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Revisiting Antigone in Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1996)

Marina Carr'ın *Portia Coughlan* Oyunu Üzerinden Antigone'yi Yeniden Okumak

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ABSTRACT
1990s Contemporary British Drama is epitomized with plays over which violence, cruelty, and abject depictions of selfhood reign in an attempt to propel a renegotiation of imposed normativity on the subject. Marina Carr, as a prominent contemporary Irish playwright writes plays that are experiential on a deeper level as she delves into characters that walk on the liminal borders between life and death. Marina Carr's play *Portia Coughlan* represents a family enmeshed in the incest taboo, re-negotiates the subversive familial subjectification enforced on Portia and explores the theme of a broken self, which is condensed by the loss of an irreplaceable brother. Interpreting *Portia Coughlan* as a re-evaluation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, this article initiates discussion on the play by applying contemporary arguments on the intersections between Antigone, gender normativity, taboos, kinship, familial ties and interior objectification of the subject as were discussed in Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* (2000). By questioning why gender is so crucial to our understanding of the self and why Portia and Antigone as tragic characters are left with no option but to die, this article aims to examine the function of ambiguity and uncontainable nature found in the heroines in regard to their treatment in plays as well as their premise in their respective cultural setting.

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Introduction

Portia Coughlan was first staged at the Abbey Theatre in 1996, winning the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize the following year. It was later revived on the Peacock Stage as part of the AbbeyOneHundred centenary program in 2004. Even though the play was planned to be staged once more in September 2020 by Young Vic Theatre, with Caroline Bryne directing and Academy award-nominee Ruth Negga portraying the asphyxiated heroine, it was cancelled during the Covid Pandemic. *Portia Coughlan* was hailed for its sharp portrayal of a broken self where one critic called the original Garry Hynes production on the Abbey Theatre "a brutal and passionate drama of family relationships and personal disintegration, set on the day of Portia's thirtieth birthday over three, time-bending acts" (Ruane, 2003, p. 83). Breaking away from the linear plot structure in the play, Carr placed the death of Portia between the first and third act, adding to the liminal fragmentation of the heroine who is torn between the impositions on her feminine identity imposed by patriarchal authority and her twin brother's ubiquitous call for a reunification in

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death.

Portia's persistence to live in the play vanes after a backlash of a suicide pact of which she backs out at the last minute. As she experiences the horrifying act of her twin brother's suicide, she feels ubiquitously stuck in a purgatory of darkness enshrouding her liminal post-Gabriel presence, the aberrations of her psyche. Portia's refusal to perform the duties of a wife and a mother is part of a feminist discourse Carr strives to convey throughout her Midland plays. Carr's feminist depictions in these plays were exemplified through taking the portrayal of patriarchal impositions on the wifehood and motherhood to extremities and taboo depictions. In Midlands trilogy and her other plays, Carr offers a re-reading of several female characters from Greek mythology such as Medea, Phaedra, and Antigone by locating them in a traditional yet modern Irish Midlands setting. The disobedience that Portia shows against paternal authority, the incestuous cycle of her familial surroundings and her liminal and splintered self that is condensed by loss are all closely reminiscent of Antigone's defiance and dramatic legacy.

The tragic story of Antigone stems from her insistence to give her brother Polyneices a proper burial against her uncle Creon's orders. The order is issued by the new king of Thebes since Polyneices had led a foreign army to invade Thebes and ensued a fight with his brother Eteocles. The fight ends with both siblings lying dead as Oedipus prophesized and Polyneices was consequently labelled a traitor, his body left for the beasts to be devoured. Antigone is willing to die in the name of giving her brother a proper burial and for enabling his soul to pass through the liminal River Styx that connects the realm of the living with the underworld under the domain of Hades. Antigone is also believed to possess incestuous love towards Polyneices, for whom she denies motherhood and wifehood. This sacrifice resonates with Portia's defiance as both commit suicide in spaces reminiscent of pre-natal existence: Antigone takes her own life in a cave whereas Portia jumps into the Belmont River. Sophocles' *Antigone*, especially her defiance raises issues in regard of kinship, authority, subjectification and gender, all of which point to Judith Butler's reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* in his influential book entitled *Antigone's Claim*. In this book, Butler revisits the literature on the character Antigone, pondering over her modern premise. Interpreting *Portia Coughlan* as a re-evaluation of the Sophocles' *Antigone*, this article will then read *Portia Coughlan* through Butlerian lenses that follow the literature on Sophocles' *Antigone*. Juxtaposition of Butler's arguments with Carr's play allow for re-negotiating the triad of kinship, the taboo subject of incest, and subject-formation for the purpose of unearthing the modern implications of the character by equating its reflections on Portia's defiance. Such reading necessitates revisiting the literature on *Antigone* by inquiring its possible reflections on Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* through the argument on kinship ties and gender.

