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**PARALLEL LIVES**

**SOPHOCLES' HEROES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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0306492

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**CLASSICS**

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## Plays and Texts

A list of the translations and editions of the primary texts that I shall use throughout.

Sophocles. *Electra and Other Plays*. Translated by Watling. Penguin Classics, 1953.  
(*Philoctetes*)

———. *Three Theban Plays*. Translated by Robert Fagles. London: Penguin Classics, 1984. (*Antigone & Oedipus*)

*Sophocles I*. Translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones. (Loeb) Harvard University Press, 1994.  
(*Oedipus Tyrannus*)

———. *Sophocles II*. Translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones. (Loeb) Harvard University Press, 1994. (*Antigone and Philoctetes*)

Gide, André. *My Theatre*. Translated by Jackson Mathews. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1951.

———. *Oeuvres Complètes* - vol. 3. Edited by L. Martin Chauffier. 10 vols. Paris: NRF, 1933.

Heaney, Seamus. *The Cure at Troy*. London: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Anouilh, Jean. *Antigone*. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1947.

———. *Antigone*. Translated by Barbara Bray. London: Methuen Drama, 2000.

Brecht, Bertolt and Neher, Caspar. *Antigonemodell 1948*. Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1955.

Brecht, Bertolt. *The Antigone of Sophocles*. Translated by Judith Malina. New York: Applause, 1990.

Cixous, Hélène, *The Name of Oedipus: Song of the Forbidden Body*, in *Plays by French and Francophone Women*. Edited and Translated by Christiane P Makward and Judith G Miller. The University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Cocteau, Jean - *La Machine Infernale*. ed. W.M Landers. London Harrap, 1967

———. *The Infernal Machine, Orpheus, Oedipus Rex*. Translated by Carl Wildman. Oxford University Press, 1962.

**Note.** I will use the spellings for each character from the English translations of these texts.

## Philoctetes

There are a number of useful critical works on Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, important among these are Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (1983), Blundell, *Helping Friends & Harming Enemies* (1991), Segal, *Visual Symbolism and Visual Effects in Sophocles* (1980) & *Sophocles' Tragic World* (1995), Scodel, *Sophocles* (1984), Budelman, *The Language of Sophocles* (2006), Roberts 'Different Stories: Sophoclean Narrative(s) in the *Philoctetes*' (1989), Wilson 'The Wound and the Bow' (1952), and Hunsaker Hawkins, *The Classical World* (1996). These texts all provide useful information for the interpretation and historical setting for the *Philoctetes*, further to this, the disease theme is developed by Biggs 'The Disease Theme in Sophocles' Ajax, *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*' (1996), and Stevens, 'The Wound of *Philoctetes*' (1995). Additionally, the reading of Odysseus in disguise can be found in Roberts, 'Different Stories: Sophoclean Narrative(s) in the *Philoctetes*' (1989), and Falkner 'Containing Tragedy: Rhetoric and Self-Representation in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*' (1998).

For material on Gide and his theatre, as well as specifically on his *Philoctète*, some useful literature is: Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* (1984), McLaren, *The Theatre of André Gide* (1953), Mann, *André Gide and the Crisis of Modern Thought* (1948), both the (1963) journal article 'Gide and Hellenism' and the book *André Gide and the Greek Myth* (1967) by Watson-Williams, San Juan Jr, 'The Idea of André Gide Theatre' (1965), and Picon 'Remarks on Gide's Ethics' (1951). Pollard 'Date and Interpretation of Gide's *Philoctetes*' (1970) addresses the date of Gide's play and the issues that can thus be addressed in the text (ie. the Dreyfus Affair - also see Derfler, *The Dreyfus Affair* (2002)).

Literature on Heaney's *The Cure At Troy* is predominately found in journal articles or essays in edited books. The following are the most important of these, and all have interesting things to say about the nature of Heaney's play and its relationship to Ireland: Deane 'Field Day's Greeks (and Russians)' (2002), McDonald 'Amid our Troubles' (2002), Denard 'Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-Visions' (2000), Carey, 'Heaney and Havel: Parables of Politics' (1996), Wilmer, 'Seamus Heaney and the Tragedy of Stasis' (1999) as well as 'Radical Reworkings. Prometheus, Medea and Antigone: Metaphors for Irish Rebellion and Social Change' (1996). Denard touches on the issue of post colonial debate in theatre which is addressed more clearly by Hardwick, *Translating Worlds, Translating Cultures* (2000), 'Greek Drama and Anti-Colonialism: Decolonizing Classics' (2004), 'Refiguring Classical Texts: Aspects of the Postcolonial Condition' (2005), and *Shades of Multi-Lingualism and Multi-Vocalism in Modern Performances of Greek Tragedy in Post-Colonial Contexts* (2007). There are also a number of useful articles by Heaney himself, including his participation in the Jayne Lectures - Heaney (2004c), his 'Production Notes in No

Particular Order' for *The Cure*, (2002) and his article 'The Gates of Thebes' in the Sunday Times - Heaney (2004b).

## Antigone

Steiner's monograph *Antigones* (1984) is a useful place to start for the history of *Antigone* in production, literature and art. For scholarly debate on Sophocles' *Antigone* important literature includes, Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (1983), Scodel, *Sophocles* (1984), Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (1920), the introduction Griffith gives to his translation of *Antigone* (1999), Carter, *The Politics of Greek Tragedy* (2007), and Sourvinou-Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (2003). There are also a large number of useful journal articles, some of interest to the topics discussed are: Ferguson, 'Politics and Man's Fate in Sophocles' "Antigone"' (1975), Joseph 'The Antigone as Cultural Touchstone' (1981), Lewis, 'An Alternative Date for Sophocles' Antigone' (1988), Mackay, 'Antigone, Coriolanus, and Hegel' (1962), and Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' Antigone' (1989). Also important is Zeitlin (1990) 'Thebes: Theatre of Self and Society in Athenian Drama', where she discusses the idea of Thebes as the 'anti-city'.

For material on the period of the German Occupation of France and the associated literature, see Atack, *Literature and the French Resistance* (1989), Forkey 'The Theaters of Paris During the Occupation' (1949), and Berry, 'Antigone and the French Resistance' (1946). Two good introductions to Anouilh and his theatre are Thody, *Anouilh* (1986), and Bradby, *Modern French Drama 1940-1990* (1991). For literature relating directly to Anouilh's *Antigone* see Fleming, 'Fascism on Stage: Anouilh's Antigone' (2006), Witt, both, *The Search for Modern Tragedy* (1991) and her article 'Fascist Ideology and Theatre under the Occupation: the case of Anouilh' (1993), DeLaura, 'Anouilh's Other "Antigone"' (1961), O'Hanlon, 'Metatragedy and Anouilh's *Antigone*' (1980), 'Berry Antigone and the French Resistance' (1946), Heiney 'Jean Anouilh: The Revival of Tragedy' (1955), Ziolkowski, 'The Fragmented Text: Classics and Postwar European Literature' (2000), Calin, 'Patterns of Imagery in Anouilh's *Antigone*' (1967), Sachs, 'Notes on the Theatricality of Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*' (1962) and Dickinson *Myth on the Modern Stage* (1969). For material on the chorus see Ince, 'Prologue and Chorus in Anouilh's *Antigone*' (1962), Jones, F 'Scenes from the Life of Antigone' (1950), McNultyre *The Theatre of Jean Anouilh* (1981), and Champigny 'Theatre in a Mirror: Anouilh' (1954). Dickinson, *Myth on the Modern Stage* (1969) discusses how chorus, scenery and costume are a debt to Cocteau, and Sartre gives and insight into the existential nature of Antigone in Anouilh's play in his (1946) article 'Forgers of Myth'.

For general literature on Brecht's theatre, actors and other works see: Brecht 'On the Experimental Theatre' (1961), Rouse, 'Brecht and the Contradictory Actor' (1984), Tian, '"Alienation-Effect" for Whom? Brecht's (Mis)interpretation of the Classical Chinese Theatre' (1997), and Völker, 'Brecht Today: Classic or Challenge' (1987). For Brecht's criticism of Aristotle, instructive works include: Willet (ed) *Brecht on Theatre* (1964), the usefulness of whose book should not be underated, Curran, 'Brecht's Criticism of Aristotle's Aesthetics of Tragedy' (2001), Gray, *Brecht* (1976), Goodman, H, 'Bertolt Brecht as "Traditional" Dramatist' (1952), and Gorelik, *An Epic Theatre Catechism* (1959). For information on Brecht's 'translation' of *Antigone* see: Weisstein, 'The Language of Brecht's *Antigone* and its relation to Hölderlin's version of Sophocles' (1973), Rouse 'The Sophocles/Hölderline Antigone and the System' (1980). And works on the effect and interpretation of the play comprise of Jones, F, 'Scenes from the life of Antigone' (1950), & 'Tragedy with a Purpose Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone*' (1957), as well as Elwood 'Hasenclever and Brecht: A Critical Comparison of Two *Antigones*' (1972).

## Oedipus

Key work on the interpretation of Sophocles' *Oedipus* is similar to those given for the previous chapters: Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (1983), Blundell, *Helping Friends & Harming Enemies* (1991), Scodel, *Sophocles* (1984), Segal, *Visual Symbolism and Visual Effects in Sophocles* (1980), *Sophocles' Tragic World* (1995) & *Oedipus Tyrannus. Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge* (1993), Brody, *"Fate" in Oedipus Tyrannus: A textual Approach* (1985). Additional material pertinent to this thesis in journal articles can be found Lesser 'Oedipus the King: The Two Dramas, the Two Conflicts' (1967), and Smith 'The Political Meaning of Unconscious Guilt' (1968).

I found Brown's biography of Jean Cocteau *An Impersonation of Angels* (1969), to be very useful. Oxenhandler's article and book are also of interest, 'Jean Cocteau: Theatre as Parade' (1954) and *The Theatre of Jean Cocteau* (1984). Some good material contextualising Cocteau's impact on French theatre can be found in Guicharnaud, *Modern French Theatre from Giradoux to Genet* (1969), Norrish, *New Tragedy and Comedy in France 1945-70* (1988), Knowles, *French Drama of the Interwar Years, 1918-39* (1967), and Burian, 'Tragedy adapted for stages and screens: Renaissance to the Present' (1997b). Other works on Cocteau's theatre and specifically *The Infernal Machine* include Jones, E, 'Hamlet and Oedipus' (1949), Bauschatz, 'Oedipus: Stravinsky and Cocteau Recompose Sophocles' (1991), Andrus, 'Oedipus Revisited: Cocteau's "Poésie de théâtre"' (1975), Boorsch 'The Use of Myths in Cocteau's Theatre' (1950), and Levitt 'Jean Cocteau's Theatre: Idea and Enactment' (1993).

For information on Cixous' theatre see: Miller, 'Jean Cocteau and Hélène Cixous: Oedipus' (1985), Foley, 'Bad Women: Gender Politics in Late 20th Century Performance and Revision of Greek Tragedy' (2004), Freeman, 'Bisexuality in Cixous's *Le Nom d'Œdipe*' (1989), Dobson, 'The Scene of Writing: The Representation of Poetic Identity in Cixous's Recent Theatre' (1988). Though short, the introduction to Makward & Miller, *Plays by French and Francophone Women* (1994) in which *Le Nom d'Œdipe* is printed in English translation is invaluable. Also informative are: Birkett, 'The Limits of Language: The Theatre of Hélène Cixous' (1992), Oliver, 'Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother' (1989), Bowlby, *Freudian Mythologies, Greek Tragedy and Modern Identity* (2007), Chase 'Oedipal Textuality: Reading Freud's Reading of Oedipus' (1979), and Ballif, 'Re/Dressing Histories; Or, On Re/Covering Figures Who Have Been Laid Bare By Our Gaze' (1992).

## An Introduction to Adaptation

When looking at adaptations<sup>1</sup> of Sophocles, you are immediately confronted with an array of choices. The word 'adaptation' itself is one confusingly simplistic in the face of the complexity of the media and styles sources can be adapted into.<sup>2</sup> But for myself, looking at the Twentieth Century adaptations in the theatre a choice immediately presented itself; between those adaptations that maintain fidelity to the original setting, and those that export the plot, or aspects of it, to a new environment. It is the former style that I believe is most relevant to the Classicist, and the six plays I have chosen to examine here fall into that category; the *Philoctetes* plays are set on Lemnos, the *Antigone* and *Oedipus* plays in Thebes.

The lure of a mythical setting is a potent one for a number of reasons, and each author has their own motivations for using it. They are locations rich in metaphor, and the playwright is able to harness this to create parallels with contemporary society whilst still maintaining a distance from it. But in order to add new elements to the story, and to create newly formed versions of Sophocles' heroes, the structure of the place has to be altered. And as such, the creation and manipulation of setting is one of my main points of interest in this discussion, particularly in its relationship to the construction of political and social discourse. Each of the plays, bar one, were written in the Twentieth Century

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<sup>1</sup> cf **Walton** (2006: 181-196) The definition of adaptation as opposed to translation is far from simple. Translation itself can be regarded as adaptation, (see **Hardwick** (2005: 107) "translation" now includes a wide range of verbal languages involved in translation to the stage.) the alteration that happens when a play is re-written in a new language and the choices as to metre, rhyme etc all mean that it is significantly changed from the original - even a literal word-for-word translation would be adaptation for the metre and poetry would be changed or even destroyed. Further development on the specific issue of metre and rhyme see, **Walton** (2006: 106-125) and **Budelmänn** (2000). However, in this work, I shall be using adaptation simply to mean plays which take a Sophoclean play as their inspiration, but affect significant changes in both plot and language.

<sup>2</sup> **Hutcheon** (2006: 14), see (1-32) for an exhaustive list of what can be categorised as an 'adaptation'.

- and Gide's *Philoctète* falls just a couple of years outside. I will look at them in pairs, showing the points of similarity and mutual departure from the Sophoclean texts in the fabrication of a new play, and examining the methods through which new political and social messages are explored and new theatrical styles achieved in the last century.

Staging Greek tragedy in an 'original' setting is not necessarily straightforward in the Twentieth Century, and is perhaps more complicated than creating a new location and characters to receive the bones of the old story. The attention paid to locating the action in these tragedies is quite unlike anything from previous centuries, and indeed such attention would have clashed with the emphasis on naturalism and accessibility of the late Nineteenth Century,<sup>3</sup> and it reflects both changing theatre fashions and the changing perception of Greek tragedy. George Steiner wrote: 'A setting of a text is as radical an act of interpretation as are translation, commentary, or performance'<sup>4</sup>, and it is vital for the location to have a meaning beyond simply being where the play has historically been set. I contend that the location is central to the development of each of the six texts under scrutiny, though in different ways for each; it is something created on a number of levels.

At face value, each play is set in the same place as the original, and on the page they have the same name. It is 'on the page' that I shall focus my enquiries into, because although some details remain of the their stagings in photos, reviews, descriptions and staging instructions, the main source available is the text each playwright wrote. Even with all the details, or even a film of the performance, it would be impossible to truly capture all the elements of a production in a theatre.<sup>5</sup> Alongside

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<sup>3</sup> Hall & McIntosh (2005: 432).

<sup>4</sup> Steiner (1984: 88).

<sup>5</sup> Hardwick (2003: 53).

visual clues such as set and costume, the playwrights use the narrative to map the Greek locations onto contemporary cities and countries, and they develop alternate realities and theatrical spaces for these places to exist in. These spaces are predominantly political in character, with the staging of some being more overtly political than their Athenian counterparts, but it is not uniformly so. The plays by Gide and Cixous fall outwith the trend, but though their visions eschew the use of Lemnos or Thebes to veil an allegory of a contemporary place, no less effort is exerted to re-orientate their setting for a new purpose. Location underpins action, and the techniques used to create this environment, and the manner in which the audience is encouraged to view and respond to the play with reference to the setting will all be examined in detail.

Each play opens with some form of theatrical device that deliberately dislocates and relocates, the author negotiating a path between the 'now' of the performance and the 'then' of Greek antiquity. It is not enough simply to lift the curtain on a set stage, the audience cannot be allowed to slip into a dreamlike play world, they must be deliberately transported, with that journey being used to produce meaning in its own right. Thus I will explore the ways in the world of the play is created onstage for the audience in each of these plays. They are environments that do a number of things, they pay homage to the Sophoclean original and emphasise the continuity of performance and adaptation, and still leave room for the dramatisation of a new story in a new political and social space. Techniques for doing this include set dressing and acting style, as well as prologues and other theatrical devices enshrined in the text. The prologues under examination in the following essays all contain metatheatrical elements, they are plays within plays and bend the rules of conventional storytelling. They also attempt to explain the purpose of the theatre, of the particular production on stage; they announce, as it were, the nature of the play to come.

Having set their audiences off on the back foot at the openings of these plays, these playwrights continue to employ metatheatrical devices throughout the play. The audience's reverie is repeatedly broken, forcing them to look at the play anew, both in terms of theatre and in terms of politics and social change. These plays contain worlds within worlds, and characters who are cast in intermediary roles between the audience and stage, commenting on the action in both spheres. That all these plays employ metatheatrical methods of commentary and structuring begs a question: does inviting a political comparison come at the cost of a sustained suspension of disbelief? And can metatheatre and tragedy really go hand in hand? These are plays that can be read simultaneously on different levels, perhaps as all good plays should. However, this can lead to problems, and at times the plays seemingly oscillate between two positions that don't fully dovetail, leaving questions over whether the authors manage to reconcile the different aspects of their texts to create a coherent message.

For the purpose of demonstrating the changes in theatrical style in performance of Greek tragedy, the example of Goethe's Greek tragedies gives us a good comparison. He followed contemporary theatre conventions, a result of which was that typically Greek devices like *deus ex machina* were removed. The intervention of the supernatural in the lives of the heroes on stage was rationalised and their contribution to the plot replaced with a development of human origin and explanations of their actions in terms of will, passion or accident. Enlightenment discourse featured heavily, for example, Iphigenia's plea for the sanctity of the laws of hospitality and common humanity at the end of *Iphigenia in Tauris*<sup>6</sup>. However, there is no commentary on the alterations within the text, and neither are there any attempts to set up parallels with contemporary personalities. For an author of the same era, Racine, his Greek tragedies

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<sup>6</sup> Goethe (1987:53, 2152-2175).

were about 'improving' on the Greek text.<sup>7</sup> His aim was psychological realism and not political relevancy and as such, maintaining the audience's suspension of disbelief is paramount, whereas modern productions show a prominent trend of breaking it. And although Goethe and Racine modernise the discourse of their plays to fit with contemporary philosophical trends as well as altering the endings, the bulk of these alterations are designed to be aesthetical and not political. Indeed, Racine talks of the 'tastes' of Paris and Athens being alike,<sup>8</sup> not their politics. And though Hecuba has many times stood for the despair in changing fortunes, and the double fratricide of Oedipus' sons for the religious internecine wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,<sup>9</sup> the last century has seen Greek tragedy become increasingly overt in its nature as a political medium. A medium which has become progressively more politically conspicuous and characterised with an almost documentary style in its adaptation in this last century.

Goethe and Racine make good examples of the changing fashions of theatre because their alterations stem in large part from a desire to make the play more naturalistic. In contrast, the last century has shown a trend to retreat from naturalism, and to deliberately break it down. And such is the case with the six modern plays featured in this discussion. It is something reflected in every aspect of the play. From the language and lyrical qualities of the text to the visual cues provided for the theatre audience and the nature of the stage directions written for those who read the text. We see stage dressing shy away from painted canvasses, costumes away from tunics and the characters holding up mirrors to themselves and reflecting on the story yet to come.

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<sup>7</sup> cf. **Racine** (1970: 49-53), **Hall & McIntosh** (2005: 319).

<sup>8</sup> **Racine** (1970: 51).

<sup>9</sup> **Burian** (1997b: 232).

There are a number of explanations for the differences in tone and content of Greek tragedy through the ages. In part, it is conforming to fashion, contemporary stage conventions and sensibilities. But perhaps this last century has become more aware of the very theatrical nature of theatre and the nature of a character in its own right. Or it could be that these authors are able to tap into part of the essence of Greek tragedy as it existed for the original authors and audiences; one of very theatrical and stylised conventions, of constant revision and reinterpretation, of newly contrived combinations of mythical persons and stories distilled into tense new dramas. Another angle of this comes from theatrical breakthroughs of the early 1900's, notably Pirandello's 1921 *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. His notion of characters being self-aware and existing without, or beyond authorship is one that holds a powerful influence over the authors I am discussing. The idea of a character being an entity in their own right is one particularly powerful in the case of many of the heroes of Greek myths and their stage. Greece has long held an ability to survive in the Western imagination, its architecture is replicated in our cities and the same political system that gave us Sophocles gave us that word held sacred in the West, democracy.<sup>10</sup>

But of our inheritance from Greece, the characters she bequeathed to us are the most alive. They change and grow in each reading and replication, but ultimately they are always defined by their names. Every generation throws up bold new interpretations and the collision between metatheatre and tragedy has produced some captivating results. Anouilh's heroine knows what it means to be called Antigone, and Cixous' Jocasta begs Oedipus to refute his name. Of course they cannot deny their names; their names are their acts and they cannot escape them. However, these delineations spark great creativity, and despite similarities no two adaptations are alike. The

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<sup>10</sup> cf. Goldhill (2004: 163-212)

personalities and motivations of the characters, their circumstance and the journey they take to reach the defining events of their existence vary in each of their excursions into fresh print. These names, these characters have shown themselves to have an endless ability to change, alter, and portray new perspectives and style without ever losing their integrity.

This is of course not a new state of being for the characters of Greek myth. At no point in the ancient world did they adhere to a strict canon. Certain events are fixed, but the stories that surround them impinge on and alter each other, and thus no version of a story can be seen as being intrinsically right or wrong. The Greeks did not recognise the need for a fixed continuity as is required by modern man and his different perception of history. In a modern trilogy the expectation would be that the chronology of events and genealogy of those involved would remain constant throughout, even if different stories were put forward altering characters and mentioning different versions of events, whereas the three Theban plays of Sophocles throw up a number of chronological and character anomalies. But they were never intended to be presented as a trilogy, and nor do they represent Sophocles' opinion of a definitive versions of events. Rather, each play represents the events formulated in a version he believed most compelling and most likely to garner him first prize in the competition in a given year.<sup>11</sup>

The wealth of themes and the myriad interpretations of character in Sophocles supply authors with almost limitless points of inspiration. Alongside this, there are a number of different approaches towards staging and theatrical and literary style to choose among. With such options at their disposal, the playwright need only pick an element of the Sophoclean text to expand on or re-write. And each time they do so, a

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<sup>11</sup> *Philoctetes* won first prize in 409, **Wilkins & Macleod** (1987: 7), *Oedipus* lost to a forgotten play by Philocles. **Segal** (1993: 16), 'the failure of Sophocles to win the first prize excited the indignation of the rhetor Aristides in the second century A.D., oration 46, 256, 11' **Dawe** (2006: 1), cf. **Marshall & Willigenburg** (2004: 100) *Antigone* the placing is unknown, but possibly led to the election of Sophocles to general the following year, **Fagles** (1984:35)

new world is created for their version of the story to inhabit. Still, it is difficult to only alter a play a little. Sophocles' plays are carefully balanced, such that the restructuring of one event or character causes a chain reaction through the piece. Further changes thus need to be made elsewhere to ensure a coherent new story that reaches a conclusion satisfactory to events that precede it without seeming manufactured.

The alteration of story, structure, and world of the Sophoclean plays to create new versions is only one of the elements of adaptation I will look at. But it also serves as an overarching topic for other issues. The chorus is an integral part of the Greek play, but it is not a feature that necessarily benefits from a sympathetic and literal translation. And although the chorus is an intrinsic feature of the Greek tragedy, it is the named characters who hold the attention of the audience and the chorus have none; their identity is as a group, not as individuals. Their role is not one as caught up in the story as the lead characters, though they do at times help drive the plot, for example it is the chorus leader who finally persuades Oedipus to reverse his decision in *Antigone*.<sup>12</sup> However, at other times they stand back, and as such their role is open to even wider interpretation than the named characters. Of the six authors, Gide play is alone in featuring no chorus of any form. Each of the others implements a different interpretation and form of a chorus, and of them it is Brecht, followed by Cixous who use their choruses in a form closest to the Greek. The use of the chorus, or lack thereof, is one of the single most powerful means of conveying style. Of the six plays, four of them open with words from the chorus or a figure related to it, each one immediately communicating ideas that are to be central to the production.

Without the informing elements of location and theatrical language, the named characters at the heart of each piece would have little to contextualise their actions.

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<sup>12</sup> **Sophocles**, *Antigone* (116) 1091-1101. Page references are to **Fagles** (1984), line numbers to the Greek text in **Lloyd-Jones** (1994).

They need a world to exist in, and the exposition of the history of the place used to define the location of the drama, coupled with the theatrical qualities developed through the actions and words of the chorus give them this. Together, they form a structure for these characters to inhabit. They define the rules of existence for the leading names, as well as providing a starting point for their story. Like every other aspect of Greek tragedy, each author uses the flexibility in the characters to produce new meanings and relevances for their audiences. The heroes of Sophocles' dramas are rarely one sided, they have nuance and twist and are often subject to events far outside of their control. The balance of these worlds can easily be swayed and sympathies with them. And, there is, with but a few alterations, the potential for the hero and the villain to change sides. The definition of the heroic is also subject to change and each author is charged with recreating the narrative obstacles and hurdles, or *moves*<sup>13</sup> that these characters must overcome and imbuing them with meanings that bear relation to their audience. The creation of new elements to the characters and the development of analogues to contemporary figures, produce new conflict and also bear great weight on the formulation of resolution of each play. In each play, the deviations from the concluding events as ordered by Sophocles, though some only slight, produce endings with different implications for the characters on stage as well as audience the other side of the footlights.

The six plays are in general politically and socially minded, their authors responding to current events and what they saw in contemporary thought and literature. However, none of them are simple knee jerk reactions to atrocity or social concerns, and each shows itself to have its own artistic merit. Of the six, only three develop overtly political analogues in term of character and place, (ie. Thebes is Germany and Creon is

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<sup>13</sup> Lowe (2000: 65-73)

Hitler). This is primarily achieved through the lead characters, but also through the creation of the world in which the play is set. And the very nature of tragedy is different in each adaptation. Only the two *Antigone* plays remain in anything like a tragic cast, and Anouilh's version is certainly not without comic moments. *Philoctetes* belongs to a subset of tragedies where a peaceful resolution is achieved and Gide and Heaney produce two versions of completely different style and substance. The two versions of *Oedipus*, whilst both showing an emphasis on the character of Jocasta exist at opposite ends of the spectrum. Cocteau presents a version of the story verging on farce, littered with pop culture references and Cixous brings out the lost voices of Jocasta, fully aware and unashamed of the nature of her love for Oedipus.

It has been my aim to show and analyse the adaptation of Sophoclean drama across a sweep of styles and purposes. The Twentieth century has seen a profusion of tragedy in all manner of forms. And whilst I have confined myself to just six, I wish to show that though none of these plays are at all alike, there are a number of approaches that they share: Approaches to creating, or recreating, location, and of the treatment of characters and presentation of the story, that whilst similar, create radically different effects. I mean to discuss the mechanics by which the alterations which create a new piece are made and made successful. I shall show how issues of time and place, of contemporary life, are realised in the text, of how the social and political discourses of their day and interest are brought out. Ultimately, not every aspect is successful, and I will consider their failings as well as their triumphs. For me, the characters of Greek tragedy are most truly alive when they are made relevant to current society. And this is what I hope to examine - the lives Sophocles' heroes have enjoyed in the Twentieth century.



**‘If we could be heroes just for one day’ - what would we do, and what  
would that say? Reorientation of the heroic ideal in two versions of  
Philoctetes: Gide’s *Philoctète* and Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy***

This chapter focuses on the Philoctetes plays of André Gide and Seamus Heaney, exploring how elements of the texts relate to contemporary life, debate and politics. I shall also focus on the ways in which they deal with elements of the Greek original such as the chorus, the setting, the nature of heroism, of the divine and *deus ex machina*, and their acknowledgement of the heritage of the play they are working with. I shall also look at some of the difficulties faced when adapting this particular play, as well as what I view to be problematic aspects of the modern texts.

