

A Study of Anouilh's *Antigone*

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〈Abstract〉

Anouilh, on the basis of the famous tragedy of Sophocles, wrote two *Antigones*. The first one which appeared during the Occupation is rather of political concern and a mirror of the conflict of Frenchmen under a specific situation, while the other deals with more philosophical values. In this paper my whole concern is with the second version in 1946.

On the surface, Anouilh's *Antigone* is based on the same myth and dramaturgy as those of Sophocles' *Antigone*. But his theme and effect on the audience are quite contrary to those of Sophocles: Anouilh's modernized theme deals with the eternal tragedy of all human beings, not just of the noblemen with their *hamartia*; while Sophocles can achieve the heightening effect of *catharsis* on the absorbed audience, Anouilh asks the audience to see the world as it is, keeping both the optimum emotional distance and the optimal willingness of participation. In *Antigone*, Anouilh really gives new life and meaning to the myth and dramatic technique of old days.

Anouilh의 *Antigone* 연구

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〈요 약〉

Anouilh는 Sophocles의 *Antigone*에 현대적인 해석을 가해 두개의 *Antigone*를 썼다. 이중 Nazi의 불란서 점령기간 중 발표된 첫번째 *Antigone*는 당시의 정치적 특수상황으로 인해 Antigone의 저항성이 강조된 반면, 46년도의 *Antigone*는 인간 존재상황의 보다 근원적인 문제를 다루고 있다. 본고는 46년도 *Antigone*의 분석을 목적으로 삼았다.

Anouilh의 *Antigone*는 표면상 Sophocles와 동일한 소재와 동일한 극작법에 근거하고 있다. 그럼에도 불구하고 Anouilh가 다루는 주제와 이 작품이 관객에게 불러 일으키는 효과는 Sophocles의 *Antigone*와는 대립적이기 까지만 차이를 보이고 있다. Sophocles의 *Antigone*가 다른 그리스 비극처럼 비극적 결함을 지닌 고귀한 인물의 전락을 다룬 것에 비해, 이 작품은 모든 인간이 생존을 위해 필연적으로 겪게 되는 비극적인 전락을 주제로 다룬다. 또한 그리스 비극의 여러 수법이 관객으로 하여금 작품에 몰입하여 고향된 감화를 느끼도록 꾀한다면, Anouilh는 같은 극작법의 도입으로 관객으로 하여금 오히려 작품과 지질한 거리를 유지하며 삶과 세상을 이성적으로 판단하도록 유도했다. 이 작품은 고대 신화와 극작법이 현대에도 새로운 생명력을 지닐 수 있는 방법을 제시한 하나의 예이다.

I. Introduction

Anouilh, on the basis of the famous tragedy of Sophocles, wrote two *Antigones*.⁽¹⁾ The first one which appeared during the Occupation is rather of political concern and a mirror of the conflict of Frenchmen under a specific situation, while the other deals with more philosophical values. In this paper my whole concern is with the second version in 1946.

It is fairly interesting that many differences are easily found between the 1946 version and Sophocles' *Antigone* because they have both dramatized the same myth using the conventional dramaturgy of Greek drama. My purpose in this paper is to follow up as many differences as possible; which, I am sure, would lead to a better interpretation of modern *Antigone*: better interpretation of its theme, techniques, and its effect. And through this process, I think the continuity of present and past would be shown.

II. The Inevitable Tragedy for Survival

Both Sophocles' *Antigone* and Anouilh's modernized *Antigone* rebel against Creon's edict that Polynices should not be buried, and die; one with certainty that she is in the right and Creon is in the wrong, and the other without that. This indicates well that the themes of the two plays are different from each other in spite of their basically similar story.

In the Greek drama, *Antigone* is, though not spotless, chiefly a martyr to the higher law. When arrested, she defends her deed in the name of God:

Creon: Did you know the order forbidding such an act?

Antigone: I knew it, naturally. It was plain enough.