Liminal Crossings/Ghostly Apparitions

Portia Coughlan begins by introducing the titular heroine standing with a drink in her hand at her home, and simultaneously Gabriel as a ghost occupying the stage physically along the infamous Belmont River, culminating in an uncanny sequence where "*they mirror one another's posture and movements in an odd way; unconsciously*" (Carr, 2014, p. 165). Portia's fragmented self is juxtaposed against the ghost of Gabriel who often sings at the beginning of the acts and the ghost is only visible to Portia and to the audience throughout the play. Raphael Coughlan as the waning patriarch of the household suffers from a limp occupies the first scene, complaining about the state of Portia, who is drinking at such an early time: "Ten o'clock in the mornin' and you're at it already" (Carr, 2014, p. 165). It becomes clear that Portia is in an unhappy arranged marriage with Raphael, the wealthiest man in the area, a factory owner whose partnership through wedlock would increase the fortune of Sly Scully. Portia is often scorned by her family for not performing the duties of a proper wife and mother. She rejects familial obligations, spending her time flirting with her lover Damus Halion and barman Fintan Goolan in the Belmont River instead.

Portia often escapes to the liminal landscape, the Belmont River, which flows between the lands of her husband and father. However, the river does not only flow through these lands but also slashes through them. It serves as a way of escape from the interiority of familial bonds and impositions since the river still occupies the symbolic meaning of returning to Gabriel who killed himself by jumping into the river fifteen years ago. This connotation of the river as a liminal zone represents uncontainable nature of the heroine who refuses to be locked up in an interior space. It additionally serves as "a polyvalent metaphor … [a] watery womb, it is the place of original oneness, secret sexual union, and the dissolution of sex and gender boundaries. As River Styx, it represents the permeable border between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (Wald, 2007, p. 194). However, the liminal reasserts itself starkly when the audience is made aware that Portia's thirtieth birthday will recall and echo the departure date of her twin brother on their fifteenth birthday. Portia could not kill herself that day and she has been haunted by Gabriel's ghost calling her to reunite with him ever since. Breaking the linear plot structure, Marina Carr opens the second act with Portia's body being raised out of the Belmont River, the exact spot where Gabriel committed suicide.

The incestuous secrets of the Scully family are revealed after the wake ceremony where Maggie May, an old sex worker and Portia's aunt, confesses that she had sexual intercourse with Portia's grandmother Blaize Scully's husband, Old Sly Scully. This is followed after Blaize's abject depiction of her daughter-in-law Marianne's gypsy blood, calling them "Fuckin' tinkers, the Joyces, always and ever, with their waxy blood and wanin' souls" (Carr, 2014, p. 198). The third act traces Portia picking right after the end of the second act, giving more insight to the grief-stricken heroine and the hereditary incest looming on her familial background. Portia's closest friend Stacia, the Cyclops of Coolinarney as Marina Carr names her, often takes care of the children for Portia. In a conversation with Maggie May, Portia's aunt, Portia learns the looming secret of the cycle of incest long embedded in Scully family. Maggie reveals that Portia's parents Sly and Marianne were brother and sister and Blaize Scully, the old grandmother, knew the secret all along: "Marianne was auld Scully's child, around the same time Blaize was expectin' Sly. She knows. The auld bitch! Always knew. That I'm convinced of" (Carr, 2014, p. 213). The incest as a hereditary disease is carried through the Scully blood, as Maggie and Blaize insist, since Portia and Gabriel also had an incestuous relationship. This is evident towards the end of play where Portia confesses to her husband Raphael that: "ya see, me and Gabriel made love all the time down be the Belmont River among the swale, from the age of five – That's as far back as I can remember anyways" (Carr, 2014, p. 222). Portia's forced marital bond with Raphael is closest to being entombed alive, echoing Sophocles' *Antigone* whose vivisepulture in a cave by the orders of Creon is defied by a self-cathartic death. In a similar manner, Portia rejects the patriarchal impositions on her already fragmented self by walking on the borders of the symbolic order, attempting to exceed it the same way Antigone did in Sophocles' play.

Portia's dramatic fall invokes the spirit of Antigone who has already embraced her liminal existence in Sophocles' play when she addressed the polis: "What a wretched creature I am with nowhere to dwell, neither among mortals or corpses, not the living nor the dead" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 170). It can be argued that both are victims of a cursed family engraved in incest taboo. Antigone's suffering emanates from the curse of the Labdacids, the family from which Oedipus sprung. Antigone's father Oedipus kills his father Laius and marries his mother Jocasta. As the familial ties of the cursed family gets even more ambiguous, Antigone is betrothed to his cousin Haemon. It is also true that some critics see her having incestuous desires toward her brother Polyneices whom she views irreplaceable. In similar fashion Portia's parents Marianne and Sly are revealed to be brother and sisters, same father different mothers. Furthermore, Portia had incestuous relationship with Gabriel, as her father confronts her in the play: "watched how you played with him, how ya teased him, I watched yeer perverted activities, I seen yees, dancin' in

yeer pelts, disgustin', and the whole world asleep barrin' ye and the river - I'll sort you out once and for all, ya little hoor, ya, ya rip, ya fuckin' bitch ya!" (Carr, 2014, p. 219).

