

## Analysing the reading of Antigone by Jean Anouilh

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**Abstract:** *The opening of Antigone by Anouilh is significant as it implies dramatic autonomy on a spatial-temporal plane; set without historical or terrestrial implications. This lends the play a contemporaneity and relevance in the current geo-political scenario, and brings it out of the milieu of Greek culture. The stage setting signifies a contemporary locale, where the characters onstage, are chatting, drinking and playing cards in fading light before the play begins. Interestingly, the play is not divided into acts and scenes and is played without interval. Jean Anouilh in his text has been tried to keep the structure of Sophocles' play as much as possible. He has also shown his story in keeping with the special period of time which could be a present or past. Anouilh's story of Antigone, changes the character of Antigone to the modern character. This type of reworking gives a different reading of Antigone which combine by politics, sociology and psychology in modernity. Anouilh wrote Antigone during the Second World War and he revised this play as a protest against the fascist regime in France. Antigone could be a metaphor of people against autocracy and that is why it becomes modern and contemporary.*

**Key Words:** *Revision, Antigone, Creon, Sophocles, Anouilh.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

“Anouilh wrote and produced Antigone during the second world war and he revised this play as a protest against the fascist regime in France, imposed by Hitler after his army occupied the country during the Second World War” (SyedKazmi, 2015, p 141). Antigone is a tragedy about people who decided to kill themselves and warmly opened their hand for death. This act shows by Antigone in both plays (Sophocles and Anouilh), specially Anouilh’s play which represent it in a significant way where people find out the life is meaningless under the untearable power of Nazi. Anouilh revised the text based on original one and just added and removed some characters, for example; he removed the Tiresias and added nurse. On the other hand, by using cigarette, playing card and other things, he took it out from the historical time and put it in modernity. Modernity and history are mixed in his play and it puts the play in an unknown period of time.

“Anouilh redefined tragedy by choosing to do away with the figure of a conventional tragic hero. Antigone, the female protagonist dominates the plot of the play. The man, god, society matrix which was a staple element of Greek tragedy has been done away with. Anouilh creates a heroine with human foibles, with whom the audience can empathize” (SyedKazmi, 2015, p.p 141-142).. The play offers an insight into the minds of the oppressed masses who struggle to break their shackles. Antigone is thus a metaphor for rebellion against tyranny and that is why it becomes contemporary. The thematic concerns of Antigone are topical as the world is still faced with both suppression from without and repression from within at the hands of oppressive regimes. Hence the question of allowing funeral rites for her dead brother, Polynices, is not so much about the maltreatment meted out to him after death, but how Antigone struggles to assert her right, and eventually has to pay with her life, because of her rebellion against authority. That is why the issue of burial rites occupies minimal space in Anouilh’s Antigone, where the characters are driven by impulses, and not by the notions of religion and hereafter. In Antigone by Sophocles, the burial issue is the locus of conflict, culminating in mourning.

Nevertheless, Anouilh’s text is so complicated. By reading it, you feel that he is going to support Nazi, for example, if we compare Creon as power (Nazi), he is represented as a positive character who wants to save Antigone from death, save people who have a negative opinion to the life. But on the other side he shows a negative personality of Creon who just accept the life by misery and shame. In Antigone's repeated use of NO against Creon, the French audience saw their own resistance against the German occupation. By and large, “The Nazis allowed the play to be staged because some of Creon's arguments seemingly favored autocracy” (SyedKazmi, 2015, p 141). Everyone who reads a book find a relationship between an original text and revised one. There are always going to be different views and revisions. some like and some do not like it. A great deal of it can depend on what was the original text for that person, what are they comparing every revision they see to? This can lead to different views on how to keep the story the same but with changing it and how to keep the stories essence throughout different revisions.