Creon: And yet you dared to contravene it?

Antigone: Yes.

That order did not come from God. Justice,
That dwells with the gods below, knows no such law.
I did not think your edicts strong enough
To overrule the unwritten, unalterable laws
Of God and heaven, you being only a man.⁽²⁾

Her assertion that Creon violates the God's eternal law is strongly backed up throughout the play. First, the chorus receives his edict with slight reserve:

Creon, son of Menoeceus

You have given your judgement for the friend and for the enemy.

As for those that are dead, so for us who remain

Your will is law. (Sophocles, p.132)

And when they hear that somebody defied it, they express themselves by saying "My lord, I fear—I feared it from the first—/ That this may prove to be an act of the gods"(Sophocles, p.133). The citizenry of Thebes are also on *Antigone's* side as is shown by her bold declaration that "All

(1) Sometimes a literary work can hardly be changed without being made a different one. sometimes it can. As for Anouilh's *Antigone*, the changes are significant enough to make two different works.

(2) Sophocles, *Antigone* in *Sophocles: The Theban Plays*, trans. E.F. Watling(Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books), 1947, p.138. From now on, all my necessary quotation from Sophocles' *Antigone* will be done only with its page number and the author's name.

these/Would say that what I did was honourable/But fear locks up their lips" (Sophocles, pp. 139—140). Haemon, reaffirming the opposition of the whole Thebes against Creon's edict, entreats him to listen to wise advice. More than anything else, Teiresias' supernatural prophecy and its realization are the most powerful evidence that Antigone's view of the matter is the right one and Creon's is the wrong. He tells Creon that the gods, being angry with his doing, demand the burial of Polynices' body. When Creon blasphemously rejects his advice, Teiresias prophesies deaths in Creon's family as retribution for his crime:

Then hear this. Ere the chariot of sun
Has rounded once or twice his wheeling way,
You shall have given a son of your own loins
To death, in payment for death—two deaths to pay.
One for the life that you have sent to death,
The life you have abominably entomed;
One for the dead still lying above ground
Unburied, unhonoured, unblest by the gods below.
You cannot undo it. It follows of necessity
From what you have done. (Sophocles, pp.154—55)

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, it is crystal-clear that Creon has sinned against the Gods and Antigone is innocent.

The cause of downfall for both Creon and Antigone is their innate stubbornness. Creon has his own honesty, his own justification, and his own sense of responsibility. He seems never to intend the transgression of the higher law; his judgment is wrong:

Hold him in high esteem
I suppose, and buried him like a benefactor—
A man who came to burn their temples down,
Ransack their holy shrines, their land, their laws?
Is that the sort of man you think gods love?
Not they. (Sophocles, p.134)

If he listened to wise advice, he would escape a great disaster. But his obstinacy never permits it.

Antigone's hardness is shown in her attitude to Ismene, in her rebellion "when everything's against her" (Sophocles, p.139), and in her suicide. If she didn't act with her stubbornness, there would be no wasteful deaths including her own.

Anouilh's *Antigone* is not based on an ethical assumption that this way of life is right and that one is wrong; we cannot say that Creon is in the wrong and Antigone in the right. The two present us with very different issues of life. When Antigone rebels against his edict, Creon, unlike Sophocles' Creon, does his best to save her. He elaborates on all the reasons why she need not be sacrificed through his long, long speeches which are in sharp contrast with the short ones by Antigone. He points out the hypocrisy of religious burial and the folly to die for "a little earth"; the necessity of some arbitrary standards and false polices in this world; even the fact that the identification of two brothers is impossible and they were "cheap, idiotic bounders." Despite all these, Creon fails to persuade her. What makes her so obstinate? The true reason why she gives up her life pours out when Creon speaks a few words in praise of every happiness of life:

