makes the words spoken in the play resonate with the Irish, given Ireland's history "of poverty and deprivation" (p. 60). McDonald also highlights Kennelly's concern with feminism, quoting Antigone's response to the chorus' commentary: "What man knows anything of woman? If he did he would change from being a man as men recognize a man" (Kennelly, 1986, p. 35).

Murray (1991) also notices Kennelly's Antigone's feminist lines, which "speed her on her way" up to the role of heroine (p. 119). For Murray, *Sophocles' Antigone*, by Kennelly, tells a "very simplified version of the Antigone story" (p. 117): Creon, the truly tragic figure of the play, embodies fanaticism and its destructiveness, which is "the unifying issue of the play" (p. 119). In a speech about his determination to act,

Kennelly's Creon claims to stand for both the living and the unborn. For this reason, Murray draws a parallel between Kennelly's Creon's morality and the morality of the Irish voters of the abortion rights referendum of 1983. The underlying message of Kennelly's play would be thus that "determination to fix and apply a social and moral vision that is inflexible only leads to catastrophe" (Murray, 1991, p. 119).

Macintosh (2011) argues that the particularly local potency of the 1980's Irish *Antigones* was founded upon "pre-existing cultural affinities and practices that allied Antigone to Erin, the virginal emblematic figure of Romantic Irish Nationalism", and to Deirdre, the mythological figure of "a strong woman who challenges the dictates of the patriarchal system" (p. 92). Mathews, Paulin and Kennelly's *Antigones*, merged with Irish mythological figures that embodied nationalism and female resilience in the Irish cultural imaginary, were indeed Irish *Antigones*. The Deirdre/Antigone composite is fundamental in Kennelly's play: his Antigone, as well as Deirdre before her, are creatures "of the wild who resist the yoke of patriarchy" (Macintosh, 2011, p. 97).

After the generation of Irish *Antigones* of the 1980s came the generation of Irish *Antigones* of the 2000s: Conall Morrison's *Antigone* of 2003; Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* of 2004; and Owen McCafferty's *Sophocles' Antigone in a New Version* of 2008. Gotsi (2012) notices that the "writers of the turn of the millennium, living in a globalized area, and with a more settled Ireland, locate the reworking of the myth within a more international outlook" (p. 2). In fact, Conall Morrison portrays Antigone as a suicide bomber in the Middle East in his *Antigone*, while Seamus Heaney addresses the invasion of Iraq by the United States in *The Burial at Thebes*. As Rosa (2020) observes, Heaney's play brings a critical viewpoint of its times as similarities can be observed between the subject "of power abuse in both [Heaney's] Creon and American President George W. Bush's government" (p. 508).

Macintosh (2011) also notes that Heaney adopts speech rhythms of George W. Bush in his Creon, while emphasizing that Heaney "affords Creon tragic dignity" (p. 101). Heaney's Creon final lines are: [...] "The hammer blow of justice / Has caught me and brought me low. / I am under the wheels of the world. / Smashed to bits by a god" (Heaney, 2004, p. 53). It was in fact Heaney's intention to avoid transforming Creon into a cipher for President Bush, what, in his words, would have been "reductive and demeaning, both of Sophocles' art and of the huge responsibility the White House must bear for national security" (2004, p. 422). Heaney's central

concern with his play, exemplified by the word “burial” in its title, was to address in the verses of his translation of Sophocles “the solemnity of death, the sacredness of life and the need to allow in every case the essential dignity of the human creature” (Heaney, 2004, p. 426).

Owen McCafferty’s *Sophocles’ Antigone in a New Version* of 2008 portrays Creon as “a pragmatist rather than a tyrant, an honest broker rather than spin merchant” (Macintosh, 2011, p. 102). In his version, according to Macintosh, “the ruler rather than the ruled comes under scrutiny” (p. 103). Creon’s centrality marginalizes Antigone almost to the point of even “underplaying the importance of the burial” (Macintosh, 2011, p. 102), which, in Macintosh’s words (2011), is no longer here “the exclusive preserve of Irish womanhood” in a post-Celtic tiger and post-feminist world (p. 103). Ireland, in its new condition as an emergent state, has in McCafferty’s play fully come of age: heroic acts of feminine resistance may still be plentiful and necessary, but “it is the menfolk who now merit scrutiny and our sympathies” (Macintosh, 2011, p. 103).

More recently, two versions of *Antigone* written by Irish playwrights relocate its myth and the conflict between Creon and Antigone within the context of the pandemic of COVID-19: Darren Murphy’s *X’ntigone after Sophocles* of 2022 and Colin Murphy’s *#ANTIGONE* of 2023 (written for the radio). In Darren Murphy’s *X’ntigone after Sophocles*, the government of Thebes, led by Creon, has just administered vaccines to the population and is now preparing a festival to celebrate liberty and the end of social distancing measures. Meanwhile, *X’ntigone*, who thus identifies herself, is locked on quarantine and is confronted by Creon. In this play, according to its synopsis, “political expediency meets the voice of a generation who wants to tear down the power structures that have ill-served a crumbling state” (Murphy, 2022). It seems that Murphy’s *X’ntigone* fits into what Remondou writes about the myth of Antigone in contemporary Irish drama: having moved past a postcolonial premise, Antigone has become now a “potent feminist subject that confronts in performance the ever-growing injustices of neoliberal capitalism, sexism, racism, and ecocide” (Remondou, 2022, p. 219).

In *#ANTIGONE*, Colin Murphy brings the myth of Antigone to the present, telling “the story of a plague, a refugee crisis, a coup and a body too dangerous to be buried” (GoLoud, 2023). General Críon, the first female head of the armed forces, “has seized power in a coup, in a bid to defend the State from the influx of refugees

that are desperately trying to escape the plague” (GoLoud, 2023). When Antigone’s brother’s body washes up on the beach, Antigone flouts Críon’s edict that bans the burial of newly arrived refugees in Ireland, risking both infection and punishment. Murphy’s response to the pandemic of COVID-19, *#ANTIGONE* draws out contemporary resonances, provoking insight into the social-political fault lines of recent history, including “the trauma of not being able to properly mourn our dead; the extreme restriction of individual rights [...]; the heightened fear of the other; and the potential abuse of an emergency to consolidate state power” (GoLoud, 2023).

Translating *Antigone* and other Greek tragedies in Ireland is a rich and ongoing tradition of Irish drama. In the 1980’s, a first generation of Irish *Antigones* responded to times in which human rights were violated in the Republic of Ireland, where police had just been given increased powers and women just been denied of their rights, and in Northern Ireland, where unionists and nationalists still fought for their freedom. In these Irish *Antigones*, Antigone was portrayed as a heroine who fought a tyrannical Creon and an oppressive and patriarchal state, mirroring the image of Erin and Deirdre – Irish mythological figures that embodied nationalism and female resilience. In the 2000’s, in times of economic prosperity in the republic and peace in the north (the Good Friday Agreement, ending point of The Troubles, was signed in 1998), a second generation of Irish *Antigones* addressed the same issues of human rights violations, but within a more international perspective, commenting critically on George W. Bush’s administration of the USA during the invasion of Iraq and on the treatment of Palestinians in the Middle East. Creon, in this second generation, is portrayed as a pragmatic leader who falls into misfortune with dignity. Finally, in the 2020’s, a third generation of Irish *Antigones* has relocated the myth of Antigone and the Antigone-Creon conflict for pandemic times, addressing human rights-related concerns that were raised during the pandemic of COVID-19 in Ireland and in most Western societies.

Walton (2002) posits that Ireland has “the last English-speaking contemporary drama that still sees the theatre as the natural place to juggle ideas”, and “it is no accident” that Irish settings still work to give the Greek classics a new dimension (p. 8). Any Antigone, he boldly states, “can be an Irish Antigone”, for “all that is necessary are the social or political conditions and these myths will work their magic” (2002, p. 35). In fact, an approach via the Greeks contains within their “given” situations and characters the “precious power of metaphor” (Walton, 2002, p. 34).

Drawing from and tapping into this precious power, playwrights as diverse as Mathews, Paulin, Kennelly, Morrison, Heaney and McCafferty have reworked the myth of Antigone with their own approaches and views of Greek tragedy and drama, offering critical commentary on their times in their own local immediacy. It is within this tradition that Darren Murphy and Colin Murphy have written their Irish *Antigones* of pandemic and new troubling times.

2.6 COLIN MURPHY AND HIS POLITICAL THEATRE

Colin Murphy is a Dublin-based playwright whose works focus primarily on Irish political history. Writing for both the stage and the radio, he has made his name as one of Ireland's leading documentary playwrights, applying his resources as a research journalist to create plays that respond to Ireland's past and recent history.²⁴ Murphy's mostly adopted genre, documentary theatre, is described by Gary Fisher Dawson (1999) as "dramatic representation of societal forces using a close re-examination of events, individuals, or situations" (p. xii). With its care for detail and factual accuracy, this genre, as Dawson reminds us, adds to "the importance of theatre art in learning about life" (1999, p. xi).

Murphy's stage plays include *Guaranteed!* (2013), *Bailed out!* (2015), *Jack Duggan's War* (2015), *Inside the GPO* (2016), *Haughey/Gregory* (2019), *The Treaty* (2021), *A Day in May* (2022) and *The Asylum Workshop* (2023). *Guaranteed!* addresses the Irish government's response to the 2008 global financial crisis; *Bailed Out!* focuses on the negotiations that led the European Union and the IMF to rescue Ireland in 2010; *Jack Duggan's War* recounts the story of a young Irish officer who served and died in the Gallipoli campaign during World War I; *Inside the GPO* revisits the Easter Rising of 1916; *Haughey/Gregory* dramatizes the Gregory Deal of 1982; *The Treaty* portrays the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921; *A Day in May* examines the introduction of the Irish Marriage Equality Act of 2015; and *The Asylum Workshop* exposes abuses that occurred in Ireland's first public psychiatric hospital, the Richmond Asylum.

Murphy's radio plays include, besides *#ANTIGONE* (2023), *Roger Casement's "Apocalypse Now" – Africa & 1916*, first broadcast in 2016, *Hamlet*,

²⁴ Murphy writes a weekly column for the *Irish Independent*. He graduated in Politics and Philosophy at UCD.

Prince of Derry, first broadcast in 2020, and *The United States Versus Ulysses*,²⁵ first broadcast in 2021. *Roger Casement's "Apocalypse Now" – Africa & 1916* delves into the transformative journey of Sir Roger Casement, from a British diplomat to a fervent Irish nationalist; *Hamlet, Prince of Derry* re-imagines Shakespeare's classic tragedy in contemporary Ireland, incorporating elements such as YouTube rants, gaming sessions, and social media interactions; *The United States Versus Ulysses* dramatizes the 1933 court case that lifted the ban on James Joyce's *Ulysses in the United States*.

Murphy's plays dramatise political processes that precede and fuel historical conflicts, portraying contending parties, their modes of organisation, and the consequences of the outcomes achieved in each case. From war plays to conflicts involving revolutionaries and politicians, and disputes between bureaucrats and bankers, conservatives and LGBT activists, Murphy's theatre uncovers the politics of conflict and mechanisms of power. *#ANTIGONE* and *Hamlet, Prince of Derry* differ from the bulk of Murphy's work in that they do not depict historical events. However, both plays still tell stories that uncover mechanisms of power and the individual and collective consequences of political decisions taken within conflict scenarios.

Barry Houlihan (2018) postulates that Murphy's docu-archival works have "enabled audiences to stand as witness, active in the work's own re-situating of the historical affect, in place of being passive bystanders under more traditional audience–performer binaries" (p. 829). A similar process seems to happen with Murphy's adaptations of classics: by re-imagining well-known characters and stories under contemporary circumstances, Murphy invites his audiences to actively re-situate their understanding and appreciation of these ancient characters and stories. Preserving the core of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Sophocles' *Antigone* in *Hamlet, Prince of Derry* and *#ANTIGONE*, Murphy rewrites these plays to attend to his own and his audience's contemporary concerns, requiring from them renewed participation in their reception process.

In a recent interview, Murphy stated that if someone "is producing or adapting one of the classics it has to be about today. It has to feel relevant. You have to make it relevant to the current moment" (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 3). He describes himself as a "contemporary writer", one who has "his own integrity", and has "total

²⁵ This also became a stage play, which opened on 4 May 2025 at the Irish Arts Center in New York City.

freedom” when working with the classics (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 8). He describes his process as follows:

It's like coming into the office every day and sitting down with Shakespeare or Sophocles and asking them what they do overnight; and having the temerity, the cheek, the impertinence to take what they have done and see if I can refine or rework it for my audience and my concerns (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 8).