## 2. ANTIGONE'S PLAY:

According to the Wikipedia encyclopedia, Antigone is a tragedy by Sophocles written in 441 BC. One of the three Theban plays Antigone is the third in order of the events depicted in the plays, but it is the first that was written. Prior to the beginning of the play, brothers Eteocles and Polynices, leading opposite sides in Thebes' civil war, died fighting each other for the throne. Creon, the new ruler of Thebes and brother of the former Queen Jocasta, has decided that Eteocles will be honored and Polynices will be in public shame. The rebel brother's body will not be sanctified by holy rites and will lie unburied on the battlefield, prey for carrion animals like worms and vultures, the harshest punishment at the time. Antigone and Ismene are the sisters of the dead Polynices and Eteocles. Antigone wants to bury Polynices' body, in defiance of Creon's edict. Ismene refuses to help her, not believing that it will actually be possible to bury their brother, who is under guard, but she is unable to stop Antigone from going to bury her brother herself. After a while a sentry enters, fearfully reporting that the body has been given funeral rites and a symbolic burial with a thin covering of earth, though no one sees who actually committed the crime. Creon, furious, orders the sentry to find the culprit or face death himself. Then, the sentry explains that the watchmen uncovered Polynices' body and then caught Antigone as she did the funeral rituals. Creon questions her after sending the sentry away, and she does not deny what she has done. She argues unflinchingly with Creon about the immorality of the edict and the morality of her actions. Creon becomes furious, and seeing Ismene upset, thinks she must have known of Antigone's plan. He summons her. Ismene tries to confess falsely to the crime, wishing to die alongside her sister, but Antigone will not have it. Creon orders that the two women be imprisoned. Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's fiancé, when found that Creon threatens to execute Antigone in front of him, Haemon leaves, vowing never to see Creon again. Creon decides to spare Ismene and to bury Antigone alive in a cave. By not killing her directly, he hopes to pay the minimal respects to the gods. Finally, Haemon killed himself beside Antigone and when Haemon's mother and Creon's wife found that her boy is dead, she killed herself too.

## 3. SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE:

"Antigone's pains and suffers begins by her birth, when she is born as a result of the incestuous adultery of Oedipus and his mother" (Brook, 1963, p.11). Actually Oedipus is her brother and father. After Oedipus's death, Antigone returns to the city of Thebes where her brothers killed themselves. Both brothers are killed and Creon sits in power. Creon, the new ruler of Thebes has decided that Eteocles will be honored and Polynices will be in public shame. Antigone, however, condemns such an act because it is contradicting the moral and divine law. For this reason, she buries Polynices' body. After this disobedience, Creon orders Antigone to be imprisoned in a cave to be buried alive.

Sophocles' Antigone is the contradiction between an individual and society, the human attempts to gain the power and the reaction of power and society to him. We can see it in Creon and Haemon dialogues;

*Creon: Is the town to tell me How I ought to rule?*

*Haemon: Now there you speak just like a boy yourself.*

*Creon: Am I to rule by other mind than mine?*

*Haemon: No city is property of a single man.*

*Creon: But custom gives possession to the ruler.*

*Haemon: You'd rule a desert beautifully alone....(pp.25-26).*

On the other hand, it reflects the knowledge and wise which is existed in ancient Greece and still we can see it in the political, social, moral and legal aspects of the west and European countries. It can be seen in the dialogues between Antigone and Creon.

Antigone confirms her act, but she does not call herself guilty. She stands against the power. Her action is a sort of symbol which is resistance to power. Antigone admits to have dishonored to the law, but she stands against a law which is not in the line of morals and ethics. Subsequently, she is not a guilty. But if we consider her action in the field of Creon's law, she is guilty. Nevertheless, what we mean by law is the law which is contrary to the moral law. At the beginning of the play, Creon defends the law, the law which he has put in place. In the case of doing his law, he goes above limitations of the morals and drills his power as he pleases. However, at the end of the play he capitulated.