I spit on your happiness! I spit on your idea of life—that life must go on, come what may.
You are all like dogs that lick everything they smell. You with your promise of a humdrum

happiness—provided a person doesn't ask too much of life. I want everything of life, I do; and I want it now! I want it total, complete: otherwise I reject it! I will not be moderate. I will not be satisfied with the bit of cake you offer me if I promise to be a good little girl. I want to be sure of everything this very day; sure that everything will be as beautiful as when I was a little girl. If not, I want to die.⁽³⁾

This Antigone's first long speech since their argument began makes everything clear. She aspires to purity and perfection of childhood. She can't endure anything vile: "I can say no to anything I think vile and I don't have to count the cost" (Anouilh, p.40). And she can't accept life which is less than perfection. When the purity of childhood disappears, she, losing all the meaning of life, cannot go on living. But man inevitably outgrows the childhood to lose his purity; because a grown-up must do his trade: "the truth is the work is there to be done, and a man can't fold his arms and refuse to do it. They say it's dirty work. But if we didn't do it, who would?" (Anouilh, pp.60—61) Then man is compelled to shed all the comforts of infantile dreams and behold the world as it is, or the world of ugliness as well as of beauty, and he must accept it to live on; needless to say, it is tremendously difficult: "To say yes, you have to sweat and roll up your sleeves and plunge both hands into life to elbows" (Anouilh, p.62). This is really "the burden of manhood." When Creon says to the page, "Never grow up if you can help it," it is because of this tragic situation of human existence.

Whoever rejects to compromise, or wants to evade the burden of manhood cannot survive. Antigone, feeling disillusionment by the "paper flower" of manhood and the arbitrariness of the world shown by the defilement of her brother's corpse, fails to accept the reality of life. She cannot live on. So she dies as a child:

Antigone had hanged herself by the cord of her robe, by the red and golden twisted cord of her robe. The cord was round her neck like a child's collar." (Anouilh, p.59)

Here the little boy image tells us that it is the purity of childhood that kills her.

Creon's long and earnest argument shows his attempt to put into her an idea that "Life is not what you think it is"; but it is also his own desperate effort to accept life:

A moment ago, when we were quarreling, you said I was drinking in your words. I was. But it wasn't you I was listening to; it was a lad named Creon who lived here in Thebes many years ago. He was thin and pale, as you are. (Anouilh, p.47)

The surface conflict between Creon and Antigone is, in fact, the conflict between his inner and outer selves: the conflict between his aspiring to purity and his necessity to compromise. In other words, through Antigone and Creon who symbolize childhood and adulthood respectively, Anouilh shows us the eternal conflict of human beings who are imposed to give up purity to survive. We all human beings suffer from this unavoidable tragedy of existence: "We are all wounded to death" (Anouilh, p.53). And it is this agony that Antigone's suicide and Creon's bereavement symbolize.

Those who only concern their "cheap little day-to-day traffic" or "those who believed nothing at all" like three guards can least suffer from this agony. They are "eternally indifferent" to it, for nothing that happens can matter to them. Perhaps they are the strongest to survive. It is really a powerful image of our cruel life that the stage in the end is occupied only by these three guards.

Many distinctions of Anouilh's *Antigone* from Sophocles' are due to the thematic difference. They

(3) Jean Anouilh, *Antigone* in *Four Contemporary French Plays*, trans. Lewis Galantiere (New York: The Modern Library), 1967, p.49. After this, I will quote the necessary passage with its page number and the author's name.

all contribute to the embodiment of the theme. Among them, the elimination of Teiresias and putting in Nurse are the most conspicuous ones. In Sophocles', Teiresias is an indispensable character to make certain that Antigone is in the right and Creon transgresses the God; in Anouilh's *Antigone* such ethical question doesn't matter at all; naturally he loses all his importance and role. Instead motherly Nurse enters. She recalls Antigone to the dreams, happiness, and innocence of Childhood:

Oh, it's so good that you are here. I can hold your callused hand, your hand that is so prompt to ward off evil. (Anouilh, p.16)

...you must keep me warm and safe, the way you used to do when I was little. (Anouilh, p.16)

There, now, my sweet red apple. Do you remember how I used to rub your cheeks to make them shine? My dear, wrinkled red apple! (Anouilh, p.10)

She is her childhood itself. Through her, we can see how firmly Antigone adheres to her immaculate, lovely childhood and refuses to acquiesce the absurdity of life.