Murphy reveals that he takes the necessary freedoms to rework and refine the classics to make them contemporary plays. His contemporary audiences are thus challenged to learn new stories based on ancient stories. This active participation of the audience is even greater in audio drama, once the listeners are the ones who do “more images of work and, therefore, more individualistic work in interpreting the drama”. Murphy describes this feature of audio drama as “exciting” (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 7). He also highlights that there is an element of “intimacy” involved in the act of hearing to audio drama, and that he is “attracted to the idea” of writing for this form (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 7).

#ANTIGONE, Murphy’s latest radio play, was written during the pandemic of COVID-19 and addresses issues that were reflected in this period. For Murphy, *Antigone* is probably the Greek drama that “resonates the most with modern politics”, as it is about “the individual versus the state” (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 3). Upon it occurring to him, “Antigone, which is in part about the importance of funeral rights and how we honour the dead, which was of course something that became problematic in the site of conflict during COVID, might have particular resonance with that moment” (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 3). As can be perceived in Murphy’s own words, the political context of the COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in the conception of *#ANTIGONE*.

Whether in journalism or writing drama for the stage or the radio, Murphy has established himself as one of Ireland’s finest contemporary writers of Irish history, uncovering the politics of conflict and the mechanisms of power in his theatre. With his documentary plays, such as *Guaranteed!*, incredibly well-received by audiences and critics alike, he has allowed audiences to re-situate their understanding and appreciation of historical events of Irish political history through the magic of drama. Murphy does the same with his late adaptations of ancient classics for the radio, such as *#ANTIGONE*, in which audiences are challenged to learn new stories from

ancient ones, questioning their previous understandings and reinterpreting them in contemporary times.

3 AUDIO DRAMA, COVID-19, AND THE ADAPTATION OF ANCIENT CLASSICS FOR CONTEMPORANEITY

3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUDIO DRAMA

No precise date can be attributed to the invention of the radio, for its technology emerged out of “an international mixture of theoretical physics” and “practical experimentation” conducted by various professionals (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 5). From 1908 onwards, nevertheless, audio drama became possible from the development of broadcasting and of “a style of performance and writing which engaged with the human ear and imagination” (Crook, 1999, p. 24). In the 1920’s, when radio became the world’s “first global electronic village” (Crook, 1999, p. 9), audio drama was established as a new medium for dramatic expression.

It is generally agreed that the first play written for radio was *A Comedy of Danger* by Richard Hughes, which was broadcast on 15 January 1924 (Crook, 1999). This play consciously used the potential of the radio form, since its story, set in a coal mine in Wales, takes place in the dark. The three main characters in the play need to “feel their way in the utter darkness and talk to each other as they do so. Their dialogue ranges from being generous and mutually supportive to, under the stress of the situation, violent” (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 16). The resulting play, the earliest example of a script written specifically for the radio, remains “compelling” and “alive”, as observed by Richard J. Hand and Mary Traynor (2011, p. 16).

Before Hughes’ *A Comedy of Danger* (1924), though, drama and literature were already being broadcast on the radio. Hand and Traynor (2011) elucidate that “the first radio institution” was “the reading of children’s stories at bedtime” (p. 14). Also popular in the early days of radio broadcasting were “Gilbert Sullivan operettas, extracts from Verdi and Puccini operas, adaptations of popular stage melodramas, and, most of all, productions of Shakespeare” (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 15), which took “the form of single voice soliloquy performances of well-known speeches (Crook, 1999, p. 32). Crook (1999) regards Shakespeare’s plays as “a natural forum for

communication through sound alone” for they rely “on imaginative sympathy” and on a “closer link with the oral tradition” (p. 33).

The international rise of radio was somewhat uneven, but nevertheless many nations “saw the appeal of radio broadcasting and embraced the technology with passion” (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 7). In the United States, KDKA station started broadcasting in 1920 and was “a huge success” (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 7); in the United Kingdom, the British Broadcasting Company started broadcasting in 1922. In the German Weimar Republic, radio programming embraced “a powerful and experimental period of audio drama production” (1999, p. 10), with Brecht being “a pioneer practitioner and significant theoretical philosopher on the artistic and social potential of radio” (Crook, 1999, p. 10). His play *Mann* was in fact adapted for radio broadcast in 1927.

In Ireland, Radio Éireann (RÉ) was founded in 1926 as one of the earliest projects of the newly established Free State, partly “as a response to the presence of the BBC” (Mahony, 2001, p. 11). By offering national news, sporting events, weather forecasts, and agricultural programming, RÉ created, according to Christina Hunt Mahony (2001), “a national listening nexus in the new nation that displaced, to some extent, regional and local Irish concerns” (p. 11). The formation of a national audience created opportunities for post-Independence Irish writers, including Sean O’Faolain, Frank O’Connor, Michael Farrell, and Mervyn Wall, who, as observed by Eileen Morgan-Zayache (2009), turned to the radio to find “native sources of revenue” and “remain in Ireland” (p. 52) during times of economic hardship.

The “golden age” of audio drama coincided with a period in which radio was “the primary electronic means of mass communication” worldwide, spanning the years “1922 to 1952” (Crook, 1999, p. 49). In this era, performances of plays, which were conducted live, followed mostly a thirty-minute format. Plays in this format and from that time are, for Hand and Traynor (2011), “easy to take in” and “driven by a sense of economy and structural robustness” (p. 19). Dialogue, sound effects, music and soundscape were effectively used in dramas, comedies and thrillers, generating “powerful cultural resonances” (1999, p. 24). Hollywood actors and music stars would commonly be cast in radio plays from this period (Hand; Traynor; 2011) – Frank Sinatra, for example, starred in *To Find Help* (1945), while Judy Garland starred both in *Drive-In* (1946) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1950).

Some seminal radio plays, such as Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* (1954) and John Houseman/Howard Koch's *The War of the Worlds* (1938), "have endured during radio's subsidiary status which followed the ascendancy of television" and "continue to have cultural and historical resonance" to this day (Crook, 1999, p. 24). *The War of The Worlds*, particularly, constitutes a triumphant example of the radio form, "exploiting the imagination of the listener as only radio can, matching technical and documentary verisimilitude with the utilization of the formula of classic horror and suspense narrative" (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 29). It stands "as extraordinary proof of the power of radio" as its broadcast became "a highly significant episode in the history of popular culture" (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 29).

Houseman/Koch's *The War of The Worlds* (1938) takes the concept of H. G. Wells' eponymous novel (1898) and redeploys it for the medium of live radio, recasting its narrative in the form of simulated breaking news. Reporter Carl Phillips (Frank Readick) narrates an alien invasion set in contemporary New Jersey, conveying both confusion and the immediacy of eyewitness account. The brilliant scriptwriting of Houseman and Koch, which is crafted to seem unscripted, captures "a sense of spontaneity" and creates "a greater sense of authenticity" (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 25).²⁶ This resulted in 1.7 million people out of the some six million who heard the play's original broadcast believing the events to be true, and "1.2 million feeling "genuinely frightened" (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 27). The broadcast soon became legendary and Orson Welles, who directed and acted in *The War of the Worlds*, secured his entry into Hollywood with the success of the play (Hand; Traynor; 2011).

Irish playwright Samuel Beckett represents another noteworthy case in the history of audio drama, exemplifying an innovative approach that employs sound and scriptwriting to challenge established conventions and foreground ambiguities. Conventionally, radio was and still is the purveyor of messages such as, for example, who killed whom, how, why. In Beckett's *All That Fall* (1957), however, mysteries and solutions do not unfold logically, but "are crossed by invasive noises, and leave a residue of unresolved ambiguity" (O'Leary, 2008, p. 7). Similarly, there are no findings and no announcements in *Embers* (1959). In fact, "radio audience's demand

²⁶ As observed by Hand and Traynor (2011), Frank Readick's portrayal of Carl Phillips closely models the vocal tone used by reporter Herbert Morrison during the 1937 Hindenburg airship disaster, in which 37 people died. Morrison's eyewitness account of the Hindenburg disaster is one of the most famous examples of live radio broadcasting for its spontaneity and authenticity.

for fact is consistently undercut by verbal and phrasal repetition, by unanchored visual image, and by rhetorical and sonic excess” in Beckett’s radio drama (p. 8). Joseph S. O’Leary (2008) claims that Beckett discovered and exploited an affinity between radio and the Theatre of the Absurd: subversion of logic, shifts from farce to tragedy, repetitions, all could be “effected more easily in the radio medium where the solid reality of stage props does not get in the way and where space and time are more easily made elastic” (p. 5).

Despite the end of its golden era, audio drama still thrives. Even with the rise of television, the BBC has maintained its commitment to radio, and there continues to be more BBC radio channels than television channels (Hand; Traynor; 2011). BBC Radio 4 broadcasts drama on a daily basis, as the BBC World Service and the BBC Radio 3 also do. In response to the digital age, the BBC launched a number of digital-only channels, including the BBC Radio 4 Extra, which features classic recordings and all-new commissioned works. Moreover, it is possible to listen to BBC radio dramas, written by playwrights as diverse as Tom Stoppard, Caryl Churchill and Lucy Caldwell, on the BBC Sounds catalogue online.

In Ireland, RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ’s main radio station, and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta (RnaG) broadcast regularly radio plays and fiction series, including original plays and literary adaptations. *Drama On One* presents dramatic writing and performances for radio every Sunday night at 8 pm. Radio plays are also available as audio on demand at *Drama On One*’s catalogue online. Playwrights such as Bernard Farrell, Zoë Comyns and Colin Murphy, among others, have had their plays broadcast in RTÉ’s *Drama On One*.

The advent of the internet marked a decisive turning point in the history of radio and audio drama. From 1994 onwards, the Internet and World Wide Web began to deliver sound services to a mass audience (Crook, 1999). Subsequently, the digital revolution and the information age that followed the creation of the personal computer “allowed dissemination through the internet and the efficient creation and packaging of audio materials” (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 69). As a result, new possibilities opened up for audio drama: audiences were then able to listen to radio plays in real time whenever they wanted to; to read texts synchronously with the sound; to roll the text on screen and start the play at any point; to click on marked words and get additional information; to see moving pictures that illustrated plays; to express their opinions about the plays; among other features (Crook, 1999).

With its culture of downloads, file sharing and podcasts, the internet has yielded a forum for the creation and consumption of audio art, both of collections of historical material and of all-new works for listeners. Hand and Traynor (2011) observe that nowadays there are “countless small-scale groups and companies that are producing a new generation of radio drama, many of which can be listened to as live streams via their own websites or as freely downloadable podcasts” (p. 72). Murphy’s *#ANTIGONE* (2023) belongs to this generation: It is freely available online to listeners with reliable internet access on GoLoud’s podcast *Drama On Newstalk*, as well as via iOS and Android platforms.

3.2 THE CODES OF AUDIO DRAMA AND ITS IMAGINATIVE SPECTACLE

A radio play is essentially composed of sound and its absence. All sounds, explains Crook (1999), have “a hue – a spectrum of nature” (p. 76). They can be defined scientifically in terms of “oscillation, reverberation, pitch, decibels, or equalization” (Crook, 1999, p. 76). The crafting of sound in a radio play includes sounds of words, music and sound effects. Silence communicates that “there are no objects making sound” (Crook, 1999, p. 80). The auditory codes of audio drama that exist physically are, therefore, “speech, music, sounds and silence” (Crook, 1999, p. 64). It is through these that a radio play comes into being as a real object.

In audio drama, words articulated in the characters’ speech “retain the primary semiotic code because they have the power to signpost and contextualise” (Crook, 1999, p. 80). Without accurate signposting, as Crook (1999) points out, the fictionalisation that arises from the imagination of a radio play listener “has full reign” (Crook, 1999, p. 60). Once they help defining a clear meaning from the polysemic nature of various sounds, words and speech are used “to create the architecture and primary colours in sound imagery” (Crook, 1999, p. 80). Author of *Understanding Radio* (1986), Andrew Crisell, indeed places speech at the top of the hierarchy of audio drama codes, above music, sounds and silence.