At first glance, Gide’s *Philoctète* and Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy* appear to have little in common aside from their basic source material in Sophocles’ play of that name. *The Cure* is a stage production<sup>14</sup> which remains predominantly faithful to the Sophoclean plot. *Philoctète* was written for a reading audience,<sup>15</sup> and follows a widely altered plot, and can be interpreted as an inner dialogue of Gide’s own psyche.<sup>16</sup> They are two very different plays. However, once the the surface has been scratched, a number of similarities appear in the manner in which the two authors deal with and

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<sup>14</sup> First performed at the Guildhall, Derry, 1990.

<sup>15</sup> **Mandel** (1981: 159) *Philoctète* was first published in 1898 in the *Revue Blanche* and then in book form in 1899, Gide wrote in 1948 in an anthology of his works that he had never intended his play for the stage. It has not enjoyed regular performance and the three listed below were all one off events. It was given its first performance at a private theatre in Paris. There was a second in 1921, a reading with pictures of the three characters projected onto a screen, and a third 1937, again in Paris, directed by Jacques Copeau at the Comédie des Champs-Élysée, Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier.

<sup>16</sup> **McLaren** (1953: 31).

present certain aspects of the text, specifically in their handling of setting and location and in their treatment and adaptation of the *deus ex machina* ending.

Heaney's play is designed as a discussion of the division and political unrest in Northern Ireland. The predominant message of the play is one of hope and forgiveness, and this is in part facilitated by the increased and altered role of the chorus. Heaney gives them new speeches and roles within the text including using them to channel Heracles and thus to enable the resolution at the close of the play. Gide's *Philoctète*, subtitled *The Treatise on Three Morals* is by comparison an almost completely abstract discussion of morality, existence and virtue. Gide fashions his Lemnos as a social vacuum, it is a grey, liminal place, dislocated in both time and space. Gide was not interested in social allegory and avoids 'contaminating' this very self-consciously symbolist play, 'with so immediate a concern as politics or social crusading.'<sup>17</sup> Gide's aim is for universality,<sup>18</sup> and where Heaney aims to bring the universal nature of the play to bear on Ireland, Gide puts the values on which our civilisation is based on the scales.<sup>19</sup> However, Gide cannot completely avoid the influence of his times, and aspects of contemporary social sensibilities and discourse present themselves within his text. The most obvious being the debates of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century over personal freedom and the conflicts between state and church present in French life.<sup>20</sup>

One of the similarities between the playwright's approach to the material is in how they deal with the setting and the heritage of the play. Each author takes care to

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<sup>17</sup> Pollard (1970: 368).

<sup>18</sup> cf. San Juan Jr. (1965).

<sup>19</sup> Mann (1948: 7).

<sup>20</sup> The question of the place of the Church in France was being addressed across the country. The hold of the aristocracy had been broken in the French revolution, but the institutionalised status of the church had yet to fall. In 1904 the ban on any religious order teaching was enacted and in 1905 came the formal separation of church and state. cf. Larkin (1999: 147-171.), Price (1987: 283).

set up a location that allows them to place their play in a continuum of other versions and adaptations. The two Lemnoses created are strikingly different, designed to facilitate different aspects of the narrative and dramatic effects. However, the attention paid to the continuum of past plays and the islands with them draw the two places together. By deconstructing the place and function of the island within the play it can be argued that, on quite a basic philosophical level these two versions of Lemnos are the same island seen only through different eyes and visited for different reasons.

The *Philoctetes* with its averted disasters and lack of casualties is not among the most famous or most revived of Sophocles' tragedies.<sup>21</sup> The location is more isolated and the cast much smaller than *Antigone* or *Oedipus* as well as the earlier *Philoctetes* plays of Aeschylus and Euripides. It also has just four speaking characters instead of eight or more seen in the Theban plays. These limitations serve, as constraints often do, to enhance creativity. Sophocles pares away the disposable characters and creates a completely isolated and uncivilised world for *Philoctetes*, and into this he introduces the new factor of Neoptolemus.<sup>22</sup> This move sees the dramatic tension concentrated while the audience is left undistracted by visual stunts. Until the closing moments of the play and the timely arrival of Heracles, the characters are focused purely on each other, giving the impression that these men have some measure of control over their fates, that unlike *Oedipus*, there is still room to manoeuvre.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as an index of this control, though there are not the numbers and range of

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<sup>21</sup> Though it won the first prize in 409BC. cf. **Jameson** (1965) for a good account of the background to the play and Sophocles in art and politics. **Taplin** (2004: 147-148) places it fifth out of seven for number of performances in modern times.

<sup>22</sup> Aeschylus (c.475BC) cf. *TrGF* III. 352-359, & Euripides (431BC), cf. *TrGF* V.2. 827-844, & **Collard** et al, Vol II (2004: 1-34). cf. **Kieffer** (1942), **Mandel** (1981), **Scodel** (1984: 89-90), **Segal** (1995: 112).

<sup>23</sup> **Hunsaker Hawkins** (1999:340) 'In the *Poetics*, Aristotle distinguishes four kinds of tragedy: the simple, the complex and, the pathetic, and the ethical. It would seem that the *Philoctetes* typifies ethical tragedy.'

adaptations that other Greek Tragedies have enjoyed,<sup>24</sup> there are adaptations in which Philoctetes is killed, left on the island, or the bow is broken,<sup>25</sup> whereas in no version of *Antigone* is the heroine allowed to live.

*Philoctetes* is play about the avoidance of calamity rather than the route to disaster. Unlike *Antigone* where one polarised mindset is set against its counterpart until they wreck one another, *Philoctetes* ends in reconciliation. For those who wish to re-write a Greek tragedy but wish it to have a positive message, this is a boon. *Antigone* is frequently adapted to lament a situation, whereas adaptations of *Philoctetes* have the potential, as does *The Cure*, to advise and inspire; to look forwards rather than only back. The play is also significantly less well known, which allows Heaney to avoid the 'ready-made reactions that attend on any dramatic version of *Antigone*.'<sup>26</sup>

Although there is little heroic action in *Philoctetes*, much of the debate centres around what it means to be heroic.<sup>27</sup> Different version of the heroic are promoted and addressed and Odysseus' tactics of deception are called into question, despite their intention to prevent unnecessary death. Philoctetes must decide whether he can forgive those who betrayed him, rejoin the war, and reclaim his status as a Trojan hero. And thirdly there is Neoptolemus, the ephebe who must decide the man he will be. His education represents the education of the next generation, something that Heaney in particular highlights. His development and decisions on the island represent that of a whole generation and the hope for a better future. The ideals of a

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<sup>24</sup> **Wilson** (1952: 246) lists just 'a chapter of Fénelon's *Télémaque*, a discussion of Lessing's *Laocoön*, a sonnet of Wordsworth's, a little play by André Gide, an adaptation by John Jay Chapman' as 'all so far as I know that has any claim to interest.'

<sup>25</sup> i.e. **Müller** (1965) - Philoctetes is killed, **Mandel** (1961) - the bow is broken, though Philoctetes goes with Odysseus. Philoctetes also has a companion, Medon, on the island. (both in **Mandel**, 1981)

<sup>26</sup> **Deane** (2002: 156).

<sup>27</sup> **Segal** (1995: 96).

hero have much to say about the ideals of a civilisation, and Heaney and Gide have quite different perceptions of what it means to be heroic. However, as will be discussed the basic tenet of heroism seems to be the same for both.

Central to Sophocles' play is a conflict between religion and the demands of state. Personal ethics and a commitment to the aristocratic heroic code are shown to be incompatible in their obligations towards their city. This sparks moral and ethical dilemmas as Neoptolemus in particular struggles to come to terms with his task while still honouring the heroic code and the gods. Both Gide and Heaney draw upon this. But they take their material in entirely different directions. Heaney remains more focused on the twin forces of state and religion. But his ideas of religion in the play show few specifics in terms of reference to Christianity or sectarian views; rather, honouring the gods serves to emphasise the importance of honesty. However, against this backdrop of honesty and its overriding power, we are given sufficient clues to understand that according to the lines of sectarian conflict, Odysseus and Neoptolemus are representative of the British Army or Protestant interests in opposition to Philoctetes who stands for the Catholic side of the conflict.<sup>28</sup> Gide's play concerns itself with personal ethics; ideas of virtue, its meanings, its attainment and the compromises it faces when put in contact with others. In his hands the ideas of both the gods and country become fairly abstract principles characterised by Philoctetes' inability to name them.

Despite being the eponymous character, Philoctetes shares the focus of the play with Neoptolemus, much as Antigone does with Creon in her play.<sup>29</sup> Indeed the focus of the play is on Neoptolemus as much or more than on the eponymous Philoctetes or

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<sup>28</sup> Wilmer (1999b: 222), Denard (2000).

<sup>29</sup> cf. Blundell (1991:184-225), Segal (1995: 95-118), Knox (1964: 117-142), Hunsaker Hawkins (1999).

Odysseus.<sup>30</sup> Although structurally the rehabilitation of Philoctetes to the *polis* and army forms the spine of the play, the emotional journey undertaken by Neoptolemus continually draws the focus of the audience. He becomes the battlefield over which the play is fought;<sup>31</sup> Philoctetes sits as the righteous though mutilated angel on his one shoulder while Odysseus tempts him from the other. Both Heaney and Gide rebalance the story to place Philoctetes squarely at the centre of their narratives. The development of Neoptolemus remains an important part of each play. But it is Philoctetes and his potential for redemption that both authors choose as their focus.

## I

### **New Arcs Bring New Pitfalls**

Adaptation of Greek tragedy comprises the alteration of all the constituent parts of a production. Characters have to be recast, lines rewritten, the set redressed, for by changing nothing the play is relevant to no one. The story, the plot, also has to alter to be able make sense of these alterations. To change just one thing is to upset the balance of the play and new plot lines must be followed through in order to rebalance the play on a different footing.

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<sup>30</sup> cf. **Scodel** (1984: 92), **Roberts** (1989: 162).

<sup>31</sup> **McDonald** (2002: 68).

## Heaney's *The Cure At Troy*

In terms of structure and resolution, Heaney closely follows the Sophoclean text. All the central plot moments remain; Philoctetes speaks of being pleased to hear Greek speech, the manner in which the trap unfolds is practically identical, as is the temptation of Neoptolemus. However, Heaney alters the dynamics in some of the debates, reversing the power roles of the characters involved. For example, the decision to sail for Sycros rather than Troy comes about in the same way, but the arguments that preface it are set in a different key to those in the Sophocles. Sophocles' Philoctetes holds the higher ground, whereas in *The Cure* he receives a dressing down from Neoptolemus: 'Stop just licking your wounds. Start seeing things'.<sup>32</sup> Though new, these lines still play on a Sophoclean theme; that of sight and self imposed blindness. Heaney's Neoptolemus echoes Tiresias imploring Oedipus to become aware of his self important blindness.<sup>33</sup>

New speeches, predominantly choral, are added that reflect on the realities of Ireland. Although few verses remain faithful to a direct translation, Heaney retains plenty of lyrical notes and similes which maintain a Sophoclean feel to the words.<sup>34</sup> For example the 'Like lions hunting together' of Sophocles is replaced with 'Marauding

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<sup>32</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (74-5).

<sup>33</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*. **Fagles** (1984: 183) **Lloyd-Jones** (1994. Vol I: 412-419), also, *Ajax*, **Watling** (1953: 19-20), (1994. Vol I: 412-419).

<sup>34</sup> **Denard** (2000: 3) 'On the whole, Heaney's version is characterised by a conservative attentiveness to the dignity of the Greek original'. Heaney was advised by David Walcott and others at Harvard as well as Robert Fitzgerald, to whom *The Cure* is dedicated. **Arrowsmith** (Editors note) Lattimore (1973: vii) 'Unless the translator is a poet, his original is likely to reach us in crippled form: deprived of power and pertinence... but poetry is not enough; the translator must obviously know what he is doing... Clearly, few contemporary poets possess enough Greek... Collaboration between scholar and poet is therefore the essential operating experience' cf. **Honig** (1976). **Wilmer** (1999b: 222), **Heaney** (2002) & (2005), **Walton** (2006: 108).

lions on that shore'.<sup>35</sup> Some subtle changes have wider significance, the most obvious of which is the alteration of Odysseus' description of Philoctetes from 'monster' in Sophocles to 'creature' by Heaney.<sup>36</sup> This 'creature' analogy is developed by Heaney and forms an aspect of the post colonial discourse present in the play.<sup>37</sup> As Denard puts it 'Defining the colonised as bestial is a highly useful ruse for the colonist in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is that the colonised 'Other' need not be dealt with on terms of equality.'<sup>38</sup> Such linguistic alterations define how the characters relate to one another, and map onto the Protestant and Catholic analogies in the play.

Most of the entirely new material is given to the chorus, the most significant speeches falling at the open and close.<sup>39</sup> Heaney designed these to contextualise the action,<sup>40</sup> bracketing the action of the play like theatre curtains. But there are other small alterations, new lines distil ideas present in the Sophoclean text but elucidate them in a different fashion. Such lines create a dialogue between the history of the play and the contemporary realities. Upon deciding to return the bow, Neoptolemus declares: 'The jurisdiction I am under here, Is justice herself. She isn't only Greek.'<sup>41</sup> The comparable exchange in Sophocles is between just Neoptolemus and Philoctetes,<sup>42</sup> and it is less grand gesture and more apology.<sup>43</sup> Heaney's version highlights the idea of common humanity rather than international or religious divisions.

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<sup>35</sup> **Sophocles**, *Phil.* (211) 1435-7. Page reference (in brackets) are to **Watling** (1953), line numbers to the Greek text in **Lloyd-Jones** (1994. Vol II). **Heaney**, *The Cure*, (79).

<sup>36</sup> **Denard** (2000: 6-7), **Sophocles**, *Phil.* (169) 147, **Heaney**, *The Cure*, (12).

<sup>37</sup> cf. **Denard** (2000), **Hardwick** (2000), (2004) & (2005), **Childs & Williams** (1997: ch 5), & **Walder** (1998).

<sup>38</sup> **Denard** (2000: 7).

<sup>39</sup> cf. **McDonald** (1996: 131)

<sup>40</sup> **Heaney** (2002: 173).

<sup>41</sup> **Heaney**, *The Cure* (67).

<sup>42</sup> **Sophocles**, *Phil.* (206) 1263-1292.

<sup>43</sup> cf. **Gill** (1980: 138) & **Harsh** (1960) for the symbolism of the bow and its transfer in Sophocles.

By this action Neoptolemus aligns himself with the role primarily played by the chorus, quashing any claims to sole ownership of truth or betrayal and foregrounding the relevance of the play to Protestant/Catholic or English/Irish relations.

The final scene of the play changes little in terms of events. However, both the motivation and execution are very different and bring a number of new aspects and meanings to the end of the play. Heracles' arrival still provides the denouement, breaking the impasse in accordance with the principles of Aristotle.<sup>44</sup> But, 'not having the nerve to bring on a god two minutes from curtain',<sup>45</sup> Heaney brings him on from within the play, rather than from outside it. And the switch from *deus ex machina*, and Heracles' appearance on the roof magicked from behind the *skēnē*,<sup>46</sup> to the repositioning and re-clothing of the chorus leader is an important one. Adapting and updating Greek tragedy necessitates a re-negotiation of the nature of divinity and heroism. Here the impetus for the healing and forgiveness of the characters is shown to exist within the play rather than needing an external force deliver it. Heaney develops a multifaceted nature for his chorus, but one view is as a personification of poetry; they even state in their opening speech that 'Poetry, Allowed the gods to speak.'<sup>47</sup> Although this alteration, from Heracles as God to Heracles as poetry and chorus constitutes a radical alteration to the play, the ideas nonetheless remain staunchly Greek. That the muse of poetry could be called upon and the poet granted access to the divine; as in the invocation that starts the *Iliad*, 'Sing, goddess, of the anger of Achilleus'.<sup>48</sup> Heaney internalises this idea; instead of calling upon an external

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<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 8.1, cf. Fletcher (1964: 147-180) & Goodman (1954: 49-58).

<sup>45</sup> Heaney (2002: 172).

<sup>46</sup> Webster (1970: 8)

<sup>47</sup> Heaney, *The Cure* (2) cf. Carey (1996).

<sup>48</sup> trans. Hammond (1987), or Fitzgerald (1974) 'Anger be now your song, Immortal one'. Or the Odyssey 'Tell me, Muse, the story of that resourceful man' trans. Rieu (1946).

divinity, he gives us the chance to see this divinity within ourselves. He even states that Heracles through the Chorus 'is the voice of his unconscious.'<sup>49</sup> And thus, the healing and resolution of the play is found by drawing on the divine and poetic nature within humanity.<sup>50</sup>

*The Cure at Troy* is supposed to be a play about forgiveness, about healing. Hardwick calls it an examination of 'the healing process in fractured communities',<sup>51</sup> and to this end, it is mostly a very compelling play.<sup>52</sup> However, aspects of the healing metaphor Heaney develops disintegrate under scrutiny. In particular, the idea of war, of fighting, gets in the way, leaving the reader with the impression that aspects of the contemporary situation have been shoehorned in. Heaney himself admits that the more explicit references to Ireland such as the lines concerning hunger strikers and police widows<sup>53</sup> were out of place and removed them from the text for performances in the USA.<sup>54</sup>

In terms of the story as an analogy for the Irish Troubles, the most coherent reading of the play sees Philoctetes as a Catholic, betrayed by both Stormont and England, as a hurt and disillusioned Sinn Féiner.<sup>55</sup> Although this is an alternative perspective that casts him as the Ulster Protestants of Northern Ireland.<sup>56</sup> His bow represents trust; it cannot be tricked or coerced, and Troy becomes the peace process

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<sup>49</sup> Heaney (2002: 173).

<sup>50</sup> De Jong (1987: 45-52).

<sup>51</sup> Hardwick (2005: 111).

<sup>52</sup> Gutman (1998) *Curtain Up Review*, (Juxtaposing dialogue and verse) Heaney 'seems as interested in the notion of poetry's capacity for healing as he is in the story he is attempting to relate. The poetry also becomes a crutch that doesn't serve Heaney particularly well because he frequently falls back on his considerable skills in lyrical description instead of developing his characters and situations dramatically.'

<sup>53</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> Wilmer (1999b: 224-5).

<sup>55</sup> Denard (2000: 4).

<sup>56</sup> Wilmer (1999b: 222).

where wounds can be healed. Odysseus stands for the British army and their use of trickery and violence in contravention to the rights of individual under the justification that it is to preserve the peace.<sup>57</sup>

Heaney's reference to, 'a hunger-striker's father', and 'the police widow in veils',<sup>58</sup> does serve to show that he sympathises with both sides of the conflict. However, the lines are still clearly drawn and despite the suggestion that Philoctetes could stand also stand for the Ulster Protestants, it seems clear that he represents the Catholic cause. Thus the Catholics are depicted as those most hurt and betrayed, leaving the Protestant portrayal to be carried by either the naive Neoptolemus or the faithless and dishonest Odysseus, for whom few sympathies are left. Odysseus is a character commonly demonised in *Philoctetes*, both in the interpretation of Sophocles and in adaptations,<sup>59</sup> and yet Odysseus is arguably the least bloodthirsty characters. He reasons that lying is acceptable when it will 'save life, and save the day'.<sup>60</sup> He is also the only character to have thought his actions through, in contrast to Neoptolemus who constantly changes his mind. Such emphasis leaves Heaney open to the charge of perpetuating the cycle of recrimination rather than breaking it. For how can a play about forgiveness truly be successful if it relies on casting negative aspersions on Odysseus, the one man who wants the fighting to end and expressly seeks to avoid bloodshed?

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<sup>57</sup> Wilmer (1999b: 222).

<sup>58</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Segal (1995:241-note 20) agrees with Harsh (1960: 409) 'Sophocles has shown no sympathy whatsoever for the unprincipled politician Odysseus.' Avery (1965) highlights the comparison of Odysseus with Diomedes, Thersites and the Atreidai. Kitto (1956: 87-137) links Odysseus with the post Periclean demagogic politicians. Scodel (1984:97) pairs Odysseus with Theramenes 'who rose to prominence during the events of 411, and was nicknamed "Buskin," the shoe that fits either foot, because of his shifts of allegiance.' Vickers (1987) suggests Andocides, and Alcibiades for the figure of Philoctetes. And Wilson (1951:256-7) suggests Odysseus as Alcibiades. Jameson (1956: 219) suggests that Odysseus is a 'familiar type' and 'the poet draws on a store of feeling against an array of unsavory political figures: Cleon, Alcibiades, Antiphon, Theramenes, Peisander... depending on the spectator's own political viewpoint.' For the other side of the argument and the rehabilitation of Odysseus' character, cf. Stevens (1995).

<sup>60</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (10).

The symbolism of Troy is no more perfect, Denard believes the most persuasive analogy sees it as representative of the peace process.<sup>61</sup> And by rejoining the fight, Philoctetes will be healed, and in Heaney's text, help to resolve a great political problem. But this message is complicated by the messages that have been brought across directly from the Sophoclean text. Heaney gives his Hercules words similar to those in Sophocles:

And, Neoptolemus, you must be  
His twin in arms and archery.  
Marauding lions on that shore,  
Troy's nemesis and last nightmare.<sup>62</sup>

This emphasis on a return to the fight and the connotations of violence complicate the overriding message of forgiveness. Neoptolemus and Philoctetes will now be fighting on the same side, but here the text implies their union will be the 'nemesis' of Troy, the peace process. There is also a plausible argument for reading Troy as representative of Northern Ireland, however, there is a significant problem even here once looked at in the wider scheme of Greek myth. In that, Troy is a place finally to be sacked, and the play *Philoctetes* only a prelude to it, thus any miraculous resolution that occurs on Lemnos is ultimately not transferable to reconciliation at Troy.<sup>63</sup> There is a third solution to this problem, suggested by Wilmer, that supplies perhaps the most compelling answer to this problem. It sees Trojan War as a metaphor for the Troubles

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<sup>61</sup> Denard (2000: 4-6).

<sup>62</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (79). Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, (211) 1436-7 'You cannot conquer Troy without his help, I Nor he without you. Guard each other's life, I Like lions hunting together.

<sup>63</sup> Deane (2002: 159-60).

rather than for the peace,<sup>64</sup> which allows for a much more satisfying resolution.

However, Heaney's words still clearly state that this is a return to the fight, a recourse to violence and the words 'nemesis' and 'nightmare' conjure no positive images of healing or resolution.

Still, it cannot be expected that a complicated contemporary situation may be married to an ancient myth without a hitch. Greek tragedy provides a 'unique means of combining public debate and private conflict,'<sup>65</sup> both in the original and in adaptations, and it permits us to discuss universals with a variety of subtexts. However, it is not always so forgiving when the subtext becomes text; when issues of contemporary debate or public conflict are not inferred but rather stated. This is where Heaney runs into trouble, his choral speeches especially fracture the text between past and present, historic and new, mythic and real, creating two versions of the play with irreconcilable agendas struggling for dominance. The analogies are not developed in the subtext, but are foisted upon the reader by the chorus. It is perhaps harder for a reader versed in Sophocles to read Heaney's play without simultaneously seeing the original framework and the alterations and departures from it, but Heaney's abrupt switching between Sophoclean plot and his new choral songs is jarring and breaks the coherence of the narrative.

### **Gide's *Philoctète***

Gide avoids this particular problem as his play runs at a tangent from Sophocles from the start, and finishes with Philoctetes stranded without his bow, and by his own volition. Gide's characters perform very different roles, both in relation to each other

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<sup>64</sup> Wilmer (1999b: 229).

<sup>65</sup> Walton (2006: 113).

and in relation to society in comparison to their Sophoclean counterparts. Philoctetes does not despise Ulysses, despite having good reason and consequently there is a greater level of interaction between the three characters. Significantly, Philoctetes' wound no longer troubles him. Perhaps taking notes from Dostoevsky,<sup>66</sup> whose influence can be seen in his Journals at this time,<sup>67</sup> Gide seizes on the idea that pleasure can be found in pain, and that its vocalisation is for the benefit of those around it. Early on in *Notes from Underground*, a novel about self-exile from society, is a passage about toothache and the pain and pleasures inherent in the vocalisation of it:

These moans express the pleasure of the one who is suffering; if they did not give him pleasure, he wouldn't bother moaning.

it is in despair that the most burning pleasure occurs, especially when one is too highly conscious of the hopelessness of one's position.<sup>68</sup>

Since Philoctetes had no one to hear his pain he has ceased to moan. But he has not been silent, instead he sings and 'since I no longer use my complaint to manifest my suffering, it has been beautiful, so beautiful that it consoles me.'<sup>69</sup> Neither is Philoctetes fooled by Ulysses. He responds to Ulysses' declaration that they are on

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<sup>66</sup> Gide publishes two books on Dostoevsky - 1908 & 1923. Further inspiration - on the topic of the island - can be found in **Pascal**, *Pensées* XI.693 (1959: 198) 'upon seeing the blindness and misery of man, upon considering the whole mute universe, and man without enlightenment, abandoned to himself and as if lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who put him there, what he has come to do there, what will happen to him after death, incapable of all knowledge, I am afright, like a man carried onto a dreadful desert island during his sleep, who would waken without knowing where he is and without any way of getting off. And thereupon, I marvel how people do not become desperate at such a miserable condition.'

<sup>67</sup> **McLaren** (1953: 20).

<sup>68</sup> **Dostoevsky**, *Notes From Underground*, (14 & 9)

<sup>69</sup> **Gide**, *Phil*, (142 - Act II, Scene 1), *OC* III (32) 'Mais depuis que je ne m'en sers plus pour manifester ma souffrance, ma plainte est devenue très belle; à ce point que j'en suis consolé.'

the island 'to see you, my dear Philoctetes.' with 'I don't believe a word of it, but no matter...'70

The scene from Sophocles in which Philoctetes falls unconscious and Neoptolemus is entrusted with the bow<sup>71</sup> is divided by Gide into two parts. Philoctetes gives Neoptolemus the bow to string as a test after discovering that they plan to betray him, Neoptolemus returns it immediately. As he explains to Ulysses; what use is a bow without the arrows? Philoctetes' lapse into unconsciousness falls at the end of the play and is deliberately induced. Ulysses sends Neoptolemus with a philtre to render him unconscious in order that they might steal the bow. Neoptolemus shows it to Philoctetes in a gesture similar to returning the bow in the Sophoclean version, i.e. an act imploring forgiveness. Philoctetes promptly drinks it of his own volition and Ulysses then finds himself in the shoes of the Sophoclean Neoptolemus, unable to take the bow from the sleeping man. However, in a typically Ulyssean fashion, he is able to find his own get out clause, he orders Neoptolemus to take it instead.

Neither playwright seeks to conceal the fact that the Greek myth of the play forms what is essentially a cipher for their personal preoccupations. Heaney's follow a more political bent than the more philosophical Gide whose ideas turn the play in on itself. The preoccupations each poet brings to the table are reflected elsewhere in their works. Heaney has long drawn on the Irish struggles, developing a language of violence that pervades his poetry. For instance, the child narrator of *A Constable Calls*, describes a policeman's bicycle as having its dynamo 'cocked back' like the hammer of a gun, its pedals momentarily 'relieved of the boot of the law', and finally as it leaves the farm, it 'ticked, ticked, ticked.'<sup>72</sup> He uses both geographical dislocation

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<sup>70</sup> **Gide**, *Phil*, (141 - Act II, Scene 1) His suspicions are later confirmed in Act III, Scene 1 (148) when he overhears Ulysses coaching Neoptolemus on what to do next. *OC* III (31) 'Je n'en crois rien et peu m'importe'.

<sup>71</sup> **Sophocles**, *Phil*, (188-192) 731-826.