Ghosts as literary tropes are considered to embody liminal presences in dramas, a spectral or an apparition that is not alive but not quite dead, stuck between the two, haunting the living subjects for reasons repressed. The liminal ghost as a motif is exemplified through Gabriel in Marina Carr's play which is only seen by the audience and Portia. Echoing the concerns of Antigone over Polyneices' devoured body and unproper burial, the spirit of Gabriel was as if unable to pass through the River Styx, still occupying a presence in Portia's tormented netherworld. Ghosts as liminal entities are generally connoted to representing a repressed reality, a secret unknown but reflected in the image of the ghost. In Portia's case, this unutterable secret points to the cycle of incest running in the Scully family. This hereditary malady, as Portia's aunt and grandmother insist, condemned Portia and Gabriel to death since the day they were born out of incest between Marianne and Sly as half-siblings. The ghost is thus a symbol for the repression of a secret, as Abraham and Rand (2020) notes:

> From the brucolacs, the errant spirits of outcasts in ancient Greece, to the ghost of Hamlet's vengeful father, and on down to the rapping spirits of mod the theme of the dead - who, having suffered repression by their family or society, cannot enjoy, even in death, a state of authenticity - appears to be omnipresent (whether overtly expressed or disguised) on the fringes of religions and, failing that, in rational systems. (p. 287)

The ghost imagery is used to denote the repressed gap in the lives of others, as Abraham (2020) believes, whose presence is too fearful to utter as it signifies "a gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one's life produced in us. The phantom, therefore, also a metapsychological fact … what haunts not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets" (p. 287). Gabriel's ghost manifests itself therefore as a dissatisfied spirit, only encountered by Portia, not by his parents or others in the play. The reason why the apparition only appears to Portia can be ascribed to the close but uncanny connection between the twins. When Portia asks Marianne "We were so alike, weren't we, Mother?" (Carr, 2014, p. 181), her mother responds:

> Marianne: The spit; couldn't tell yees apart in the cradle.
> Portia: Came out of the womb holdin' hands - When God was handin' out souls he must've got mine and Gabriel's mixed up, aither that or he gave us just the one between us and it went into the Belmont River with him - Oh, Gabriel, ya had no right to discard me so, to float me on the world as if I were a ball of flotsam. Ya had no right. (Begins to weep uncontrollably.) (Carr, 2014, p. 181)

Portia's existence is splintered to its core after Gabriel's suicide, which culminates dramatically towards a reunification ushering death at the same spot, which results from crossing kinship boundaries as part of symbolic associations of the law of the Father. However, as Lacan's (1977) reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* would reveal, the ghost of Hamlet's father points to phallus, "one cannot strike the phallus, because the phallus, even the real phallus, is a *ghost*" (p. 50). In Hamlets' case, one could not be able to strike the phallus since it is a ghost haunting the troubled subject suffering from the Oedipal dilemma. The ghost of the father only exists in Hamlet's psyche. Unseen to others, striking it would be an enactment of the tragic reiteration of the complex of which Hamlet tragically wants to avoid and waver. The ghost therefore hints at the incest taboo since Hamlet would have done the same thing dictated by the Oedipus complex: he would kill his father the king and then marry his mother Queen Gertrude if such marriage had not been carried out by Claudius.

In *Portia Coughlan*, the twin brother's ghost is still the punitive manifestation of the social breach: breaking of the incest taboo. The taboo is traditionally considered to be a necessity for the

formation of kinship ties giving away to state formation, which would operate on the techniques of biopolitics inscribed on bodies to ensure subjects that are proper. The prohibition of incest is thought to be necessary for the biopolitics of the modern state as the scientific knowledge would affirm the fact that it reduces the gene pool from which healthy bodies are born *or* for society to be *possible* at all, the prohibition is self-referentially a must law. Hence, the castration-complex which by itself serves psychoanalytically as the most feared punishment of the child for any incestuous desires against the father ensures the entry into the symbolic order of the Father in the purpose of assuring a social order that regulates and administers sexual relationship, prohibiting incest.