Crook (1999) identifies three types of speech in audio drama: theatrical speech, textual speech and emanation speech. Theatrical speech, which is the most common one, is “the exchange of language in dialogue or the performance of action by a character” (p. 81). Textual speech, also known as “narration”, “acts upon the images” (p. 82) created by the imagination of the listener of a radio play. It can

“protect the credibility of characters while providing the visual landscape to enable the listener to perceive the environment” in his or her imagination (p. 82). Finally, emanation speech is characterised by the use of words that “are not completely heard or understood” (p. 82). This type of speech can be used “to strike up an enigma or mystery”, as well as to, for instance, “symbolise another character’s emotional and intellectual myopia in relation to the other characters in the story” (p. 83).

Music can be employed differently in a radio play, serving symbolic, indexical or iconic functions. A symbol, according to Crook (1999), is a communication sign that “has a meaning beyond its object” (p. 77). Music which communicates sentiment or emotion is, therefore, symbolic. Examples of symbolic music would be the sound of a violin playing a sad melody, or the sound of a saxophone playing a romantic song. Music is indexical when it establishes a connection or association with an object. Chopin’s “Death March” played in a church acoustic associates with the holding of a funeral, for instance. Finally, music is iconic “when it mimics rhythmically and in terms of tonality a natural sound” (p. 80). The sound of percussion, for example, can stand for many things, from footsteps to animal calls, earthquakes, machinery, and more.

Music in a radio play can also be used as sound effect. Fading a Beethoven symphony against jazz, Crook (1999) argues, could be used to “symbolise sacred and profane love forces” (p. 73); similarly, loss of memory could be symbolized with the “use of an insistent and repeated unfinished musical phrase” (p. 73). Musical pieces, however, “can have dangerous, divergent cultural resonances” (Crook, 1999, p. 73). “Amazing Grace”, for example, is widely perceived as a conventional Christian hymn, but in the southern United States it has acquired associations with the Ku Klux Klan and has been described as an anthem for this white supremacist group (Crook, 1999, p. 73).

Sounds in a radio play can also be iconic or indexical. An icon, as defined by Crook (1999), is “a representation or resemblance to an object” (p. 77). An example of an iconic sound would thus be “the sound of wind rustling through the trees” (Crook, 1999, p. 77), a representation of wind. An example of an indexical sound would be the sound of echoing footsteps that indicate that someone is walking down a deserted street – ambient sounds which “provide a pervasive definition of space and environment” are also known as “territorial sounds” (Crook, 1999, p. 88).

Ultimately, both iconic and indexical sounds work as signposts for listeners, helping them imagine action, mood, or setting. Crook (1999) notes, nevertheless, that sounds “often need to be symbolised by words” (p. 80), emphasizing that “every sound effect can be given additional coloration through dialogue and narration” (p. 73). Water, he exemplifies, can be either hot or cold, but if a character states an intention to have a hot bath, water then becomes hot.

Sounds and music in a radio play can be empathetic or unempathetic. Empathetic sounds are “introduced to match and enhance the emotions, feelings and mood of the drama scene” (Crook, 1999, p. 88). Unempathetic sounds are “emotionally discordant and indifferent” to “the context of the scene or action” (Crook, 1999, p. 88). An example would be “the playing of a joyful, Christmas time Viennese Waltz as a Jewish mother weeps over the arbitrary arrest and execution of her teenage son” (Crook, 1999, p. 88). For Crook (1999), unempathetic sounds have the potential to “strike up irony or tragedy or herald the potential of conflict and tension in the story” (p. 89).

Combining observations written by Andrew Crisell, Michel Chion and Lance Sieveking, Crook (1999) constructs a reliable vocabulary for critical concepts in sound design for audio drama. This research requires a differentiation between types of sound effects for the analysis of a radio play and its codes. For this reason, sound effects typically used in radio plays are subsequently defined and exemplified.

The realistic-confirmatory effect is a sound which “amplifies a signpost rooted in the dialogue” (Crook, 1999, p. 70). An example is the sound of a ship labouring in a storm that reinforces a storm first mentioned by a character. The realistic-evocative effect is a sound that suggests a mood, atmosphere, or context without relying on explicit dialogue, engaging the listener’s imagination through associative qualities. The sound of church bells, bees buzzing and a mowing machine, for instance, can create a rustic atmosphere and “a sense of peacefulness” (Crook, 1999, p. 71). The symbolic-evocative effect is “a sound symbol of mind state or being” (Crook, 1999, p. 71). These are sounds that do not correspond to concrete objects or actions but evoke a mental or emotional state for the listener, such as sounds of irregular metallic clangs that represent internal tension, or indistinct murmurs that suggest guilt or psychological unrest.

The conventionalised effect is produced with “easily identifiable sounds” that represent “objects and phenomena” (Crook, 1999, p. 71), such as the roar of a car

engine, the neigh of a horse, or the cry of a baby. These sounds convey “by way of cultural codification a mood, idea or feeling” (Crook, 1999, p. 71). The impressionistic effect, also known as “surrealistic effect”, is produced by sounds that relate to “the world of dream” (Crook, 1999, p. 73). Artificial voices or echoes that indicate the end of temporalism and mortality are examples.

Audio drama, in all its technical, literary, and performative elements, builds to create a phonic texture that depends, as explained by Crook (1999), on rhythm, the physical impact of the sound via the listener’s auditory perception, and, above all, on the listener’s imagination. The listener’s imagination is indeed capable of recreating “a full sensory spectrum of experience: colour and visual depth; olfactory perception; touch and texture; imaginary sound and taste” (p. 62). It is in the listener’s imagination, then, that the spectacle of audio drama takes place. For Crook (1999),

Radio’s imaginative spectacle presents a powerful dynamic: by giving the listener the opportunity to create an individual filmic narrative and experience through the imaginative spectacle the listener becomes an active participant and ‘dramaturgist’ in the process of communication and listening. This participation is physical, intellectual and emotional (p. 66).

Crook’s notion of the “imaginative spectacle” is fundamental to understand why audio drama offers an engaging experience to the audience. With no visible stage with sets and costumes as part of its narrative frame, the radio scene is completed only in the imagination of the listener of the play. This participation is physical because hearing is a physical act, but it is also intellectual and emotional because listeners imagine what is being performed, bringing their own memories and their own peculiar understanding of the world to the scene. In such an active role, the audience of a radio play engages in an individual filmic narrative and experience.

The quality of the mental imagery and filmic experience generated in the listener’s mind is shaped by the composition of sound, defined by Crook as the effective combination of elements that create meaning in a radio play (1999). Through the interplay of speech, music, sounds, and silence, the radio playwright can anticipate how the listener will imagine the scene and thereby foster the imaginative spectacle. In fact, Crook (1999) advocates that a significant factor in audio drama is that “its literary quality enables the creator of audio/radio drama to control space” (p. 9), which “lies in the physicality of aural experience and the psychological space of the mind’s imagination” (p. 36).

In 2022, the BBC issued guidelines for emerging radio playwrights, foregrounding the expressive possibilities of sound and silence. To help the listener's imagination create an entire world, they advise, playwrights should "use background sound to create atmosphere; choose a setting with a distinct aural environment and use those sounds to underscore the story; and use sound to cut between places and times" (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 16). The "silence, the pause, the space between the words is important", because audio drama is "not prose on the radio", and should be kept "lean and dramatic" (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 16). For the BBC, audio drama is "liberating, not restrictive – it can mean more variety, more locations, more action, more imagination, and more originality" (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 17). Playwrights are urged, therefore, to use the full potential of such a liberating medium.

The BBC's guidelines also extend to issues of emotion, closure, sensitivity, and audience reception. "No drama works without emotionally engaging characters", the BBC advocates (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 17). The audience must want to spend time with the characters and know what will happen to them. Everything must "earn its keep" and "emotionally tie the audience down" (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 16). Hence, "gratuitousness of any kind won't work – though something contentious put in meaningful context might" (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 17). Language is more "naked" and "potent" on the radio, and "simple often works best" (quoted in Crook, 2023, p. 16). A strong resolution that leaves audiences satisfied is also recommended.

In his latest book *Writing Audio Drama* (2023), Crook addresses "the boom in internet and online sound storytelling cultures" and advocates that audio drama offers "huge logistical advantages" (p. 2). Nowadays, with the spread of Wi-Fi and 5G access, the listener of audio drama can listen to plays, most of the times for free, at home, in the car, on the bus, or even at the beach. Headphones, now widely used, provide a more immersive and intimate experience to the listener, once they "enhance the perception of stereo" (Hand; Traynor; 2011, p. 70). Technological accessibility, combined with the intimacy of listening, allows audio drama to engage audiences in immersive and impactful ways.

Crook (2023) contends that audio drama is a deeply psychological and intimate form of art, which gives writers "the power to fashion stories that are emotional, truthful and thought-provoking" (p. 2). Interestingly, these qualities are also found in Greek tragedy, whose ultimate goal is the discharge of emotions by the emotions themselves. As previously discussed, catharsis is only achieved in Greek

tragedy when verisimilitude is obtained. This implies a pursuit of truthfulness in the representation of a serious action. As also previously discussed, Greek tragedy continues to resonate with writers who explore thought-provoking narratives about the human condition and social life.

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, theatres and performance venues worldwide were forced to close, making audio drama, which does not require a physically present audience, an attractive option for writers. In this pandemic context, The Arts Council of Ireland created crisis response grants as a way of funding money to artists who were then out of work.²⁷ Murphy applied to one of these grants and staged a rehearsal of an earlier version of *#ANTIGONE* using a video conferencing application. After this rehearsal, Murphy took the idea of *#ANTIGONE* to The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland,²⁸ which approved the production of the play (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025).

Murphy, who worked previously in radio stations as a journalist, regards radio as “hugely important in Ireland in disseminating politics and news” (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 6). For this reason, he explains, it felt as “a very natural feat” for him to tell a new story of *Antigone* on radio (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 6). One of the exciting things about audio drama, he says, is that “listeners are doing more images of work and, therefore, more individualistic work in interpreting the drama” (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 7). Murphy was therefore aware of the dynamics of radio’s imaginative spectacle and felt compelled to write an emotional and thought-provoking story for this medium.

Murphy also emphasizes the logistical advantages of audio drama in contemporaneity. He observes (Gonçalves; Bastos; 2025, p. 7):

[...] on a more mundane level, you can take it with you in your earphones. That’s very compelling for a writer: you know, to make something that people don’t need to come together – they can even sit down at the couch to experience it; they can hear it on the train or on the commute; or while walking the dog. There is an intimacy about that. You know, I consume a lot

²⁷ Established in 1951, The Arts Council of Ireland is a national government agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts of Ireland. Its role is to advocate, advise, invest and work in partnership with others, to cultivate a vibrant arts environment at the heart of Irish society. Source: <https://artscouncil.ie/about/>

²⁸ The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is Ireland’s national agency for developing and regulating the media landscape since 2023. It is committed to promoting and upholding fundamental rights, ensuring that Irish media landscape contributes to an open, democratic society. Source: www.bai.ie

of podcasts mostly on politics and history, so I'm very attracted to the idea of writing for that form.

In sum, audio drama generates an imaginative spectacle that engages listeners with the use of speech, music, sounds, and silence. Signposting is a key technique for playwrights to guide the audience's imaginative performance, mainly conveyed through speech. Intimacy constitutes a defining feature of audio drama, which privileges narratives that are emotional, authentic, and intellectually engaging, and which are best conveyed in a clear, economical, and purposeful manner. The conception and production of Murphy's *#ANTIGONE*, which happened during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifies how contemporary writers can harness the aesthetic and logistical possibilities of audio drama, amplified with the advents of Wi-Fi, 5G, and portable devices such as smartphones and headphones. Audio drama, in fact, can be considered a contemporary and liberating art form that generates spectacles from the interplay of sound composition and the human's immeasurable imagination.

3.3 THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19, POLITICS AND THEATRE

From 2020 to 2023, the pandemic of COVID-19 "decimated lives, crumbled down the economic structure, displaced millions, smashed, and speared the hopes of life" around the world (Roy, 2022, p. 62). By posing "the greatest challenge to the very survival and existence of the humankind since Second World War" (Roy, 2022, p. 68), the pandemic intensified the current human tragedy and crisis, defined by "hunger, unemployment, gender discrimination, diseases, rising crimes against humanity, cultural estrangement, and growing hardcore ideologies that accelerate the tendency of separatism and segregation" (Roy, 2022, p. 71). It produced a storm of social, political, economic, and cultural shocks, making "the life of the underprivileged people miserable and worse" (Roy, 2022, p. 73).