<sup>72</sup> **Heaney**, (1975: 66) cf. **Murphy** (2000: 3).

and ancient history to provide analogues for contemporary Irish politics and society.<sup>73</sup> They act as windows, as filters through which to discuss Ireland and her problems. For example in *Punishment* he describes the death of a girl found in a peat bog, with an implied question as to whether modern society is actually any less barbarian.<sup>74</sup> *The Cure* is also not the only time Heaney uses the war at Troy as a metaphor for the Irish Troubles. Six years after *The Cure* was first performed Heaney released a book of poetry called *The Spirit Level* which contains a poem entitled *Mycenae Lookout*. It starts from the vantage point of the sentry from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and his watch over the years for the violence to end and works through five movements. Including one entitled *Cassandra*, for whom there is 'no such thing as innocent bystanding.'<sup>75</sup>

Gide turns away from political and social concerns. Like all the works of his early career, *Philoctetes* is inspired almost exclusively by moral considerations.<sup>76</sup> A number of his early works particularly *Fruits of the Earth* and *The Immoralist*, revolve around the changes illness make in a man. A poorly child,<sup>77</sup> Gide was brought close to his death in Africa in 1894. The experience provoked his discourses on recovery and change; it was also the year he first began *Philoctète*. The premise that physical sickness can provoke huge mental change in a man is a central feature of the text, but is not the only idea obsessed over in *Philoctète*. Gide was also interested the idea of the liberation of self through the divestment of worldly ties. Philoctetes finds his liberation in exile, but it is not completed until he surrenders his bow, his most treasured possession. This dedication to freedom contains reflections of other Gidean

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<sup>73</sup> e.g. *Summer 1969* (1975: 69).

<sup>74</sup> *Punishment*, in *North*, (1975: 37).

<sup>75</sup> Heaney, (1996: 30), cf. McDonald (2002: 72-74) & Wilmer (1999b).

<sup>76</sup> McLaren, (1953: 20) 'This play, like all the early writings of Gide, is clearly inspired by more by moral than political or social considerations.'

<sup>77</sup> Pierre-Quint (1934: 29).

characters. One such is the unnamed narrator of *Fruits of the Earth*, that 'manual of escape, of liberation',<sup>78</sup> or rather his alter-ego, Menalcas.

Menalcas: That lovely morning, this haze and this life, this breezy freshness, this pulsation of your being give you no doubt a feeling of delight. But how far greater it would be if you could abandon yourself to it entirely. You imagine that you are here, but the best part of you is confined elsewhere; your wife and children, your books and studies hold it prisoner and God robbed of it.<sup>79</sup>

Philoctetes achieves true freedom once divested of his final worldly possession. But the play doesn't force him to address the question that condemns the protagonist of *The Immoralist* - what do you do with your freedom once you've obtained it?<sup>80</sup> Another of his fascinations indulged in *Philoctète* is the idea of 'Robinsonnisme'.<sup>81</sup> Pollard argues that this theme is too 'superficial to be accepted as a totally adequate interpretation'.<sup>82</sup> This may be true, but it is as necessary to the plot as the wound. Like Sophocles' twin lions who will bring down Troy, Philoctetes' wound takes him nowhere unless coupled with his isolation. The ideas of liminality and Robinsonnisme do not, as they might, work at cross purposes. The liminality of Philoctetes' island, the grey emptiness of it, enhances the isolation suffered by Philoctetes. He is not just on any old desert island, there is no chance of accidental rescue, only the deliberate dispatch from the Achaean army. This liminality and isolation differentiates *Philoctète* from other works by Gide. The philosophies he uses are by no means unique to the

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<sup>78</sup> **Gide** (1970), preface to the French edition of 1927.

<sup>79</sup> **Gide** (1970: 61).

<sup>80</sup> **Gide** (1960: 13) 'To know how to free oneself is nothing; the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom.'

<sup>81</sup> **McLaren** (1953: 20) 'Robinsonnisme' - the idea of Robinson Crusoe and his isolation upon a desert island. cf. **Vernant & Vidal-Naquet** (1981: 179). **Schadewaldt** writes 'Philoctetes lives like a Robinson Crusoe of the ancient world', (1960: 238) However, **Jones. J.**, (1962: 219) Philoctetes' solitude is not that of Robinson Crusoe, it is not a pastoral existence. Philoctetes has been exposed - in the 'alien and hostile space of the *agrós*'.

<sup>82</sup> **Pollard**, (1970: 368) 'Gide's somewhat disingenuous remark mentioned by Heyd in his edition of the *Théâtre Complete*, that the play is merely on the theme of 'le Robinsonnisme' seems to superficial to be accepted as a totally adequate interpretation.'

play, but only here are they shielded from the complications inherent when in contact with the world.

## II

### The Story of the Islands

In the creation of their plays, Gide and Heaney both start from the same place; with the voyage of the characters and no less importantly, the audience to the island. Sophocles created a fairly atypical location, away from the polis and society and more isolated than the Lemnos' devised by his contemporaries. Segal likens it to the 'mysterious islands of the *Odyssey*', 'the remote, sea-washed shores of Egypt in Euripides' *Helen* or Prospero's island in *The Tempest*, places where human identity reaches a zero-point for the rebirth of a stronger self.'<sup>83</sup> Both Heaney and Gide remain heavily indebted to this haunted and isolated version of Lemnos. From the same genesis, they direct the energy of the island in different directions and create vastly different landscapes. The character of the island is of fundamental importance to both plays and the question over the physical or rather metaphysical existence of the island is one of the more interesting aspects.

Gide's Lemnos bears little immediate resemblance to that of Sophocles. He uses a number of techniques to effectively divorce Lemnos from any kind of straightforward reality. The uninhabited island is snowbound and reminiscent of the cold, glacial lands

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<sup>83</sup> Segal (1995: 113), cf. McDonald (1996: 131), Feder (1963).

favoured by symbolist writers.<sup>84</sup> Neoptolemus is first to break the silence of the play and tells of his journey to Lemnos. He has been sailing with Ulysses for fourteen days. Each day they saw more colour leeched from the world, until on the fourteenth morning the sun never rose. Since then they have been 'living, as it were, beyond night and day.'<sup>85</sup> To reach Lemnos it seems they have had to sail to the very edges of the world, yet this island is still only part of the way to Troy. This is no typical journey across the Mediterranean, for there are usually no polar ice-caps there. It is a voyage more akin to the *Odyssey*, where the ideas of fate and geography are interwoven. The island is symbolically drawn,<sup>86</sup> and subsequently changes in accordance with the altered states of the characters.

Gide maintains this idea of being dislocated from the world throughout the play. In Act II there is metatheatrical twist, which appears at first by way of a joke but is quickly shown to have repercussions throughout the play. It serves to further disjoint Lemnos, and by extrapolation the whole gamut of the heroes and events of the Trojan war. Upon being asked to recite some of his poetry Philoctetes declaims, 'The numberless shining waves of the sea...'<sup>87</sup> Ulysses is quick to point out that these are the words of Aeschylus,<sup>88</sup> and in doing so casts the island adrift from time. The line comes from *Prometheus Bound* and has particular significance towards the end of the play and the symbolic figures and echoes that reside there.

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<sup>84</sup> Pollard (1970: 370).

<sup>85</sup> Gide, *Phil*, (133 - Act I, Scene 1), *OC* III (18) 'et depuis nous vivons comme hors de la nuit et du jour.'

<sup>86</sup> cf. Watson-Williams (1967: 58-59).

<sup>87</sup> Gide, *Phil*, (145 - Act II, Scene 1), *OC* III (36) '*Sourires infinis des flots de la mer...*' - lines come from *Prometheus Bound*, 89-90

<sup>88</sup> Pollard (1970: 371) 'Words he (Philoctetes) says, are more beautiful when they are not used with an end in view: he has evolved a poetry of his grief and pain detached from actual physical suffering. He recites Aeschylus to demonstrate this'.

Initially the mention of Aeschylus functions as a means of textual dislocation. It momentarily forces the audience out of their dramatic reverie and brings their attention to reflect on the wider implications of the text and the mythological story arcs and characters it is associated with. The *Prometheus* line is from the start of the text, shortly after Prometheus is bound to the rock. In *Philoctète*, it signifies that Philoctetes identifies with Prometheus; cast away and forgotten about. It also begins the process of linking up the symbolic characters that exist in the shadows of the play. A number of characters figure indirectly in the play and affect the action by way of the subtext, indeed many ‘invisible entities play significant roles in Sophoclean tragedy’, and most frequently these characters are gods.<sup>89</sup> In Gide’s version of the play, Hercules is the most notable of these, and he figures strongly, perhaps because his absence is so notable. This single line is not sufficient to force his inclusion in a reading, at this point it is merely a suggestion, for Hercules is the character who eventually frees Prometheus. Hercules’ bow and his symbolic trait of virtue<sup>90</sup> are also referenced constantly. Later events show Philoctetes emulating some of Hercules’ actions,<sup>91</sup> and in retrospect this quote reinforces the message that this play was written in reference to the numerous other versions of the play. Sophocles’ play features Heracles, and so long as an adaptation retains any semblance of Sophocles’ story, Heracles/Hercules will exist as a trace. In this play he has a present-absence; he is made conspicuous by his very absence. Gide also attaches other stories, like Prometheus, picking up on the cyclic nature of myth and the echoes that they create through time. Gide expands upon the play given by Sophocles, showing what is beyond the text. He once remarked on his intentions in his renderings of Greek

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<sup>89</sup> Budelman (2000: 92).

<sup>90</sup> cf. Liapis (2006).

<sup>91</sup> this is also the case in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, cf. Avery (1965).

tragedy, that they were 'To show the reverse of the stage-set... I intend not to make you shiver or weep, but make you think.'<sup>92</sup>

These techniques enable Gide to create an environment for his ultimate discussion of the three morals in his conception; towards others, towards God and towards oneself.<sup>93</sup> Or rather 'the emotional idealism of the adolescent, the devotion to the state of the collectivist thinker and the devotion to self-betterment of the individualist.'<sup>94</sup> Mandel explains the morals in conflict as follows:

In the figure of Ulysses, Gide follows the lead of Sophocles, inasmuch as his Ithacan is a noble representative of the ethic of patriotism, but loses the argument against his betters. Presently, however, Gide begins to diverge from the Greek. His second ethic seems to make its appearance in act 4, when Neoptolemus betrays Ulysses' plot to Philoctetes. 'I love you and am trying to save you,' he cries. And he asks Philoctetes, 'Do you love me? Say, Philoctetes, is that what virtue is?' This love of one's country is here displaced personal love. This differs from Sophocles, who, in a more severe voice, speaks of honour; yet it should be remembered that in the Greek text a powerful compassion - love, of we so wish to think of it - is the psychological force which awakens the young man's vision of his real duty. The divergence remains a genuine one, but Gide's second ethic does not remove us to another planet.

His third ethic does. The inverted pyramid comes to a point: from broad social love to individual love and then finally to self-love. 'My only care is to be,' say Philoctetes. He

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<sup>92</sup> **Steiner** (1984:163), French text, Gide's Journal, 2.1.1933 **Gide** (1951:1151) 'There is in the pleasantries, trivialities, and incongruities of my play something like a constant need to alert the public: you have Sophocles' play and I do not set myself up as a rival; I leave pathos to him: but here is what he Sophocles, could not see or understand, and which is nevertheless offered by his theme; and which I do understand not because I am more intelligent, but because I belong to another era; and I intend to make you see the reverse of the stage-set, at the risk of hurting your feelings, for it is not they which matter to me or to which I address myself. I intend not to make you shiver or weep, but to make you think.' (This was written about Gide's *Oedipus*).

<sup>93</sup> **Pollard** (1970: 373). Gide defines the three attitudes in a letter to Drouin in March 1898.

<sup>94</sup> **McLaren** (1953: 23).

relishes his fine phrases and his deep thinking (art and intellect) all by himself. He is that familiar figure of Symbolism, the lone prince in his castle.<sup>95</sup>

Gide's conception of Lemnos forces Philoctetes, Neoptolemus and Odysseus to make their decisions in isolation from the world. Their isolation is more poignant than their Sophoclean counterparts. Sophocles' island was separated from reality by the myth/history divide, and like most other locations in Greek tragedy, the location is half metaphor. Lemnos is not like Thebes an 'anti-Athens',<sup>96</sup> but it is still very much 'other' to the city of Athens. It is a wild, uninhabited place, 'a desolate island in the midst of the sea, where no man walks or lives'<sup>97</sup>, it reflects the condition of Philoctetes' soul, 'harsh, barren and removed from all human intercourse.'<sup>98</sup> Philoctetes defines it as with 'no harbour here, no home for any man'.<sup>99</sup> Lemnos is, though in different ways to Thebes, the antithesis of Athens; as uninhabited as Athens is civilised. Though a real island, and one populated in the 5th century,<sup>100</sup> as clearly evidenced by their payment of tribute to the Delian League,<sup>101</sup> the island that Sophocles presents is not a real place, it is a place that once might have been. This is theatrical convention for Sophocles and little attention is drawn to the mechanics in the construction of the island. Gide exaggerates the unreality of both island and time and he fabricates it in such a way that you can see the girders, the frame, all that holds it together. It does not exist in 'our' world, and whereas Sophocles' island belongs to an old world, Gide's

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<sup>95</sup> Mandel (1981: 159-160) (intro to Gide).

<sup>96</sup> cf. Zeitlin (1990).

<sup>97</sup> Sophocles, *Phil*, (163) 1-2.

<sup>98</sup> Segal (1995: 113).

<sup>99</sup> Sophocles, *Phil*, (171) 220-1.

<sup>100</sup> Budelman (2006: 97)

<sup>101</sup> Meiggs (1972: 424).

seems to exist on an alternative plane of reality, to which we have travelled by dint of being theatregoers or readers. It is an island designed for the purpose of thinking. As Philoctetes puts it:

I shall soon be, though still alive, quite abstract.' ... 'Here Ulysses, nothing becomes: everything is, everything remains.' ... 'In short, here one can speculate!'<sup>102</sup>

Here they get the luxury of truly thinking for themselves. We, the audience are granted the experience of considering the social, religious and metaphysical problems through them. Philoctetes' words are quite apt, he is quite abstract, as he is a fraction of Gide's psyche. But he also represents a segment of French society, as do both Neoptolemus and Ulysses. For as much as Gide isolates his characters, he himself will always be influenced by the debate of the society around him.

Heaney's play immediately asserts itself as having far more to do with reality than Gide's version. The political overtones are overt in comparison to those in Gide which are almost incidental. Heaney grounds his play in language, he uses words, phrases and idioms that evoke the public rhetoric and attitudes produced by 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland.<sup>103</sup> Heaney aimed to write verse that would sound natural if spoken in a Northern Ireland accent.<sup>104</sup> Various characters, in particular the merchant, 'sound' Irish,<sup>105</sup> and Philoctetes is often ('a little too often maybe') heard saying 'Och'.<sup>106</sup> The chorus reference events unmistakable to the audience on both sides of the fight. Despite such techniques grounding the play in an Irish political space, Heaney relies heavily on the liminality offered by Lemnos. Like Gide, Heaney

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<sup>102</sup> **Gide**, *Phil*, (146 - Act II, Scene 1), *OC* III (38) 'Enfin, l'on peut ici spéculer!'

<sup>103</sup> **Denard** (2000: 3).

<sup>104</sup> **Heaney** (2002: 174).

<sup>105</sup> **Denard** (2000: 3-4), **McDonald** (1996: 134)

<sup>106</sup> **Heaney** (2002: 174).

employs a range of distancing techniques to develop the liminality and metaphysical nature of the island. The chorus, and particularly their introduction and the opening stage directions, are used to complicate the reality of Lemnos. Rather than giving a description of the journey to the island as Gide does, Heaney shows how the chorus arrive in time for the opening lines of the play.

As representative of a segment of society, the Greek chorus is a commonly seen to have political relevance to the specific time of the play. Heaney updates the sailors, or 'shipmates' of Sophocles<sup>107</sup> and their political relevance to the fictional polis under scrutiny. They are listed as 'Attendants to Neoptolemus', and though this is an inadequate description of what they are, it is significant that they are aligned with a character who represents Protestant interests within the play. However, the chorus do not arrive with Neoptolemus. They appear to belong to the island and have a way to go before they present themselves in their role as Attendants. The opening stage directions read:

**CHORUS** *discovered, boulder-still, wrapped in shawls. All three in series stir and move, as it were seabirds stretching and unstiffening.*<sup>108</sup>

The chorus start as like boulders, as though they have been there forever, belonging to the earth and the physical reality of the island. They stretch and seemingly unfurl themselves, drawing themselves into the roles they will play to accompany the new characters arriving on their island. Heaney gives the chorus a new prologue which they recite as they transform themselves into '*lookouts attending the entry of Odysseus and Neoptolemus*', ready to greet the other characters on stage. The new

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<sup>107</sup> cf. **Gardiner** (1987: 13-49) on Sophocles' chorus in *Philoctetes*.

<sup>108</sup> **Heaney**, *The Cure*, (1).

lines explain in part the nature of this performance, the play on stage and their place as the chorus with in it.

*For my part is the chorus, and the chorus*

*Is more or less a borderline between*

*The you and the me and the it of it.*

*Between*

*The god's and human beings' sense of things.*<sup>109</sup>

They are anything but simply the attendants of Neoptolemus, Heaney wanted them to seem like the three Fates or the Weird Sisters,<sup>110</sup> three women to contrast with the three male characters of the play.<sup>111</sup> Their ability to exist between the physical and intangible, and their ability to change characters is crucial to the resolution of the play. Mirroring their transformations as the play opens, as it draws to a close the chorus leader undergoes a further metamorphosis. This time into the demigod Heracles.

In Sophocles' *Philoctetes* there is the potential to read in the ending, not the appearance of Heracles, but the reappearance of Odysseus in disguise.<sup>112</sup> Odysseus has already dressed up once, as the merchant,<sup>113</sup> certainly he lies as well as Odysseus,<sup>114</sup> and in reality it would have been the same actor in another costume. The casting by Heaney of Hercules as a chorus member has the effect of ensuring against this interpretation, it assures that there is no further trickery, either for the

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<sup>109</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (2).

<sup>110</sup> Heaney (2002: 172).

<sup>111</sup> McDonald (2002: 67).

<sup>112</sup> Tessitore (2003: 86) cf. Errandonea (1956), Lattimore (1964).

<sup>113</sup> Although this is not the interpretation taken by all, there can be no doubt that the same actor plays Odysseus, the merchant and Heracles, several interpretations list the merchant as a sailor rather than Odysseus in disguise. Cf. Roberts (1989: 171), Falkner (1998:35).

<sup>114</sup> Budelman (2006: 95-100).

characters on stage or the audience. This is important for the message of honesty in Heaney's text and hugely important for the resolution of the play. The chorus's role as attendants to Neoptolemus mean that the words of healing that persuade Philoctetes to move forward come from the Protestant side of the conflict. But Heracles is also a personal deity to Philoctetes. He is part of the enemy and a personal friend. It imparts two messages: that the truth and divinity do not take sides, and that if someone has the answers they should be attended to, no matter their loyalties.

The capacity of the chorus to alter their image and the depiction of their growth from the island, showing them first dormant and then awakening there, carries suggestions for the role of the island itself. Heaney develops the impression that the island and the story cannot be separated from each other, that a combined 'it' exists in its own right as an entity in the collective consciousness.<sup>115</sup> The island with its story hold both an eternal and dislocated property of existence. It becomes a staging point in time that can be endlessly revisited. Into this Heaney introduces new versions of Neoptolemus and Odysseus, composite characters, representing both Sophoclean symbols; ephebe, wily politician etc., and metaphors for contemporary religious and political ideas.<sup>116</sup> Heaney underlines the unplaceable nature of the chorus' existence in their *parados*; the chorus exist between things, and things that can only be described as 'it'.<sup>117</sup>

As a theatrical device, it is quite different to Gide's grey island. However, it none the less sets up a comparable setting and mood of eternal presence of the drama. For

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<sup>115</sup> **Lowe** (2000: 159). 'It is not philosophically nonsensical to claim that tragic myths are literally alive, in the sense claimed by Dawkins and his successors for the notion of "memes" ' cf. **Dawkins** (1989:189-201) 'memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically' (192), **Dennett** (1995: 342-69), **Lynch** (1996), **Blackmore**, (1999).

<sup>116</sup> cf. **Knox** (1983), **Vernant & Vidal-Naquet** (1981), **Whitlock Blundell** (1989).

<sup>117</sup> **Carey** (1966: 140) 'the 'it' of it seems to be primarily the disease, which infecting individuals has spread through the body politic.'

both, Lemnos is an island in an eternal metaphysical limbo and a place in which men are compelled to act out a sequence of actions among themselves under fresh excuses every generation or so. Each writer has a choice as to how they will deal with the cultural authority of the material they are working with and the feeling, particularly poignant in Greek tragedy, that it is a life force in its own right. Those who harness the power of the island's existence separate themselves from those to choose to export the story to an external setting. Stoppard's *Neutral Ground*, Wertebaker's *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, or the more recent film, *Sexy Beast*,<sup>118</sup> introduce travel, new characters, alter names and split the roles of Sophoclean characters between couples or groups of characters. Effective in some regards, moving the action limits the ability of the play and its characters to feel part of universals far more than when the story is changed but the island is still used, for example Mandel's *The Summoning of Philoctetes* or Müller's *Philoctetes*.<sup>119</sup> Gide and Heaney tap into this sense of universalism, they develop the idea that they are part of a continuum, of a history larger than any of the individual plays, even Sophocles' original.

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<sup>118</sup> **Stoppard** (1998 - book publication, 1968 - TV film - spy thriller); **Wertebaker** (1992); **Glazer** (2000) a gangster thriller film which claims to use the Philoctetes story, but it does so so abstractly that the myth is barely recognisable - APGRD lists it as a 'distant relative'.

<sup>119</sup> **Mandel** (1961) **Müller** (1965), both in **Mandel** (1981).

### III

#### Aspect of the divine - Choruses and *deus ex machina*

The problem of what to do with the chorus<sup>120</sup> or a theatrical device so specific to the Greek stage as resolution through divine intervention by way of stage machinery, is not a new one. They are integral parts of the structure of a Greek tragedy, but, *deus ex machina* especially, have long been unpopular on the modern stage. In fact stripping the divine intervention and reasoning out of Greek myths has been going on since the Euhemerists in the 4th century BC, and probably earlier.<sup>121</sup> Many modern writers choose to take out the chorus completely and remove the *deus ex machina* from the plays in which it appears, substituting an alternative ending based on human rather than divine events. Those who retain it tend to make changes in favour of either relevance or theatrical creativity, depending on the importance of maintaining suspension of disbelief. These two plays each pick one direction, with Gide stripping out both the chorus and the appearance of Heracles, while Heaney retains them, although altering them drastically in the process.

Many of the speeches that Heaney gives to the chorus function as soliloquies. They tend to reference Ireland and not the events on Lesbos, and consequently stand apart from the rest of the text. Their position as 'in between' sees them oscillate between the reality of the play and a secondary reality of Ireland, bringing home the relevance of the play to the audience. But the resonance of these words reaches out

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<sup>120</sup> cf, **Goldhill** (2007: 45-79).

<sup>121</sup> Euhemerous was a late 4th Century BC mythographer at the court of Macedon who promoted a rationalising method of interpretation that treated myth as historical fact corrupted by retellings. Euhemerist literature retold traditional myths without recourse to divine intervention - two examples; *The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete* and *Dares the Phrygian*, **Frazer** (1966).

beyond the theatre, to a world audience. The lines that begin 'Don't hope on this side of the grave...' <sup>122</sup> are some of the most poignant and oft quoted words of modern theatre most famously spoken in a speech by Bill Clinton, but also by Mary Robinson and Jacques Santer. <sup>123</sup> These speeches show that the power of this particular play - about hope for healing within the damaged communities of the Northern Ireland - has been able to be translated from fiction into politics, becoming part of the movement for peace.

Despite referencing events in Ireland, Heaney's chorus hold on to their Greek roots by means of echoing lines and words from Sophocles. This trace of Sophocles, coupled with their introduction as discussed earlier helps to impress a timeless authority on their speeches. They are beyond men, and as we find out at the end, they are a medium to the gods, characters whose words are to be heeded. A line in the new choral prologue deepens the complexity of chorus' place within the play and the messages they are able to impart because of it. Having said that they exist on a borderline, <sup>124</sup> they then claim the same location and status for poetry, binding themselves to that idea. Poetry has power, poetry is the 'voice of reality and justice', poetry 'allowed the gods to speak'. <sup>125</sup> Elsewhere Heaney writes that 'in one sense, the efficacy of poetry is nil - no lyric has ever stopped a tank'. <sup>126</sup> However, the opposing

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<sup>122</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (77).

<sup>123</sup> Robinson 1990 (Irish President), Clinton 1995 (US President), Santer 1995 (President of the European Commission). Denard, (2000: 1-2), Goldhill (2007: 151-152), Taplin (2004: 145-146).

<sup>124</sup> Heaney (1988: 108) 'Poetry... does not say to the accusing crowds or to the helpless accused, 'Now a solution will take place', it does not propose to be instrumental or effective. In the rift between what is going to happen, and whatever we would wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as a distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves. This is what gives poetry its governing power..... Poetry is more a threshold than a path, one constantly approached and constantly departed from, at which reader and writer undergo in their different ways the experience of being at the same time summoned and released.'

<sup>125</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (2).

<sup>126</sup> Heaney (1988: 107).

position to this is that poetry has a divine power of healing, of hope, and that is a clear message projected in this play. Carey writes:

‘Poetry’ becomes the enabling voice in the play, at the threshold between individuals and at the border between the past and the present, between exile and community, and between space and time, a position that is emphasised at the end of the play as poetry opens a door into the dark between the living and the dead.<sup>127</sup>

This brings a new bearing to the end of the play. As in the Sophocles the appearance of Hercules, the advent of the supernatural, only comes into play after the natural probabilities have been shown to reach an impasse.<sup>128</sup> But, following theatrical trends the audience expects more, they will not ‘buy’ a supernatural occurrence and resolution. There has to be a production of meaning in the use of a deity rather than a simplistic answer of ‘god saved the day’. Heaney’s chorus tie themselves to the idea of poetry, and it is poetry that is seen to be divine. Rather than draw attention to god’s intervention in human events, Heaney emphasises poetry’s power to ‘awaken the spiritual in human experience’.<sup>129</sup> Poetry might not be able to halt a tank, but it might just be able to illuminate a way forward. Heaney writes about the point of telling stories, of their power of endurance and of message.<sup>130</sup> That they are metaphors that can be translated back into reality. Thus Heaney depicts the appearance of Hercules and the forgiveness he inspires as coming from within the chorus. This coupled with the idea that the chorus have always been there, that they are as eternal as the island, shows that the capacity for resolution can be found. It has always been there, it is just a matter of locating it and listening to it. For Heaney, the divine is located within humanity. He shows the power of poetry, that the Greeks called to the muses to

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<sup>127</sup> Carey (1996: 138).

<sup>128</sup> cf. Fletcher (1964: 149), Goodman (1954: 49-58).

<sup>129</sup> Carey (1996: 139).

<sup>130</sup> cf. Heaney (1988).

inspire them with, can bring that divinity forth, such that the poet himself become the conduit for it rather than the creator.

Gide chooses to populate his play as sparsely as possible, stripping the cast list down to the bare minimum. Even the appearance of the false merchant is removed. With no chorus, there is no external perspective or outside council to influence either the audience or the characters, and as might be expected, no physical deity intervenes at the end. However, unlike the Sophoclean text where tragedy is seen to be averted by Philoctetes' decision to go to Troy, Gide concludes his play with Philoctetes left on Lemnos bereft of both bow and companionship. Still, Philoctetes is described as 'victorious',<sup>131</sup> the final words of the play are his: 'I am happy'.<sup>132</sup> Crucially it is Philoctetes' own decision to stay behind and forfeit his bow, for losing the bow does not diminish Philoctetes we discover, quite the opposite; echoing Menalcas' words, 'the best part of you is confined elsewhere',<sup>133</sup> once the bow is gone it transpires that he does not need it. Without it, the 'birds from heaven' come down to feed him rather than needing to be shot.<sup>134</sup>

The final scenes replace the need for Heracles as *deus ex machina* in a manner that resembles Goethe's treatment of the need for resolution at the end of his *Iphigenia in Tauris*.<sup>135</sup> Goethe locates the essence of divinity in Iphigenia; it is her own

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<sup>131</sup> McLaren (1953: 12), Pollard (1970: 374). 'Although indeed he has not succeeded in achieving a perfect victory, the fact he *has chosen* is of prime importance, even in the eyes of Ulysses.... he establishes his theoretical superiority over the other two protagonists.'