The changes in Haemon's role and character are quite noteworthy. In the Greek drama Haemon is completely neglected by Antigone; she never pays attention to him, though he does his best to save her and gives up his life for her. And his rounded advice to Creon and the reasonable argument prove that he is quite a man of wisdom. But Anouilh's Haemon is childlike and Antigone's other self as is shown by Antigone's description: "The Haemon I love is hard and young, faithful and difficult to satisfy, the way I am" (Anouilh, p.48). The following passage reassures this point:

Creon: Haemon—you will have to resign yourself to life without Antigone. Sooner or later there comes a day of sorrow in each man's life when he must cease to be a child and take up the burden of manhood. That day has come for you.

Haemon: (backs away a step) That giant strength, that courage. That massive god who used to pick me up in his arms and shelter me from shadows and monsters— was that you, Father? Was it of you I stood in awe? Was that man you?

Creon: For God's sake, Haemon, do not judge me! Not you, too!

Haemon: (pleading now) This is all a bad dream, Father. You are not yourself. It isn't true that we have been backed up against a wall, forced to surrender. We don't have to say *yes* to this terrible thing. You are still king. You have no right to desert me, to shrink *into nothingness*. The world will be too bare, I shall be too alone in the world, if you force me to disown you.

Creon: The world *is* bare, Haemon, and you *are* alone.
You must cease to think your father all powerful.
Look straight at me. See your father as he is.
That is what it means to grow up and be a man.

Haemon: (Stares at Creon for a moment) I tell you that I will not live without Antigone.
(Turns and goes quickly out through arch.) (Anouilh, p.53)

He is in every respect Antigone: he refuses to accept the life as it is and simply importunes Creon to save Antigone. This passage is a really powerful recapitulation of intense conflict between Antigone and Creon, and Haemon contributes a great deal to clarification of the theme. Besides he serves as a device for the character revelation of Antigone: through her letter to Haemon her agony and disillusionment of life are disclosed.

The insertion of the "kid's shovel" also echoes the theme. Unlike Anouilh's *Antigone*, Sophocles' Antigone does not use a kid's shovel. This strongly implies that Creon as manhood is pitted against childhood.

III. Dramatic Intention

The atmosphere of Anouilh's *Antigone* is modern because of its anachronistic elements. There are references to cigarettes, automobiles, coffee, blood test, birth certificate, and so on. But the most interesting anachronism is the characters with the characteristics of modern common people from the stupid three guards who are "bothered by the little day-to-day worries that beset us all" to the king who "goes to bed with the day's work." And these anachronistic elements induce the audience to positively participate in the play with the conviction that the tragic situation of the play is of our own, not of the old days.

Other techniques Anouilh uses in *Antigone* make the audience keep the optimum psychic distance from the characters and the action of the play. They continually prevent the audience from being affected by them. The question why Anouilh adapts the well-known Greek myth following the Greek dramaturgy is solved to view it from this point of view.