The sudden emergence of a new virus compelled states and international organisations to adopt forceful responses. On 11 February 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) decided to give COVID-19, whose initial outbreak had occurred in China in the end of 2019, the status of a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern". On 11 March 2020, the WHO characterised COVID-19 as a pandemic. Immediately afterwards, "many states took the decision to restrict the entry of

Chinese nationals and people who had been on the Chinese mainland to their respective territories” (Aaltola, 2022, p. 171). Before April in the same year, “all European states adopted legislation to compel their populations to reduce social contact” (Ó Cathaoir, 2021, p. 40).

From a legal perspective, some of the restrictions adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis were questionable. As observed by Katharina Ó Cathaoir (2021), stay-at-home orders, although legitimate measures for the containment of airborne viruses, “limit individuals’ ability to access adequate food, water, and healthcare, which can result in violations of rights to health, food, and social security” (p. 41). She identifies three public measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic as “problematic from a human rights perspective”: 1) “the failure to advance less restrictive measures”; 2) “the creep of criminalization into public health laws”, and 3) “states’ willingness to ignore scientific evidence” (p. 41), notably regarding the importance of physical exercise and social interaction for overall health. Ó Cathaoir (2021) criticises the reliance on criminal law to curb the spread of COVID-19, advocating that “using fines as a public health tool can undermine trust and impose disproportionate burdens on the poor” (p. 47).

Aaltola (2022) argues that in pandemic security emergency situations, the likely global sentiment yearning for leadership is of “taking care of one’s own community, where one feels more securely embodied” (p. 3). Consequently, the immediate global reflex to the pandemic of COVID-19 was that of “distancing and severing contact with the site of the unfamiliar and deadly disease” (p. 3). This distancing, however, fed existing stereotypical patterns of suspicion and prejudice, raising social tensions among different peoples and countries. Aaltola (2022) recalls what happened during the outbreak of the pandemic:

In the US, there were discussions that featured the expressive term “China virus”, while China declared that the disease had not originated in China but could have had its origins in the US. In the paranoid atmosphere of a pandemic, misinformation and disinformation are norms that reflect underlying power-political cleavages (p. 5).

Echoing Aaltola, Kim Yi Dionne and Fulya Felicity Turkmen (2020) argue that the pandemic of COVID-19 exacerbated the marginalization of already oppressed groups, including, among others, Chinese in the USA, Muslims in India, Africans in China, and Ivorians in Tunisia. Dionne and Turkmen use the concept of “othering” to

explain how this process of marginalisation unfolds in pandemic times: creating the “other” as targets of blame, majority groups build boundaries between and stigmatize marginal groups as “disease breeders” (p. 216). This happens because “racial and ethnic stratification continue in most, if not all, racially heterogeneous societies” (p. 214), while “racialized structures are embedded in power relations on local, national, and global scales” (p. 215).

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers were “often perceived as carriers of the virus, a threat, and a spreader of contamination in their villages” (Mishra, N.; Mishra, A. J., 2022, p. 190). In line with this, the Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. Antonio Guterres, asserted that the pandemic “spread hatred, xenophobia, scaremongering, blaming, and stigmatizing mainly against the vulnerable groups, minorities, migrants, and refugees” (Roy, 2022, p. 74). Similarly, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, observed that racial and ethnic minorities were “the worst victim of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the discriminatory policies of the Governments of some countries” (Roy, 2022, p. 74).

Both Dionne and Turkmen (2020) and Ó Cathaoir (2021) highlight how political actors exploited the COVID-19 crisis to advance their own agendas, whether by restricting immigration or by using public health laws to target outsiders. In Denmark, for instance, “an amendment to the immigration act was included in a bill to introduce stricter punishments for those who commit crimes connected to COVID- 19” (Ó Cathaoir, 2021, p. 46). This law specified “an unconditional custodial term connected to COVID- 19’ as a ground for deportation” (Ó Cathaoir, 2021, p. 46). For O’ Cathaoir, the Danish policy was “a reminder of how pandemics can be used to capitalize on xenophobia and distrust of minorities” (p. 46). Xenophobia, indeed, had been rising in the years prior to the pandemic in the western world, with the Mediterranean migration crisis provoked largely by the war in Syria, BREXIT, and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, whose discourse articulated anti-Mexican and anti-migration sentiments.

In Ireland, although immigrants make up an increasingly significant part of society, they face precarious employment conditions and sometimes even prejudice. According to the Central Statistics Office of Ireland (2025), there were 125,300 immigrants in the 12-months to April 2025, and this was the fourth successive 12-month period where over 100,000 people immigrated to Ireland. For Luz Pilar Rodrigues, Hazel O’Brien and Tom Boland (2023), “migrants are one of the groups

most prone to be engaged in precarious work” in Ireland (p. 213), with this precariousness being shaped by “the attributes of work in specific industries, such as agriculture, construction, and cleaning” (p. 215). In recent years, according to Rodrigues,

there has been a rise in anti-immigration sentiment in Ireland, which did not exist before. This has mainly resulted from the housing crisis in the country and the arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees as a consequence of conflicts and wars (2024, 8:25, my translation).²⁹

Although no public measure was implemented to discriminate immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland, authoritarian and antihumanitarian tendencies were revealed in the way emergency laws were enforced there. Between April and June 2020, legislation gave powers to Irish police to “direct persons to comply with the rules and to arrest individuals for failure to comply” (Ó Cathaoir, 2021, p. 46). The police became more visible in pandemic Ireland: “50,977 police checkpoints were set up between 8 April and 20 June 2020 to monitor compliance with restrictions on movement” (Ó Cathaoir, 2021, p. 46). In this period, minors reported “feeling targeted by police when outside, particularly if living in areas dominated by social housing”, while “reports of domestic violence increased by 25 percent” (Ó Cathaoir, 2021, p. 46). As Jyoti Ahlawat (2022) observes, “COVID-19 brought in its set of new problems amidst the old existing gender inequities” (p. 278).

Neha Mishra and Anindya J. Mishra (2022) argue that a gender lens is essential for understanding the pandemic, since women, particularly migrant women, were among the most vulnerable groups. According to UN Women, women migrant workers were disproportionately at risk from the impact of the pandemic “due to their crowded living conditions [...], narrower reach to healthcare and essential services, and exploitative working conditions” (quoted in Mishra, N.; Mishra, A. J., 2022, p. 187). Additionally, these vulnerable women faced “ideological and social conditioning of patriarchal values that operated at multiple levels” (p. 185). Consequently, they “got fewer wages; the burden of care was on them, and fewer resources were available to them” (p. 184).

²⁹ Original: Nos últimos anos tem realmente intensificado um sentimento anti-imigração na Irlanda que não existia antes, e isso vem principalmente por conta da crise de moradia no país e com a vinda de grandes números de migrantes e refugiados como consequências de conflitos e guerras nos últimos anos.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, digital connectivity allowed women, “who were more stressed as compared to men” (Ahlawat, 2022, p. 274), to “vent out their fears and anguish” (Ahlawat, 2022, p. 278). Many campaigns were started during the COVID-19 pandemic to rescue women who were facing domestic abuse, including #YouAreNotAlone, #DomesticAbuse, #WhenHomeNotSafe, #WhyIGiveToWin and #TogetherForHer. The posts, according to Ahlawat (2022), “ranged from those who were the victims sharing pictures of their assault injuries to posts from agencies extending support to anyone who could have been in a situation needing urgent help from domestic violence” (p. 276). The pandemic experience, therefore, showed the ability and potential of Hashtag feminism “to connect individual stories with collective action” (Ahlawat, 2022, p. 276), bridging the gap between agencies extending help and women in need – who were in fact affected by a sharp rise in domestic abuse during this period of unprecedented social restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a profound impact on the arts, including the theatre. As Murphy points out, one “very literal and visceral impact” of the pandemic was the closure of theatres and performance venues, which “ended up being more protracted” than initially anticipated (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 7). Moreover, the pandemic forced funding agencies, producers, and artists “to think about alternative ways of making drama and bringing drama to people” (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 7). For this reason, the pandemic “was creatively a provocation or a catalyst” (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 7), with audio drama emerging as an “opportunity” to continue doing theatre (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 6).

Similarly, Morgan Green, an American theatre director and co-artistic director of the Wilma Theatre in Philadelphia, credited audio drama with enabling her “to continue producing art” during the pandemic (Svich, 2022, p. 131). Dámaso Rodríguez, a Cuban American director and producer, also expressed enthusiasm for the potential of this medium. He has mentioned that, during the pandemic, he was particularly excited by “the idea of working with writers to adapt scripts that could thrive, or even be enhanced, as a listening experience” (Svich, 2022, p. 93). By adapting *The Berlin Diaries* (2017), by Andrea Stolowitz, and *Magellanica* (2018), by E. M. Lewis, into audio drama, Rodríguez claims to have invited “sound designers and composers to create something exhilarating for listeners” (Svich, 2022, p. 93).

During the pandemic, Hassan Abdulrazzak, a playwright and writer of Iraqi origin based in London, was commissioned to write a radio play called *The Fireman*,

inspired by records of Yemeni sailors who arrived in Britain in the 1920's and 1930's. His account of his artistic interests highlights the potential of audio drama as a medium that combines both literary and logistical advantages:

I have always been fascinated by plays that did not require much physical interactions or props or sets. For me such work is pure theatre. People just saying words and the words carry the action. They can hurt, heal, instigate desire or hate. Just words uttered changing the charge in the room [...] This could be under conditions of social distancing (Svich, 2022, p. 208; 209).

Lauren Gunderson, an American playwright and writer, shares Abdulrazzak's optimistic view of the potential of audio drama and further encourages artists to write for this medium. For her, "the gates of traditional theatre" were "thrown open" by the COVID-19 pandemic, and playwrights should surprise and shock audiences, disrupting the way things had been done before (Svich, 2022, p. 221). She describes the performances delivered to her through her headphones as "riveting, intimate, profound" (Svich, 2022, p. 222). Virtual theatre, whether on Zoom or streamed, offers, in Gunderson's words, "unparalleled democracy, affordability and accessibility".

Although Murphy expresses excitement in writing dramas for the radio, regarded by him as an important medium in Irish culture, he is doubtful about the prospects of audio drama in post-pandemic theatre. His opinion is that audio drama "hasn't had the podcast boom that talk radio has had" and is generally "a little neglected" (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 7). Murphy highlights that RTÉ does not get "huge exposure in terms of slots on live radio" (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 7). Nevertheless, he remains "hopeful that in the podcasting online space there is room for more growth" (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 8).

Another consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts concerns the creative stimulus it generated. Murphy elaborates on how the pandemic affected his own artistic practice:

I found the experience of the pandemic very stimulating creatively because I think societal stresses are creatively stimulating; the kind of things that we respond to that are instinctively very political. I find it very provocative. So, for me, it was quite a rich time in terms of thought (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 8).

Murphy considers that the Irish government's response to the pandemic "tipped the scales too much in the direction of restrictions and weighed freedoms and rights a little too lightly" (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 4). The social stresses generated thereafter compelled him to work on his *#ANTIGONE*. Interestingly, Carlo Gébler, author of *I, Antigone* (2021), claims that whenever people are "in trouble", they "revert to the literature of the ancients" (2019, p. 8). This is exactly what Murphy did with *#ANTIGONE*, bringing Greek tragedy and audio drama together in pandemic and troubling times.

In short, the pandemic generated profound and multifaceted stresses, reinforcing cultural estrangement, gender discrimination, racism, and other pre-existing societal issues. In the face of injustices and potential human rights violations, citizens were compelled to take a stance, aligning themselves with discourses that were often instrumentalised by political actors to advance their own agendas. If on the one hand the pandemic produced real human conflicts and dramas, often mediated on social networks, on the other it provoked artists to respond to new times in innovative ways. For playwrights as diverse as Murphy, Green, Rodríguez, Abdulrazzak, and Gunderson, audio drama, despite not being a new medium, provided a platform by which they could respond creatively to the challenges imposed by the pandemic. It now remains to wait and assess whether this art form will experience growth in post-pandemic times.

3.4 RECENT THEORIES ON THE ADAPTATION OF CLASSICS FOR CONTEMPORANEITY

Reconsidering ideas of textual authority, Roland Barthes (1977) defines a text as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash", being "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (p. 146). Drawing on this notion, some writers have been subsequently framing translation and adaptation not as mechanisms of faithful transpositions of authoritative meanings, but as mechanisms "of new creation" which can branch off into "possibilities of hermeneutic openness" (Griffiths, 2017, p. 78). This also applies to the adaptation of classical works for contemporary contexts, a practice frequently undertaken by writers interested in creatively exploring the potential of drama to offer critical commentary on social and political issues.