<sup>132</sup> Gide, *Phil*, (160 - Act V), OC III (63) 'Je suis heureux.'

<sup>133</sup> Gide, *Fruits of the Earth*, (61).

<sup>134</sup> Gide, *Phil*, (160 - Act V), OC III (63) stage directions read *His voice has become extraordinarily mild and beautiful; around him flowers are showing through the snow, and birds from heaven come down to feed him. / Sa voix est devenue extraordinairement belle et douce; des fleurs autour de lui percent la neige, et les oiseaux du ciel descendent le nourrir.*

Mandel, (1981: 160) 'This almost Christian embroidery to Gide's Symbolist fervour is not inappropriate, for Philoctetes has become the perfect anchorite. It hardly needs to be added that praising a life cut off from the polis would have seemed to Sophocles and any other Greek pure madness'.

<sup>135</sup> Goethe (1987:53).

enlightened humanistic ideals that save the day.<sup>136</sup> Gide follows suit, locating the divinity within his hero; Philoctetes transcends his position as common man by his devotion to duty and to himself. As a consequence of which the laws of nature governing the little island are altered and it becomes spring in the land of ice and snow. It is as though, by divesting himself of his last possession and link to mankind he is able to move from a position of limbo, of the shades of grey which characterise Neoptolemus' description of the island, to one of enlightenment.

Mandel sees in the ending of the play 'that familiar figure of Symbolism, the lone prince in his castle. His 'acte gratuit' of drinking the poison ensures that the bow will be removed and that he will be left alone.'<sup>137</sup> This is one reading, but it is a stilted one, for two reasons. Firstly it is not really a 'gratuitous impulsive act' at all. Though it might be a little impulsive, it is not uncalled for, lacking good reason or unwarranted. Secondly, it fails to see a symbolic place for Hercules. Reading Hercules as symbolically present, especially for the ending scenes where he would normally expect to be found, throws a quite different light on Philoctetes' 'free act'. Looking at the events of the ending in the light of the myth of Hercules, pairings emerge linking sets of prerequisite events in the history of the bow's ownership, from Hercules to Philoctetes, and Philoctetes to Neoptolemus.<sup>138</sup> These pairings bring to light new conclusions, and from an act of shunning others it becomes an act of ascendance.

Philoctetes' exact relationship to Hercules is not specified, however, we are told that he was his friend.<sup>139</sup> Thus we can broadly assume that in Gide's projected

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<sup>136</sup> **Pollard** (1970: 369) 'In this period, Gide was heavily influenced by Goethe and read amongst other works, Ekermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe*, which contains a long discussion on the possibilities of the Philoctetes legend, together with an account of the versions of it that were written in antiquity. Goethe begins by saying that the Greeks were less concerned with the literal truth of a story than with the way in which a poet had treated the facts.'

<sup>137</sup> **Mandel** (1981: 160).

<sup>138</sup> **Avery** (1965: 290-295).

<sup>139</sup> **Gide**, *Phil*, (133 - Act I, Scene 1), *OC III* (19).

backstory it was Philoctetes who set alight Hercules' funeral pyre; this being how he came to possession the bow rather than inheriting it from his father, Poas.<sup>140</sup> The ending of the play mirrors this story. Just as Philoctetes did what no one else would and cremated the living man, Neoptolemus does what only he can, and takes the bow away from Philoctetes. It is an act tantamount to condemning him to death in the Sophoclean order of things, an act equal to setting flames under a living man. Drawing on the tradition of Hercules as virtue, Gide suggests Philoctetes as the new Hercules.<sup>141</sup> Like Hercules before him, Philoctetes had done all he could to make himself virtuous. His trial on Lemnos becomes the symbolic equivalent of the labours, but like Hercules the final step must be taken for him by another. This other is Neoptolemus, who has now stepped into the shoes of Philoctetes, and by facilitating Philoctetes' transformation he makes himself the next rightful owner of the bow of Hercules.

The idea that Philoctetes attains immortality of the order of Hercules simplifies the ending of the play. Philoctetes' level of virtue is supposed to be unobtainable, most mortals do not expect to obtain such perfect virtue as to rise as a god. It is something that has to be seen as untenable yet needs to be exemplified by means of a hero for the benefit of the community. Philoctetes becomes this; Neoptolemus and Ulysses are affected by it but must still continue with their own personal quests. Philoctetes laments that his devotion serves Greece because it will provide them with

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<sup>140</sup> cf. **Webster** (1970: 2-5) on the background of the Philoctetes myth.

<sup>141</sup> **Gide**, Journals November 1890 (1978: 18) 'Thinking of one's salvation: egotism. The hero must not even think of his salvation. He has *voluntarily* and *fatally* consecrated himself, unto damnation, for the sake of others; in order to manifest.'

Also **Scodel** (1984: 100), 'Through Heracles, the process of uniting the divine plan and the man Philoctetes is completed: in Heracles the prophecy becomes a fate which, imitating Heracles' own, is fully appropriate.' (101-2) 'The friendship between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus is effectively a repetition of that between Philoctetes and Heracles. Cf. **Hamilton** (1975: 135-6), **Gill** (1980), **Biggs** (1996) on symmetry between Heracles, Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, **Roberts** (1989: 172) on the similarities of wounds. **Segal** (1980:132-3) 'The three actors, all united under the sign of the bow - Heracles, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus- form a triangular configuration whose apex is the mythic embodiments of heroic values in the play, the god from whom the heroic meaning emanates.'

the bow, but it is more than that, Philoctetes becomes the symbol that benefits the community. This also makes clear Gide's choice of the Aeschylus quote from *Prometheus Bound* in Act II. It is not just a throw-away line, and serves more than the joint purposes of a moment of humour and textual dislocation. The figure of Prometheus has a role to play in the wider arc and symbolism of the play. Prometheus is left in chains for helping mankind, and he is rescued by Hercules, rescued by virtue. His exile is tied to the benefit received by the community of man, as is to some extent Philoctetes'. They do not function in precisely the same roles, but there are layers of similarity, and indeed, polarity; the birds eat Prometheus' guts whereas they feed Philoctetes.

The ideas of virtue, sacrifice and benefit to mankind are bound up together in the three characters of Philoctetes, Hercules and Prometheus, with each instance of virtue and sacrifice bolstering the others. Prometheus and Philoctetes are also tied to each other in Gidean chronology - they were published within a month of each other, 'appearing like a pair of wounded and suffering Dioscuri'.<sup>142</sup> Both characters were in mind during the writing of each, and 'Philoctetes passes through the same experience as Prometheus, that of liberation from outside forces in order to pursue the self.'<sup>143</sup>

But it is necessary to include one more aspect for a full understanding of Gide's play and its conclusion. To find it, the reader must step back from the story and think of it in terms of an internal dialogue. The characters can be seen both as coherent and individual entities, and simultaneously as representative of an inner dialogue; the characters indivisible from each other, aspects of a whole. Neoptolemus, Philoctetes

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<sup>142</sup> Watson-Williams (1967: 40).

<sup>143</sup> Watson-Williams (1967: 61).

and Ulysses are fragments of Gide's mind.<sup>144</sup> Philoctetes wins the battle of virtue and he ascends to heaven like a god, however, he must be left behind. This part of a man's nature may be perfect and divine, but it cannot exist in the real world. Ulysses and Neoptolemus both develop their understanding of virtue through their contact with Philoctetes, but ultimately they must return to the world where they know they will be compromised. The battle for Troy will be a messy affair, even if, by changing the end of the Philoctetes episode, Neoptolemus will not kill Priam on the altar of Zeus. An action which evidently also concerns Heaney, for his has his Heracles issue a caution: 'know to shun reprisal killings when that's [Troy] done.'<sup>145</sup>

Like Heaney, Gide internalises the idea of divine intervention. Through poetry and his chorus Heaney shows that divinity is an aspect of humanity, and that each of us has the divine power of healing and poetry within us. Gide's explanation of human divinity is twofold. Firstly that through dedication to oneself divinity can be achieved, something that is found when the three characters are seen as individuals. When the characters are viewed as three aspects of a whole the story of the divine changes. Each individual can be seen to have these three factions inside their psyche. This again has a fluid interpretation. It can be seen with Neoptolemus in the middle, and Ulysses and Philoctetes sat on either shoulder as tempter and angel in a battle for the boy's soul and affection. The other way of seeing this - and perhaps the more compelling of the two options - is that, within each psyche there are a variety of personas, and Philoctetes comprises the pure and divine element. However, he is not something that can function properly in the real world, his purity coming from his abstinence from society and perpetual reflection without interaction. He achieves his ascent, but he must remain on the island. The elements represented by Neoptolemus

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<sup>144</sup> McLaren (1953: 31).

<sup>145</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (79).

and Ulysses are those which must engage with the world. The message created in these two plays is constantly in dialogue with the structural elements and story of Sophocles' play. The alteration of chorus and *deus ex machina* always says something quite interesting about an adaptation. The arrival of a god is always an *event* in a play, and the replacement of this device is consequently more striking than more general alteration in text and plot. The way in which the divine is encountered is approached differently by both authors, but as with their handling of Lemnos, they end up with a similar effect.

#### IV

##### **France is not so easily shaken off**

Heaney's version of *Philoctetes* is a politically charged piece from the outset. From the first choral song to the last the backdrop of Northern Ireland and her troubles are invoked. Though the play is set on Lemnos, it is firmly grounded in Northern Ireland and the politics are central to the the understanding of the play. It informs Philoctetes' refusal to go rejoin the Trojan war, the distrust between Philoctetes and Odysseus as well as the friendship he forms with Neoptolemus. Gide's play is slightly different. Though apparently isolated, even estranged from the real world, Gide remains influenced by the public debate and rhetoric of the era. Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes that Greece is not so easily shaken off, and the same holds true for France.

The political climate of *fin de siècle* France was one incubating the conflict of ideologies that was to lead to the Dreyfus Affair. The ideas and principles fit too well with Gide's play to be irrelevant, and what is seen in France as a social battle that is 'perhaps eternal, to be refought every generation or two',<sup>146</sup> can also be seen on Gide's Lemnos.<sup>147</sup> Sections of the drama reflect the conflicts that were beginning to unfold in France, capturing the mood and examining some of the moral questions that it provoked. The Dreyfus Affair would distil these conflicting attitudes into coherent groups: Those who evoke the nation, the army, honour and God. And those who termed themselves 'Dreyfusards', who believed that the principles of justice and freedom transcended even the nation and the instrument designed to ensure its security, the army.<sup>148</sup> Whether related to the Dreyfus Affair or not, the following conversation between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus teases out the skeins of the moral choices to be made by the individuals who comprise a nation. The arguments at stake do not pertain only to the question of state versus individual. They also concern a suitably Sophoclean theme, one that is present in *Philoctetes* but most famously is in conflict in *Antigone*, that of the place and status of the church, within or opposed to the state.

**Philoctetes:** Listen, child. Don't you believe the gods are above Greece, more important than Greece?

**Neoptolemus:** No, by Zeus, I don't believe it

**Philoctetes:** But why not, Neoptolemus?

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<sup>146</sup> Derfler, (2000:63).

<sup>147</sup> Chauffier suggests *Philoctète* as an allegory for the Dreyfus Affair. OC III. VIII. The initial visual similarities are striking, however the potential for allegory is unfounded. Dreyfus was not convicted of treason until 1894. He was released in 1899, but was not officially declared innocent and re-accepted into the army until 1906. cf. Derfler (2002) *Philoctète* was probably written as early as 1894. Pollard, (1970: 368) rubbishes Chauffier's suggestion on the basis of chronology. Also, Gide in 1898 seemed relatively indifferent to the fate of Dreyfus 'Dreyfus innocent? Dreyfus coupable? Peu m'importe. La France m'importe plus qu'un individu.' (Gide to Rouart, 24/1/1898).

<sup>148</sup> Derfler, (2000: 63) 'If the Dreyfus Affair is best understood as a product of the time in which it took place - the France of the 1890's and the social, cultural and economic forces that confronted each other - it is also true that it pitted two attitudes, two moralities...'

**Neoptolemus:** Because the gods I serve serve Greece.

**Philoctetes:** So! You mean they are subject?

**Neoptolemus:** Not subject - I don't know how to say it... But look! You know they are unknown outside Greece; Greece is their country as well as ours; by serving her, I serve them; they are no different from my country.

**Philoctetes:** Yet, look, I have something to say, there; I no longer belong to Greece, yet - I serve them.

**Neoptolemus:** You think so? Ah, poor Philoctetes! Greece is not so easily shaken off.... and even—

**Philoctetes** [*attentive*]: And even—?

**Neoptolemus:** Ah, if you knew.... Philoctetes—

**Philoctetes:** If I knew—what?

**Neoptolemus** [*recovering*]: No, you, you must talk; I came to listen, and now you question me.... I see plainly that Ulysses' virtue and yours are not the same. ... You used to speak so well, but now when you have to speak, you hesitate... Devote oneself to what, Philoctetes?

**Philoctetes:** I was going to say: to the gods... But the truth is, Neoptolemus, there is something above the gods.

**Neoptolemus:** Above the gods!

**Philoctetes:** Yes. I will not act like Ulysses.

**Neoptolemus:** Devote oneself to what Philoctetes? What is there above the gods?

**Philoctetes:** There is— [*Taking his head in his hands, overcome*] I don't know any longer. I don't know.... Ah! Ah, **oneself**! ... I don't know how to say it any longer, Neoptolemus...

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Philoctetes' statement of 'oneself' as the supreme aim in accountability and devotion, does play into the hands of what would come to be the Dreyfusard camp. However, the play is manifestly not about Dreyfus, if it is about any man, it is about

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<sup>149</sup> **Gide**, *Phil*, (150-1, Act III, Scene 2), *OC* III (46-48), emphasis my own.

Gide himself. McLaren writes that at this point in his career Gide is ‘still searching for a workable ethic and still developing and criticising the basic tendencies of his own nature through the protagonists of his plays.’<sup>150</sup> Gide belonged to a generation that questioned the establishment; the decisions under scrutiny above were in conflicts his own mind as well as in France. Gide argued that his upbringing, influenced both by his Huguenot father and his Norman Catholic mother led to a duality in his nature which brought him to frequently question his aesthetic and moral views.<sup>151</sup> He personally viewed himself as always being in dialogue with himself,<sup>152</sup> something that can clearly be seen in the above extract.

Philoctetes’ iteration of ‘oneself’ is the crux of the play. Ideas of religion, duty, devotion, virtue, and the heroic code elide towards the end of the play, as Philoctetes simultaneously surrenders himself and breaks free of his remaining constraints. Philoctetes attains his perfect virtue and ascends to a higher spiritual and intellectual level. However, perhaps the most pertinent observation on the topic of virtue is made by Ulysses. Philoctetes enquires of him ‘Don’t you love virtue?’, Ulysses replies ‘Yes, my own.’<sup>153</sup> Each character has their own conception of virtue. The question as to whose is right or wrong is not a useful question, as each conception is equally unstable. It transpires that real virtue is attained through being true to yourself.

San Juan Jr writes that:

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<sup>150</sup> McLaren, (1953: 31).

<sup>151</sup> Mann (1948: 35), Pierre-Quint (1934: 13).

<sup>152</sup> McLaren (1953: 5) ‘Je suis un être de dialogue’ ... ‘tout en moi combat et se contredit.’

<sup>153</sup> Gide, *Phil*, (142 - Act II, Scene 1), *OC* III (32) P: Tu m’écoutes sans me comprendre. — N’estimes-tu pas la vertu? U: Si: la mienne.

Above all, Gide's theatre concerns itself with the search of the individual for self-fulfilment' ... 'One's desires, so long as they rule one's actions, are the only true gods.... To follow one's desires is to realise one's virtues.<sup>154</sup>

This is something Philoctetes and Ulysses know, but Neoptolemus discovers during the play. It is Philoctetes' complete dedication to himself that enables him to rise as a god, however, Ulysses' virtue is no less valid so long as he remains faithful to himself. Justice and freedom has to be created for the individual by the individual, but it also constructs a new ideal of heroism, namely remaining true to yourself in the face of adversity and change. It is shown to be paramount to be culpable only to oneself, for if you cannot be true to yourself you cannot know whether what you are doing is right? True service to oneself becomes the ultimate act of service to the community and the gods, in that if the individual cannot be compromised, neither can the community.

## V

### **Are we the heroes?**

Gide and Heaney's plays work in different directions. Upon initial contact Gide's mix of philosophies<sup>155</sup> frustrate the reader's attempt to find a coherent message, whereas by comparison Heaney's play seems quite direct. His fidelity to Sophocles' plot allows for his agenda to be more easily foregrounded through his interpolated speeches that reference events in Ireland. The clarity of his message of forgiveness

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<sup>154</sup> **San Juan Jr** (1965: 220, 221).

<sup>155</sup> cf. **Fanning** (1984: 49) (Existentialism), **Pollard** (1970: 370) (Symbolism), **McLaren** (1953: 20) - (Humanistic philosophies of Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky).

and progression is unmistakable next to Gide's somewhat reflexive creation. It is later reflection that shows where there is room to pick holes in the consistency of Heaney's symbolism. The opposite is the case with *Philoctète*; later reflection allows the reader to assemble the key moments of the text to create a meaningful conclusion.

Despite being two such different plays, there are a number of moments where the paths of the plays overlap. It appears mostly in their handling of what could be classed as the problematic aspects of Greek tragedy, notably the location, chorus, *deus ex machina* and what it means to be a hero. The problem of what to do with Heracles is one they both deal with in a fashion that although superficially different is also remarkably similar. They both find their resolutions in causing the divine to become part of characters themselves. Instead of seeing the gods as imposing their will on their subjects, the gods become an aspect of humanity. For both, the divinity of an individual can be applied across the board. Each of us has the capacity for forgiveness and enlightenment by being true to ourselves, and both plays develop a 'vision of a society based on individual self-respect freely following one's conscience.'<sup>156</sup>

The negotiation of the cultural authority of the play is one of the most successful aspect of the texts from both authors, and they deal with it in a similar fashion. The play to some extent becomes synonymous with the destination, and Lemnos becomes to them eternal, eternal yet highly adaptable. Both islands are seen as destinations in time, a metaphorical reality where problems can be contemplated and resolved and where hidden divinity can be revealed. By undertaking to visit such a place, the characters, along with the audience, consent to be changed in some way, to experience something. In terms of being mapped onto places, they function very

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<sup>156</sup> Carey (1966: 140).

differently. Gide cannot help but to include elements of French debate and life in his play, but Heaney's Irish *Lemnos* is much more direct in its presentation. It was conceived and produced as a play about Ireland and this is what it turns out to be, and though some elements do not function as well as others there can be no doubt that the political space is that of the Irish.

The definition of heroism is altered by both playwrights, but both draw upon the ideas Sophocles presents.<sup>157</sup> That to steer towards dishonesty is to betray yourself; a hero doesn't need to use deceit to achieve success. Heaney's application of the play to Ireland emphasises this to show that there can be no moving forward unless with honesty, but that past betrayals must be forgiven. Heroism for Heaney is about forgiveness and is dependant on genuine friendship; the bond created by the transference of the bow between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus is that what guarantees the success at Troy.<sup>158</sup> Heracles steps in, not to alter this relationship, but to redirect their path. For Gide heroic achievement is about personal culpability and discovering one's true nature.<sup>159</sup> To remain true to oneself is the only guidance in this world. However, the heroism of both plays must be seen in relation to the community. Heaney uses *Philoctetes* to show that the entrenched position, with its analogy of political and sectarian conflict, must be released in order to forgive, in order to move on and to become part of a community rather than holding back from it. For Gide, devotion to oneself allows for better devotion to the community. A person who cannot

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<sup>157</sup> **Segal** (1995:109) 'Both men are confined to the heroism of their essential natures: Neoptolemus, in his courage, compassion, and sense of honour; Philoctetes, in his ability to endure suffering, his strength of will, and his moral integrity. But the oracles have made it clear that heroism serves a larger purpose, The action cannot rest with the affirmation of human friendship and moral strength alone. Heracles therefore enters to speed both men to the place where their now realized heroic natures belong, the only place that offers such natures full scope for their greatness, the battlefield of Troy.'

<sup>158</sup> **Gill** (1980: 199).

<sup>159</sup> **San Juan Jr** (1965: 223), 'Gide's theatre is then the theatre of the individual struggling to find his own identity. In this struggle he become heroic.'

be corrupted can defend and represent a community better than one who will let his decisions about right and wrong be affected by the words of those around them.

Gide captures contemporary debate in his philosophical, humanistic treatment of the legend,<sup>160</sup> but whether he builds up a coherent narrative or philosophy is less clear. He wields a certain amount of literary obtuseness which manifests itself in undercutting sections of the text and undermining conclusions. The three versions of virtue that are expounded seem always on the brink of failure. Gide's *Philoctète* has the feeling of an intellectual exercise in comparison to Heaney's *The Cure*, which is a serious attempt at a bridge to reconciliation. But Gide has to have the last laugh. Neoptolemus learns from Philoctetes, but he fails to remember a lesson he is taught at the start of the play. In the days of silence before the play opens, Neoptolemus comes to a number of conclusions. One of which is that he is to be sacrificed, like Iphigenia, to the Greek cause.<sup>161</sup> Ulysses quickly tells him he is wrong, but Neoptolemus fails to understand what this means. Neoptolemus is given the tools from the outset, as is the audience, that suppositions made in a void of information do not hold true. His are a projection of fancy, of immortality without ever facing fear or danger, and yet he thinks that the hermit can give him truths about the world. But you cannot be taught virtue in a vacuum from society, it becomes meaningless.

The two plays can both be considered as successful adaptations of *Philoctetes*, insofar as they achieve what they started out to. Gide's *Philoctète* remains slightly obscure, a short abstract piece which is not currently in print in a major publishing house. However, it survives in old collections and is read by those who are willing to offer the time to contemplate the themes and reversals of the work. Heaney's version was always intended to be much more accessible. It was conceived for the Field Day

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<sup>160</sup> McLaren (1953: 20).

<sup>161</sup> Gide, *Phil*, (132 - Act I, Scene 1), *OC* III (18).

Theatre Company, a group which aimed establish a significant theatre company in Northern Ireland and to create a 'Fifth Province', a aesthetic space beyond the reach 'of our normal scientific consciousness' and one that transcended the dire state of Irish politics.<sup>162</sup> As part of this mission *The Cure of Troy* is very successful, it rises above the party and religious lines of conflict and encourages peace, honesty and forgiveness from all sides. And in the years since its publication 'a great sea-change'<sup>163</sup> has occurred, and Heaney and his play have provided a little of the impetus behind it.

Both texts bear the hallmarks of their authors and their poetic styles of writing. In this way they imprint themselves upon the revised material, but nonetheless both authors are remain locked in a constant battle for control over the text. They are always seen as altering it away from the Sophocles, and the underlying story remains. Whether they wish to be or not, writers who adapt Greek tragedy remain always in dialogue with the original text. In some ways this is helpful. For *Philoctète* the knowledge that Heracles is there in the underlying text brings him out in Gide's story without it ever needing to be stated. In other places it is less helpful, Heaney has trouble with his metaphors of peace, a problem perhaps exacerbated by keeping so closely to Sophocles' plot. It is both against Sophocles and in dialogue with him that these authors are able to produce meaning and metaphor. But it is also against Sophocles that they are judged.

It goes further than that though. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* has become the most well known version of the myth, but the myth underneath still remains. Stripped down the variations all say that Philoctetes was abandoned after he was wounded and then

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<sup>162</sup> Hederman (1985: 110) cf. Longley (1985), Ritchtarik (1994)

<sup>163</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, (77).

returned to help bring down Troy. It puts a final twist on the ending of Gide's play. Philoctetes is happy and free. Free in a number of senses. Both Heaney and Gide make some effort to emphasise the repeating nature of this island, and the cycle of events that happen over and over. Philoctetes, in his complete devotion to himself finally succeeds in escaping his own myth. He surrenders his bow and his identity and becomes a god. He alone from this collection of plays escapes his destiny and denies his own myth. He escapes from the name Philoctetes, for who will call him that now - the birds? Heaney's Philoctetes does not, he remains bound to his name and his destiny, one that means two things, an abandoned and crippled man, and a powerful and destructive force. Heaney rehabilitates the character and sends him back to battle complete with his bow and the arrows that never miss and never fail to kill.

## **Can you hear Sophocles through the clamour? Style, voice and action in the 1940's: the Antigones of Anouilh and Brecht**

This chapter focuses on series of elements that I believe to be critical to the interpretation of these two plays in relation both to Sophocles' *Antigone*, and to the country of their staging. These include the use of the Prologue as a theatrical device and means to establish a commentary on the play as a whole, the creation of the idea of Thebes, both physically on stage and through the re-imagining of a backstory the creation of an allegorical place representing a city/country, and the use of the characters of Antigone and Creon to make political statements and the problems with doing so.

Brecht and Anouilh's versions of *Antigone* are perhaps not the most the most original adaptations to pick. Nonetheless they do serve to show the flexibility of the Antigone story and the completely different angles, both in terms of politics and theatrical style, that can be taken by playwrights when dealing with the material. Though both plays revolve around the same cataclysmic European event, their focus centres on different countries and governments. Occupied France was not the same thing as Nazi Germany and neither were their *Antigones*.<sup>164</sup> Through her death and Haemon's after it, two very different messages emerge. In both cases Antigone becomes metaphor, but not of an individual or identifiable person. What she stands for, and perhaps more importantly stands against, are in turns manifold and simplistic. And although in

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<sup>164</sup> Anouilh's *Antigone* was first performed at the Théâtre d'Atelier in Paris, in February 1944-1945 and directed by André Barsacq. Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* was first performed at the Stadttheater in Chur, Switzerland, in February 1948.

Sophocles, Antigone fights Creon's edict simply because she believes it is her duty to provide the sacred rite of burial to her brother, citing the 'unwritten, unshakeable traditions' of the gods<sup>165</sup> over Creon's authority as lawmaker, the significance and consequences of her actions are far reaching in terms of personal freedom, government of the polis, sacred duty, and of Olympian versus chthonic gods.<sup>166</sup> Both Creon and Antigone trespass into realms in which they do not belong; actions which have repercussions for the reading of their characters.<sup>167</sup> And in the same way as her actions would have been considered by their original audience against their social and political backdrop,<sup>168</sup> Antigone's actions in the plays of Anouilh and Brecht are designed to be seen in dialogue with the contemporary worlds in which they are situated.

Creon, the man she defies, is a much more identifiable figure: he is a dictator. In Brecht, there is little doubt that Creon, hailed as 'Mein Führer'<sup>169</sup> is analogous with Hitler.<sup>170</sup> The parallels with Nazi Germany are made unmistakable from the outset by way of the prologue featuring two unnamed girls and their dead brother under a caption of 'Berlin Ende März 1945'.<sup>171</sup> The identity of Creon in Anouilh's *Antigone* is more disputed and there are a number of candidates for the role.<sup>172</sup> I shall argue that

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<sup>165</sup> **Sophocles**, *Antigone*, (82) 453-7. Page references are to **Fagles** (1984), line numbers to the Greek text in **Lloyd-Jones** (1994. Vol II).

<sup>166</sup> **Sourvinou-Inwood** (1989: 140).

<sup>167</sup> cf. **Knox** (1983: 62- 116), **Scodel** (1984: 43-57).

<sup>168</sup> cf. **Norwood** (1920: 133), **Knox** (1983: 85), **Griffith** (1999), **Sourvinou-Inwood** (1989).

<sup>169</sup> **Brecht**, *Die Antigone des Sophokles*, (1955) 186. **Malina** (1990:22) translates it as 'Sir'. All references to Brecht's *Antigone* will be page references to Malina's translation, and line numbers in brackets to the German text included in the *Antigonemodell* 1948 (1955).