At the end of the story, it seems, Antigone's action, not only doesn't work, but it also makes the story incommensurable. In fact, Antigone's action results another death. Because, the situation getting more complicated with the deaths of Haemon and Creon's wife. Ambiguity still retains its shadow over the play. Antigone calls the gods to help, but still she is seen as a guilty. In contrast, Creon claims that his orders are for goodness. Nonetheless, there may not be a difference between Antigone and Creon action. Both consider themselves as a representatives of goodness.

#### 4. ANOUILH'S ANTIGONE:

When Sophocles wrote the play *Antigone*, he never imagined, twenty-five centuries later, an author revised his text. Anouilh has chosen *Antigone* and he has put the story into modern play. Anouilh, the French writer, wrote *Antigone* in 1942 as a modern tragedy. *Antigone*'s play first performed on the scene in Paris in 1944 when Paris was occupied by Hitler's German armies. *Antigone* is a modern tragedy, however besides the modern appearance of the play, the origin theme of *Antigone* is like the ancient Sophocles tragedy. Sanders (2016) mentioned, "adaptations carry the same title as their source text" (p. 22). *Antigone* is a tragedy which events, like the fate of mankind, spontaneously take shape and do not inevitably escape. However, Anouilh's idea of fate is different from the Sophocles.

The most important approach of Anouilh in this revision is reducing the mythical aspect of the play and give it its present character. Sanders mentioned, "From the apparently simple revision of a text into film, theatre or a new literary work, to the more complex appropriation of style or meaning, it is arguable that all texts are somehow connected to a network of existing texts and art forms" (p. 2). She continued, "There is a case to be made that in some instances the process of adaptation starts to move away from simple proximation towards something more culturally loaded" (p. 21).

Anouilh recreates this ancient tragedy as if it were happening in France during Second World War, and yet it can happen at any time and in any place in the contemporary world. In this sense, time here, rather than being used as a historical concept, is concerned with social and intellectual concerns and structures. Sanders mentioned, "adaptation studies mobilize a wide vocabulary of active terms: version, variation, interpretation, continuation, transformation, imitation, pastiche, parody, forgery, travesty, transposition, revaluation, revision, rewriting, echo" (p.18). The reason that we can understand the Anouilh's *Antigone*, it is not because of the modernity written, rather it is more comprehensible to us, because we find and recognize the structures of our societies in Anouilh's text.

Benjamin (1968) mentioned, "In all language and linguistic creations, there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized" (p. 261). Anouilh's characters are more understandable and closer to us than Sophocles' characters, because of the recognition of social and intellectual structures. Unlike Sophocles' simple characters, Anouilh's characters represent the complex structures of modern world. These structures make the text of Anouilh a political text. For example, the ruler of Creon Sophocles is not a politician while the creator of Anouilh's Creon is precisely a person drowned in the politics.

#### 5. DISCUSSION:

Walter Benjamin (1968) starts his essay "The Task of the Translator" with a discussion of "the appreciation of a work of art or an art form" (p.253). Benjamin's main argument is that the appreciation of art does not rest on interpreting its content. He assumed, "Art posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works is it concerned with his attentiveness. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience" (p.253). He is an attempt to conceive of translation as a form of art, an art form, moreover, whose unique concern is what happens when one language passes into another. Hence, art in first step is not about communication and translation as an art is not about communication or connection too. Whereof translation is a kind of adaptation we can claim this idea of Benjamin could be appropriate for adaptation too. On the other hand, Sanders mentioned, "adaptations carry the same title as their source text" (p.22). Therefore, in Anouilh adaptation text, the title and framework of an original text are same and it is completely coincident to the Sophocles' *Antigone*. There are, however, some major differences between these plays. First, Tiresias is absent in the Anouilh's play and there is nothing about the divination and anger of gods. Secondly, unlike Sophocles' play, Creon does not regret for his action in the Anouilh's text and makes nothing to bury Polynices' body or rescue *Antigone*. Furthermore, there are significant paradoxes between the characters and the story of *Antigone* in Sophocles' text and Anouilh's text. The most important of these contradictions are mentioned below, and each will be discussed respectively.