Classics are defined by Ítalo Calvino (1981) as books which come to us “bearing the aura of previous interpretations and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed” (p. 5). Classics are, therefore, intrinsically multidimensional and polysemic texts that, in this way, acquire a life of their own. For Žižek (2016), treating the classical work as “open” is “the only way” to keep it “alive” (p. xii). Reversely, sticking to the “traditional letter” is “the safest way to betray the spirit of the classic” (p. xii). Žižek argues that the “to be faithful to a classic work is to take such as risk”, making it point “towards the future” (p. xii).

Griffiths (2017), herself also the author of another adaptation of *Antigone* (2015), argues that a radical reconfiguration of a classic, in its innovation, can shake up preconceived ideas and engage audiences in a dialogue between the past and the present. For her, the duty of care of the adapter is to translate Greek drama’s communal responsibility in a more experiential way, resurrecting the original text instead of watching over it. By saying this, Griffiths emphasizes the value of innovation, subversion of expectations, and experience in the reworking a classic for the present days.

Jorge Larrosa Bondía (2002) explains the etymology of the word experience: it comes from the Latin *experiri*, to prove (to experience); the root is “*periri*, which is also found in *periculum*, danger” (p. 25, my translation).³⁰ By definition, therefore, experience implies the idea of something new, of putting oneself at risk. Flávio Desgranges (2017) argues that this understanding allows us to think the dramatic experience as “perdition in language, as invention of possibilities, of making the unknown, the unsaid, sound as a path of production of knowledge and subjectivities” (p. 16, my translation).³¹ In the same sense, Eleonora Fabião (2009) argues that an experience is necessarily transformative and always determines a before and an after.

A successful adaptation of *Antigone* for the present times therefore implies the possibility of experimenting, of putting oneself at risk, of transforming oneself, of making the unknown sound, of producing knowledge and of producing subjectivities. To this end, Bird (2020) argues that the adapter must decide on the facts that will

³⁰ Original: [...] *periri*, que se encontra também em *periculum*, perigo.

³¹ Original: [...] perdação na linguagem, como invenção de possibilidades de fazer soar o desconhecido, o não dito, como percurso de produção de conhecimentos e de subjetividades.

constitute the backstory of his or her characters in a personal process that should be “instinctive, reckless and licensed by whims” (p. 88). For her, the new story must gain new life and, because of that, “myths can always be further mythologized” (p. 87).

Similarly, Murphy emphasises that adaptation offers him total artistic freedom (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025). He mentions having only a duty of care “to his audience” and his own “integrity” (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 8). For him, the classics are “robust” texts, which become “strengthened” by “being taken apart or teased out anew” (Gonçalves; Bastos, 2025, p. 8). His ideas are consonant with those of Žižek, Griffiths, and Bird, who all frame adaptation as a mechanism of new creation that branches off into new possibilities and subjectivities.

Considering that “the scenic text is only constituted as a work of art at the moment it is processed by the spectator” (Desgranges, 2017, p. 18, my translation),³² it is indispensable to acknowledge the active role of the reader in the process of reimagining classical works in contemporary times. For Desgranges (2017), assigning meanings to a text means establishing meanings in relation to us, an act that requires “willingness to let yourself be affected by the object, to let yourself be affected by the fact” (p. 17, my translation).³³ We can therefore attribute two fundamental poles to the artistic event: “a stimulating proposition and an available participant” (Desgranges, 2017, p. 33).³⁴

The act of reading – an act because it implies the idea of production and invention – is constituted as a fundamental aspect of the theatrical event (Desgranges, 2017). For Desgranges (2017), reading, when understood as an experience,

invests radically in the conquest of autonomy by the spectator, who needs to constitute his/her own experiential path and the production of meanings. An achievement that, even if it sometimes exposes uncertainties and mistakes, bets on the production of singularities, free from the truths previously consecrated by others. Reception is made as a historical experience, from the present and in the present, in which the reader needs to make use of his/her own experience (p. 48, my translation).³⁵

³² Original: [...] o texto cênico se constitui como obra no momento em que é processado pelo espectador.

³³ Original: [...] disponibilidade para se deixar atingir pelo objeto, para se deixar atravessar pelo fato.

³⁴ Original: [...] uma proposição estimulante e um participante disponível.

³⁵ Original: [...] investe radicalmente na conquista da autonomia pelo espectador, que precisa constituir seu percurso experiencial e a própria produção de sentidos. Uma conquista que, mesmo que por vezes exponha incertezas e enganos, aposta na produção de singularidades, livre das verdades previamente consagradas por outrem. A recepção se faz como experiência histórica, do presente, no presente, em que o leitor precisa valer-se da própria experiência.

Therefore, reimagining classical works in contemporary times requires openness, innovation, and transformation, both on the part of adapters and audiences. While the adapter proposes his or her own version of the classic, often subverting expectations and further mythologizing the source text, the audience allows itself to be affected by the proposal, producing subjectivities based on their own experiences and views of the world. Ultimately, it is this dialogue that underpins the transformative potential of adaptations of classical works in contemporary contexts.

4 A CONTEMPORARY AND COMPELLING NEW IRISH ANTIGONE

4.1 #ANTIGONE AND THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF GREEK TRAGEDY: A HISTORICAL, CONTEXTUAL, FORMAL, AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS.

#ANTIGONE was first broadcast at Newstalk FM in October of 2023 and is still available in the “Drama on Newstalk” section of the GoLoud’s online streaming platform. The play, conceived and produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, is the latest addition to the canon of Irish adaptations of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, composed by Mathews’ *The Antigone* (1984), Paulin’s *The Riot Act* (1984), Kennelly’s *Sophocles’ Antigone* (1986), Morrison’s *Antigone* (2003), Heaney’s *The Burial at Thebes* (2004), McCafferty’s *Sophocles’ Antigone in a New Version* (2008), and Darren Murphy’s *X’ntigone after Sophocles* (2022). Colin Murphy’s #ANTIGONE, which was directed by Aoife Spillane-Hinks, also extends the broader Western tradition of adaptations of Sophocles’ tragedy, alongside works such as Anouilh’s *Antigone* (1944), Brecht’s *Antigone* (1948), Fugard’s *The Island* (1973), Carson’s *Antigonik* (2012), and Žižek’s *Antigone* (2016). Like its predecessors, #ANTIGONE offers a critique of its own time, allowing audiences to engage with the world of Sophocles through contemporary lenses. Unlike earlier versions, #ANTIGONE is a radio rather than a stage play, making the work of its sound designer, Simon Kenny, particularly significant for this analysis.

Adaptations of Sophocles’ *Antigone* have tended to emerge in Irish theatre during times of social and political turmoil, and this pattern also applies to Murphy’s #ANTIGONE. Mathews’ *The Antigone*, Paulin’s *The Riot Act*, and Kennelly’s

Sophocles' Antigone responded to times in which respect for human rights was at stake in the Republic of Ireland, where police had just been given increased powers, and women just been denied of their rights, and in Northern Ireland, then at the height of the so-called Troubles. Later, Morrison's *Antigone* and Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* offered critical commentary on the treatment of Palestinians in the Middle East and on the U.S. administration under George W. Bush during the invasion of Iraq, respectively. #ANTIGONE, as well as Darren Murphy's *X'ntigone after Sophocles*, addresses the COVID-19 pandemic context, a period marked by an extreme restriction of individual rights (Ó Cathaoir, 2021), including the right to freedom of movement and to properly mourn the dead; by the heightened fear of the other (Aaltola, 2022); and by potential abuses of state power (Dionne; Turkmen, 2020).

From the very title of his play, Murphy engages his audience in a thought-provoking dialogue between the present and the past: #ANTIGONE. Here, the hashtag symbol represents the present, while Antigone's name represents the past. The stimulating proposition of the play's title invites Murphy's audience to think about Antigone in an age of social media and viral outcries: #MeToo, #YouAreNotAlone, #DomesticAbuse. Would today's Antigone be a socially engaged young woman? Would she use social media to protest against sexism? Against harassment and domestic abuse? These are some of the questions that might be raised by a willingly engaged participant in this scenic proposal.

The synopsis of #ANTIGONE, available at GoLoud, anticipates the radical nature of this adaptation, in which the Sophoclean text is treated as open and the Antigone myth, further mythologized. The play presents a dystopian alternative Ireland "in which the worst fears of the pandemic have been realised, social order has collapsed, and a military government is attempting to restore order by setting a brutal example" (GoLoud, 2023). The adaptation moves across time and context: from ancient Greece to Ireland in the twenty-first century; from the collapse of social order caused by a war for the succession to the throne of Thebes to a collapse triggered by a pandemic in Europe; from Creon's reign to a new military regime. By framing adaptation as a mechanism of new creation, Murphy enacts Žižek (2016), Bird and Griffiths' visions for the adaptations of Greek classics to contemporary contexts (2020), in which experimentation, risk, transformation, giving voice to the unknown, and the production of new subjectivities are valued.

In the first scene of *#ANTIGONE*, we can hear interspersed and overlapping lines from journalists who report that an epidemic is spreading across Europe and has already reached Ireland. The sound of their voices grows louder and clearer as the news about the pandemic become more serious, from “the plague is now spreading across Europe” to “the government has reported the first official cases in Ireland” and “morgues across the city are now closed” (Murphy, 2023, p. 2-3, unpublished script). The use of emanation speech in this passage contributes effectively to the depiction of a chaotic pandemic scenario, in which certain voices are not heard properly and information spreads too rapidly.

The second scene opens with the sound of rumbling drums: a news program sting that simultaneously indexes a radio broadcast and generates tension, functioning as a symbolic-evocative effect that recurs throughout the play. We are then introduced to the characters Theo Elder, anchor of The News Chorus, and Professor Nikos Choragos, member of the Theban Researchers Online League. Elder and Choragos discuss in theatrical speech the epidemic and the establishment of a new government under the leadership of General Críon, Ireland’s first female prime minister. For the professor, the new government is legitimate and necessary, once it acts within the Constitution and seeks to restore the order, shaken by the massive influx of refugees into the country. Next, we hear Críon’s statement, in which she declares martial law and suspends the right to asylum in Ireland, prohibiting, with the possibility of death penalty, the burial of refugees who die trying to enter the country by boat, under the justification of containing the spread of the pandemic.

By developing the dramatic action as a breaking news report, broadcast in the language of contemporary politics and media, Murphy generates a “sense of spontaneity” and creates a “greater sense of authenticity” in *#ANTIGONE*, much as Houseman and Koch did in *The War of the Worlds* (Hand; Traynor; 2011). While Theo Elder and Professor Choragos deliver and discuss the news, General Críon addresses the nation, justifying her authoritarian policies as necessary for the greater good. *#ANTIGONE* sounds like the typical radio broadcast of political leadership mediated by punditry and commentary. The play resonates as contemporary and compelling because its breaking news format enhances the play’s spontaneity, with the topics it addresses, expressed in the language of contemporary politics, reflecting immediacy and social relevance.

The characters Theo Elder and Professor Choragos represent the chorus in *#ANTIGONE*, in that they mediate the drama for the audience while speaking to and warning the characters (Rosenfeld, 1985). While Theo Elder adopts a more neutral stance, Professor Choragos emphatically endorses Críon and her policies, claiming for “clarity”, “stability”, “order”, and “leadership” (Murphy, 2023, p. 4, unpublished script). As representative of the polis, Professor Choragos stands for those people in Ireland who see immigrants and refugees as a threat for the collective health and security. These people, as discussed by Rodrigues (2024), belong to a phenomenon that has recently experienced notable growth in Ireland. Ironically, the initials of the Theban Researchers Online League, the organization to which Professor Choragos is a member, spell TROLL, a term that, in internet discourse, refers to someone who deliberately provokes or disrupts online communities.

When Antigone finally appears in *#ANTIGONE*, in the third scene, the soft sound of waves can be heard in the background, a fine example of the use of territorial sound to signpost the spatial setting. Antigone asks her sister, Ismene, if she is aware of what has just happened. Ismene does not know. Antigone then tells her sister that there is a body on the beach and that it is Polynices’ body. Ismene and Antigone then discuss Polynices’ burial: Ismene fears disobeying Críon’s order, while Antigone fears failing to fulfil her duty to bury her dead brother. On the one hand, Ismene believes that Críon is doing everything she can to contain the crisis generated by the pandemic; on the other, Antigone believes that Críon is only using the crisis to punish immigrants and refugees. From this moment onwards, audiences are emotionally tied down to the unfolding tragedy, as Antigone’s moral struggle becomes a personal and political conflict.