The apparition of the dead brother in ghost form reveals that Gabriel is no longer a desire to be pursued but an overwhelming presence threating the boundaries between the living and the dead. This change is reflected in the play when the angelic voice of Gabriel is heard not only by Portia but near the Belmont River as well; "Still nights he can be heard singin' in his high girly voice" (Carr, 2014, p. 205). Gabriel represents the unattainable fulfilment of desire, the fantasy of which only exists to the extent that it is always deferred in remaining unattainable as such is the conundrum of desire. Portia could never fulfil the desire Gabriel represents in real life, she is forever doomed, the only way to redeem is a self-redemption in death. What Portia does is daring to cross the boundaries of symbolic associations of the clear-cut boundary between life and death, but this dangerous encounter with the Real would only result in death. Such lethal instance with the Real manifests itself when Portia commits suicide jumping into the Belmont River. As Zizek (2000) points out, the death drive "is the very opposite of dying, it is a name for the 'undead' eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain" (p. 292). This is precisely what torments Portia whose identity gets entrapped in the hereditary cycle of familial incest bounds followed by suffocation after Gabriel. The intrusion of *the Real* into the familiar territory as well as Gabriel's apparition into Portia's already tormented life results in the breaking of the familiar, culminating in the provocation of anxiety leading to death. When Portia encounters her *double* embodied through the ghost, as psychoanalysis would tell us, it is that "moment [where] one encounters one's double, one is headed for disaster; there seems to be no way out" (Dolar, 1991, p. 11).

If one is to further apply the Lacanian identity-formation by looking at the mirror stage on Portia's self-identification, it becomes clear that she always identified herself with that lost part of her very existence, Gabriel. Portia and Gabriel as twins were uncannily inseparable as Damus tells Fintan after they witnessed Portia's body raising out from the river; "You'd ask them a question and they'd both answer the same answer - at the same time, exact inflexion, exact pause, exact everythin'" (Carr, 2014, p. 194). Therefore, a gap resulted from her twin brother's death plagues Portia's self-identification, causing Portia to feel alienated, fragmented and lost in her post-Gabriel existence. The ghost is a reminder of the lost part of her identity as one being, half-Portia and half-Gabriel. As Portia always identified herself with her twin brother, even in the mirror stage as two beings in one body, the loss is unbearable to the point of death. This unfillable and forever-sought gap which Lacan formalized through the notion of *objet petit a* serve as a substitution to the lost desire of the fragmented self. Thus, having acknowledged that interior ties exemplified through the familial ties in the play, that is Raphael Coughlan and her kids, cannot substitute for the loss of Gabriel, Portia looks for ways of external self-identification to substitute the loss by meeting lovers in the Belmont River and heavy drinking to no avail.

Antigone in Modern Context

Having been forced to live in a familial space entrenched between two patriarchs, Portia feels as if she is gradually being buried alive just as Antigone was entombed after addressing the polis in an act of defiance against Creon's orders. Antigone's act denotes the fact the enforced notion of female

subjugation by patriarchal authority is long inscribed in western mode of thinking. In this vein, Sihra (2018) points out that the allocation of the public space as a male-dominated sphere in western society started with the Greeks, where natural biological activities such as giving birth attempted to "place her in *social roles* that in turn are considered to be at a lower order of the cultural process than man's," thus giving women a different psychic structure which is seen as closer to nature (p. 98). Taking this into consideration, Antigone knew that she would never give birth to any child and become a dutiful wife to Haemon as prophesized by Oedipus. Moreover, she dislocated herself from the submissive position of her sister Ismene who claims "Do not forget that we are women— it is not in our nature to oppose men but to be ruled by their power. We must submit, whatever they order, no matter how awful" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 141). Antigone *unmans* Creon by the same vocabulary she is barred from using, as Butler (2000) emphasizes that "to the extent that she occupies the language that can never belong to her, she functions as a chiasm within the vocabulary of political norms" (p. 82). Appealing to the same Gods Creon appeals, she subverts the discourse on "there is no way we can allow a woman to triumph" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 163) to Creon's tragic demise resulting from his unjust treatment of Antigone, "all [his] misdirected and ill-fated plans" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 185). In the same vein, *Portia Coughlan* embodies female defiance of patriarchal authority. Such act manifests itself as *Antigone* in the modern context whereby the domestic impositions of marriage and being a dutiful wife to the husband while nurturing the children are completely and explicitly rejected to be performed.