<sup>170</sup> Although the Hitler analogy is made quite clear, it has not prevented alternate readings from performances in other countries. The Living Theatre toured *Antigone* for 20 years performing it in 16 different countries 'and wherever we played it, it seemed to become the symbol of the struggle of that time and place - in bleeding Ireland, in Franco's Spain, in Poland a month before martial law was declared, clandestinely in Prague.' **Malina**, Preface to Brecht's *Antigone* (1990: vii) However, the performance style of the Living Theatre departs radically from Brecht's *Antigonemodell*, using interpretive dance heavily, and only the poem, 'The Antigone Legend' would have been in the audience's own language.

<sup>171</sup> **Elwood** (1972: 56) See pictures in **Brecht & Neher**, *Antigonemodell 1948* (1955) ('Berlin, End of March 1945').

<sup>172</sup> I shall address this issue later in the section 'Presenting the Dictators'

Marshal Pétain is the most convincing of these options which I shall address under the section 'Presenting the Dictators'. Anouilh's Creon is an intriguing character and a very different one to those of either Brecht or Sophocles. Of these two Creons, Anouilh's is arguably the more interesting and brave characterisation, having more subtlety and depth than Brecht's. The character of Creon to some extent defines these texts: he is the most obvious symbol of both the performance era and national politics. But it is Antigone who inspires the audience with her attack on the established but unpopular order. The two characters work as a foil for one another; indeed, Antigone cannot properly exist without the actions of Creon.

*Antigone* lends herself to the playwright in different ways to *Philoctetes*.

*Philoctetes* though a Greek tragedy is not tragic in the sense a modern audience might expect and lacks the complete certainty throughout that is found in *Antigone*; that the tragedy cannot be averted. Antigone herself is well documented as one of the most compelling characters in literary history. She is quite literally, 'born to oppose'.<sup>173</sup> The play had a huge impact even at the time, with Sophocles' success in the competition perhaps leading to his election to *strategos* for the Samian expedition in 441-40BC,<sup>174</sup> as well as probably inspiring the adding of a spurious ending to Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*.<sup>175</sup> More recently she has been called the clarion call to the resistance fighter, the anarchist, the just against oppression.<sup>176</sup> Antigone lives in the western political consciousness, she is Helmut Richter's *Antigone anno jetzt*.<sup>177</sup> She has become a character through whom to document oppression and the *Antigone* itself has

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<sup>173</sup> Braun (1974: 7), also Lane & Lane (1986: 117).

<sup>174</sup> Lewis (1988:35-50).

<sup>175</sup> Griffith (1999:6-7).

<sup>176</sup> Steiner (1984: 108).

<sup>177</sup> Steiner (1984: 108)), 'Antigone year-now'.

solidified its status as a 'documentary' play. It is almost as though Antigone has broken through from mythology and fiction, and has asserted herself back into the reality of the world, establishing herself with a reputation for being a tool for documenting and responding to current, or recent events, especially war.

It is an interesting status. Perhaps it was inevitable that a play whose conflict is born of war and concludes in death would be harnessed to military and civil conflicts. The main themes are so strongly cross-cultural; individual versus state, woman against man, the secular and sacred. They do not need to be related to war to be powerful, but perhaps because the situation in *Antigone* becomes so desperate (and desperation is so readily found in time of war), it is unsurprising that for the majority of adaptations in any medium, current or recent wars are rarely far from the page. However, despite the overriding themes of conflict, different centuries have tended to each have their own styles and themes. The Romantic Antigone had an era, as did the Christianising agenda, an example of which is Ballanche's 1814 *Antigone* poem which centred on the French Revolution. Each new era puts new words and causes in to Antigone's mouth. Brecht and Anouilh's musings on the second world war are not original in their theme, (Hasenclever wrote an *Antigone* following the First World War in 1916), but their styles and idea of theatre are their own. Both Brecht and Anouilh acknowledge this trend in their plays, but they have also proved to be a motivating factor in its continuation: witness their success inspiring further playwrights and theatrical invention. An exhaustive list of Antigones on modern political themes is impossible, not only because of the number written, but because of their constant production. Steiner's monograph,

*Antigones* concludes: 'New Antigones' are being imagined, thought, lived now; and will be tomorrow.<sup>178</sup>

Both Anouilh and Brecht produce heavily stylised and self-conscious versions of *Antigone* and both deconstruct the idea of Antigone. They highlight the nature of her character and story as ever repeating. Both also add prologues existing outwith the fictional reality of the play and both use metatheatrical techniques to insert breaks in the action and invite the audience to assess the situation from another angle. Striking techniques at the time, deconstruction of Antigone has become almost a clichéd way of interpreting the text, and has since been taken to extremes by other playwrights. One such is the 2000 Kurup<sup>179</sup> adaptation, *An Antigone Story*, 'from Sophocles and Anouilh'<sup>180</sup> with strains of Brecht.<sup>181</sup> Kurup takes the documentary aspect of the modern tradition and deconstructs it further. Antigone is shunted into a futuristic, and in parts almost Orwellian world where the dictator Krayon is a media mogul rather than official head of government. The deconstruction unfolds along with the play and is led by 'Korus' in his guise as a documentary film maker. He flits about the stage recording and pausing the action which appears for the audience on big screens.<sup>182</sup> The verdict on the production as successful and insightful or self indulgent and confused depends what

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<sup>178</sup> **Steiner** (1984: 304). Some well known examples are: At least four in Ireland in 1984, by Paulin, *The Riot Act*, Carl Mathews, *Antigone* and Kennelly, *Sophocles' Antigone* and the film by Pat Murphy, *Anne Devlin*. Fugard's *The Island* (1985). Gavran's, *Creon's Antigone*, (1985) Slovenia, also, Vergou, *The Marriage of Antigone* (1985) in modern Greek on Cyprus and *The Gospel of Colonus*, Breuer (after Fitts and Fitzgerald) performed and televised by the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Gurney's *Another Antigone*, (1987), Spender's *Creon* (1988), and Greenfield's film *Rites for the Dead* (1990).

<sup>179</sup> **Kurup** (2000), *An Antigone Story, A Greek Tragedy Hijack*. Commissioned by the Getty Centre.

<sup>180</sup> Information from the official website of the Cornerstone Theatre Company, producers of the play. <http://cornerstone.pbworks.com/AN-ANTIGONE-STORY>

<sup>181</sup> **Phillips**, 'The Fine Art of Sedition', *Los Angeles Times*, (1/8/2000: F1 & F9)

<sup>182</sup> **Martinez**, *Variety* (4/8/2000)

review you read.<sup>183</sup> But this is not so important, it's interest here is as an example of the Antigone of our times come full circle.

It plays with the concept of our obsession with using Antigone to document atrocities past and present. The documentary theme is usually presented in the set dressing, costumes or allusions within the text correlating the play with the situation of the playwright's choice. The futuristic setting liberates this Antigone from the constraints of documentation, but instead Korus records a new Antigone through the play by filming the 'real' rather than a theatrical recapitulation of events. In Kurup's hands the documentary aspect of the Antigone tradition is brought to the attention of the audience as an ongoing process. He shows both the events and the recording of them under the structure and interpretative values of *Antigone*. Instead of just showing the 'recorded' events of an Antigone play, he shows both the 'real' events and their documentation. A second, quite striking but less visually overwhelming version is Gurney's *Another Antigone*.<sup>184</sup> It centres on the writing of 'Another Antigone', rather than the production and documentation of one that Kurup produces. Gurney sets an American college professor against his student. The student has written 'Another Antigone' for her term paper, but the professor labels it as 'a juvenile polemic on current events' that has less to do with tragedy than the stirring up of 'cheap liberal guilt'<sup>185</sup> over the Soviet-American arms race. Judy's 'Antigone' doesn't remain static, she continually rewrites her play based on any new idea she happens on. Her final version makes Antigone a Jew to reflect her own heritage, which she cares little for, but makes a good smear campaign against the professor, an educator placed by the *New York Times* reviewer among the inspiration fictional allums of Mr Chips, Miss Brooks, Miss Jean Brodie, and Professor

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<sup>183</sup> **Philips**, *LA Times*, (1/8/2000), is ambivalent, **Weinert**, *Backstage West* (3/8/2000), is very positive and **Martinez** (4/10/2000) for *Variety* is fairly damning.

<sup>184</sup> **Gurney**, *Another Antigone* (1989).

<sup>185</sup> **Gurney** (1989:106).

Kingsley.<sup>186</sup> The play represents another deconstruction of a trend which has a tendency to take the ready made pathos of *Antigone* and colour it with new details rather than trying to say or make anything truly original. Heaney made the comment when he was asked to write an adaptation that Antigone has ‘the play had been translated and adapted so often, and had been co-opted into so many different cultural and political arguments, it had begun to feel less like a text from the theatrical repertoire and more like a pretext for debate.’<sup>187</sup> And yet, he was unable to refuse the offer to produce a new text for a performance, which he entitled *The Burial At Thebes*, and to do so with two main things in mind: the politics and language of Ireland, particularly the right to claim and bury hunger strikers in 1981, and the emergence of a Creon figure on the global stage, that of George Bush and his War on Terror.<sup>188</sup>

It would be incorrect to establish Anouilh and Brecht at the foot of this deconstructive trend. Indeed Cocteau used *Antigone* in 1922<sup>189</sup> to create the effect of a play within a play and staged it in such a way as to convey Antigone as acting at a literary remove from herself and her doomed actions.<sup>190</sup> Cocteau’s *Antigone* never achieved the same success as some of his other productions, and certainly didn’t capture the imagination of the French audience in the same way Anouilh’s adaptation did two decades. But Cocteau’s Greek tragedy plays clearly inspired Anouilh, and his influence can be seen quite clearly.<sup>191</sup> Both Brecht and Anouilh found favour with their audiences and have continued to do so. Their success has provided sterling examples

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<sup>186</sup> Rich, *New York Times*, (15.1.1988),

<sup>187</sup> Heaney (2004c: 414-5).

<sup>188</sup> Heaney (2004c: 411), Wilmer (2007), Hardwick (2007: 320-24).

<sup>189</sup> Cocteau, *Antigone* (1922) in *Four Plays* (1962).

<sup>190</sup> Brown (1969: 258).

<sup>191</sup> Dickinson (1969: 261) chorus, scenery and costume a debt to Cocteau. cf. McNulty (1981: 46). On the chorus, and inspiration for the ‘the trap is set’ speech from Cocteau’s *La Machine Infernale*, Jones, F (1950: 99).

for the perpetuation of the trend, both of political and deconstructive treatments of the Sophoclean play and of Greek tragedy as a whole.

## I

### Mapping Thebes: Two for the Price of One

Thebes is an interesting location for the setting of any story. It is rich in political allegory, and this is not something new to the modern age. To Athens it represented the anti-city,<sup>192</sup> the reverse of their civilised society, and even today it retains its status as metaphorical place symbolising a state on the cusp of disaster. Depicting a political leader as Creon is a powerful statement, but showing the state through the prism of Thebes is no less of one. But by using Thebes in this way, Thebes is changed. It is changed by the altered character of its altered protagonists, by the reordered history the place is given in order to enable the mapping of Thebes onto a portrayal of France or Germany. Direct links are made to contemporary politics and conflicts, both visual, in terms of costume and *mis en scène*, and as part of the plot. For though each play opens following the deaths of the two brothers and closes with the deaths of Antigone and Haemon, Brecht and Anouilh impose bold alterations on the story as structured by Sophocles,<sup>193</sup> and crucially, they also change swathes of the back story to fit their needs.

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<sup>192</sup> Zeitlin (1990).

<sup>193</sup> Griffith (1999: 6). Thebais, Oidipodeia, and Epigonoï are epic treatments of the myth ascribed to Homer or Arktinos. There are fragments of the saga by Hesiod, Stesichoros, and Ion. In tragedy, Aeschylus provided two tetralogies on the topic of Thebes, c.475 BC *Nemea*, *Argeioi*, *Eleusinioi* and *Epigonoï* and 467 BC *Laïos*, *Oidipous*, *Seven Against Thebes*, and *Sphinx*. Cf. Steiner (1983: 177-181).

In general, Brecht plays around less with the structure of the play than Anouilh. Following the prologue, Brecht's play proper opens in the same position as Sophocles' whereas Anouilh's play opens slightly later; the debate between the sisters over whether to bury their brother figures the previous evening and the play opens at dawn. A second exchange between the sisters occurs soon after the play opens, and we see Ismene trying to persuade Antigone not to go ahead with her plan. Ismene doesn't know that her words can have no effect, and her attempt to convince Antigone to comply with Creon's decree only underline the *fait accompli* of her actions, and of her impending death.<sup>194</sup> In terms of structural elements, the largest alteration Brecht makes is to excise Eurydice, and the imminent fall of Thebes is substituted for her suicide as consequence for the loss of Haemon. A Messenger still comes with news of a death, but it is that of Megareus and the defeat of the army at Argos. The fall of Thebes and its parallel in Berlin is not shown in the play and as such mirrors Brecht's approach to the back story. The acts that fall in the shadows at the beginning and end of the play; the start of aggressive war against Argos, and the fall of the dictator and his city, are clear enough to his audience and readers to need no description. They fall outside the arc of the play, but their presence alters it. The curve of the play now arches between two different points which allows Brecht to give significant new meanings to the play without significantly changing the events portrayed on stage.

Anouilh pares down Eurydice's role and though he does keep her, she loses her entrance and speech as it is in Sophocles. She does figure in the prologue; characterised as an old woman 'busy with her knitting... until it is her turn to stand up and die.'<sup>195</sup> Anouilh does however drop the character of Tiresias, a far more substantial

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<sup>194</sup> Fleming (2006: 171).

<sup>195</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 4-5. (FT 11-12) 'Elle tricoter pendant toute la tragédie jusqu'à ce que son tour vienne de se lever et de mourir.' All page references will be first to the English translation Bray (2000) and in brackets to the French text Anouilh (1947).

role, though not one among the play's death toll. Tiresias is extraneous to Anouilh's rendering of Thebes, the burial of Polynices is never expressed as a religious matter.<sup>196</sup> In Sophocles' rendering his entrance is precipitated by the pollution he detects from the birds, the failed sacrifices and fouled altars of Thebes,<sup>197</sup> events that do not happen in Anouilh's work. The removal of Tiresias also substantially limits the amount of counsel Creon receives, instead of being asked to reconsider by the chorus and three separate individuals, Anouilh concentrates on his conflict with Antigone. Haemon still tries to intercede on her behalf, but he no longer carries with him the support of the people of Thebes. Creon here is a very isolated character.

Religious matters are distanced from the central conflict in Anouilh's play and the play remains quite secular in its focus. Antigone's reasons for burying her brother are never very clearly spelled out, but the burial of Polynices is in general presented as a matter of human rights rather than religious ones. When Ismene asks whether she understands why she must not bury Polynices she replies that she is always being asked if she understands why she cannot do the things that are natural to her, playing with water, eating cake before bread and butter, running in the wind, that she can understand when she gets older.<sup>198</sup> As well as being a refusal to provide a clear explanation for her action, Antigone's avoidance of the issue presents a switch in focus from the nature versus politics theme in Sophocles<sup>199</sup> to one of immaturity against maturity. She later tells Creon that 'People who aren't buried wander for ever in search of rest',<sup>200</sup> yet she says that she doesn't believe in the ecclesiastical rigmarole.<sup>201</sup> For

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<sup>196</sup> DeLaura (1961: 36-7).

<sup>197</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, (111) 98-1022.

<sup>198</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 12, (FT 27).

<sup>199</sup> cf. Knox (1983), Griffith (1999).

<sup>200</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 31. (FT 70) 'Ceux qu'on n'enterre pas errent éternellement sans jamais trouver de repos.'

<sup>201</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 35 (FT 76-77).

Sophocles, gods are important,<sup>202</sup> and the religious rites concerning her brother and his passage to the underworld is Antigone's central concern; Anouilh's heroine loses this passion. Brecht keeps the religion in, and his Antigone is remarkably similar in motivation and outlook to Sophocles' version in comparison to the girl she becomes for Anouilh. It is interesting to note that while Anouilh drops the religious focus, he gives some prominence to the problem of fate for Antigone. The fate of Antigone has never been the same as that of Oedipus; Antigone receives no note from providence to the effect that she will die.<sup>203</sup> Rather it is the accumulation of centuries worth of literature re-engraving the line that holds her so firmly in her trap.<sup>204</sup> Brecht discounts this reasoning, seeking to reinstill choice and public action and accountability rather than allowing the paralysis instilled by the word fate.

In the *Philoctetes* plays the journey to the island facilitates a sense of arriving at a theatrical place. It helps to imbue the place with strange metaphysical properties of existence: powers of healing and resolution as well as pain and conflict. However, in the *Antigone* the story opens with the cast already embroiled in conflict. And whereas Lemnos is a place exclusive to *Philoctetes*, Thebes is one that comes with a family and a curse and its own epic cycle. For both Brecht and Anouilh the exposition of back story necessary to locate the play at a particular point in Theban history is central to the mapping of Thebes onto France and Berlin and the establishment of the political allegories at the opening of the play. The fighting of the brothers, their relationship with Creon, and more particularly the manner of their deaths, reveal almost all the necessary

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<sup>202</sup> Budelman (2006: 133-194).

<sup>203</sup> MacKay (1962:167) asserts that 'the gods do not need her aid (cf. Norwood, (1920: 140), Kitto (1996: 133), Lane & Lane (1986: 162, 177-8)), nor do they appreciate her act enough to save her from her hasty suicide, though this would have needed no miracle. Except for Sophocles' dramatic purposes, it cannot be said that she had to die. Versions of the story have survived in which she lived'.

<sup>204</sup> Bowra (1944: 64) 'Antigone is not based on a familiar and popular story. Antigone is not mentioned by Homer, or, so far as we know, by the lyric poets. It is therefore difficult to assess how much the audience would know or what it would feel about her when Sophocles produced this play.'

information to contextualise the environment Thebes represents, and sets up parallels to be elaborated throughout the rest of the texts. The back story is particularly important in these two adaptations, for each playwright tells two stories of the deaths.

The idea of competing versions of the 'truth' is not an idea invented by Anouilh or Brecht. In Sophocles' *Antigone* we are given four different views of the past in the opening scenes of the play.<sup>205</sup> Antigone, Ismene, the Chorus and Creon all give competing versions of the history of the house of Oedipus. Their individual tellings serve to develop their characters, but here the pasts that are presented by Brecht and Anouilh are designed to develop political allegories. The two competing stories are clearly defined in both plays and they are contained in key parts of the text to reveal something about the very real wars in the playwrights' own countries.

The story of the brothers is told more directly by Brecht. But first, he sketches the death of an anonymous single brother and the initial responses of his two unnamed sisters. This prologue is clearly labelled as Berlin 1945.<sup>206</sup> The brother has come home from the war, but before the sisters find him, he is strung up by the Gestapo on a meat hook in front of the house as an exhibition of the punishment for deserting. This aspect of the play was no myth, and such events did happen. Brecht also used a different set, designed to give a more conventional and realistic feel to the setting. The sisters have the rucksack they describe, a wall is lowered on wires with a cupboard and door set into it, as well as a table and chairs.<sup>207</sup> We do not see outside of the house and the brother hanging, but for any in the audience who had experienced the war, the description would

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<sup>205</sup> Roberts (1989: 164).

<sup>206</sup> Brecht uses captions heavily in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (in *Collected Plays Six*. 1994: 113-214, Chronological reference table 213, List of politicians and corresponding characters 369) to establish the correlation between the actions on stage and the rise of Hitler to power. Cf. Branscombe (1961: 484) on Brecht's introduction to Piscator's use of caption and the creation of epic theatre, Goodman, H (1952: 113) and Gorelik (1959: 93) on specific use of captions.

<sup>207</sup> Willet (1964:212). See p111 for a sketch of the set design.

have been sufficient to invoke the horrors perpetrated on the German people by their own government.

The themes invoked in this short five page play give the audience a prelude to what will come. We see the changes of key that will happen between the Sophoclean and Brechtian texts as well as the theme of a dual war: one against a foreign enemy, and another battle against the 'traitors' in the homeland which amounts to an undeclared civil war. The prologue serves to highlight the more Marxian angles of Brecht's rendering of *Antigone*.<sup>208</sup> In it Brecht clearly and succinctly sets out the social and economic situation that underpins the allegory and characters present in the following production. It also constitutes a denial of the play's lofty character by demonstrating that the play is really about the people on the streets of Berlin, not the aristocracy of Thebes.<sup>209</sup> Anouilh uses his prologue to establish the theatricality of his piece. Suggestions are made linking the character of Creon to Pétain, but the allegory mapping Thebes onto occupied France is developed more slowly throughout the play and the precise correlation between the two locations remains more suggestive and open to interpretation.

The second story is told in full once the play proper has started; *Antigone*'s opening speech provides the necessary exposition. Eteokles and Polyneikes had fought on the same side, both soldiers in the long war of Kreon. Thebes are the aggressors in this war against Argos, primarily for their resources of iron ore. Eteokles fell, 'one among many in the tyrant's service'<sup>210</sup> and Polyneikes, the younger brother, seeing this flees from the battle. What was for Sophocles treason for armed rebellion, becomes in Brecht treason

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<sup>208</sup> **Curran** (2001: 178).

<sup>209</sup> **Willett** (1964: 210), 'Foreword to *Antigone*'.

<sup>210</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone*, 16 (GT 6-8) 'In langen Krieg, einer mit vielen, fiel Eteokles uns, der Bruder. Im Zug des Tyrannen fiel er jung'.

for rebellion from arms.<sup>211</sup> As he comes in sight of Thebes he is seized and killed 'by blood-spattered' Kreon, who thus fulfils the prerequisite in *Antigone* for the spilling of kindred blood. Antigones' speech does not clarify whether Kreon perpetrated the act himself. But what is clear to Antigone is that it is his war, and as such he is culpable for every death it results in. She thus holds him directly responsible for the deaths of both her brothers. No statements of responsibility are made in the prologue, though one can assume that the Officer, who accuses the sisters of knowing the traitor, did the deed. But, the reflection of the statement of culpability Antigone iterates finds Hitler to blame for the unnecessary loss of life. The heavily doctored back story presented in this play leaves no room for the suggestion that either of the brothers have ruled Thebes, Kreon stands alone as the autocratic head of state. The two stories back each other up, functioning together to develop the allegory and relate it to the historical context and encourage the audience to explore the one through the other. For they both expand on each other, aspects of the play elaborate on the events of the prologue and the prologue functions to underline the significance and the reality of the events portrayed through allegory. Or, in Brecht's own words, the prologue 'poses a point of actuality and an outlining of the subjective problem.'<sup>212</sup>

Anouilh takes a very different position in his mapping of Thebes. Whereas Brecht creates a fairly straightforward metaphor for Berlin, Anouilh's Theban France works somewhat differently. The first story to be presented is told by 'Prologue', another incarnation of 'Chorus', a single actor.<sup>213</sup> It is a basic rendering of the tale; the brothers were supposed to rule a year in turn, but Eteocles refused to give way to Polynices after

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<sup>211</sup> Jones, F (1957: 39).

<sup>212</sup> Willett (1964: 210), 'Foreword to *Antigone*'.

<sup>213</sup> The chorus owes a lot to Cocteau, who used disconnected, narrator-type characters for his *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, the *Infernal Machine* - also inspiration for the trap is set speech. cf. Jones, F (1950: 99) also McNytre (1981: 51). For the chorus as standing for Anouilh, see Champigny (1954:60), Dickinson (1969: 261) discusses how chorus, scenery and costume are a debt to Cocteau.

his first year in power. Polynices raised seven champions to fight at the seven gates of Thebes, the champions were routed and Polynices and Eteocles slew one another in single combat. This is not however, the story that remains. It is critically altered, and the truth revealed, forming a new *peripeteia* during the interview; the *agon* of Antigone and Creon which dominates the play. Creon reveals that in fact he doesn't know which brother was interred and which left exposed. The bodies had been trampled by the Argive cavalry and Creon had instructed that the least mangled of the two to be scraped together for state burial. Creon then goes on to say, that it matters not to him which brother is buried,<sup>214</sup> justifying his actions by explaining that neither brother was fit to rule. Polynices might have been damned by the city, but this was merely a publicity stunt, for both brothers were equally terrible. This has a number of allegorical interpretations. It can be seen simply as an illustration of political pragmatism of this Creon and his allegory in Pétain. It also poses a point of contrast with the near fanatical conviction Sophocles' Creon expresses in his actions.<sup>215</sup> But the brothers themselves can be seen as standing for the lost generation of politicians who characterised the inter-war period with incompetent and self-interested leadership, or for the armies of Europe that had thrown themselves against one another and been pulverised in the trenches in the previous war. As a turning point in the text, it serves to pull the rug out from underneath Antigone's feet. It is the point at which she turns most violently away from the model given by Sophocles. By revealing a new truth about her brothers Creon halts Antigone in her tracks, but he cannot hold her long in her pursuit of death, and she swiftly picks a new argument with him to assure her sentence.

The idea of leaders and nations fruitlessly at war and seeking conquest is alluded to by Antigone in the first scene. She describes to her Nurse the world she slipped out

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<sup>214</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 44 (FT 96) 'Je ne sais même pas lequel. Et je t'assure que cela m'est égal'.

<sup>215</sup> **Sophocles**, *Antigone*, (73-74) 280-315, (96-99) 726-761, (112-114) 1033-1063.

into before dawn as a 'world without colour'.<sup>216</sup> She perceives this grey world of the dead she has emerged from<sup>217</sup> to be beautiful, an interesting comment on her state of mind. But maybe also because it is a world before the flags of allegiance and government are seen, perhaps a reference to the prominent display of the Nazi Swastika in Paris. This is an appropriate comment for an Antigone to make, she adheres to the laws of the gods and not to those of cities and rulers. This Antigone, whilst not overly religious still adheres to her own laws,<sup>218</sup> which in this play she seems to make up as she goes along.



**Photograph of a boulevard in Occupied Paris**

More than anything it is the contradiction between the two stories in Anouilh that suggests a picture of France. The stories play off each other to demonstrate the difference between truth and fiction, making a point about the dubious nature of propaganda in their contemporary world. Brecht's two stories reinforce each other, fixing a 'true' depiction of Berlin whilst at the same time utilising a through the looking glass

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<sup>216</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 6 (FT 14) 'un monde sans couleurs'.

<sup>217</sup> **Witt** (2001: 222).

<sup>218</sup> **Knox**, (1983: 66).

effect to ensure the transparency of the allegory. That two different versions of the backstory are presented by both authors ties into a wider schema present in both texts. And they are not the only aspect of the story to be split or repeated. There is a plurality of storytelling in each of these plays, both authors creating a number of levels of reality within their texts. But perhaps more importantly, the backstories and the mapping that they provide underpin the text. Once laid out it facilitates an ease and clarity of subtext without needing to constantly lay out the allegory for the audiences' benefit. This permits a freedom of dialogue, allowing each character to speak freely and for those words to be interpreted in a number of different contexts, avoiding the problems of jarring experienced as we saw with the *Cure At Troy*.

## II

### Presenting the Dictator

In comparison to the multiple stories and the multiple allusions made in creating the backstory and establishing the symbolic location of Thebes, the character of Creon is remarkably fixed. In *Antigone*, Ismene, the other characters, and the chorus in Brecht, generalised reflections of certain aspects of society can be seen. But of all the cast, in both plays, Creon is the only one to be identified with a specific political figure.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> There are some arguments that align the Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* with politicians in Athens. (cf. **Lewis** (1988:43-5 at 45) 'There is a obvious temptation to see in these items scarcely veiled allusion to Pericles and his conduct, not least in the contrast between his treatment of the Samian prisoners and his grandiloquent rhetoric over the Athenian dead of the Samian campaign.' **Lane & Lane** (1986: 169) 'Thebes is at a point where its recovery from the recent invasion and loss of its king could require an inescapably dangerous, nonconstitutional endeavor, such as evidenced historically in the radical reforms of Cleisthenes and Ephialtes.' cf. **Ehrenberg** (1954:54-66, 75-98).

There are a couple of suggestions for the personality behind Anouilh's Creon.