Desgranges’s assumption that assigning meanings to the text suggests establishing meanings in relation to us (2017) leads me into relating *#ANTIGONE* to events related to the current refugee crisis in Europe and the pandemic of COVID-19. The image of dead Polynices on a beach resembles a photo, taken in 2015, of a Syrian boy dead on a beach in Turkey. This photo, regarded as the “most tragic symbol of the Mediterranean refugee crisis”³⁶ (G1; PAULO, 2015), was one of the most talked about topics on Twitter and was widely reported in the press. Similarly, the portrayal of the pandemic in *#ANTIGONE* parallels the collective experience of

³⁶ Original: [...] mais trágico símbolo da crise de refugiados do Mediterrâneo.

the pandemic of COVID-19, when the dead were also forbidden to have their funeral rites performed for public health reasons. During this sad chapter in human history, millions of people were unable to properly bury their family members, making the pandemic experience an even more tragic one.

Although Murphy proposes a radical reconfiguration of Sophocles' *Antigone*, he preserves the form of Greek tragedy and the essence of the Antigone myth in *#ANTIGONE*. The world is presented in the play as autonomous; the time is the present; each scene is a link to the next; dialogue, exclusively, moves the dramatic action, which is a serious one, through a clash of intentions (Rosenfeld, 1985). In *#ANTIGONE*, the clash of intentions arises when Antigone disobeys Críon's law, burying Polynices. Just like Sophocles's Antigone, Murphy's Antigone acts without hesitation, putting her life at risk to honour her family (Lesky, 1996). The essence of the myth, as formulated by Steiner (1986), Butler (2000), McDonald (2002), Walton (2002), and Žižek (2016), is preserved: Antigone still stands for kinship, for moral stance, for women, for the young, for the dead, for the natural law, and for all those excluded from the public domain, including immigrants and refugees.

A significant difference between Murphy's play and Sophocles' concerns the reason for the prohibition of Polynices' burial. While in Sophocles' *Antigone* Polynices is regarded as a traitor conspiring for power, in Murphy's version he becomes an immigrant who dies on an Irish beach and is suspected of being infected. In Sophocles' play, Polynices' body must be exposed to the open air because he had directly confronted King Creon and, therefore, become a war traitor; in Murphy's play, Polynices does not directly confront Críon, but his body must be left out in the open because it represents a threat of contagion. In her confrontation with Críon, Antigone vents: "I don't need to be rescued! Polynices needed to be rescued. But you let him drown – like he was nothing – worse than nothing – a contagion. Well I'm of the same contagion" (Murphy, 2023, p. 20, unpublished script).

The notion of immigrants and refugees bringing a contagion to the countries that host them, which reverberated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mishra, N.; Mishra, A. J., 2022), is part of a repertoire of arguments reproduced by the far right around the world. This notion underpins discourses which reinforce cultural othering (Dionne; Turkmen, 2020), such as those depicting immigrants and refugees as stealing jobs from the local population, spreading diseases, or committing crimes. Discourses like these are also reproduced in the highest echelons of power: in the

final stretch of the latest US presidential campaign, for example, then-candidate Donald Trump even said that immigrants were eating dogs and cats of American citizens in Springfield (G1, 2024). Donald Trump, in fact, was elected in 2016 promising to build a wall on the US border with Mexico and, in 2024, promising to implement the largest mass deportation program of illegal immigrants in US history.

By depicting Antigone as an immigrant herself, Murphy portrays migrant women, the group most disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mishra, N.; Mishra, A. J., 2022), as resilient, courageous and heroic. When confronted by Críon, Antigone confesses that she was the one who buried Polynices, claiming her deed: “I buried him [...] I did my duty to my brother” (Murphy, 2023, p. 18, unpublished script). She bravely defies Críon, accepting her tragic fate when she declares: “You’re going to have to kill me, and I grieve for that. But that is nothing to the grief I feel to know my brother is lying there, putrefying, to be scavenged by crows and dogs” (Murphy, 2023, p. 20, unpublished script). Antigone’s voice is clearly heard in the foreground of the soundscape, while the background remains silent, allowing her words to stand out. This illustrates what Abdulrazzak describes as audio drama in the form of “pure theatre” (Svich, 2022, p. 208): people just saying words and words carrying the action.

Murphy’s Antigone’s fight belongs to the present and is carried out through present-day means. When burying Polynices, Antigone records a video of her action, identifying herself. As domestic abuse victims did during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahlawat, 2022), Antigone makes use of social media to raise awareness about what she is fighting for and why. Ismene, feeling guilty for not having helped Antigone bury Polynices, uses Twitter to spread the video, but Antigone repudiates her sister, saying that only she will fight and die alone. Críon then orders Antigone’s execution, asserting that she is upholding the law (Murphy, 2023, unpublished script).

As previously done, among others, by Anouilh (1944), Heaney (2004) and McCafferty (2008), Murphy portrays Críon as a rather pragmatic leader, attributing traits of humanity to this flawed character. When Antigone claims to have done her duty to her brother, Críon responds: “[...] I respect that, Antigone. But your duty is at odds with my duty, which is to keep this fucking ship of state from sinking. So we have a problem, And we have to work out how to manage it” (Murphy, 2023, p. 18, unpublished script). Her pragmatism is further demonstrated when she defines politics during her confrontation with Antigone:

It's politics. If the Republic cannot defend itself – against enemies, against a plague, against conspirators – there is no Republic. There is no law, no order, no Constitution. This is what it looks like when the State defends itself: to protect the Constitution I have to suspend it. And I hate it. I'm no fascist – fascists would love this – they'd be celebrating it, in their jackboots and stupid regalia. They'd be marching you to the fucking gallows, instead of trying to rescue you from your own outraged conscience (Murphy, 2023, p. 20, unpublished script).

In justifying her actions and expressing respect for the Constitution, Críon speaks not as a tyrant, but as a politician striving to act responsibly in a time of crisis. She expresses her views in a clear and straightforward manner, as does Antigone. This contributes to the dramatic construction of the play, since, according to the BBC, language is more “naked” and “potent” on the radio (quoted in Crook, 2023). Despite the coherence of her reasoning, Críon demonstrates inflexibility when confronted by her son, Éamonn, refusing to reconsider Antigone's sentence even amid the “murmuring of support” for her (Murphy, 2023, p. 25, unpublished script). During their argument, Críon slaps Éamonn in the face, a gesture rendered through a conventionalised sound effect that reinforces the emotional escalation of the scene.

In *#ANTIGONE*, the “timeless” and “insoluble” conflict between Antigone and Creon (Steiner, 1986) takes on the contours of contemporary political polarization in the Western world. For Antigone, Críon is “a fascist”; for Críon, Antigone is “a radical” (Murphy, 2023, p. 20-21, unpublished script). In this polarized dispute, with no room for frank and transformative dialogue, Antigone and Críon do not reach any understanding and tragedy becomes imminent. In this way, fate remains irremediable, and the essential and decisive element of Greek tragedy is preserved in *#ANTIGONE* (Lesky, 1997).

The announcement of Antigone's death sentence sparks protests from the Irish population in *#ANTIGONE*. Against the backdrop of a shouting mob, which produces a realistic-evocative effect that anchors the scene in a space of political agitation, reporter Sophie Messenger explains that the video released by Antigone has gone viral and that the population is upset and angry. Éamonn and Traolach try to dissuade Críon from her decision. Traolach is the Prime Minister's special advisor and he argues that the people are on Antigone's side. Críon takes a step back and decides to exchange the death penalty for Antigone's imprisonment in an isolated cell with “just enough food” to keep her from going hungry (Murphy, 2023, p. 27,

unpublished script). Now, Murphy's Críon applies the same punishment that Sophocles' Creon applies to Antigone, condemning her to live underground while her deceased brother remains above the ground.

In response to the popular outcry, the chorus in *#ANTIGONE* slightly changes its perception of Antigone and of her conflict with Críon. Theo Elder examines the situation as follows:

Antigone has clearly captured the hearts of the people... Love for her brother drove Antigone to risk her life; love for Antigone's bravery has driven the people of the city out onto the streets in her support – defying both the plague and the law (Murphy, 2023, p. 27, unpublished script).

Professor Choragos, for his part, declares: "I'll admit – Antigone's loyalty to her brother shows a certain quality of character – but she broke the law, and in a time of crisis, the ruler cannot tolerate law breaking" (Murphy, 2023, p. 28, unpublished script). The chorus' change in perception, therefore, occurs insofar as there is a recognition of Antigone's virtue and of the merit of her fight, but such recognition does not extend to a condemnation of Críon and her authoritarian policies.

When sent to prison, Antigone publicly discusses her predicament, appealing for justice. The inherent intimacy of the audio drama experience foregrounds the emotional tremor in Antigone's voice when she cries:

I'll never see the sun again – all I have to look forward to is the darkness of an underground cell. Citizens – look at what's being done to me, a refugee in your land, because I refused to violate the natural law! This is not Justice! Without Justice, there can be no peace! (Murphy, 2023, p. 28, unpublished script).

The "great unwritten laws of the gods" (Lesky, 1996, p. 156) from Sophocles' play are depicted in Murphy's play as "the natural law". The focus shifts from a religious to a legal approach, which is in line with the current paradigm of secularism in public discourse in Western societies. The reinterpretation of Tiresias as Traolach, from mystical seer into rational political advisor, also demonstrates the secular approach adopted by Murphy in *#ANTIGONE*.

After Antigone goes to prison, protests continue and Críon and Traolach argue. For the advisor, the people have turned against the Prime Minister and she must make amends for her mistake. Críon, however, resentfully orders Traolach's dismissal and ratifies her decision regarding Antigone. Confronted by the press,

Críon blames the protesters for the spread of the epidemic, demonstrating no remorse about Antigone's conviction. Professor Choragos, for his part, criticizes the traditional press for its political bias in his participation in The News Chorus, supporting Críon again. A dispute over narrative is waged on the streets, on social media and in the conventional press in #ANTIGONE. As observed by Aaltola (2022), "misinformation and disinformation are norms that reflect underlying power-political cleavages in the paranoid atmosphere of a pandemic" (p. 5).

Polls reveal growing public support for Antigone, and the ticking of a clock, an iconic and conventionalised sound, produces a symbolic-evocative effect: Críon is now under pressure and running out of time. She finally yields, reinstating Traolach into office and reversing her decision concerning Antigone. Yet, it is already too late, as Antigone is found dead in her prison cell. The tragic outcome is revealed in Sophie Messenger's report: first Antigone hanged herself with a belt; then Éamonn, upon seeing his dead fiancée, attacked his own mother with a knife, who dodged his blows; distraught, Éamonn used the same knife to kill himself. During Sophie Messenger's report, a violin is played in the background with its sad and melancholic melody, producing empathetic sounds that enhance the emotions of the scene. The interplay between the sorrowful delivery, the musical score, and carefully placed silences intensifies the tragic dimension of Antigone and Críon, a tragedy that began in ancient Greece and is still experienced in contemporary Ireland.

Following the climax, Murphy further subverts audiences' expectations in depicting Críon's full assumption of authoritarian power. The Irish Prime Minister briefly displays some remorse, recognizing that she was "wrong" and "arrogant" (Murphy, 2023, p. 39, unpublished script), but then she addresses the nation, asserting her intention to remain in office and continue with her policies. Her speech goes as follows:

The first step to defeating this plague was to stop it from being carried in from abroad – we have now done that. The next step is to stop it being spread through protest and anarchy on our streets. I am asking our people, for a time, to forego our personal liberties and freedoms – freedoms we hold dear – for the greater good. When this is over, I will put in place the mechanisms to return to our normal constitutional order. But from tonight, martial law will apply throughout the Republic. It will apply till the plague is defeated and it is safe to return to our streets. Thank you and good night (Murphy, 2023, p. 40, unpublished script).