In the original *Dazzling Dark* version of *Portia Coughlan,* which was written in the local Midlands Dialect, Carr includes a folk tale about the Belmont River. This story revolves around how a young woman is blamed for witchcraft and how she would foretell the future: "If ya lookt her in th'eye ya didn't see her eye buh ya seen how an' whin ya war goin' ta die" (Carr, 1996, p. 253). Aside from the prophecy, the woman's expansive knowledge about nature is also seen as part of witchcraft by the people. She was accordingly subjected to the brutal acts of torture and slow death by townsfolk. This juxtaposition of young woman with Portia adds to her function as a fortune-teller like the same young girl left to die in the folk tale. This is most evident when Portia declares in a scene cut from the original text in guessing the imminent death of Gabriel who in a way had the same sort of supernatural purity in him as Melissa Sihra (2018) indicates:

> In the first edition, Portia foresees the future, like the young girl in the story, in a final monologue which is cut from the later editions: 'an' don't ax me how buh we boh knew he'd be dead chome spring. […] we seen him walchin' inta tha Belmont River; seen me wud you on our weddin' day […] we seen ud all Raphael down ta tha las' detail. (p. 101)

The story of a young woman who is tortured and left to die because of her instinctive and expansive knowledge of nature, a punishment and correction brought by patriarchy, resonates very closely with Antigone's tragic end in a cave. Antigone's premature burial is ordered by Creon who invokes the punishment of Gods against "the awesome throne of Justice" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 171) as he deputizes by himself as the new king of Thebes. Antigone had already known that the deed of giving her brother Polyneices a proper burial in defying Creon's orders would inevitably result in her death. This prophecy was already foretold by Oedipus who condemned and cursed his children a serving death. In similar vein, Portia knew that her end would be in the liminal terrain of the Belmont River, the same place Gabriel and she made a suicide pact fifteen years ago: "Ah wouldn't a bin afraid for ah know how an' whin ah will go down'" (Carr, 1996, p. 253). Both Antigone and Portia live on the margins of the symbolic order, kinship, and familial ties. However, they do not only walk on such liminal borders but they also dare crossing the symbolic associations brought by them, which inevitably result in death as Lacan would argue.

Judith Butler bases their interpretation by scrutinizing the philosophical discussions regarding Antigone that precede *Antigone's Claim*, primarily focusing on the perspectives of Georg Wilhelm

Friedrich Hegel and Jacques Lacan. Butler attempts to trace why they both viewed her death as an inevitable end. Hegel's argument on Antigone is structured around his dialectical understanding of the necessary transition from kinship to patriarchal state. Antigone as a character, Hegel believes, stands for kinship and familial ties, as was evident in her persistence over the proper burial of Polyneices against the orders of the patriarch of the state, his uncle Creon. According to Hegel, Antigone not only stands for those ties of primordial origin defining kinship but also the subordination of woman, affections and emotions that will have to eventually give way to the state which is to be associated with reason, power and authority, all male attributions. Hegel circumvents naming Antigone in his analysis. This avoidance was ascribed by Butler as his attempt of generalizing the unlawful deed attributed to all womanhood along with the representation of kinship. For Butler, these two arguments were used by Hegel to justify his dialectic of state-formation. Lacan's analysis on *Antigone* derives from his claim that Antigone bases her seemingly just right to give a proper burial to her brother on an unwritten law, which is only applicable to her brother. This stems from the fact that Antigone has an implicit lust for his deceased brother Polyneices, and she does not seem to be having the same passionate love neither for Ismene nor Eteocles. Lacan (1997) in his *Seminar VII* on Antigone points out that "It is because she goes toward *Atè* here … going beyond the limit *of Atè,* that Antigone interests the Chorus. It says that she's the one who violates the limits of *Atè* through her desire" (p. 277). What Lacan calls *Atè* points to going beyond the symbolic associations of death and living and as Antigone embodies this dangerous terrain exemplified best in lines where she exclaims: "already at birth I was doomed to join them, unmarried, in death" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 171). The price for crossing the line, for Lacan, is death:

> For Lacan, to seek recourse to the gods is precisely to seek recourse beyond human life, to seek recourse to death … as if the very invocation of that elsewhere precipitates desire in the direction of death, a second death, one that signifies the foreclosure of any further transformation. (Butler, 2000, p. 51)

The limit Lacan speaks of recalls his arguments on the Real which that cannot be confronted and if it is done so, signifying death. Butler (2000) does not necessarily associate this limit with the intrusion of the Real into Antigone's life. However, Butler further emphasizes that this prohibition marks a Lacanian "limit that is not precisely thinkable within life but that acts in life as the boundary over which the living cannot cross, a limit that constitutes and negates life simultaneously" (p. 49). For both Antigone and Portia, this limit can be conceived as an escape mechanism from the imposed structures of gendered norms and roles within kinship structure given the fact that it is the language and the symbolic entry into the father's authority that structure them in the first place.