There are some, including viewers from the time, who thought him to be a representation of Pierre Laval, the Minister of State and then Prime Minister under the Vichy Government.<sup>220</sup> Or perhaps Jacques Doirot, the leader of the French fascist party the Parti Populaire Français, and he has even been accused of being 'a Hitler or a Mussolini.'<sup>221</sup> However, I believe him to be in the guise of Marshal Pétain, the old man who has taken up the reins of government; the position of king and the job of government had been handed to him and he must get on with it.<sup>222</sup> Creon's plea of for understanding the "necessities" of politics, his role as "*chef*", and his clinging to the idea of happiness all bring his outlook in line with that of the Vichy government.<sup>223</sup> He is the opposite of many other Creons. For one, he is remarkably untyrannical. Whereas Brecht's Kreon claims to be the supreme king with the right to subdue everyone to him, Anouilh's Creon knows he is King only so long as he pleases his subjects. When Haemon implores him to find a way to save Antigone he admits he is powerless:

**Creon:** The mob knows already. They're all around the palace, yelling. I can't turn back.

**Haemon:** 'The mob! What does it matter? You're the master!'

**Creon:** 'Under the law. Not against it.'<sup>224</sup>

Creon is in a precarious position, he is helpless against the people he is supposed to rule. This mob is quite different to the people in Sophocles or Brecht, Haemon does not

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<sup>220</sup> Howarth (1983: 48).

<sup>221</sup> Ince (1962: 227).

<sup>222</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 4, 38. (FT 11/83-4); 'Un matin, je me suis réveillé roi de Thèbes. Et Dieu sait si j'aimais autre chose dans la vie que d'être puissant...' ... 'Je le pouvais. Seulement, je me suis senti tout d'un coup comme un ouvrier qui refusait un ouvrage. Cela ne m'a pas paru honnête. J'ai di oui.' On the rule of Pétain. Cf, R. Griffith (1970), Lottman (1985). Webster (1990) provides a much less flattering account and emphasises Pétain's culpability and the extent of his collaboration with the Germans.

<sup>223</sup> Witt (2001: 224).

<sup>224</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 50 (FT 190) Créon: Le foule sait déjà, elle hurle autour du palais. Je ne peux pas. Hémon: Père, le foule n'est rein. Tu es le maître. Créon: Je suis le maître avant la loi. Plus après.

bring word of their secret support for Antigone, but rather they bray for her blood. Who exactly they symbolise is important for the characterisation of Creon. A king should have some measure of control over his subjects, though the French Revolution and the crowd at the Bastille gates gives pause for thought. In terms of an analogy with Pétain, the mob can be seen as the German occupying forces and politicians. Or perhaps even the Milice Française and their leader, the Prime Minister Pierre Laval and its chief of operations, the Secretary General Joseph Darnand, both of whom were unpopular with Pétain.<sup>225</sup> Indeed, the guards wore heavy black raincoats reminiscent of the secret police with whom Laval was involved.<sup>226</sup> There is also the potential within the logic of the play to read in the mob an extremely unflattering picture of the occupied French who would shout for the death of a girl who would bury the enemy. However, this reading is at loggerheads with the characterisation of Pétain and also the experience of the theatregoers who saw in the play a message of resistance.<sup>227</sup>

Anouilh's Creon tries his best to persuade Antigone to live and the possibility of sending Ismene to the grave with Antigone is never even mooted.<sup>228</sup> We are not, however, offered the chance to find out how much it would take to persuade him to cover the corpse and release Antigone. The tomb is dismantled almost as soon as it is walled up, for a second voice is heard; Haemon is also inside. But before they can get the wall down Antigone hangs herself and Haemon in his grief moves to attack Creon before instead falling on his own sword. Despite the promise from Ismene that she will bury

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<sup>225</sup> Lottman (1985: 305, 334-5).

<sup>226</sup> Thody (1968: 33), Heiney (1955: 333).

<sup>227</sup> Bradby (1991: 36).

<sup>228</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, (86) 531-35; Ismene enters and Creon accuses her. And also, *Antigone*, (100) 768-771; 'Creon: Let him go - dream up something desperate, past all human limit! Good riddance. Rest assured, he'll never save those two young girls from death. Leader: Both of them, you really intend to kill them both? Creon: No, not her, the one whose hands are clean.' Anouilh, *Antigone*, 48-49 (FT 104-107).

Polynices again that night<sup>229</sup> the question of whether the exposed corpse is eventually covered is never fully addressed. Antigone's death achieves nothing. And finally, after hearing the news about her son, Eurydice too commits suicide, but when Creon receives the news he is not crushed as the man is in Sophocles. He retains his composure, he still has to go on - there is a Privy Council Meeting at five: 'there are plenty of urgent matters to attend to after an attempted revolution, you know'.<sup>230</sup> The interpretation of this final statement has been manifold. Some see him as a sympathetic character who is here in shock, but others contend it shows how cold and unfeeling he is. I see a depiction of Pétain, the old soldier who cannot give up on his people, working on even after so much has been lost. The stoical acceptance of Creon is reflected in this, a letter from Pétain to Émile Laure:

As you understand perfectly, I am not the happiest of chiefs of state... Troubles follow troubles, almost without interruption. I try to act as if things weren't so bad. My calmness, which is only appearance, impresses my entourage and visitors, who adopt the same attitude, and this is best for us all.<sup>231</sup>

Pétain believed he had little option but to take the title of Marshal of France. His rule was predictably unpopular as the approved leader under Hitler's puppet state.<sup>232</sup> Opinions of the man have swung widely, as have the interpretation of Creon's motives and politics in this play. This is not the place for a discussion of Pétain's leadership of France, but it is easy enough to have some sympathy with the man and the position he was left in. But in terms of the play's reception, initially:

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<sup>229</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 49 (FT 105) 'Eh bien, j'irai demain!'

<sup>230</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 37 (FT 82) 'Au lendemain d'une révolution ratée, il y a du pain sur la planche, je te l'assure.'

<sup>231</sup> **Lottman** (1985:302) New Year's letter from Pétain to Émile Laure, Jan 4, 1943, Archives of Jacques Isorni.

<sup>232</sup> cf. **Webster** (1990), **Lottman** (1985).

Antigone was well reviewed in the collaborationist press and was assumed to be on the Vichy side. But the progressive isolation of Antigone carries a strong emotional charge when the play is performed, leading an audience to sympathise with her much more strongly than might be evident from a reading of the play. Gradually the public came to identify more with Antigone and her uncompromising 'No!' Creon came to be seen, not as the sensible compromiser but as the opportunistic collaborator.<sup>233</sup>

But Antigone was also reviewed favourably by press after the liberation. And ever since claims that the play is collaborationist, resistant or apolitical have been put forward with equal fervour.<sup>234</sup> However, there has been a more recent trend among commentators, myself included, to point out the hollowness of Antigones' arguments, and sympathy for Creon has thus again been generated.<sup>235</sup> The play is certainly neither clearly on either side, pro or anti-Vichy, but Anouilh's politics have never been particularly clear and throughout this period he claimed to be a 'bête de théâtre' completely unconcerned with politics.<sup>236</sup> Some of his earlier plays contained hints of social protest, but the choices involved were never presented as anything other than personal ones.<sup>237</sup> Personal and political choice are again in conflict in the play - some decisions made are political ones, as is the distasteful exposure of the corpse by Creon, but Antigone's motives are harder to untangle. The relationship between choice, destiny, personality and politics come to a head during the Antigone's interview with Creon, but this will be dealt with later.

Brecht might be more famous than Anouilh for his radical dramatic techniques, however his Creon is far less interesting than Anouilh's. Brecht's uncompromising

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<sup>233</sup> **Bradby** (1991: 36).

<sup>234</sup> **Witt** (1993: 57) & (2001: 218), cf. **Fleming** (2006).

<sup>235</sup> **Ince** (1962: 278), 'It has now become common to claim that Créon is a sympathetic character, that he presents a strong opposition to Antigone's attitude, thus creating a dramatic balance: the brave, pragmatic Acceptor of Life against the fastidious Rejector of Life.'

<sup>236</sup> **Witt** (2001: 190), **Fleming** (2006: 181).

<sup>237</sup> **Bradby** (1991: 35).

Hitleresque character has no give in it. In comparison Anouilh keeps plenty of ambiguity in the relationship between Creon and Antigone and space for the audience to choose whether to give or withhold the benefit of the doubt. There is no such space in Brecht who emphasises the terrifying inhumanity of this man.<sup>238</sup> Sophocles' version of Creon in his *Antigone* falls somewhere in between these two characterisations. The Creon of Sophocles may not be as compelling as his antagonist Antigone, but he does garner some support from the audience.<sup>239</sup> Goheen sees him, at the end, as the character who 'draws most fully on our sympathy'.<sup>240</sup> He is initially well meaning and suffers from too much passion, conviction, stubbornness, all qualities he shares with Antigone. He is more sympathetic and interesting than Brecht's version and maintains a greater level of malevolence and conviction than Anouilh's characterisation. The characterisation of Kreon as Hitler forces Brecht to write out some of the subtleties of the Creon character. Pétain may be a personality in dispute, but Hitler is not, the monstrous nature of his personality is not popularly contested. It should be noted that the war was also over when this play was released, and Brecht did not have to be as careful as Anouilh who had to negotiate the censors of the German occupation in order for his play to reach the theatre.<sup>241</sup> A feat which was made possible by his sympathetic portrayal of Creon, as well as by the influence of authors like Max Pohlenz, one of many to promote readings of *Antigone* as a eulogy of the autocratic principles of National Socialism.<sup>242</sup>

Brecht, by comparison, was part of a movement trying to revive the theatres after the strictures of the Nazi regime and as such was able to depict Hitler in a manner that

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<sup>238</sup> Jones, F (1957: 40).

<sup>239</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) asserts that Creon and not Antigone would have been supported by the original audience for much of the play.

<sup>240</sup> Goheen (1951: 99).

<sup>241</sup> On the occupied theaters of France & censorship. cf. Forkey (1949), Witt (1993) & (2001: 190-230).

<sup>242</sup> Leonard (2005: 105).

would have been impossible during the war. That is not to say that Sophocles' *Antigone* was not performed during the war, there were at least 150 performances of the play between 1939 and 1944, in some of which it can be expected Hitler was suggested in the guise of Creon.<sup>243</sup> However, Brecht would have seen none of this, he spent the war years abroad, fleeing first to Denmark, then Sweden, Finland and eventually the USA. The alterations he makes to the character of Creon has a huge knock-on effect on the play, and in this instance the result is that:

Brecht deprives Kreon of any worthy motive, and turns him into a power-drunk vulgarian whose mind keeps shouting BEAT ARGOS! How can such a version produce a tragic effect? Is it not a mere political melodrama with all the black on one side and all that white on the other?<sup>244</sup>

Antigone and Creon exist in balance with each other.<sup>245</sup> For Sophocles there are questions over both characters, but they match like a theatrical yin and yang. They are 'daimonically linked',<sup>246</sup> the two self-deceived parts of a potential whole.<sup>247</sup> And in adaptation, if one character slides the other must change proportionally to match the move. Such that the less honourable Creon is, the more honourable Antigone becomes. Or in the case of Anouilh, as his Creon becomes more reasonable, his Antigone becomes less so. This conforms to the Helgian idea of opposing moral one-sidedness, or equivalent rights; that they must be equal and opposite forces.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Ziolkowski (2000: 555), Hardwick (2005: 110). On the mechanics of German censorship: Steinweiss (1992), Heinrich (2007).

<sup>244</sup> Jones, F (1957: 42-3).

<sup>245</sup> Steiner (1984:184), Goheen (1951: 83).

<sup>246</sup> Reinhardt (1979: 65).

<sup>247</sup> Joseph (1981:24).

<sup>248</sup> Hegel (vol. 2: 665-6), Goldhill (1986: 88-9).

Brecht enhances the dictatorial quality of Kreon with through his language. The terms used to describe this civil war, words like cleansing and filthy<sup>249</sup> conjure images of Nazi Germany. Anouilh's Creon talks of a failed revolution,<sup>250</sup> and the need to steer a ship adrift, but it has none of the sinister quality of Kreon's regime where it is clear that the perils of the state are of his doing. The death of Polyneikes carries more than a hint of a political assassination, and the war is not due to the cursed sons of Oedipus, but the brother of Jocasta. Brecht also emphasises the argument presented by the Sophoclean Antigone, that she will not call Creon king because he is not.<sup>251</sup> A final comparative note is seen in Kreon's last speech where echoes can be heard of Hitler's declaration that should the war is lost so would the country.<sup>252</sup> Antigone is as always equal to Creon in strength and conviction, and here she is, though strong, 'unwilling to use Creon's type of power, [she] is the measure of dissent of Germans, such as Brecht, who oppose the principle of force and temporal authority.'<sup>253</sup>

Kreon is not the only depiction of Hitler Brecht has in his repertoire. *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* was written during the war (1940) though it did not see performance until 1958. The Arturo/Hitler character is a world away from Kreon. The play is more in keeping with Brecht's repertoire of Epic theatre, more a black comedy than straight

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<sup>249</sup> **Brecht**, *Die Antigone des Sophokles*, (184) 'Gereinigt', (631) 'Faulen'.

<sup>250</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 37 (FT 82).

<sup>251</sup> **Carter** (2007: 105), also, **Lane & Lane** (1986: 168) Antigone also 'refers to the edict as a decree (*kérygma*) rather than a law (*nomos*), thereby indicating its injustice and immorality. In her eyes, the edict manifests Creon's unworthiness to rule.'

<sup>252</sup> **Elwood** (1972: 59) cites Speer quoting Hitler 'If the war is lost, the nation will also perish. This fate is inevitable. There is no necessity to take into consideration the basis which the people will need to continue a most primitive existence. On the contrary, it will be better to destroy these things ourselves because this nation will have proved to be the weaker one.' Compare with: **Brecht**, *Antigone* 63-64 - Creon 'My child died too soon for me. Just one more battle and Argos would have surrendered! But what there was of courage and excellence was turned against me, so now Thebes falls; and it should fall, should fall with me, should be done with, and left to the vultures. That's how I want it.' (GT 1279-85) 'Früh ists mir verstorbed, das Kind. Noch eine Schlacht, und Argos läg am Boden! Aber was da aufkam an Mut und Äußerstem, das ging nur gegen mich. So fällt jetze Thebe. Und fallen soll es, solls mit mir, und es soll auch sein und für die Geier da. So will ichs dann.' See also, **Griffith** (1999: 33) on Creon's identification of the 'city' with himself.

<sup>253</sup> **Elwood** (1972: 66).

tragedy.<sup>254</sup> It also bears the distinction of being an original Brechtian play rather than one adapted by him. In it Hitler becomes absurd and vulgar, a petty cook muscling in on the Cauliflower Trust in order to control vegetables and steal political power in a series of allegorical scenes with signs signifying recent events.<sup>255</sup> In *Arturo*, Brecht emphasises the culpability of those who gave way to the Arturo/Hitler allegory. Arturo gains his power through the corruption and petty greed of the so-called upstanding citizens who are more anxious to protect themselves than to protect their society from Arturo and his mob. It is the opposite of the assertion Antigone makes at the start of Brecht's play that Kreon bears the culpability for every death in the war. The character of Kreon doesn't see things in such black and white. He shouts at the Elders when they question his actions 'Ingrates! You'll eat the meat but you don't like to see the cook's bloody apron! The sandalwood I gave you to build your houses, where the sound of the sword is not heard, was grown in Argos...'<sup>256</sup> The two plays together represent the two sides of the coin, the accession and the downfall of Hitler in allegory. But they also display the dual responsibility of the people and the dictator for the atrocities committed by the ruling party.

The downfall of Kreon follows broadly the sequence of events in Sophocles; Kreon excuses Ismene, shouts at Tiresias and accuses him of accepting bribes. The chorus of Elders then try to persuade Kreon to release Antigone and recall the troops. They reason with him, saying that he has begun to treat his people as the enemy and accusing him of leading 'a double war'.<sup>257</sup> To this he responds that 'many reluctant

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<sup>254</sup> **Taplin** (1986: 163) places Brecht with Shakespeare and Chekhov as masters who have been able to bridge the dichotomy between tragedy and comedy.

<sup>255</sup> **Brecht**, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (in *Collected Plays Six*. 1994: 113-214, Chronological reference table 213, List of politicians and corresponding characters 369).

<sup>256</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone*, 57 (GT 1089-92) 'Undankbare! Fresser der Fleische, aber des Kochs blutige Schürze gefällt nicht! Sandelholz gab ich euch für die Häuser, in die nicht Lärm von Schwertern dringt, wuchs aber in Argos!'

<sup>257</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone*, 56 (GT 1076) 'Doppelkreig'.

victors have been garlanded with chains and danced on bended knees.'<sup>258</sup> The arrival of a messenger from Argos breaks this scene from its broadly Sophoclean mould, but also provides the necessary impetus to force Kreon to reconsider his decision. The messenger reports that Megareus has been killed and his army routed during an attack on Argos. Weakened from the bloodbath in their own ranks following the desertion of Polyneikes they were unable to stand up to the furious fighting by the Argives desperate not to lose their city.<sup>259</sup> This news forces Kreon to realise he needs Hamon to lead the Home Guard to protect the city, and Kreon is convinced to free Antigone in order to regain favour with his son. Thus Kreon rushes to the cave whilst others go to bury the remains of Polyneikes. However, as ever, he is too late. Hamon has already broken his way into the cave and is clutching Antigone's dead figure. Again, Hamon makes the same Sophoclean gesture of moving to strike his father before turning the sword on his own flesh. And here the play ends, with Hamon leaving his father and the city to fall to the invading Argives.

The events that lead Kreon to reversing his decisions, though closer to those in Sophocles in terms of a series of actions than in Anouilh's adaptation, are still just as divergent to the Sophoclean plot. *Antigone* is what Aristotle would term a complex play with a complex ending.<sup>260</sup> Both Antigone and Creon in their inability to relent to each other, share responsibility for the continued tragic momentum of the play. But in both adaptations, the prioritisation of the events and characters of reality push out the Sophoclean story line of Creon's downfall. The story in Sophocles is as much about Creon and his decisions as it is about Antigone's and pursues the fates of both characters. He is not the straightforward villain or a personification of evil that he is in

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<sup>258</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone*, 58 (GT 1113-14) 'Mancher zögernde Sieger ward schon mit Ketten bekränzt und tanzte mit sinkenden Knien.'

<sup>259</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone*, 58-59 (GT 1120-1163).

<sup>260</sup> **Aristotle**, *Poetics*: 8.6.

Brecht's and many other versions.<sup>261</sup> Sophocles' Creon recants his decisions and he does so for the right reasons. He eventually listens to the chorus of elders and realises that he has contravened the laws of the gods and nature by leaving a dead body exposed and entombing a living one.<sup>262</sup> He rushes to perform the burial himself, rather than sending someone else as Brecht does. The reversal of his decision is about what is right in terms of the laws of the gods and not just because he wants to save his son, and thus Antigone, for reasons of personal (Anouilh) or political (Brecht) desperation. Thus there is a second tragedy for him, the punishment for having arrived at his senses just a little too late.<sup>263</sup> Before Creon is able to reach redemption, Antigone kills herself and from there the tragedy spirals out of his control and sweeps up the remaining victims.

The versions of Brecht and Anouilh follow very different reasoning to get to the end. Anouilh's Creon doesn't change his mind at all. True he never gets time to question his decision, Antigone kills herself the moment the cave is bricked up, despite Haemon being in it with her. But Brecht's Kreon only reverses his decision because the city is under attack, not because he realises what he is doing is wrong. An external force is required to make him reconsider his options whereas Sophocles' Creon resolves the issue for himself, albeit with a little help from Tiresias and the Chorus. This is a significant alteration, his haste to undo his actions is not derived from a desire to make reparations for his mistakes,<sup>264</sup> rather it stems from the need to save his son. Both Creon's remain very much the victims of their own choices, Brecht's Hitler/Kreon perhaps more than Anouilh's Pétain/Creon. However, by remaining static in their

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<sup>261</sup> **Carter** (2007: 148).

<sup>262</sup> **Sophocles**, *Antigone*, (115) 1068-71.

<sup>263</sup> **Goheen** (1951: 94).

<sup>264</sup> **MacKay** (1962:166) Creon 'sincerely believes, until Tiresias remonstrates with him, that he is doing the gods an acceptable service. As soon as his error is pointed out he hastens to make reparations.'

choices and not recognizing a flaw in their reasoning they are denied any character progression. It is through Creon's decision to undo his mistake and redeem himself only to find out that he is too late that his personal tragedy is heightened. This is where Aristotle's rule that 'Nor again should a very wicked person fall from good fortune to bad fortune - that kind of structure would be agreeable, but would not excite pity or fear.'<sup>265</sup> comes into effect most powerfully. Brecht does not follow this reasoning, but then he wishes no sympathy for his Kreon. And by altering the character of Creon, both authors necessitate a different character for their endings.

### III

#### **The Repeat Antigone**

Both Brecht and Anouilh latch on to the idea of the repeat-Antigone; the Antigone who documents our times, who is fractured between her different personas and personal causes. From each text two quite distinct images of Antigone emerge and in both plays it is the prologue that forces the two images. Brecht's Berlin girls are those who the play is for, is about. They are as real as much as anything can be in theatre. Brecht focuses very clearly on the German experience. Anouilh's play by comparison is much more fluid and whereas aspects of the plot and characters are clearly designed to echo occupied France, Anouilh also creates a discourse on the nature of the character of Antigone through different eras and adaptations.

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<sup>265</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*: 7.2.

Anouilh's play starts with the speech of 'Prologue', a single character who will later become 'Chorus'. He avoids interaction with the rest of the cast, instead commenting on the action and mechanics of tragedy directly to the audience. He is used by Anouilh as an agency by which the imaginary world of the play and the real world of its actors and audience are fused together.<sup>266</sup> The interpenetration of the worlds of stage and reality, of audience and actors, helps to demonstrate that the fiction contains portions of reality. As well as the converse, that reality contains portions of fiction. During the prologue, the whole cast is on stage and Prologue introduces them one by one. Each character has a different level of awareness of his/her part in the drama which will unfold. For instance, Antigone knows what it means to be called Antigone, that she will die, even though she is young and doesn't want to. The Messenger understands that he shall have to tell of the death of Haemon. However, Haemon himself has little self awareness, he doesn't know 'that never in this world would there be such a person as Antigone's husband. That all this princely title conferred on him was the right to die.'<sup>267</sup>

Anouilh relies on Chorus for a number of effects throughout the play, like his wry 'So. Now the spring is wound' speech.<sup>268</sup> And as Prologue, he achieves:

an effect at one and the same time of distance and of emotional sympathy. His introduction of the characters one by one manages the problem of a difficult exposition of the plot as well as enlisting our sympathies on the characters' behalf. The Chorus' attitude towards them all is detached, even amused, but indulgent and comprehending.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> John, (1956: 115), see also Goldhill (1986: 270).

<sup>267</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 4 (FT 11) 'Il ne savait pas qu'il ne devait jamais exister de mari d'Antigone sur cette terre et que ce titre princier lui donnait seulement le droit de mourir.'

<sup>268</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 25 (FT 56) 'Et voilà. Maintenant le ressort est bandé'.

<sup>269</sup> Bradby (1991: 34).

But Prologue does more than this, he divides the play into two halves; the theatrical and the self-aware, or more straightforwardly, the fictional and the metatheatrical. O'Hanlon calls them the 'inner' and 'outer' play.<sup>270</sup> For each there is an Antigone, one for each side of the divide. These two halves are not concrete structures within the play, they retain some fluidity and overlap with each other. But describing and analysing the play in terms of two interrelated halves allows for a better understanding of how the play as a whole works and a better discussion of the different discourses and character contradictions in the text. This applies especially to Antigone. She presents herself first as a French Resistance fighter. This Antigone belongs in the theatrical alignment and with those characters with no higher sense of self-awareness. She engages in the battle of idealism versus pragmatism, the youth against the old. We can perhaps call her the political Antigone of the piece. The second Antigone forms a commentary on what it is to be a political Antigone, to be Antigone at all. Structurally she belongs to 'Prologue-Chorus', she is a girl who is constantly striving to pin a meaning on an act that will always lead her to her death, the girl who doesn't want to die but knows she must. As such an entirely different set of readings are applicable to the text and each act has different implications for the two sides of her character. Like the use of Polynices' spade for his burial, for the political Antigone it shows sentimentality, and for the other desperation. This division between the two Antigones does not segment her into two clear boxes, but Anouilh's introduction of the story clearly invites the audience to appreciate his characters on more than one level.

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<sup>270</sup> O'Hanlon (1980: 534).

First, there is Antigone, the heroine of the resistance. The girl in whose defiance of Creon the audience saw a coded message of resistance.<sup>271</sup> She fights against the puppet tyrant of Pétain for what is morally right, the burial of her brother. But her identification with the resistance is problematic,<sup>272</sup> she lacks integrity and the force of her conviction is continually undermined by her impetuosity and refusal to listen to reason. This is perhaps a comment on the lack of social responsibility Anouilh saw in the youth of France. But Antigone doesn't stick to her guns and when she is made aware that Polynices was not the brother she thought he was, she resigns her motivation to bury the corpse of her brother and adopts a new cause. Thus she ends up going to her death so that she might never have to enter a world where she might have to compromise to be happy or love a Haemon who is no longer 'tough and young'.<sup>273</sup>

The idea of what I have called the second, the metatheatrical and self-aware Antigone, is actually introduced first. This Antigone knows what it is to be Antigone, she knows from the beginning that she is going to die, it is the eighth sentence of the play. However, what is not spelled out in the prologue is why. She grasps at things to provide her deed with symbolism; the tin spade that had once belonged to Polynices that she uses to bury him, the paper flower he once gave her she takes out and looks at before she creeps out into the night.<sup>274</sup> In the debate with Creon he persuades her to live, a reversal she is unable to maintain and she promptly redeclares her intention to die. For she is Antigone and she has to die. When one reason is taken away, she latches onto another. It is the same story when she goes to write a letter to Haemon. Most of what is

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<sup>271</sup> **Berry** (1946: 17) Galantière's program notes to the New York (1946) production: 'The reader will have to take my word for it that only the citizen of a German-occupied country... would be able to come away from the play feeling that Antigone's case was stronger than Creon's.' (18) Several of the New York reviews 'find it lacking in point and pertinence and go on to say that the life of the play depends on the close parallel between two milieus; that in occupied France the Antigone, filled with hidden parallels, must have been vivid indeed and very much contemporary.'

<sup>272</sup> **Leonard** (2005: 105).

<sup>273</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 46 (FT 100) 'dur et jeune'.

<sup>274</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, tin spade: 30 (FT 67), paper flower: 42 (FT 92).

written is scratched out, leaving just 'I'm sorry my darling. It would have been nice and peaceful for you all without me. I love you...' <sup>275</sup> Through such characterisation Anouilh is able to comment upon the nature of Antigone as a political heroine. She is always acting the same part, but each time with a different reason and justification, her name pinned to a new actress and her act ascribed with a new cause.

By separating out two versions of Antigone Anouilh is able to force an examination of the ideal of Antigone. We are invited to make the comparison that the character and reasoning of the 'political' Antigone in this play are lacking in comparison to other eras. The dramatic dialogue Anouilh engages in with Sophocles <sup>276</sup> reminds us that Antigone is supposed to be the noblest of heroines, but in this play, she is so much less. She has to die, as Prologue states, because her name is Antigone. But here, in the world of this play, her death is not so nobly cast, she is not the heroine of her renown and Creon is not the villain. By giving away the key points of the story in the opening verse Anouilh makes the assumption that his audience is familiar with Antigone's fate. <sup>277</sup> And with the key points of Antigone's story mapped out what becomes important is how she conducts herself on the road to her death.

Brecht too has two Antigones to present. His are divided in much clearer theatrical terms. For although Anouilh's prologue stands in a world outside the rest of the production it is not a separate play in the fashion Brecht has it. However, there are a number of similarities. They both serve as a reality check upon the drama to unfold and they both introduce the theatrical nature of the performance on stage. Although Anouilh uses his to exaggerate the theatricality of his play, almost the polar opposite of Brecht's

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<sup>275</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 57 (FT 125) 'Sans la petit Antigone, vous auriez tous été bien tranquilles. Je t'aime...'

<sup>276</sup> **Fleming** (2006: 171).