Unlike Sophocles' Creon, Murphy's Críon does not waver in the face of familial tragedy, reaffirming the commitment to her political agenda. While Theo Elder wonders if the people were expecting more "humility" and "humanity" from the Prime Minister, Professor Choragos argues that what the people "really want in a leader is good authority" (Murphy, 2023, p. 41, unpublished script). Before the play ends, Professor Choragos defends Críon one last time: "Críon may have acted rashly, earlier in this crisis, but she has been severely punished by the fates for that. Her loss will teach her wisdom. I think she will prove to be a very great leader" (Murphy, 2023, p. 41, unpublished script). The strong resolution of *#ANTIGONE*, which meets the BBC's requirements for audio drama (Crook, 2023), is made especially tragic by Críon's continued unawareness of her own fall into misfortune (Lesky, 1996).

In *#ANTIGONE*, Murphy subversively reconfigures Sophocles' *Antigone* for contemporaneity, enabling audiences to construct new subjectivities in a productive dialogue between the present and the past. His play demonstrates both the contemporary resonance of Greek tragedy and the persistence of enduring moral and social ancient dilemmas. Ultimately, *#ANTIGONE* can be read as a critique of the current treatment given to immigrants and refugees in European and other Western societies, where these people are stigmatized and have their rights often restricted; and of how, in the age of social media, group thinking can be instrumentalized, especially in moments of crisis such as those experienced in pandemics, by authoritarian leaders who, backed up by their supporters, seek to consolidate and expand their power at the expense of the well-being of the marginalized and most vulnerable ones.

#ANTIGONE stands as one of the most experimental and politically charged adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* within the Irish tradition of reinterpretations of this play. Alongside Mathews' *The Antigone* (1984), Morrison's *Antigone* (2003), and Darren Murphy's *X'ntigone after Sophocles* (2022), it offers a radical reconfiguration of the circumstances surrounding the conflict between Antigone and Creon, traversing different times and contexts to render an ancient story into a fresh dramatic experience for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, *#ANTIGONE* subverts expectations in ways not previously explored in earlier adaptations: it portrays Antigone and Polynices as refugees, reconceives the chorus as a radio news broadcast team, frames the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for the exclusion of immigrants, reimagines Tiresias as a political advisor, and, most importantly,

presents Creon as a female leader whose pragmatism is matched by an unyielding attachment to power. Murphy's radical reinterpretation, which addresses issues of immediate social pertinence, is done in the language of contemporary politics and media, producing a convincing and compelling critique of the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic in a radio play that is structured aptly on to the form of Greek tragedy.

Presented as a radio news broadcast, *#ANTIGONE* conveys a sense of authenticity and immediacy through its potent use of language, inviting audiences to construct in imagination a vivid and intimate dramatic experience. Action starts to rise as soon as Antigone enters the scene, when audiences become emotionally invested in her moral struggle. Dialogue is kept lean and dramatic throughout, with few characters carrying a relatively simple yet serious action forward. There is no gratuitousness in *#ANTIGONE*, insofar as each scene merely works a link to the next one, having its functional value only within the whole – it is this structural cohesion that ultimately allows audiences to experience the cathartic discharge of emotions at the play's climax, when it is revealed once again the continued contemporaneity and relevance of Greek tragedy.

Regarding sound composition, Simon Kenny's editing of *#ANTIGONE*, which signposts the dramatic action and enhances its emotional force, enables audiences to actively develop their own imaginative spectacles. Territorial sounds, which include sounds of waves reaching the shore, shouting mobs, and the hum of air conditioning, establish atmosphere, providing a pervasive definition of space (in these examples, the beach, the street, and the office, respectively). Iconic conventionalised sounds, which include footsteps and doors being opened and slammed, contribute to the play's dramatic progression, signposting to the audience what is happening in the scene. Sometimes these sounds produce symbolic-evocative effects: the ticking of a clock signals mounting pressure, while a news programme sting heightens tension. The voices of the characters can be clearly heard in the foreground of the soundscape, allowing their words to stand out and carry the action forward. Silence is also carefully employed throughout the play, creating space for the drama's emotional force. At the play's climax, the sad melody of a violin produces an empathetic sound that reflects the emotional state of both the characters and the audience, adding poignant depth to the scene.

Murphy's careful scriptwriting further contributes to effective signposting and the successful articulation of the play within the conventions of audio drama. He

relies almost exclusively on theatrical speech, privileging dialogue as the primary code of audio drama operating in the play. His characters constantly call each other by their names, allowing the audience to easily identify who is speaking at each turn. Examples of signposting through dialogue are abundant: “[...] I’m Theo Elder. With me in studio today is our regular contributor, Professor Nikos Choragos” (Murphy, 2023, p. 4, unpublished script); “[...] General Críon is about to speak” (Murphy, 2023, p. 5, unpublished script); “Let’s go to our special correspondent, Sophie Messenger” (Murphy, 2023, p. 6, unpublished script); “Ismene: Antigone? / Antigone: Ismene! / Ismene: I’m glad you’ve come. But is it safe?” (Murphy, 2023, p. 7, unpublished script). The breaking news format itself contributes to the play’s contextualisation, given that signposting strategies are also typically used in broadcast journalism. Beyond structural contextualisation, Murphy’s linguistic choices also accommodate the particularities of audio drama, as his characters speak in a contemporary, colloquial register, exploiting the use of naked and potent language.

Murphy’s *#ANTIGONE* is a product of its time: it was conceived and produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when theatres were closed and audio drama was then the available alternative for playwrights and audiences alike (Svich, 2022). It targeted audiences experiencing social isolation at the time, offering a critique of the restrictions on liberties imposed during the pandemic in a medium that requires no in-person gatherings, the radio. Although intrinsically contemporary, the play nevertheless draws on both the tradition of Greek tragedy and that of audio drama, blending Sophocles’ *Antigone* with echoes of Houseman and Koch’s *The War of the Worlds*. In sum, Murphy’s *#ANTIGONE* succeeds in generating powerful cultural resonances, like certain of its predecessors from radio’s golden age, with its sense of economy, its structural robustness, and its subversive, emotionally engaging and thought-provocative contemporary proposal.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF THE TRADE-OFFS EMBEDDED IN MURPHY’S *#ANTIGONE*

Murphy’s radical reconfiguration of Sophocles’ *Antigone* inevitably involves literary and dramatic choices that entail both gains and losses in relation to the source text. By examining these gains and losses, the trade-offs embedded in Murphy’s choices can be better understood. In this section, I discuss the trade-offs inherent in Murphy’s most radical interventions, namely: 1) the portrayal of Antigone

and Polynices as outsiders, no longer Creon's niece and nephew, nor Oedipus' daughter and son, respectively; 2) the reimagining of Creon as a woman; 3) the transformation of the chorus into a pair of a journalist and a pundit; 4) the depiction of Tiresias as a political advisor; 5) the change in Creon's attitude in the play's resolution; 6) the use of prose rather than verse; and 7) the performance on radio rather than on stage.

4.2.1.1 *The portrayal of Antigone and Polynices as outsiders*

As we have seen, *Antigone* is the last play from Sophocles' Theban Trilogy, also composed by *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The three plays trace the curse that haunts the royal house of Thebes from the ruin of Laius and Oedipus to Antigone's tragic end. When Sophocles' Antigone is caught performing Polynices' burial, who had been killed by the hands of his own brother Eteocles, the chorus cry: "O unfortunate child of your unfortunate father" (Sophocles, 2003, p. 70). Antigone herself is aware of the curse that runs through her family, and this becomes evident as she confronts her uncle Creon about her conviction. Being part of a family that struggles against a curse while trying to hold power in Thebes is, therefore, a relevant premise for the tragedy of Sophocles' Antigone. The backstory of Murphy's Antigone, however, does not include any mention to Laius and to Oedipus, nor to the curse that runs in their family: Antigone is a mere outsider detached from the high echelons of the local politics of power.

On the one hand, Murphy's portrayal of Antigone and Polynices as outsiders can diminish the play's dramatic intensity, since the absence of an ancestral and familial curse may undermine the depth of Antigone's self-sacrificing deed. In Sophocles, Antigone confronts not only Creon but destiny itself, defying state power with full awareness that she is bringing her family's curse upon herself. She is, therefore, more courageous: in burying Polynices and claiming her deed, Antigone willingly sacrifices herself and accepts her tragic, predetermined fate. Moreover, it can be argued that *#ANTIGONE*, by omitting Antigone's ancestral curse, loses some of its connection to the mystery and supernatural forces that animate the tragic imagination of Greek drama.

On the other hand, Murphy's portrayal of Antigone and Polynices as refugees during a pandemic resonates powerfully with contemporary audiences, especially

considering how recent the refugee crisis in Europe and the COVID-19 pandemic are. In this reconfiguration, Antigone is transformed into a contemporary figure, one whose story could unfold in the headlines of today's newspapers. Antigone's timeless conflict is thus infused with immediacy and relevance, making the drama more accessible and provocative. With no curse, there is no predetermined fate, and Antigone's struggle becomes less bound by the past and more rooted in the present. She fights for her brother and for the refugees, those currently suffering under draconian restrictions imposed by authoritarian states.

In the final analysis, Murphy's portrayal of Antigone and Polynices in *#ANTIGONE* gives new life to Sophocles' characters, allowing the ancient drama to resonate more strongly with contemporary audiences. The absence of an ancestral and familial curse in the play is indeed a major departure from the source text; nevertheless, Antigone remains the voice of the excluded, representing the refugees and all those who were vulnerable and endured publicly ungrievable losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The portrayal of Polynices is also strikingly contemporary in *#ANTIGONE*: the image of a refugee's body abandoned on a beach is reminiscent of the many photographs that have appeared in newspapers in recent years.

4.2.1.2 *The reimagining of Creon as a woman*

One of the key determinants of collision between Antigone and Creon is lost in *#ANTIGONE*, as the conflict between woman and man is replaced by one between woman and woman. Murphy's choice is problematic for various reasons. First, the Antigone-Creon conflict is fundamental in nature, a clear confrontation between "two human beings who happen to be on different sides in every possible way" (Walton, 2002, p. 22), gender included. Second, Creon's sexist attitude in the source text widens the moral gulf between him and Antigone, intensifying their opposition. Finally, gender inequality has remained a pressing social issue from Ancient Greece to the present. If Murphy's intention was to engage his audiences in a dialogue between the present and the past – one capable of producing new knowledge and subjectivities – then perhaps the more effective choice would have been to foreground the perpetuation of gender inequality in the drama, rather than concealing it.

Notwithstanding the arguments outlined above, one may contend that an increasing number of women now occupy positions of authoritarian political leadership around the world, as exemplified by Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine Le Pen in France, and Sanae Takaichi in Japan. Given this context, Murphy's portrayal of Creon as a woman can be read as an insightful commentary on the nature of power: regardless of gender, authoritarian leaders do what they need to do to remain in power and extend their influence. In this sense, Murphy's Críon can be considered as another female political leader resembling those who dominate today's headlines, reproducing the same authoritarian behaviours commonly associated with their male counterparts. Ultimately, Murphy's choice makes his play resonate as contemporary and compelling, subverting audiences' expectations in a surprising way.

Murphy's portrayal of Creon as a woman is certainly his boldest and most polemical choice in *#ANTIGONE*. With this decision, he forgoes an opportunity to address the persistence of gender inequality in his play, overlooking a gender perspective that is crucial in Sophocles' *Antigone*. Indeed, gender is so central to the Antigone-Creon conflict that Murphy's adaptation is the only one discussed in this study that does not cast Creon as a man. This constitutes an unequivocal loss in his overall endeavour. However, Murphy's portrayal of Creon as a woman remains consistent with his intention of making *#ANTIGONE* a contemporary and compelling play, given that it acknowledges the increasing presence of women in authoritarian political roles.

4.2.1.3 *The transformation of the chorus into a pair of a journalist/pundit*

From a group of old citizens, the chorus is transformed into a journalist and a pundit in *#ANTIGONE*. A literally collective voice thus becomes a figuratively collective one, since in the play the representatives of the *polis* are only Theo Elder and Professor Choragos. One might argue that there is some loss involved in condensing a group into a pair of characters. Nevertheless, through their commentary, journalists and pundits do speak on behalf of broader segments of the population, representing those who think like them and reproduce their opinions. Like the chorus in Greek tragedy, news media and punditry mediate events for an audience, offering judgment and making prophecies. By exploring this close analogy

between the roles of contemporary media and the Greek chorus, Murphy adds significantly to his thought-provoking contemporary proposal.