In Sophocles' text, from the very beginning of the *Antigone* and *Ismene* dialogue we can find out the role of characters and all information about them. But in Anouilh's text situation is completely different; "in his text and context, characters and other theatrical elements are not initially introduced as Sophocles rather those introductions are presented step by step during the play" (Bray, 1987, p. 139).

In Anouilh's play *Antigone* at the beginning is portrayed as a delicate and innocent girl:

*"CHORUS: Well, here we are. These people that you see here are about to act out for you the story of Antigone. That THIS LITTLE CREATURE by herself, staring straight ahead, seeing nothing, is Antigone. She is thinking. She is thinking that the instant I finish telling you who's who and what's what in this play, she will burst forth as the, TENSE, SALLOW, WILLFUL GIRL, who is about to rise up and face the whole world alone – alone against the world and against Creon, her Uncle, the King..."(p.13)*

Anouilh deliberately uses the word little, tense, sallow and willful in her description. He needs this image for the rest of the play, defiantly for the end of the play. He introduces and describes his heroine as a skinny and not so beautiful woman, to make her responsibility more and more effective. Nevertheless, despite all these weaknesses, she stands against Creon. The scene of Antigone's dialogue with Creon provides a brilliant setting for Anouilh to rise Antigone to top and set down Creon. In Anouilh's text, Creon himself is a reason of Antigone's majesty. For example, when Antigone is frustrated and wants to give up the struggle, Creon's talk about happiness suddenly bring her back into the battlefield again:

*CREON: Antigone, go and find Haemon and get married quickly. Be happy.*

*ANTIGONE: Yes.*

*CREON: You have your whole life ahead of you and life is a treasure.*

*ANTIGONE: Yes.*

*CREON: And you were about to throw it away. Life flows like water and you young people let it run away through your fingers, Shut your hands, hold on to it Antigone. Life is not what you think it is. Life is a child playing round your feet, a tool you hold firmly in your grip, a bench you sit down upon in the evening, in your garden. People will tell you that that's not life, that life is something else. They will tell you that because they need your strength and your fire, and they will want to make use of you. Don't listen to them. Believe me when I tell you – the only poor consolation that we have in our old age is to discover that what I have just said to you is true. Life is nothing more than the happiness that you get out of it.*

*ANTIGONE: Happiness...*

*CREON: Not much of a word, is it!*

*ANTIGONE: What kind of happiness do you foresee for me? Paint me the picture of your happy Antigone. What are the unimportant little sins that I shall have to commit before I am allowed to sink my teeth into life and tear happiness from it! Tell me: to whom shall I have to lie? Upon whom shall I have to fawn! To whom must I sell myself? Whom do you want me to leave dying, while I turn away my eyes?*

*CREON. Antigone, be quiet... (pp. 56-57)*

The heroine Antigone who portrayed as a little, tense, sallow, willful and innocent girl and provoked the sympathy of audiences, at the end of the scene achieves such power that audiences will be proud of her and at the end of the play, Creon, who has fallen from the throne and authority arouses the sympathy of audiences.

In Anouilh's text, Creon has a positive outlook to life and at the most difficult moments he says YES to life, but Antigone has a negative way and says NO to it and she is ready to accept all the consequences of her action. Creon seems to love or at least tolerate the life with all its difficulties and sufferings. Antigone but denies the life which created by lies, pretense and selfishness. In Antigone's repeated use of NO against Creon and repeated use of YES by Creon, shows the perspective of people in Second World War time. In some case, Creon represented as a wise person who has a positive look at life and Antigone represented as young person who has a negative view to life. And also these perspectives represented the war situation for young and old people. On the other hand, Creon character could be a symbol of timid person who accept to be alive and live by misery and Antigone could be the symbol of person who is not accept this miserable life.