Hysteria can be considered as a way of questioning one's own social and symbolic identity, an encounter with the Real. In this respect, Portia's hysteric discourse, which is evident more explicitly in the *Dazzling Dark* version, affirms the intrusion of the Real into Portia's tormented life. Such intrusion in the Lacanian sense eventually culminates toward her tragic end. This return to a pre-natal state embodied through psychoanalytical attribution of the Belmont River as the womb functioning as a gateway to self-redemption also marks "the return to an ineffaceable ontology, prelinguistic, is thus associated in Lacan with a return to death and, indeed, with a death drive (referentiality here figured as death)" (Butler, 2000, p. 53). Furthermore, Lacan evades calling Antigone's implicit lustful love for her brother an incestuous love, but as Butler (2000) points out, "It is not the content of her brother, Lacan claims, that she loves, but his "pure Being," an ideality of being that belongs to symbolic positions" (p. 51). This echoes the pureness of Gabriel who sang beautifully with his heavenly voice as his father recalls the past:

> God forgive me, but times I'd look at him through the mirror and the thought would go through me mind that this is no human child but some little outcast from hell. And then he'd

> sing the long drive home and I knew I was listenin' to somethin' beautiful and rare though he never sang for me - Christ, I loved his singin', used stand in the vestry of Belmont chapel just to listen to his practisin'- those high notes of God he loved to sing. (Carr, 2014, p. 199)

Gabriel represents the ideal self, one who could go through committing suicide in contrast to Portia, who could not commit such an act after witnessing his suicide and being haunted by his ghost. To revisit the Lacanian argument on Gabriel as the object of desire, it seems plausible in this respect to assert that "the object [Gabriel as the object of desire] … is no more than the power to support a form of suffering, which is nothing else but the signifier of a limit. Suffering is conceived of as a stasis which affirms that that which is cannot return to the void from which it emerged" (Lacan, 1997, p. 261).

Lacan and Hegel regarded Antigone's end necessary, the former seeing her as standing at the limits of symbolic associations of kinship and family and the latter as merely standing for womanhood and kinship eventually giving away to state-formation. Butler, however, forms their own analysis in contrast to both. Hegel has "her [Antigone] stand for the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal rule, but also for the principle of kinship" (Butler, 2000, p. 1), and to the degree that Lacan also associated her with representing kinship ties. It is thereby concluded that "Antigone, who from Hegel through Lacan is said to defend kinship, a kinship that is markedly not social, a kinship that follows rules that are the condition of intelligibility for the social, nevertheless represents, as it were, kinship's fatal aberration" (Butler, 2000, p. 15). Even though they both saw the kinship embodied in Sophocles' *Antigone* as a natural and primal phenomenon before the intrusion of the social, Butler disagrees to the extent that the incest taboo is not only naturally forbidden but also socially considered taboo as well. Butler disagrees with both Lacan and Hegel, emphasizing that Antigone does not stand for all women but as a unique example. Although she walks on the borders of intelligibility, she does not stand at the limits of the symbolic associations:

> Antigone is a 'living dead' not in the sense (which Butler attributes to Lacan) of entering the mysterious domain of Ate, of going to the limit of the Law; she is a 'living dead in the sense of publicly assuming an uninhabitable position, a position for which there is no place in the public space. (Zizek, 2016, pp. 12-13)

According to Butler, the normative structure of kinship makes Antigone's standing ambivalent. In contrast with Lacan, they believe that Antigone is not driven towards her tragic end by merely *thanatos*, the death drive, but simply a lustful love for Polyneices. Furthermore, Sophocles' *Antigone* does not stand for femininity as Hegel conceived her. Antigone is not as submissive as Ismene was depicted in the play. She defies orders of Creon and claims a public sphere by *unmanning* him in his vocabulary, appealing to the Gods in an attempt to justify her claim.

Transcending and Transgressing Kinship Boundaries

Judith Butler's re-negotiation of Antigone's legacy in *Antigone's Claim* points to a liminal position for Antigone who is in between the submissive femininity supposedly occupied by Ismene and state-associated masculinity by Creon. Such position leads to further discussion on the character Antigone who not only walks on the margins of kinship but also challenges established gender normativities. The question of what constitutes gender in the context of Sophocles' play and its modern implications in Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan*, are further explored by our understanding of what kinship ties represent and to what extent they are impactful in shaping identity. Butler (2000) points to the performativity of kinship in their book, stating that kinship is "not a form of being but a form of doing" (p. 58). Antigone as a character does not stand for kinship in its natural sense since the family to which she belongs is a stark contrast to the ideal kinship ties: her father Oedipus is also her brother, and she is to be married to her uncle's son Haemon, which would only add to the ambivalence of the family tree. In close inspection, she also never openly admits that

she did the deed of burying Polyneices customarily; “I admit it—I do not deny anything” (Sophocles, 2009, p. 154). In addressing such ambiguity, Butler (2000) points out that “what she refuses is the linguistic possibility of severing herself from the deed, but she does not assert it in any unambiguously affirmative way: she does not simply say, ‘I did the deed’” (p. 10). Though less ambiguous, Portia’s ambivalence is derived from her liminal nature stuck between the socially obligated roles of motherhood and wifehood and a ubiquitous call for a re-unification in death. Even though she rejects such roles, she still tries to cling on to life, as was observed in the last scene with his husband Raphael; “I cooked your dinner, I poured your wine, I bathed Quintin, read him a story and all. Can’t we knock a bit of pleasure out of one another for once?” (Carr, 2014, p. 222). Furthermore, Portia further reveals another attempt of clinging on to life: “if Raphael Coughlan notices me I will have a chance to enter the world and stay in it, which has always been the battle for me” (Carr, 2014, p. 223). Nevertheless, Portia preferred Raphael since he had an angelic name, a substitute for the lost Gabriel.