Antigone is presented before a gray cloth cyclorama with little setting; only the lights are used to indicate the time lapse. There are no traditional act and scene divisions by the curtain. Naturally many events and actions, especially the bloody ones, are reported by the messenger or the chorus. As long as the modern audiences are concerned, this Greek bare stage and its consequently reduced amount of action can destroy the illusion of reality of the 'box set'. But Anouilh does more by exploiting the chorus' role in Sophocles' *Antigone*. They are, unlike the conventional chorus of Greek drama, a little detached from the action without any marked character except when they exhort Creon to follow the advice of Teiresias. Anouilh's chorus which is reduced to one person, apart from the play like them, describes the character and their emotional status which must be shown through the action on the stage: "Antigone doesn't think, she acts; she doesn't reason, she feels" (Anouilh, p.3); "Another thing she is thinking is this; she is going to die"(Anouilh, p.3). But his most important role is that he eliminates all the elements of surprise and suspense by foretelling what's going on: "She will go on knitting all through the play, till the time comes for her to go to her room and die" (Anouilh, p.5). Even he prepares the audience for the crisis of the play. When the sentry exits, or before the arrested Antigone enters to argue hotly with Creon, the chorus intrudes to create the necessary time lapse during which Antigone may rebury her brother. Then he indirectly indicates that "a crucial moment has been reached in the play"(Anouilh, pp.27-28) with these words:

Don't mistake me: I said "shout": I did not say groan, whimper, complain. That, you cannot do. But you can shout aloud; you can get all those things said that you never thought you'd be able to say or never even knew you had it in you to say. And you don't say these things because it will do any good to say them; you know better than that. You say them for their own sake; you say them because you learn a lot from them. (Anouilh, pp.27-28)

I don't know what more can be done to prevent the audience from being deeply involved in the fictitious. The intermittent self-conscious lines of the characters and the chorus echo this dramatic intention:

Mind you, Antigone doesn't know all these things about herself. I know them because it is my business to know them. That's what a Greek Chorus is for.(Anouilh, p.33)

I want you to know what took place in the wings of this drama in which you are burning to play a part. (Anouilh, p.45)

You have cast me for the villain in this little play of yours, and yourself for the heroine. (Anouilh, p.38)

Another alienation technique he exploits is the infusion of the sense of fatality of Greek drama into his *Antigone*. The sense of fatality in such passage of Sophocles as "you cannot alter this. The gods themselves/ Cannot undo it. It follows of necessity/ From what you have done"(Sophocles, p.155) comes from the explanation of the nature of tragedy by solo Chorus:

Tragedy is clean, it is form, it is flawless. It has nothing to do with melodrama.... Death in a melodrama, is really horrible because it is never inevitable. In a tragedy, nothing is in doubt and everyone's destiny is known. That makes for tranquility. There is a sort of fellow-feeling among characters in a tragedy: he who kills is as innocent as he who gets killed: it's all a matter of what part you are playing. (Anouilh, p.27)

This sense of fatality really distracts our attention from plot to create psychic detachment. At the same time it reinforces the theme that all human beings unavoidably suffer from the manhood burden and the amount of our agony depends upon our role and belief. The dialogue between Antigone and Ismene is also full of the sense of fatality and does the same things:

Ismene: Creon will have us put to death.

Antigone: Of course he will. That's what he's here for. He will do what he has to do; and we will do what we have to do. He is bound to put us to death. We are bound to go out and bury our brother. That's the way it is. (Anouilh, p.12)

Now we can grasp Anouilh's dramatic intention of Antigone through the alienation techniques and anachronistic elements: he requires us to participate in the play with the optimum psychic detachment. That is, he wants the audience to analyze the characters and action of the play rather than to identify with them emotionally; to intellectually think about the tragic situations of our existence.

IV. Conclusion

On the surface, Anouilh's *Antigone* is based on the same myth and dramaturgy as those of Sophocles' *Antigone*. But his theme and effect on the audience are quite contrary to those of Sophocles: Anouilh's modernized theme deals with the eternal tragedy of all human beings, not just of the noblemen with their *hamartia*; while Sophocles can achieve the heightening effect of *catharsis* on the absorbed audience, Anouilh asks the audience to see the world as it is, keeping both the optimum emotional distance and the optimal willingness of participation. In *Antigone*, Anouilh really gives new life and meaning to the myth and dramatic technique of old days. And through them, he succeeds in making a powerful statement of eternal conflict of human beings. I think it can be applauded as an effective play.

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