*CREON: My dear, I woke up one morning and found myself King of Thebes. God knows, there were other things I loved in life more than power.*

*ANTIGONE: Then you should have said no.*

*CREON: Yes, yes, I could have done that. Only, I felt that it would have been cowardly. I should have been like a workman who turns down a job that has to be done. So I said yes... (p.50)*

Creon doesn't want to kill Antigone, infact he wants to free her from the death penalty, not because Antigone is his nephew and his son's wife, but because saying no to life endangers the kings power and authority system and it may encourage others to stand against the power and also questions his positive attitude to life either.

In Sophocles' Antigone, there are two different struggles. The first struggle is between Creon and Antigone, whilst the second struggle is within Creon inside. Because when Tiresias warns Creon from the wrath of the gods, Creon finds himself in a dilemma, in on one side was his own law and on the other side was the wrath of the gods. In this struggle the gods won the battle and eventually Creon canceled his command. But in Anouilh's play, on the one hand Creon wants to save and help Antigone, but on the other hand Antigone insists to kill herself. From these facts, one may conclude that in Sophocles' play the main struggle is between Creon and gods but in Anouilh's play, the main struggle is between Creon and Antigone.

“Antigone’s action awaked the others” (Butler, 1893, p 34). Maybe because of this action, Ismene who has a conservative and devout personality dared to stand against Creon and demand death:

*ISMENE: Antigone!*

*ANTIGONE: You, too? What do you want?*

*ISMENE: Oh, forgive me, Antigone. I've come back. I'll be brave. I'll go with you now.*

*ANTIGONE: Where will you go with me?*

*ISMENE: Creon! If you kill her, you'll have to kill me too. I was with her. I helped her bury Polynices... (p.59)*

In Sophocles' Antigone, divine and human law are against of one another, while in Anouilh's Antigone, we are in a world where the behavior and actions of two main characters are based on the law which derives from their own attitude to life.

In the Sophocles' play and during that time, the belief in honoring the dead bodies and burying them in a glorious ceremony was considered as a custom and to be firmly held religious belief too, and also “Sophocles’ audience has grown with these beliefs and norms and if anyone repudiate these beliefs, he/she will be punishing and it will not be acceptable at all” (Ferrater Mora, 1962, p. 56). Now, in these circumstances, Creon issues a decree that calls into question and violates these traditional customs. Hence, Creon's command made a problem and changed the stability of society. On the other hand, the effects of Creon's command is not just about Antigone’s action and burying Polynices, rather it effected to the whole story of the play and made a terrific tragedy, including the curse of the gods and their punishments and made a dreadful punishment for Creon and his family. By and large, in Sophocles’ play Creon command, it is better to say, Creon action causes Antigone’s deed, Tiresias' claims, Haemon act, his wife action and so on.

In Anouilh's Antigone, there is a different situation. In Anouilh's time and also nowadays the belief in honoring the dead bodies and burying them in a glorious ceremony isn't so tight like ancient time anymore. It is important for people but if someone deny to do that, it doesn't mean any insult to the gods or others and it doesn't bring any punishment for him through the gods. In Anouilh's play, tragedy is on and about Antigone’s action. In fact, it seems that, Creon's decree is just an excuse for Antigone to kill herself. At the beginning of the play by such description about her, it seems that she is not happy anymore and she is looking for an alibi to end her life and standing against Creon role is just an action to find an excuse for her own act. She wants to kill herself and by Creon command, she is going to end it. Her decision to die was so serious that if the situation were otherwise, if Creon had not issued such a decree, she would certainly have found another way to commit suicide. As you can see in a dialogue between Creon and Antigone, she just looking for to find something in Creon speech and finally by using a simple word “happiness” she became insistence to die. On the other hand, in this play, there is no longer any trace of Tiresias and the anger of gods. What makes the play a tragedy, is Antigone’s action, not Creon's command.

No mention any special historical timeline in Sophocles’ play, and no specific time can be considered. On the other hand, the content of his tragedy made based on myth which is usually lack of a specific time and vast it universal. But in terms of the length of the play, like the ancient Greek tragedies, it takes place for nearly a full day, when Antigone met Ismene in the morning until the tragedy of the play is over at night. The location is also in City of Thebes and most of the plays take place in or around the Crown Palace.