<sup>277</sup> It is likely that a portion of Anouilh's audience would have been able to compare his Antigone with that of the Sophoclean version, or those of Racine, (*La Thébaine*, 1664), or Cocteau, (*Antigone*, 1922, in *Four Plays*).

intentions, both prologues serve to break the dramatic allusion. Anouilh introduces all his characters at the start, presenting them as actors who are playing parts, 'The people gathered here are about to act the Story of Antigone. The one who's going to play the lead is the thin girl sitting there silent... She's thinking that soon she's going to be Antigone.'<sup>278</sup> And Brecht has his actors sat on benches around a demarcated performing space. An effect designed as one of his array of alienation effects, to prevent the audience from being emotionally transported to the acting space of Thebes.<sup>279</sup>



**Photograph showing Antigone, Creon and the elders, with the rest of the cast in the background on benches. *Antigone* model 1948. 311-389**

The two sisters of the prologue, the unnamed Antigone and Ismene provide the repeat effect. They show Antigone in action in something, though still in performance, much more real to the audience. It is part of the same feature of the first story of the unburied brother; this is Antigone in real life. But it also plays into the performance history of the play - that the play is constantly repeated, but so too are the crimes that

<sup>278</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 3 (FT 1) 'Elle pense qu'elle va être Antigone tout à l'heure'.

<sup>279</sup> **Willett** (1964: 212), 'Foreword to Antigone'.

inspired the play. The two sides exist in parallel cycles. By existing in a closer space to the audience than the following Antigone play, the prologue functions to draw the audience in, but its brevity frustrates any attempt by the audience at emotional involvement. It is just an abbreviated sketch of a play and, standing without conclusion as it does, encourages the audience to reflect but not to immerse themselves in the scenario, prompting consideration of the magnitude and the realism of what Antigone does, and allowing examination without the historical literary weight of the *Antigone* on their shoulders.

The replication of Antigone within each of these pieces shows the playwright's awareness of the history and theatrical circumstances of the Antigone character and her eponymous play. Their portrayals of Antigone are not just a replica of Sophocles or even a single flat figure in contemporary dress, but aspects of all these things. They deconstruct the nature of Antigone on stage, demonstrating her plurality and her nature as a story telling device. Brecht fights to show that this is a different form of performance, he takes away or conceals the Aristotelian techniques to create a play that does not accept the defeatist stance that this has happened and will happen again, but seeks to break the trend by forcing his audience to analyse what is happening on stage. Anouilh comes from a different direction, bringing out a different aspect of Antigone's despair and her fate. Brecht deconstructs the institution of theatre, and highlights its failure to use the message of Antigone to inspire or affect change, Anouilh deconstructs the play itself and the character of Antigone.

## IV

### Saying yes and saying no: Resistance fighter or Anouilh's standard motif?

The most interesting part of Anouilh's play is the extended encounter between Antigone and Creon which forms the centre of the play. Structurally heavy, it forms both the intellectual crux of the play as well as being significantly longer than the equivalent encounter in Sophocles. Alberes goes so far as to say that the entire play is the dialogue between these two characters.<sup>280</sup> Several aspects of the play, especially the ideas of the resistance, come to a head in this discussion, and have different implications for different readings the play.

In terms of a resistance metaphor in the play there are two ways to interpret this scene. First, there are the implications of saying yes and no in the context of Occupied France.<sup>281</sup> There are a number of nods to motifs of resistance literature in the play and the idea that there are two sides to choose between. This opposition is seen early on in the text between the ideas of Ismene and Antigone. Bourgeois notions of decadence and parties are associated with collaboration in resistance literature and Ismene with her pretty dresses and ribbons takes part in this.<sup>282</sup> We find out that at the party the previous evening Antigone had dressed up in her sister's clothes<sup>283</sup> and tried this other life before rejecting it and going out to bury her brother. Creon by this argument is a far

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<sup>280</sup> **Alberes** (1951:11).

<sup>281</sup> **Atack** (1989:108-131).

<sup>282</sup> **Atack** (1989:56), **Deutsch** (1946: 15) 'the antithesis between the French who resisted, and those who yielded to the will of the invaders is well represented by the contrasting characters of Antigone and Ismene.'

<sup>283</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 17 (FT 38).

bigger collaborator, and as Antigone shouts at him: 'You said yes - you'll never stop paying!'.<sup>284</sup> And this is Greek tragedy, so we can be sure Antigone's statement will carry. For the resistance the only acceptable answer is a defiant 'No'. Creon says he would rather not have Polynices' body rotting outside the city, but it had to be done,<sup>285</sup> but passivity was seen as essentially collaboration. No matter that Creon has reasoning on his side and a duty to the city, both of which he sets out in his impassioned ship of state speech,<sup>286</sup> in Antigone's eyes her steadfast rejection and emphatic "no" is the only right thing to do. The Sophoclean dynamic is thus reversed, it is Antigone, not Creon who is unable to listen to reason.<sup>287</sup>

But if this Anouilh's covert salute to the resistance then it is hardly a flattering picture. Antigone retracts her position when she is told that her brothers were not the men she thought they were, and defeated says she will go to her room.<sup>288</sup> However, Creon pushes his luck, telling Antigone to go marry Haemon and find some happiness. At this point she picks a new reason to die. She rails against the picture Creon paints for her of snatching pieces of happiness, of loving a Haemon who has lost his juvenile idealism. It is no longer a principled stand over the burial of her brother, but a refusal to fight, or even to live, she even declares that she is doing this for no body, for herself.<sup>289</sup> A statement which was taken objection to by Claude Roy writing in the resistance publication *Les Lettres Françaises*, for true resisters were saying 'pour nous, pour les hommes.'<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 39 (FT 87) 'Non, Vous avez dit « oui ». Vous ne vous arrêtez jamais de payer maintenant!'

<sup>285</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 37-39 (FT 82-87).

<sup>286</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 39-40 (FT 87-88).

<sup>287</sup> **Deutsch** (1946: 14).

<sup>288</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 45 (FT 97).

<sup>289</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 35 (FT 78) 'Pour personne. Pour moi.'

<sup>290</sup> **Witt** (1993: 60) & (2001: 228).

By changing the reasons for Antigone's death, Anouilh changes the story. We, the audience, discover that this story isn't the one we thought it was. Taking the perspective momentarily of the occupied French, as represented by the regular citizens of Thebes, (rather than the mob who are later to howl for her blood), we, the audience, are granted the opportunity to see what happened behind closed doors. We are privy to the discussion between Creon and Antigone in which he reveals a different story about the brothers and she chooses a new reason for her death. But to everyone else in their world, this remains their private encounter. Even Haemon and Ismene, who enter the scene go away believing a more traditional version of events. Thebes continues without anyone but Creon knowing that Antigone did not go to her death for the previously advertised noble reasons. This idea maps on to the mentality of Occupied France and the popular opinions held of the Vichy government, especially Marshal Pétain and his acquiescence to the Germans. The girl of the French Resistance for whom Antigone stands as a metaphor, comes out the better in public opinion, but only because it happens away from the public eye. She gets to remain a martyr, and Creon the hateful dictator who sent her to her death. Anouilh tells us that there is more to be seen than what meets the eye, that public information is untrustworthy. That the brutal acts of Pétain might not be as straightforward as we thought. I certainly disagree with Carter that Anouilh's *Antigone*, 'was clearly designed to celebrate the French resistance movement'.<sup>291</sup> She is a resistance fighter, but she has no message to give. All the while she is constantly seeking to give meaning to her act; the paper flower, the tin spade, the agreement that she would have been shamed had Polynices been given 'that piffling

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<sup>291</sup> **Carter** (2007: 152) see also **Ziolkowski** (2000: 555), **Berry** (1946: 17). **Fleming** suggests that (2006: 167); 'Anouilh's *Antigone* is consistently interpreted, by its Anglophone readers and audiences, both popular and scholarly, as a clear and damning allegory of contemporary circumstances of occupied Paris in 1944. It is understood and performed as a depiction of the heroic resistance of the French, represented by Antigone, to the German Occupation (and/or to the Vichy government) ..... It remains the accepted interpretation of the play.'

passport, that mass-produced mumbo-jumbo'<sup>292</sup> of a funeral, the declaration that she will not not fight to be happy, that she is going to say no to life. The note she writes to Haemon, too ends up as nothing, just a few incoherent words. She dies, because she cannot accept that the life of adolescence is over.

Anouilh constantly reiterates this motif of childishness,<sup>293</sup> the situation of the play is dependant in a way Sophocles' is not, on the youth of Antigone.<sup>294</sup> And she is not the only character in the play on the verge of adulthood and unable to accept the terms that come with it. It is also further underlined by the presence of the Nurse at the beginning of the play. Haemon also weeps on his father and implores him to be the strong father he used to be and make everything right. The younger generation of Antigone, Ismene and Haemon represent the generation coming of age in Occupied France, and Anouilh emphasises their underdeveloped and childish nature of their acts, their inability to accept help from one another. This is perhaps criticising perhaps the factional nature of the French resistance, unable to come up with a coherent plan.<sup>295</sup> Antigone defies Creon and goes to her death, but there is something selfish about her suicide, and it achieves nothing.<sup>296</sup> Some scholars have qualified Creon and Antigone in this version as the opposing sides of young and old, idealist versus realism, acceptor vs. rejector of life<sup>297</sup> but it goes beyond that, for the conflict in *Antigone* is not unique to this alone of Anouilh's plays. The play retains the structure of self-sacrifice of the original *Antigone*,

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<sup>292</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*. 35 (FT 77) 'Et tu risques la mort maintenant parce que j'ai refusé à ton frère ce passeport dérisoire, ce bredouillage en série sur sa dépouille, cette pantomime'.

<sup>293</sup> **Steiner** (1984: 156), **Calin** (1967:76-77), **Dickinson** (1969:249), **Witt** (1993: 52) & (2001: 222-3), **Fleming** (2006: 174-5).

<sup>294</sup> **Sachs** (1962: 7).

<sup>295</sup> cf. **Paxton** (1972: 291-298).

<sup>296</sup> cf. **Thomas** (1996).

<sup>297</sup> **Ince** (1962: 278), **McIntyre** (1981:54) 'ultimately both Antigone and Creon are pleading the same case. But are trying to justify a meaningless existence in an absurd world and make some sense out of having to die. They differ in proposing to instinctive and irreconcilable solutions.'

but the informing elements, love, patriotism, devotion, everything that might give meaning to this sacrifice have been carefully rinsed out,<sup>298</sup> reducing the heroine to the 'barest characterisation of meaningless refusal.'<sup>299</sup> This again reinforces the characterisation of the resistance as rather flimsy, its agents willing to die rather than work and live. A critic in 1944 wrote of the play that her resistance in which 'some people wanted to see the image of ours, has no human value.'<sup>300</sup> Antigone pins disaster to their names, disasters whose repercussions destroy those they love without damaging those they are aimed at.

A very different picture of Antigone emerges when you look at her actions in this scene in another light. Tracing the progression of the deconstructed Antigone provides very different explanations. Going back to the prologue, Antigone knows she is going to die - for she is Antigone. Creon's argument persuades her to give up her conviction to die for her brothers. But she **is** Antigone, and there is nothing to be done about her death. It is a death that she must repeat play after play in context after context.

Sartre claims Anouilh as part of the new Existentialist group, saying that:

the plays of authors such as Anouilh, Camus and himself constituted a rejection of the realistic, psychological theatre of the inter-war period, and a search instead for 'a theatre of situations' that would present the contemporary realities of suffering and death with the force of ancient ritual. In these plays, he argued, the emphasis was all upon the moment of choice, stressing the Existential belief that men are not created but create themselves through their choices.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> **Bradby** (1991: 35).

<sup>299</sup> **Fleming** (2006: 168).

<sup>300</sup> Pol Gailliard in *Le Pensée*, **Witt** (2001: 228).

<sup>301</sup> **Bradby** (1991: 34) cf. **Sartre** (1946).

But Antigone's choice is not the act of free commitment as understood by Sartre. Antigone is acting out the *nécessité littéraire*.<sup>302</sup> She can only appeal to her role which has already fixed her destiny for her. Sartre's existentialist characters are much removed to those in Anouilh, he plays more on the Pirandellian idea as presented in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*,<sup>303</sup> that the characters exist before the text and are of their own conception rather than the authors. As Malchy points out, whereas in Sartre's plays the character must choose and create their identity, in Anouilh's 'the hero is determined *a priori* by the role assigned to him, which he must play out to the bitter end.'<sup>304</sup> Antigone must die, she must play out her role, and preserve her ideal state.<sup>305</sup> Unable to control her choice, the significance of her decisions lies with reasons and motivation. Thus the discussion of Antigone's choice must be confined to discussion of its relevance in Occupied France and not existentialist creation of self. However, another comment of Sartre's, made in reference to his own play *Les Mouches*, is rather more apt: 'What is the point of putting the Greeks on stage, if not to disguise one's thoughts under a fascist régime?'<sup>306</sup>

The third blow to the metaphor of Antigone as a resistance fighter comes in the form of other plays by Anouilh. Antigone is marked with all the defining characteristics of an Anouilhian heroine; her physique and colouring, her relationship with her nurse and reluctance to leave childhood are all things she has in common with the heroines of a

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<sup>302</sup> **Bradby** (1991: 35) 'the obligation to play out a particular story simply because that is the way it has been written.' cf. **Thody** (1968:34), **Heiney** (1955:331-2) & **Fleming** (2006: 170).

<sup>303</sup> **Pirandello** (1921).

<sup>304</sup> quote from **Bradby** (1991: 36) Thérèse Malachy - *Jean Anouilh. Les problèmes de l'existence dans un théâtre de marionnettes*. (1978: 17) - Paris, Nizet.

<sup>305</sup> **Fleming** (2006: 175, 179).

<sup>306</sup> **Atack** (1989:23) ('Pour un théâtre de l'engagement - je ferai un pièce cette année et deux films', interview par Jacques Baratier, *Carrefour*, no.3, 9 Septembre 1944, quoted in *Contat et Rybalka*, *Les Ecrits de Sartre*, Paris (1970: 90)).

number of his other plays.<sup>307</sup> But what is much more interesting, her repudiation of life - the refusal to say yes, she also shares with other heroines, Joan of Arc is another. In *The Lark* Joan on trial is in a similar position to Antigone, she refuses to agree to the demands of her inquisitors though she knows she will be burnt for it: 'And my right is to say NO, and go on believing.'<sup>308</sup> Like Antigone she relents only once, agreeing to their demands, but then recanting it again later when she comes to think of what is in store for her future and the pointless fripperies associated with it.<sup>309</sup> Her reasoning is strikingly similar to Antigone's. Joan suffers the same conflict as Antigone, they share the same "purity",<sup>310</sup> and they share the same resolve; both characters products of Anouilh's 'own obsessive myth of Innocence and Experience in a world totally corrupt and almost totally corrupting'.<sup>311</sup>

It is hard to make it out of Anouilh's *Antigone* without being a little confused. He has a tendency to undercut one point in order to make another, and the divide between the different personas Antigone embodies is hardly a seamless one. The different arguments crowd each other out, and it is difficult to discern in places whether Anouilh is being serious or theatrically flippant. The readings of Antigone cannot always be taken simultaneously. Seeing Antigone as another incarnation of a standard Anouilhian heroine cannot be read alongside the reading of Antigone defiantly declaring her 'No's' as part of the resistance. The theatrical styling of her repeated refusals in concord with Joan or Beckett<sup>312</sup> makes a mockery out of the resistance meaning. There is barely room in her character to see all three of these readings, let alone trying to find the bones

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<sup>307</sup> Ayles (1964: 280) cf. Thody (1968), Fleming (2006: 179).

<sup>308</sup> Anouilh, *The Lark*, (1953) (*Plays: One*: 286).

<sup>309</sup> Anouilh, *The Lark*, (323).

<sup>310</sup> Witt (2001: 219).

<sup>311</sup> Dickinson (1969: 249).

<sup>312</sup> Anouilh, *Beckett*, (1959), *Eurydice* (1941) (Both in *Plays: Two*)

he took from Sophocles. There is always so much going on that the Sophoclean Antigone is pushed out all but for her essence. She fulfils her main duties, she buries her brother and goes to her death, but Anouilh's Antigone bears little resemblance to her devout and courageous counterpart in Sophocles. She becomes a character whom it is difficult to forgive for committing suicide with Haemon right there in the cave with her.

## V

### Brecht and the Conflict of Aristotle

Brecht uses Aristotelian theatre as essentially a pole against which to define his Epic theatre. The epithet 'non-Aristotelean' figures repeatedly throughout his theoretical writings as an essential feature of his conception of the 'epic' theatre as an art form representing the new, scientific age.<sup>313</sup> Thus it seems a little odd that he should choose to adapt a play of Sophocles, one of the writers lauded by Aristotle.<sup>314</sup> Indeed it is something that he seeks to explain himself in his foreword to his *Antigone*. I want here to look briefly at his reasons, for and against the Aristotelian, and also to see what impact this has on the play. Anouilh skews the plot and marks his personal stamp with his yes/no motif and the moments of metatheatrical awareness he gives certain of the characters. But Brecht is better known for his theatrical techniques and the definitive style of his productions.

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<sup>313</sup> Grey (1976: 80).

<sup>314</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, III.4, XIV.13, 3, XV.10, XVIII.20, XXV.11.

Brecht argues that Aristotelian dramatic practice leads the viewer to conclude that human suffering is an 'inescapable' part of the human condition. In contrast, 'epic theatre' presents suffering as something that can be changed through the social transformation of political institutions.<sup>315</sup>

Brecht saw no place for the catharsis or ritual purification involved in the structure, story and intentions of Aristotelian theatre on his stage. He believed that this stripped the audience of their strength and motivation for change. By allowing the audience to become involved with the action on stage, the play 'consumes' their 'activity'.<sup>316</sup> In his estimation Aristotelian theatre was like the church, an opiate for the masses, drugging the spectator into an unconsciousness of true reality and persuading him that the most intolerable situations can be endured because they are endurable in the theatre.<sup>317</sup> Brecht's theatre was about movement and change not entertainment and purification. He wanted to make his audience dirty, not clean. Another charge against catharsis is that it plays on the emotional involvement of the audience rather than their intellectual engagement. Brecht's rejection of empathy is not universal:<sup>318</sup> it is rather the thoughtless identification of spectator with character that he opposes. Believing that by allowing the audience to surrender themselves to the illusion on stage by playwright promotes a 'fatalistic acceptance of the ways of the world both in the theatre and outside of it.'<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> **Curran** (2001: 170) also in *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, **Willett** (1964: 189). **Curran** (2001: 171) 'Brecht's worry is that Oedipus Rex presents the suffering of its protagonist as 'inevitable' and therefore does not leave room for the kind of critical social reflection leading to social change that Brecht sees as central to theatre.'

<sup>316</sup> *Stücke III*, 266 in **Grey** (1967: 81).

<sup>317</sup> **Grey** (1976: 81).

<sup>318</sup> **Goodman, H** (1952: 111-112).

<sup>319</sup> **Grey** (1976: 80).

The development of Brecht as an artist led him to change his views over the course of his theatrical career. Some of his views became stronger, others less so, and he was led to see that parts of the Aristotelian method and the involvement of both critical emotional and intellectual responses had a place in his theatre. However, it is nonetheless odd that he should choose to remake a Sophoclean play which would seem to exemplify some of the things he most stridently opposed. Brecht justifies his use of *Antigone* in a foreword to the play:

The *Antigone* story was picked for the present theatrical operation as providing a certain topicality of subject matter and posing some interesting formal questions. So far as the subject's political aspect went, the present-day analogies emerged astonishingly powerfully as a result of the rationalisation process, but on the whole they were a handicap; the great character of the resister in the old play does not represent the German resistance fighters who necessarily seem most important to us. It was not the occasion for a poetic tribute to them.....<sup>320</sup>

Brecht sees in *Antigone* new problems, problems to be exploited in new ways to break the audience away from being beholden to the old version of the play. For instance Brecht states that different performance and acting techniques will bring out new themes implicit in the text.<sup>321</sup> His claim is much like the one made by Gide about *Oedipus*, that as a product of his age, he is able to see things in the play that Sophocles was, through no fault of his own, unable to.<sup>322</sup> Different times, minds and approaches bring out different facets of a text, especially with the stories and themes that were far from unique to Sophocles. In some respects, in Brecht's hands *Antigone* could be seen

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<sup>320</sup> Willet (1964: 211), 'Foreword to *Antigone*'.

<sup>321</sup> Curran (2001: 171) or Willet (1964: 210).

<sup>322</sup> Steiner (1984: 163) / Gide's Journal, 1933 (2nd January) Gide (1951:1151).

as the ideal of epic theatre: 'deep feeling combined with thoughtfulness is the ideal of Epic writing.'<sup>323</sup>

Visually, the play looks different from other adaptations in terms of set and stage conventions. Photos can be seen in the model book, which was to be regarded as something to be inspired to work from rather than an exact blueprint. Brecht states that he did not regard it as either definitive or complete. Its purpose was to help reconstruct German theatres after the ravages of the Nazi regime,<sup>324</sup> and it was his hope that its shortcomings would stimulate theatres to use it.<sup>325</sup> Brecht describes Neher's stage for *Antigone* as:

Long benches, on which the actors can sit and wait for their cue, stand in front of a semicircle of screens covered in red-coloured rush matting. In the middle of these screens a gap is left, where the record turntable stands and is visibly operated; through this the actors go off when their part is done. The acting area is bounded by four posts from which horses' skulls hang suspended. In the left foreground is a board for props, the bacchic masks on sticks. Creon's laurel wreath made of copper, the millet bowl and wine jar for *Antigone* and the stool for *Tiresias*. .....

The reason why the actors sit openly on the stage and only adopt the attitudes proper to their parts once they enter the (very brilliantly lit) acting area is that the audience must not be able to think that it had been transported to the scene of the story, but must be invited to take part in the delivery of an ancient poem, irrespective of how it has been restored.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> **Gorelik** (1959:91).

<sup>324</sup> cf. **Willett** (1964: 209-10), 'Foreword to *Antigone*'. **Steinweis** (1993), **Heinrich** (2007).

<sup>325</sup> **Willett** (1964: 212) 'Foreword to *Antigone*'.

<sup>326</sup> **Willett** (1964: 212), 'Foreword to *Antigone*', also in *Antigonmodelbook*.

It is essential for Brecht's telling of the play that the audience engage intellectually and not emotionally with the text. The audience needs to assess the events and their causes intellectually in order to be able to come to a view that the fault of the play lies with the fact that Kreon was tolerated, that more didn't follow Polyneikes into revolt. Brecht brings in the argument that is essentially the opposite to that followed in Anouilh - Antigone moves through her actions in the play because fate has marked this path out for her and she is unable to stray from it. The word 'fate', had in Germany had become a word 'redolent of helpless foreboding',<sup>327</sup> and Brecht wants to give the message that the final events were avoidable ones and that this is not a world that is forever unchangeable. Brecht wants his play to spur the audience; at one point Kreon asks Antigone why she is being so stubborn, her answer is 'To set an example',<sup>328</sup> quite a different message to that given by Anouilh's Antigone's statement that she's doing this for herself alone.<sup>329</sup>

The use of an established story does not prevent Brecht from using his alienation, or V-Effekts. In addition to the use of acting techniques to draw out new characteristics of the play, they are also written in to the structure and language of the play. A structural device he frequently uses is the repetition or duplication of characters or events.<sup>330</sup> This is seen quite obviously in his Antigone. There are two plays, two Antigones, two Ismenes and two uninterred brothers. The Prologue is separated from the main play by a set change, a white wall with a door and a cupboard were lowered on to the stage. The presence of a set highlights its difference from the performance space of the main

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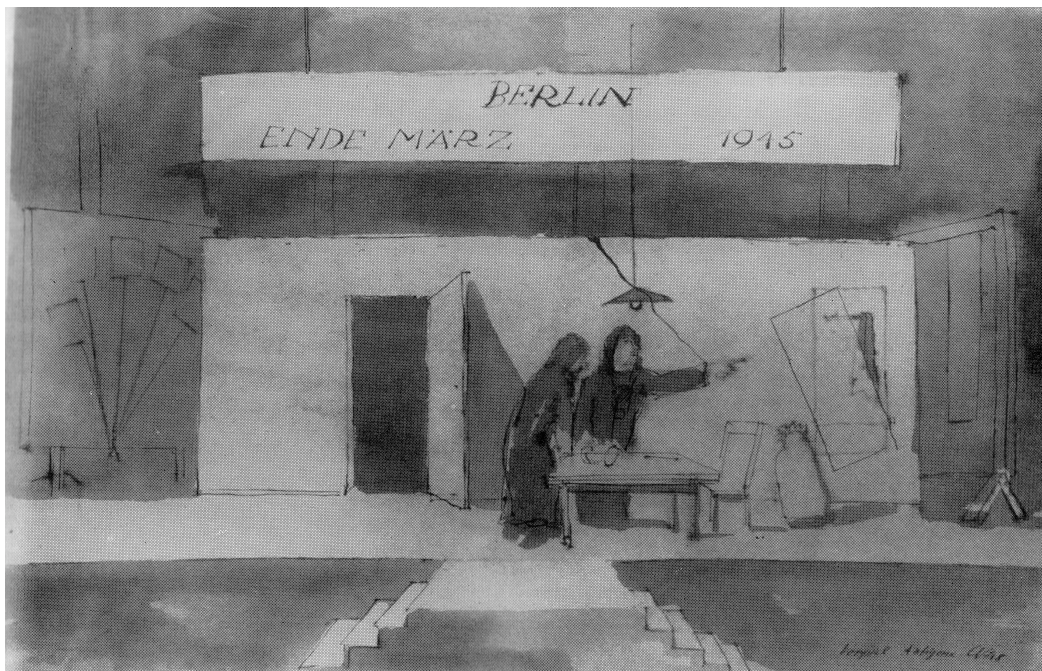
<sup>327</sup> **Grey** (1976: 80)

<sup>328</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone* 28, (GT 389) 'Halt für ein Beispiel'.

<sup>329</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 35 (FT 78) 'Pour personne. Pour moi.'

<sup>330</sup> **Grey** (1976:69).

play. It is also clearly labelled with the sign, 'Berlin Ende März 1945'. Another suggestion for the performance and set had been to do away with the Prologue and instead have boards showing bomb damage in a modern city placed behind the actors benches.<sup>331</sup> It was clearly very important to Brecht to show, quite literally, the backdrop to his production and to force his spectators to constantly negotiate the path between the modern reality and the ancient play.



**Stage sketch for the prologue from Brecht's *Antigonemodell* (1948: 1-93)**

There is a third part to the play which is not used in performance. It is a poem, entitled *The Antigone Legend*, a recapitulation of the events of the play. Brecht used it as a rehearsal device, his cast pausing while the stage manager read out sections, for the purpose that 'Each speech or action that is introduced by such verses come to seem like their realisation in practice, and the actor is prevented from transforming himself completely into the character: he is showing something...' <sup>332</sup> It is interesting that Malina

<sup>331</sup> Willett (1964: 213), 'Foreword to Antigone'.

<sup>332</sup> Willett (1964: 213-14), 'Foreword to Antigone'.

and Beck choose to put it into performance. The Living Theatre toured Brecht's *Antigone* and though the play was always performed in English, *The Antigone Legend*, however, was translated into the language of the audience and spoken at intervals in the text, a technique that was shown to be very effective.<sup>333</sup>

The combination of effect Brecht puts together produce a play that bears little stage resemblance to Sophocles' *Antigone*. The text can be examined and similarities sought and found, but, the visual experience is not anything like what one would expect from a Sophoclean production, archaeological or otherwise. Brecht alters the text, though it retains aspects of register and events that would, one might expect, provoke a cathartic response in the audience. The mode of performance strips out these leftover Aristotelian features, blocking the audience from too great an empathic connection with the unfolding events on stage and encouraging them to respond critically and intellectually rather than emotionally. Brecht's *Antigone* is then quite the opposite then to Anouilh's production where the emotion and conviction of Antigone shouting 'NO' won the audience over to her side.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Brecht, *Antigone*, (Malina 1990: 1); on The Living Theatre, cf. Phelps (1967), Tytell (1995), Rice (1972) Amitin, Malina & Beck (1981).