As she still lingers on the lost memory of Gabriel and as the world of Raphael pushes her to the edge of symbolic associations, when asked to choose between her husband and Gabriel, Portia utters the impossibility of such deed: “And you say you want me to talk about ya the way I talk about Gabriel - I cannot, Raphael, I cannot. And though everyone and everythin’ tells me I have to forget him, I cannot, Raphael, I cannot” (Carr, 2014, p. 223). What Gabriel embodies for Portia, a love that surpasses kinship and familial ties, signals a reunion that is only achieved in death by our symbolic understanding. In this vein, Antigone possesses a much more ambiguous love when one considers it as a re-exercise of the Oedipal attachment to father in the play. In other words, Antigone’s love is arguably not directed towards Polyneices but to his father Oedipus who is also her brother as they shared the same mother, Jocasta. On the other hand, in situating Antigone as opposed to Oedipus as a point of departure for psychoanalytic criticism, Patricia Johnson (1997) claims that “Antigone transfers her affections to her brothers, and to Polynices specifically in *Antigone*. When this devotion earns her death, she both laments that death as a substitute marriage, and justifies its inevitability for a child devoted to the oedipal project” (p. 395). Both Antigone and Portia have Oedipal attachments to the brother figure. For the former, “Polyneices [represents] the natal family” (Johnson, 1997, p. 393), and for the latter, Gabriel is a reminder of the pre-natal, pre-symbolic symbiosis to be found in the womb. Thus, both Portia and Antigone cannot let go of the brother figure for their conventional marriage.

For Butler, associating Antigone with kinship requires understanding the act of proper burial as the foundation of her relationship with her brother. Since the concept of kinship and familial structures point to a language of relationships, which is inherently gendered, Antigone’s defiance primarily lies in challenging the conventional gendered roles within the established vocabulary of family dynamics. Antigone stands outside of symbolic associations of kinship in its natural sense and as she is not intelligible within the norms governed by them. One finds it difficult to place her in a natural kinship context. She seems to be on the edge of kinship ties as well as the vocabulary of a kinship language that is gendered and structured as norms, she simply does not seem to fit. As Antigone does not appear to be a human but speaks its language as Butler avers, she really posits a very ambivalent character both in terms of her kinship and familial ties and attribution of gender. However, as the literature on Sophocles’ *Antigone* continuously shapes the understanding of what the character might be claiming, it is only plausible to assert at this point is that she claims for recognition for those that are ambiguous in nature, outside of normativity, resisting social impositions of social categorization, those that are uncontainable like Portia Coughlan. In Carr’s play, the titular heroine rejects the familial interiority, ties and roles that are imposed by them. Portia associates herself with the Belmont River, a liminal gateway breaking through the lands of two patriarchs that serves as a way of self-redemption as Sihra (2018) indicates:

> Characteristic of water is its excessive drive to overflow, to transgress demarcated boundaries. The Belmont River is a metaphor for Portia who, like the river, is uncontainable. Carr observes, 'With Portia I would say, the river is her. It's her and Gabriel. The unceasing current of the Belmont River erodes the male-owned farmlands, powerfully redefining the contours of patriarchy. (p. 107)

However, the tragic ending of these heroines begs the question: why do they have to die? The tragedy of their deaths adds to the sharpness of their defiance, but all the more asks: Can the ambivalent nature of their defiance still upset the gendered vocabulary of kinship and family that is imposing the roles of motherhood and wifehood on women? Contemplating on the legacy of Sophocles' *Antigone* on family and kinship, Butler (2000) questions the future of symbolic impositions brought by the psychoanalytical schema of the Oedipal dilemma for those standing outside of clear-cut gendered normativity:

> I ask this question, of course, during a time in which the family is at once idealized in nostalgic ways within various cultural forms … What will the legacy of Oedipus be for those who are formed in these situations, where positions are hardly clear, where the place of the father is dispersed, where the place of the mother is multiply occupied or displaced, where the symbolic in its stasis no longer holds? (p. 22)

Julia Kristeva (1982) has also made a critique of the Oedipal schema, mainly the "posterity the strength of (incestuous) desire and the desire for (the father's) death … [the] blinding light cast by Freud, following Oedipus, on abjection, as he invites us to recognize ourselves in it without gouging out our eyes" (p. 88). The psychoanalytical law is therefore perverse since it incorporates within itself the perversion and the norm: "One might simply say in a psychoanalytic spirit that Antigone represents a perversion of the law and conclude that the law requires perversion and that, in some dialectical sense, the law is, therefore, perverse" (Butler, 2000, p. 67).