Anouilh in his revision text has tried to keep the structure of Sophocles’ play as much as possible. He has also shown his story in keeping with the special period of time. Anouilh's play begins from morning and ends with night. But about an historical time he has chosen a different consequence. We cannot state an exact time of this play. Many things, such as battle in Thebes city and burying dead people and religious ceremony for death shows the myth and old history of the play and on the other side of the coin, by representing and talking about cars, cigarettes and playing cards he shows a present time either.

*CREON: And later on, when they came home wearing evening clothes, smoking cigarettes, strutting like men, they would take no notice of you and you thought they were wonderful...*

*CREON: A cheap, idiotic bounder, that is what he was. A cruel, vicious little voluptuary. A little beast with just wit enough to drive a car faster and throw more money away than any of his pals...*

*FIRST GUARD: NO. Let's have some fun this time. Bring your wife, and they always put the damper on! First place, what do you do with kids? Bring them, they always want to go to the can just when your right in the middle of a game of cards or something...(p. 40)*

He used these different time and objects and made his play much more complicated. In other words, Anouilh puts his play in a weird historical context that we can neither be considered mythical nor present day. The opening of Antigone by Anouilh is significant as it implies dramatic autonomy on a spatial temporal plane; set without historical or terrestrial implications. This lends the play a contemporaneity and relevance in the current geo political scenario, and brings it out of the situation of Greek culture.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

Reworking of a classic is a means to contextualize a work of art in contemporary times. A classic stands out as it transcends the spatial-temporal plane of existence and lends itself conveniently to modern interpretations. The opening of *Antigone* by Anouilh is significant as it implies dramatic autonomy on a spatial-temporal plane; set without historical or terrestrial implications. This lends the play a contemporaneity and relevance in the current geo-political scenario, and brings it out of the milieu of Greek culture. The stage setting signifies a contemporary locale, where the characters onstage, are chatting, drinking and playing cards in fading light before the play begins. Interestingly, the play is not divided into acts and scenes and is played without interval.

*Antigone's* play is written by Jean Anouilh which is a French revision of Sophocles' ancient play. Although, there are a long standing gaps between Sophocles' play and Anouilh's play, but still there are many similarities in context and theme. The first thing that needs to be said is the differences in plot of the play. There are just two differences, first of all, Tiresias is not in Anouilh story and there is nothing about the anger and punishments of gods. Second of all, in Anouilh's play, Creon does not regret his action and makes no effort to bury Polynisos' body and also save Antigone. The second thing that needs to be said is a difference of giving information about the story and characters. In Sophocles' text, from the very beginning of the *Antigone* and Ismene dialogue we can find out the role of characters and all information about them. But in Anouilh's text situation is completely different; in his text and context, characters and other theatrical elements are not initially introduced as Sophocles rather those introductions are presented step by step during the play. However, there are such significant differences in revised text. Hence, Anouilh wrote *Antigone* during the second world war and he revised this play as a protest against the fascist regime in France. *Antigone* is a metaphor for rebellion against autocracy and that is why it becomes modern and contemporary. The thematic concerns of *Antigone* are topical as the world is still faced with both suppressions from without and repression from within at the hands of oppressive regimes. Hence the question of allowing funeral rites for her dead brother, Polynices, is not so much about the maltreatment meted out to him after death, but how *Antigone* struggles to assert her right, and eventually has to pay with her life, because of her rebellion against authority. That is why the issue of burial rites occupies minimal space in Anouilh's *Antigone*, where the characters are driven by impulses, and not by the notions of religion and hereafter. In *Antigone* by Sophocles, the burial issue is the locus of conflict, culminating in mourning. Anouilh's revision of *Antigone* changes the character of *Antigone* as a modern character. This sort of revision gives a different reading of *Antigone* which combine by politics, sociology and psychology in modernity.

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