Moreover, Murphy's portrayal of the chorus offers a crucial innovation in *#ANTIGONE*, as the breaking-news report format lends the play a heightened sense of authenticity. As previously demonstrated, *#ANTIGONE* resonates as contemporary and compelling because this format enhances the play's spontaneity: the issues it addresses, articulated in the language of contemporary politics, convey immediacy and social relevance.

4.2.1.4 *The depiction of Tiresias as a political advisor*

Tiresias, the seer, becomes Traolach in *#ANTIGONE*, Críon's political advisor. A mythical, religious figure is thus transformed into a literal, secular one. Consequently, the play loses some of its connection to the mystery and supernatural forces that animate the tragic imagination of Greek drama. On the other hand, Murphy's secular approach to the portrayal of Tiresias aligns with the current prevailing paradigm of public discourse in Western societies: in the twenty-first century, politicians tend to rely on evidence-based and rational advice to conceive and implement their policies, rather than on intuitive, fate-oriented counsel. Ultimately, Murphy's analogy between a secular present and a mythical, religious past reinforces his intention to make *#ANTIGONE* feel and sound contemporary and compelling, enabling audiences to generate new knowledge and subjectivities.

4.2.1.5 *The change in Creon's attitude in the play's resolution*

Unlike Sophocles' Creon, who is left paralysed after the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice, Murphy's Críon moves beyond remorse in the resolution of *#ANTIGONE*, reaffirming her commitment to an authoritarian political agenda. Murphy's Críon thus appears to suffer less than Sophocles's Creon, as she does not waver in the face of familial tragedy. On the one hand, this choice can undermine the tragic depth of *#ANTIGONE*: its event full of suffering seems to contain less suffering than the one from Sophocles' play, in which Creon falls utterly into misfortune and fully experiences his tragedy. On the other hand, Críon's continued unawareness of

her own fall into misfortune can be read as an even more tragic condition, as she remains incapable of recognizing what is right until the very end of the play. Significantly, this change in Creon's attitude renders the ending of *#ANTIGONE* undeniably fresh and surprising.

The resolution of *#ANTIGONE* offers a pessimistic view of humanity under power, suggesting that authoritarian leaders prevail despite the tragic consequences that befall them. Murphy's Críon, in contrast to Sophocles' Creon, neither regrets nor learns from her mistakes, remaining unwaveringly committed to authority. She embodies contemporary authoritarian leaders who are devoid of empathy, even in the face of tragedy. With this portrayal, Murphy invites audiences to perceive a regression of human conscience from ancient Greece to the present, as authoritarianism not only endures but intensifies in the contemporary world. Ultimately, the play's resolution engages with issues of growing and urgent social relevance, resonating powerfully with audiences.

In the final analysis, Murphy's change in Creon's attitude in the play's resolution constitutes an insightful intervention. By transforming Críon into an unrepentant authoritarian, Murphy not only revitalises the play's ending but also encourages audiences to reflect critically on contemporary issues of power and human empathy. While some degree of tragic depth may be diminished, the play gains immediacy, relevance, and a provocative lens for examining authoritarianism in contemporary society.

4.2.1.6 *The use of prose rather than verse*

Unlike Sophocles' *Antigone*, which is written in verse, Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* is written in prose. While Murphy's play sacrifices the rhythm and musicality inherent to the poetic form, which lends the text formal elegance, it gains accessibility, clarity, and a heightened sense of realism. By allowing dialogues to resonate as natural, everyday speech, this transformation makes the play more immediately intelligible to contemporary audiences. Additionally, this transformation is well-suited to radio, a medium in which plain language proves especially potent. The use of prose in *#ANTIGONE* is, therefore, consistent with Murphy's proposal of making Greek tragedy feel and sound contemporary and compelling in audio drama, representing a valid and meaningful intervention.

4.2.1.7 *The performance on radio rather than on stage*

Whereas Sophocles' *Antigone* is a stage play, Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* is a radio play. At first glance, the play could lose the excitement and immediacy characteristic of live performances. However, Murphy's calculated writing, which renders *#ANTIGONE* akin to a contemporary radio broadcast of political leadership mediated by punditry and commentary, fosters a heightened sense of spontaneity, preserving to some degree the excitement and immediacy of live theatre within the audio drama form. Therefore, the play manages to maintain its dramatic impact and ability to engage audiences, even though it is a recorded performance rather than a live one.

It could also be argued that the narrative frame of *#ANTIGONE* is less fully realized than that of Sophocles' *Antigone*, which features visible actors, costumes, and sets. Nevertheless, the human imagination, boundless as it is, enables audiences to recreate a full sensory spectrum of experience, compensating for the absence of visual dramatic elements. Moreover, the imaginative spectacle of audio drama engages audiences actively in the dramatic experience, requiring them to complete the scenes using their own memories and understanding of the world. This active participation enables audiences to forge their own experiential path in the act of listening to the play, producing new meanings and subjectivities.

The success of *#ANTIGONE* in generating powerful cultural resonances is much related to the fact that the play addressed audiences who were experiencing social isolation and listening to radio news that closely resembled the reports delivered and commented on by Theo Elder and Professor Choragos, respectively, in *The News Chorus*. There are echoes of *The War of The Worlds* in *#ANTIGONE* because both plays similarly exploited the imagination of the listener in ways that are unique to the radio medium, matching technical and documentary verisimilitude in dramatic proposals that reflected immediacy and social relevance. In essence, both *The War of The Worlds* and *#ANTIGONE*, the latter albeit with much more modest commercial and critical reception, are fine examples of carefully scripted radio plays designed to immerse audiences in vivid dramatic experiences within their respective historical contexts: the first capturing the tense, pre-World War paranoia; the second, the fearful, hostile atmosphere of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering, therefore, the relationship between text and context, as well as the interplay between text and its medium, it is untenable to argue that *#ANTIGONE* would have functioned better as a stage play. The play succeeds precisely because it was created for radio at a time when audiences were socially isolated and regularly tuning in to pandemic-related radio news. For this reason, as well as for the other points discussed above, Murphy's choice of audio drama does not entail losses for *#ANTIGONE*; rather, it produces considerable gains in terms of audience immersion and dramatic prowess.

5 CONCLUSION

Sophocles' *Antigone* exemplifies what Calvino (2000) characterizes as a classic: "a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers" (p. 5). Indeed, each return to *Antigone* reveals new echoes of her claim, ever compelling in its moral force. Her act of defiance remains relevant because the world has not changed enough to preclude the State from assuming the role of oppressor, infringing upon the freedom and fundamental rights of the most vulnerable. Antigone's moral struggle, I argue, will continue to resonate with generations to come, as long as conflicts between the State and the individual, the old and the young, and the male and the female remain possible or imminent.

Reworkings of Sophocles' *Antigone* offer new points of entry to this ancient story, further expanding its political resonances across diverse cultural and historical contexts. During the horrors of the Second World War, Anouilh and Brecht turned to the myth of *Antigone* to expose and critique the brutality of the Nazi regime. In South Africa, Fugard similarly drew on the *Antigone* myth to confront the injustices of apartheid. More recently, *Antigone* has reappeared in countries as varied as Syria, Japan, and Manipur, addressing specific social concerns rooted in the enduring conflict between Antigone and Creon. Sophocles' *Antigone* and Greek tragedy more broadly have thus continued to serve as a template for artists seeking to explore the interplay of power, justice, and resistance in drama.

In Ireland, a country marked by division and conflict, where artists have often turned to the theatre as a means of expression, the reimagining of Sophocles' *Antigone* has become a recurring dramatic tradition. From The Troubles to the COVID-19 pandemic, the myth of *Antigone* has reappeared in Ireland in times of social stress and political turmoil. Mathews, Paulin, Kennelly, Morrison, Heaney, McCafferty, Darren Murphy, and Colin Murphy have each drawn on the Antigone-Creon conflict to comment on their times with distinctly local immediacy. Together, these adaptations trace the intersections between Greek tragedy and the Irish political struggles across history.

Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* was conceived and produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, a moment in history in which people were deprived of their liberties, including the liberty to move freely and to properly mourn the dead. In this adaptation, Antigone is portrayed as a refugee, one of the groups most vulnerable to

authoritarian policies and among those who suffered most during the COVID-19 pandemic. Murphy further mythologises the myth of Antigone in *#ANTIGONE*, positioning the pandemic context as central to the play's political and emotional resonance.

The analysis conducted throughout this research supports the initial hypothesis that Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* revitalises Greek tragedy, making it feel and sound contemporary and compelling by reimagining the myth of Antigone in experimental ways. Innovations in *#ANTIGONE* include portraying Antigone and Polynices as refugees in contemporary pandemic-era Ireland, reimagining Creon as a woman, transforming the chorus into a pair of a journalist and a pundit, depicting Tiresias as a political advisor, altering Creon's attitude in the play's resolution, using prose rather than verse, and producing the performance for radio rather than live theatre. Although some of these choices may entail departures from the source text, they all serve to make the play resonate as both contemporary and compelling, subverting audience's expectations in surprising and thought-provoking ways.

By radically reconfiguring an ancient story for the present in the language of contemporary politics and media, Murphy's *#ANTIGONE* transforms a classical narrative into a resonant exploration of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing refugee crisis in the West. Murphy's Antigone embodies refugees who are treated as second-class citizens under authoritarian governments, while his Críon similarly represents politicians who seek to expand their power at the expense of society's most vulnerable. By "resurrecting" Antigone and Creon in pandemic-era Ireland, Murphy not only bridges the gap between the ancient and the contemporary but also reaffirms the enduring vitality of Greek tragedy as a framework for addressing new crises.

Furthermore, this study confirms the assumption that Murphy's choice for audio drama contributes to making Greek tragedy feel and sound contemporary and compelling in *#ANTIGONE*. Its breaking-news format heightens the play's sense of immediacy and spontaneity, echoing the approach taken by Houseman and Koch in *The War of the Worlds*. Combining the structural robustness of Greek tragedy with the intimacy of audio drama, *#ANTIGONE* generates powerful cultural resonances with an emotional and thought-provoking story co-created by audiences in their imagination. By compelling listeners to construct the drama imaginatively from

soundscapes, the play fosters deeper immersion and engagement, thereby amplifying the ethical and political force of Greek tragedy.

Based on the analysis presented here, future research may further explore other contemporary reworkings of Greek tragedy and Sophocles' *Antigone*. The enduring relevance of Greek tragedy lies in its capacity for continual reinterpretation in response to changing social and cultural conditions, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. As contexts continue to evolve, new adaptations will inevitably emerge and should remain the focus of sustained critical inquiry. Ireland, in particular, where adaptations of *Antigone* and other Greek tragedies have established a distinctive and ongoing theatrical tradition, offers a compelling site for such exploration. In this regard, the present study makes a timely contribution to the field of Irish Studies by providing a diachronic analysis of the most recent Irish *Antigone*.

Author of *#ANTIGONE*, Murphy has established himself as a major figure in contemporary Irish political theatre whose work calls for deeper scholarly engagement. His stage and radio plays uncover the politics of conflict and mechanisms of power, offering insight into historical conflicts and the consequences they generate. Engaging with his theatre, which includes adaptations of ancient classics for contemporary times, invites a deeper exploration of the intersections between political experience and the Irish dramatic expression. Furthermore, his radio plays extend his engagement with politics and society into the realm of sound, underscoring its expressive and critical potential.

As a medium that offers distinct advantages to both theatre practitioners and audiences, audio drama may experience renewed growth in post-pandemic times, warranting further scholarly attention. Its flexibility, tested during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, enables artists to experiment beyond the physical constraints of the stage while engaging audiences across diverse locations. As a liberating art form that draws on the immeasurable power of the human imagination, audio drama is likely to continue delivering emotionally resonant and thought-provoking stories that captivate both audiences and scholars. Consequently, this study may serve as a valuable point of reference for researchers interested in examining audio drama and its evolving role within contemporary theatre.

This study has sought to illuminate the enduring vitality of Sophocles' *Antigone* in contemporary Irish culture, reaffirming the capacity of drama to question,

challenge, and inspire. By tracing the ways in which *#ANTIGONE* reconfigures an ancient story for modern audiences, I have aimed to show how drama, more specifically audio drama, can function as a space for civic reflection and imaginative renewal. The insights emerging from this research, therefore, extend beyond the realm of artistic appreciation, pointing to ethical and political concerns that speak to my own sense of civic and moral responsibility. In conclusion, I would like to address artists and intellectuals alike: in tragic times, art most powerfully cultivates empathy and resists the forces that threaten human dignity and freedom; therefore, we must ensure that our voices continue to be heard.

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