As Kristeva (1982) observes, the prohibition against incest "has the logical import of founding, by means of that very prohibition, the discreteness of interchangeable units, thus establishing social order and the symbolic" (p. 64). The kinship ties are therefore formed through the exchange of women with the establishment of the taboo in primitive society. The ties located the female in the passive familial position as the mother and wife whereas the men actively engaged in the political sphere. Kristeva (1982) talks of an authority of the male that "shapes the body into a *territory* having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted" (p. 72). The inscription on the female body as submissive, passive mother and wife are rejected by Portia who, by definition, is the abject drawn "toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). The fact that Portia is married off to Raphael can be considered as part of a ritual of purification as the catholic attribution of marriage connotes to Kristevan claim that "in a number of primitive societies religious rites are purification rites whose function is to separate this or that social, sexual, or age group from another one, by means of prohibiting a filthy, defiling element" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 165). This manifests itself as a defilement "by means of the rituals that consecrate it, is perhaps, for a social aggregate, only-one of the possible foundings of abjection bordering the frail identity of the speaking being" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 68), which is embodied in the incestuous relationship Portia had with Gabriel. The function of these rituals has strategic value for the religious program of cleansing the defilement off the subject which poses a striking threat.

The abject for Portia recalls the moment when she is severed from the mother in the womb and bonded herself with Gabriel, thereby constituting the boundary between a united self, comprised of Gabriel and Portia and the other. Claire Wallace (2001) associates Portia with the abjection of

Gabriel's haunting self, pointing out that "If described through the lens of Kristeva's discussion of abjection and food loathing, Portia hungers for Gabriel whom she regards as contiguous with her self, and yet in order to establish her self she must expel Gabriel, in other words, abject her self" (p. 446). In *Portia Coughlan*, the perversion of the law is literally embodied in the dictated marriage on Portia's part by his father whose union was perverse, which propels the idea that the law that condemns Portia is perverse by itself. The law is perverse since they push Portia into a role, a state of unintelligibility. Regardless of her choice, Portia would inevitably defy inherently patriarchal authorities: if she were to choose Gabriel, as she does, this would mean betraying her husband and children, while choosing them would constitute a betrayal to Gabriel.

Conclusion

The predetermined gender norms and roles embedded in kinship and family structures define the notions of gender. *Portia Coughlan* clearly illustrates that Portia and Gabriel's gender attributions are enforced by social norms dictated by the patriarchal order. Gabriel is expected to help his father on his farm who only deals with "animals, not ghosts" (Carr, 2014, p. 219), but far from it, he focused on singing, "the outcast from hell" also "Looked like a girl … Sang like one, too" (Carr, 2014, p. 194). Furthermore, Portia and Gabriel were two sides of the same coin, they would dress the same and be undistinguishable from one another, blurring the socially constituted gender roles attributed to them. Taking these into consideration, Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* offers a subversive re-reading of the argument on gendered kinship and familial ties through the uncanny twins. Carr's reading not only asks the question of why gender is so crucial to our understanding of what means to the self, but breeds another: Is it not the imposed gendered norms that binds her to a familial setting which suffocates her, pushing her to the edge of what constitutes a proper human being?

Butler's response to the gender argument provides a valuable insight into what Marina Carr attempts to achieve through one of the darkest and sharpest characters in contemporary theatre embodied in the tragic story of *Portia Coughlan*: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler, 2015, p. 33). It is the pre-determined notions of gender reality which enforce heteronormative roles of the binary gender matrix on its subjects. The normative structure of the heteronormative gender matrix still enforces a limited grammar on gender roles in the familial space. However, the stark representations of how such impositions torment the subject begs a re-negotiation of what gender ties constitute. Having considered the Irish catholic setting where what womanhood is associated with assigned roles of being a dutiful mother and wife, Portia's stark defiance triggers a renegotiation of the gendered norms and roles attributed to family and kinship. *Portia Coughlan* also challenges the applicability of such roles for those occupying a liminal presence, the uncategorized and thereby ascribed as the abject. In close alliance with *Antigone's Claim*, *Portia Coughlan* not only upsets the very patriarchal language that creates the gendered roles within the family, but also renegotiates the necessity of the ways to come up with a new vocabulary of understanding for those outside of normative bounds of the pre-determined gender structure.

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