<sup>334</sup> Goldhill (1986: 251).

## VI

### Can you hear any Sophocles over the clamour?

We began with the notion that Occupied France was very different from Nazi Germany and as were their respective Antigones. But Brecht and Anouilh are very different authors and it follows that their Antigones will be marked by them too. Both have quite recognisable techniques and styles and these show through clearly. What is interesting is the interplay between the original text, the influence of the present age, the style of the playwright and the question of whether there is anything of Sophocles left.

Brecht creates through a fairly complete re-imagining of the back story a place in which the Sophoclean Antigone is quite at home. His Antigone speaks and acts like the Sophoclean counterpart, and much of the text retains the flavour of Sophocles' play. Brecht worked with the translation by Hölderlin,<sup>335</sup> who himself wrote a bold translation of *Antigone*. It is probably fair to say that Brecht works with the text whereas Anouilh works with the story. Anouilh keeps certain key motifs, like Haemon's strike at his father before he falls on his sword, and the ship of state speech. But Brecht keeps in many more of the small incidences of the play, such as the description of Antigone when she is burying Polynices as like a bird, who has found her nest with all the babies gone.<sup>336</sup>

In both plays Creon is simultaneously sidelined and brought into greater focus. His development through the text is displaced in favour of his characterisation as either Hitler or Pétain. The impact this has on the rest of the text is immediate, for Brecht,

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<sup>335</sup> cf. **Weisstein** (1973), **Rouse** (1960), **Steiner** (1984).

<sup>336</sup> **Sophocles**, (80) 425-30, **Brecht**, 28 (GT 340-345).

Kreon painted wholly in black, without a momentary redeeming feature, provides a whiter Antigone by contrast. Now how much braver she becomes in her stand against the hateful and maniacal tyrant. The murkier characterisations in Anouilh balance each other in the same fashion. Though there is an element of there being a sinister character behind the show pulling the strings like a puppet master, the unspoken German occupation. The new reasonings given for Creon to attempt to free Antigone are essential for the characterisation of the dictators, but the effect this has on the significance of the ending is manifold.

The Sophoclean Creon holds our sympathy at the close of the play, perhaps not a straightforward untainted sympathy, but one generated by the punishment meted out being disproportionate to his crimes. Brecht's Kreon deserves every inch of his punishment, but he doesn't view it as such. He laments the death of his son, but only as the commander of the city's defence.<sup>337</sup> The imminent loss of the city is not expressed by him in terms of a sane man, but as Hitler, declaring that without him, the city can be nothing. It is the loss of a dream rather than the very real loss of state and the citizens belonging to it. The equations are changed, in Sophocles, Creon flouts religion and family and these are the things he loses in the end; in Brecht is it the city he betrays, so it is the city that he loses.<sup>338</sup> Anouilh's Creon is bemused at the end, barely stricken at the loss of his wife, son and niece; he lays out Antigone and Haemon together like young lovers after their first night.<sup>339</sup> They are all asleep, and it must be nice to sleep, rather than continue living in the desperate world. He justifies his stance

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<sup>337</sup> **Brecht**, *Antigone*, 60/63 (GT 1170-1179, 1278-1281)

<sup>338</sup> **Jones**, F (1957: 44)

<sup>339</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 59 (FT 128).

to the young page, that someone has to do the dirty work, then, in the same breath he calls the page crazy for ever wanting to grow up.<sup>340</sup>

But what of Antigone? Chorus in his closing words says that she has been cured of the fever whose name we shall never know. He says that those who are still alive are beginning to forget the dead. Soon they will become the unknown war dead, again called Antigone for her real name has been forgotten. Anouilh's Antigone is a character far removed from the principled girl from Sophocles whose actions are inspired by her value of life, humanity, her brother and her piety before the gods. She certainly doesn't honour the gods and her love of life is strictly contained to her childhood - memories of playing outside all day and refusing to go to sleep lest she missed something. Another thing that transpires in the agon of Antigone and Creon is that Antigone does what she does for purely selfish motives.<sup>341</sup> Her cause ceases to be about her brother and becomes an argument about her. As she says to Creon, she is doing this for no-one but herself.<sup>342</sup> This section of the plot line brings out the case of Antigone as repeat figure, forever trapped in her unchanging destiny. However, by doing so, Anouilh hollows her out, guts her of the principles and pathos that make her great. I have argued that this is done deliberately to make the point, that this Antigone of our times is not as great as she used to be, she lacks direction, principles and resolve to do anything other than be a destructive force. It lays the ground for the charge laid by Aylen, that tragedy for Anouilh is 'to shout at the top of your voice when hope is lost.'<sup>343</sup>

For the character of Creon and Antigone, it seems that Brecht and Anouilh are standing one each side of Sophocles' text. Each taking the story in their own divergent

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<sup>340</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 60 (FT 130-31).

<sup>341</sup> **Deutsch** (1946: 14).

<sup>342</sup> **Anouilh**, *Antigone*, 35 (FT 78) 'Pour personne. Pour moi.' cf. **DeLaura** (1961).

<sup>343</sup> **Aylen** (1964: 279).

directions. It is the same with the notion of fate of fate and religion. Brecht maintains the religious character of Antigone and the potential to see the hand of the gods in the wind storm, the birds and the punishments apportioned at the close of the play, but he carefully excises the influence of fate. For Brecht the Sophoclean qualities of moral ambiguity and inevitable ruin need to be removed. The terms the story is presented in intimates that the death of Antigone and the fall of Thebes were avoidable events, had the citizens and soldiers mounted a successful revolution against Creon. The aim of this is to encourage the audience 'to think about the story as one thinks about necessity and free will in history.' Whereas Sophocles seems to be saying 'Character is fate', or 'People are like that', Brecht says 'Nothing is inevitable, except that violence begets violence',<sup>344</sup> and prompts his audience to consider the social forces at work through the framework of a Marxist analysis.

On the other side of Sophocles we have Anouilh holding fate and the demands of story as the motivations behind his text. And in keeping with the mirror opposites to the Brechtian text, religion and the involvement of the gods are removed. The type of fate that is presented is quite different to Brecht's, it applies to theatrical demands rather than contemporary implications. Anouilh's play is a little like Shaw's saying of the bitter social pill encased in sugar.<sup>345</sup> The implications of fate belong to the merry theatrical romp that disguises the play about France and all her problems.

When asking whether we can still hear Sophocles over the clamour of authorial and contemporary influence, the answer is yes. Antigone will always belong to Sophocles, he cannot be removed from the equation, no matter which direction his play is taken in or cause it is re-written for. Anouilh and Brecht each latch on to a different

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<sup>344</sup> Jones, F (1957: 43-44).

<sup>345</sup> Vidal (1957: 45) ' "My plays are actually very bitter social pills and the playwriting is just a sugar-coating," to which a friend once said, "How clever of the public to lick off the sugar-coating and reject the pill." ' cf. Mills (1967: 220).

aspect of the text to bring to the fore and surround with their own writings. But Sophocles can always be seen. It is possible to distill the inspirations down to a single sentence from Sophocles: for Brecht it is Antigone, making her thoughts quite clear to Creon, 'Lucky tyrants - the perquisites of power! Ruthless power to do and say whatever pleases them.'<sup>346</sup> Anouilh's version again takes Antigone as his lead, 'You chose to live. I chose to die.'<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> **Sophocles**, *Antigone*, (84) 505-507.

<sup>347</sup> **Sophocles**, *Antigone*, (88) 555.

**‘Queen, your colours may fade, seasons may change, weather blows, but you  
still leave a mark on me.’ Time for Jocasta to take to the centre stage.**

Cocteau’s *Infernal Machine* (1934) and Cixous’ *The Name of Oedipus: Song of the  
Forbidden Body* (1978)

My final chapter will examine two plays that use Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* as their inspiration. In the previous chapters there have been quiet obvious contemporary situations to tie the events and backdrop of the play to, however, that is not a schema the two plays under scrutiny here fit into well. Cixous’ play is very cerebral - a little like that of Gide’s, she does engage in contemporary debate, but it is that of gender politics and linguistics, and the relationship between them, rather than a response to war as are Anouilh’s, Brecht’s and Heaney’s. The plays here are very different to that of Sophocles and I shall look at how the key moments are reformed and reframed to produce new meanings for Cixous, and for Cocteau what additional stories are added and why. As previously I will investigate the use of chorus and what privileges their voice is given within the text, as well as the idea of fate within the play and how that ties into the issues of naming.

Oedipus is as synonymous with Thebes as Antigone. Other plays may have depicted these characters elsewhere - perhaps a young Oedipus at the court of Corinth hearing a drunk questioning his parentage and setting out to Delphi, meeting the Sphinx, or at Colonos where Oedipus with his daughter decides where he is going to live out his final days. But the crystallisation, or realisation of their true natures happens for them

respectively in *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*, plays which each capture a day each in the mythological history of Thebes and a rung of the cursed family tree of Cadmus.

The name of Oedipus might be as ubiquitous as that of Antigone, but the connotations are as rarely political. The character of Creon in *Antigone* can all too easily be remodelled into that of a political figure, and there are plenty who have and will deny the human rights of their citizens. Finding a political figure who brings about his own downfall through a quest to find the truth and heal his city is a somewhat tougher undertaking.<sup>348</sup> Instead the story of Oedipus has found other fame in the last century. Freud's revolutionary reading of *Oedipus Rex* has brought endless new enquiry into the story,<sup>349</sup> and Freud's connection with the *Oedipus* has also come to essentially immortalise own his name.<sup>350</sup> Long before I knew anything about the psychoanalyst, or read Sophocles' play, I knew that Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother and that this was the acting out of what Freud called the Oedipus complex.

*Oedipus Rex* is a play that though only encompassing a day in true Aristotelean fashion,<sup>351</sup> still captures the accumulated stories of this family, listed in a way that slowly unravels the secrets of Oedipus' life in perfect timing. His history revealed, Oedipus' present disintegrates and the force of his enquiries, his resolution in marching forward destroys his love in a mirror of Orpheus' downfall. But Cixous and Cocteau are not interested in the same goals as Sophocles, the nature of the relationship of *The Infernal Machine* and *The Name of Oedipus* to Sophocles is of a different type to those

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<sup>348</sup> Although **Ehrenberg** (1954: 99-116), **Wiles** (1997: 209) & **Knox** (1998: 23, 63-4) on similarities between Pericles and Oedipus.

<sup>349</sup> **Fleming** (2006: 163).

<sup>350</sup> cf. **Knox** (1998: 435).

<sup>351</sup> **Aristotle**, *Poetics*, V.8, cf. **Lowe** (2000: 165)

examined in the previous two chapters. In their cases, though it may be argued whether each author worked from the story behind the play or from the Sophoclean play itself, each of the plays examined so far sufficiently resembles Sophocles' original to be recognisable. These two stretch that relationship further.

For Cocteau, the stories that Oedipus' enquiry called from the past now occupy centre stage. We get to see Oedipus as a young man claiming his victory over the Sphinx, his wedding night with Jocasta, and we have to wait until the final act to be propelled seventeen years into the future to watch the arrival of a messenger from Corinth bringing the news that will unravel the story of his life. The first act is pure invention of the part of Cocteau and doesn't even feature Oedipus, rather it shows what is happening in Thebes the self-same night he meets the Sphinx. The scene opens, after the narrating 'Voice' has finished his introduction, on the battlements of Thebes, with two soldiers groaning about night watch and wondering whether the ghost of King Laius will show again that night. Expecting *Oedipus Rex*, the audience find themselves in a parodied *Hamlet*,<sup>352</sup> made preposterous by Cocteau with the introduction of Jocasta and Tiresias - whom she calls 'Zizi' ('a little prick'<sup>353</sup>). And although his son does not see him and swear to avenge his murder, he will eventually mete out the punishment. There are other similarities too, in the speed with which the funeral meats become a wedding feast, as well as the changing status of familial relationships. Though Gertrude's transition from Claudius' 'sometime sister'<sup>354</sup> to his wife is a somewhat more palatable change in status than the one Jocasta makes.<sup>355</sup> Indeed the description Freud, whose

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<sup>352</sup> cf. **Brown** (1969: 310), **Fowlie** (1961: 83).

<sup>353</sup> **Miller** (1985: 209).

<sup>354</sup> **Shakespeare**, *Hamlet*, I.2.8.

<sup>355</sup> Although many dramatisations of *Hamlet*, including the 1948 Lawrence Olivier film adaptation foreground the suggestion of incest.

influence is felt strongly in both Cocteau and Cixous' texts, gives of Hamlet chimes with elements of the Oedipus myth:

Hamlet is able to do anything - except take revenge on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his childhood realised.<sup>356</sup>

In the *Infernal Machine* it is the queen and not her son who has been sent news of the ghost. She comes to investigate, but alas, it is only the soldiers who can see him. To them he imparts a truncated message of warning, of someone coming to the town before he fades out; the red from his blooded forehead fading last, like the grin of the Cheshire Cat. And this isn't the only feature reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland*, Oedipus falls down the rabbit hole, he just doesn't realise he is doing so. But like Alice following the White Rabbit, Oedipus is tempted by the Sphinx into a world where things are not at all what they seem. The Sphinx and Anubis both appear as anthropomorphised animals, and Anubis answers the question of why they appear in the guise they do in a manner akin to the skewed logic of the characters Alice meets along the way; that they must appear in the form men imagine them, and, that they are meaningless.<sup>357</sup> The whole of the play exists in a 'dream state of unrationalised awareness',<sup>358</sup> and just as Alice's sister recognises the inspirations for the characters Alice recounts to her in the noises she can hear from where she is sitting,<sup>359</sup> plenty of the details and characterisations in the play come from the milieu of Cocteau's world.

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<sup>356</sup> Freud (1998: 299), cf. Bowlby (2007: 17-19), & Jones, E (1949).

<sup>357</sup> Cocteau, *Infernal Machine*, (hereafter *IM*) 106 (FT 46-47). All page references will be first to the English translation Wildman (1962) and in brackets to the French text Cocteau, Landers ed. (1967). cf. Knowles (1967: 55-6). Brown (1969: 313); The play opened on the 10th April 1934 and ran for 64 performances, 'not enough to qualify it as a Boulevard success, yet too many to qualify it as an avant-garde fiasco'

<sup>358</sup> Miller (1985: 206).

<sup>359</sup> Carroll, L (1940: 131-132).

The other great Carollian notion, that of going through the looking glass is one of Cocteau's great fascinations, and though not one indulged in this play he used it to great effect in both the theatrical and film versions of *Orpheus*.<sup>360</sup> There is, however, one moment with a mirror, and it does fit with the overall schema that Cocteau uses - that they represent death because we see ourselves grow old in them.<sup>361</sup> After Oedipus has fallen asleep on their wedding night, Jocasta lifts up the frame, and holding it so that the audience becomes her mirror, she 'lifts her cheeks by handfuls.'<sup>362</sup>

In contrast to the somewhat flippant approach of Cocteau, the approach Cixous takes in turning the myth on its head is done very seriously. Cocteau revels in the amusement generated by the constant Freudian slips of Oedipus and Jocasta revealing their subconscious love for each other in roles of mother and son instead of husband and wife. Cixous, aiming to recover the subjective female experience in a male-dominated culture, deconstructs and reconstructs the traditional archetypes and myths and utilises her form of 'woman's writing', and in doing so decensoring the woman's relation to her sexuality and her culturally controlled body.<sup>363</sup> Cixous deals with the problem of vocalising the different levels of consciousness and internal conflict by dividing the speaking parts between a number of actors. For the 1978 performance at the Avignon Theatre Festival, there were two each of Jocasta, Oedipus and Tiresias. The number of the chorus is subject to interpretation, and there exists the potential for a director to cast further actors, to create a 'tone poem' rather than an opera,<sup>364</sup> especially

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<sup>360</sup> The play was written in 1925 and opened in Paris at the Théâtre des Arts. It was revived the following year with Cocteau in the part of Heurtebise. Cocteau later made the film adaptation in 1950.

<sup>361</sup> Knowles (1967: 53).

<sup>362</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 144. (FT 105) 'se remontre les joues, à pleines mains'.

<sup>363</sup> Foley (2004: 86).

<sup>364</sup> Makward & Millar (1994: 251).

if one of those playing Oedipus was a woman, and Jocasta a man.<sup>365</sup> This creation of bisexual characters on stage, both plays to the strengths of Cixous' text and her undoing of the 'essentialist knot joining gender identity and biological sex',<sup>366</sup> as well as being somewhat fitting given the transvestism of the Greek stage necessitated by the exclusion of female actors. The different performers of the characters each take a section to speak or sing, sometimes the two halves of one character taking a number of turns before another character is again heard. Each time they modify, by adding to or contradicting the passage of the previous speaker and thus demonstrating the cognitive dissonance of each of the figures.

Instead of telling the whole story as Cocteau does, Cixous pushes almost all of the events of Sophocles' version off stage. The plague is 'feasting outside'<sup>367</sup> of the world Jocasta exists in, and she begs Oedipus to remain in it with her. Much of the play remains, from Jocasta's perspective, in a suspended moment before Oedipus discovers the truth. In the last movements of the play, we watch Jocasta dying, hoping that Oedipus will answer her call and return to her. It is a death characterised as a decline into silence.<sup>368</sup> It is not until the moment of her death that he is able to make it back 'From among the words. From among the dead',<sup>369</sup> to call that he has come back for her.<sup>370</sup> Her life runs out waiting for him to return, but it is also his return that closes her last breath. Jocasta, Tiresias and the chorus all speak in unison: 'She will be unable to

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<sup>365</sup> Freeman (1998: 247).

<sup>366</sup> Morris (1993: 113)

<sup>367</sup> Cixous, *The Name of Oedipus*, (hereafter *Le Nom*) 256, Makward & Millar (1994).

<sup>368</sup> Dobson (1998: 256).

<sup>369</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 319.

<sup>370</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 320.

stay alive. And if he comes I will die of it.’<sup>371</sup> Tiresias tells us that Oedipus ‘is death’,<sup>372</sup> whatever his actions he will kill Jocasta. Before Oedipus arrives, Jocasta is in a state akin to Schrödinger’s Cat. Whilst he is still away she exists in a suspended state, both dead and not dead, undecided on life, and it is not until he opens the door that her death is realised.

Cixous leads Jocasta in a rejection of the last hundred years of obsession over the Oedipus complex as well as a repudiation of the patriarchal system based on the need to trade women between families in order to maintain the structure of their society,<sup>373</sup> and she answers the call to take notice of Jocasta and her desire.<sup>374</sup> Oedipus is not the lead in this play, but his mother/wife who knows exactly who she is, and as such the problem of Oedipal love is addressed primarily from her perspective. Cocteau’s Jocasta asks if there is ‘a union more sweet and cruel, a prouder couple than a son and young mother?’<sup>375</sup> But she doesn’t really know what she is saying. Cixous’ Jocasta on the other hand is by no means a comic character, she is both quite serious and perfectly lucid in her love for Oedipus and from the start begs her not to leave him. Ultimately she dies because the truth is discovered, but she finds no horror in her understanding of the situation, and though she asks Oedipus to deny his name, she never shows any intention of disowning hers.

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<sup>371</sup> **Cixous**, *Le Nom*, 317.

<sup>372</sup> **Cixous**, *Le Nom*, 316.

<sup>373</sup> **Morris** (1993: 119).

<sup>374</sup> **Olivier** (1989: 1).

<sup>375</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 101 (FT 34) ‘Est-il plus doux ménage, ménage plus doux et plus cruel, ménage plus fier de soi, que ce couple d’un fils et d’une mère jeune?’

Freud and his work on the Oedipus complex come into these two pieces in different ways. For Cocteau, writing in the 1930's, the fame of Freud was comparatively fresh relative to his status now. Cocteau parodies this fame, almost mercilessly. There is no subtlety in the way he presents the elements of Freudian analysis. In his hands, both Jocasta and Oedipus express 'Oedipal' desires a number of times without ever beginning to realise what it means. Jocasta has gruesomely preposterous and quite transparent nightmares, which Tiresias is supposed to interpret, of a baby which turns into a sticky paste in her hands and proceeds to fix itself over her mouth and creep up her thighs.<sup>376</sup> Where Cocteau parodies Freud, Cixous rejects him. Freud and Lacan and their insistence on the penis as the master signifier have not been popular among the feminists, indeed, 'the greater part of the feminist movement identified Freud as the enemy',<sup>377</sup> and used him, with Lacan as a point of departure for their work.

The part of Jocasta brings with it certain ambiguities as to how much she knows and when she knows it,<sup>378</sup> however, she is denied by Sophocles a character in her own right. We aren't privy to as much of her personality as we are Oedipus'. We witness some of her struggles and the moment when she realises beyond all doubt the nature of her relationship to Oedipus. But she is silenced almost as soon as she discovers the truth.<sup>379</sup> We get no last speeches contemplating her fate with anguish as we do with Antigone on the way to her tomb.<sup>380</sup> From the moment the messenger reveals that it was a servant of Laius that brought him the baby,<sup>381</sup> and when she sees there is no way

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<sup>376</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 94 (FT 23).

<sup>377</sup> Morris (1993: 94).

<sup>378</sup> cf. Olivier (1989: 1-2).

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Knox (1998: 146-47).

<sup>380</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, (102-106) 806-816, 823-833, 838-852, 857-871, 876-882, 891-928, 937-943.

<sup>381</sup> Sophocles, *OT* (211) 1071. Page reference (in brackets) are to Fagles (1984), line numbers to the Greek text in Lloyd-Jones (1994. Vol I).

to hide the secret from her son, she gets just six short exchanges with Oedipus as she desperately tries to stop Oedipus from bringing the information to light. Finally, she cries *Aieeeeeee (iou iou)*, names Oedipus ‘man of agony’ and runs from the stage.<sup>382</sup> The lines convey fear and desperation and suffering, but ultimately they reveal little more than an instinctive reaction. Indeed, there is little to suggest that had she prevented Oedipus from discovering the truth she would have been able to live with her knowledge. The exploration of her wishes and desires, subconscious or otherwise, are not something relevant to this play. Sophocles’ women are not those of Euripides, where they can be fierce, sexual and knowledgeable in skills aside those ‘civilised’ learnings of men. There is simply no room in Sophocles’ rendering of the Oedipus myth for a Jocasta who finds the revelation of her relationship to her husband anything other than horrendous. A *Jocasta* by Euripides could have been very interesting, but his Oedipus play hasn’t survived, and only the *Seven Against Thebes* of Aeschylus’ 467BC Theban tetralogy (*Laius*,<sup>383</sup> *Oedipus*,<sup>384</sup> *Seven against Thebes*, and the satyr play *Sphinx*,<sup>385</sup>) remains extant.<sup>386</sup>

But Cixous’ Jocasta is more than a rebuttal of the focus on Oedipus and the source of his desires and determination to uncover the truth. She is both sad and defiant, and unapologetic about her love though eventually defeated by it. The variant voices through which her story is told bring new perspectives and there is no attempt to hide the multiplicity of her character; the echoes of her interpretations, her unfixable

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<sup>382</sup> **Sophocles**, *OT* (223) 1071-1072.

<sup>383</sup> *Laius* (*TrGF* III. 231) tells the story of Laius’ love for Chrysippus, Pelop’s son, whom he carries off. The boy commits suicide in shame, and this is what leads Pelops to call down a curse on Laius’ house. Euripides also wrote a play, *Chrysippus*, also lost, which was presented with the *Phoenician Women* in 409. cf. **Segal** (1993:47), **McHardy** et al (2005: 155-161), **Kerenyi** (1959: 88-104).

<sup>384</sup> *TrGF* III. 287-288.

<sup>385</sup> *TrGF* III. 341-343.

<sup>386</sup> **O’Brien** (1968: 2), **McHardy** et al (2005: 57-62).

nature and fractured consciousness, and of the very creation of these forms through language and the act of speaking. And like every character of tragedy, she is both innocent and complicit in her downfall, as is Cocteau's Jocasta who has a weakness for handsome young men. She declares the young soldier on the wall in the first act to be 'delicious'<sup>387</sup> and squeezes his biceps just moments after exclaiming to 'Zizi' that he is exactly the age of her lost son. But Oedipus is no better, and he makes the admission that he has 'always dreamed of such a love, an almost motherly love.'<sup>388</sup> But these are the same 'cute extravagances and daring slips of the tongue' that turn up in all of Cocteau's plays.<sup>389</sup>

Both authors deal with the causal factors that lead to the catastrophic events of *Oedipus*. Cocteau's approach is somewhat facetious with regards to Jocasta, the play is dedicated to Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, and this Thebes is part of their world, of the smart set at play in the Midi. Jocasta is cut out of the same fabric as the 'various wealthy ageing adventuresses so nonchalant about their children and so avidly interested in young gigolos that a son of theirs could, almost in the normal course of things turn up at their side in bed and not be recognised until too late.'<sup>390</sup> He throws in references from other plays and literature as well as mimicking people and scenes from real life, creating as he does so a rich but light tragicomedy, every step of which is prefigured by omens and statements underlined as it were in thick red ink. Even the grievous ending is relieved by the appearance of the ghost Jocasta returning to Oedipus as his mother whom he can only now see because he is blind. Cixous creates a more considered and less hectic backdrop to her play. She looks to the structure of society

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<sup>387</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 98 (FT 29) 'N'est-il pas exquis?'

<sup>388</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 131 (FT 85) 'j'ai tousjours rêvé d'un amour de ce genre, d'un amour presque maternel.'

<sup>389</sup> **Brown** (1969: 328).

<sup>390</sup> **Brown** (1969: 309).

and language that deemed these actions to be problematic, and seeks to find a way beyond them.

Jocasta is the star of both of these shows, although she shares stage time fairly equally with Oedipus in the *Infernal Machine*, the fact that she has been given such a larger role grabs our attention. She is a wonderful character, but not as proud as Cixous', her Jocasta says what she does with knowledge and pain, trying to voice enough but not too much. She gives a mesmerising illumination of the character and the problem, tackling issues in a manner that few have dared. Cocteau's Jocasta is blissfully unknowing, as blind as Oedipus is to the knowledge that is right in front of her eyes.<sup>391</sup>

## I

### Is this still a tale of Oedipus Rex?

My fascination with the reforming of a tragic plot from the story provided by Sophocles is not something that I have sought to hide. The refocusing and rebalancing of plot, and the structural mechanics through which it is done and why it is done I believe are crucial to a critical understanding of a play. The parts that are left in, and those discarded, represent a choice on the behalf of the storyteller of what their story is about. Despite the many alterations and innovations of the plays examined in the previous two chapters, ultimately each author remains relatively close to the version of events given

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<sup>391</sup> On themes of sight and blindness, cf. **Musurillo** (1967: 80-93).

by Sophocles. This is not the case for either the *Infernal Machine* or *The Name of Oedipus*, of the story events they retain, it is only the use of the plague that is a true inheritance from Sophocles. The most famous of Oedipus' actions, that of killing of his father and his incestuous marriage, are common to the early versions of the myth.<sup>392</sup> The self-blinding of Oedipus was not an innovation of Sophocles', rather it was Aeschylus,<sup>393</sup> though Sophocles capitalised on the significance of such an action. In Sophocles' play it becomes the climax, whereas Aeschylus' play culminated with Oedipus renewing the blight on his family for the next generation by cursing his sons.<sup>394</sup> The emphasis laid on Oedipus' blinding is not translated into the plays by Cixous and Cocteau. Cixous creates an alternate metaphor for blinding and sight, deafness and muteness, and her Oedipus does not inflict such violence on himself. But hers is a play about words, and is almost without action at all. She also outs as extraneous to her 'plot', perhaps the most disastrous products of the union; the four children of overly close familial bonds.<sup>395</sup> Cocteau does blind his Oedipus, but he cannot resist but to play with the significance of this action. And the play ends with his reconnection with Jocasta, a reconciliation facilitated precisely because he is blind.

Sophocles' invention of the plague, probably influenced by the great plague in Athens in 430BC, achieves two main goals. It appears as a manifestation of the horror and pollution of Oedipus' deeds, his incest and parricide, though perpetrated in ignorance, 'are so deep a violation of the world order that nature responds with sterility

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<sup>392</sup> Segal (1993:46), cf. Dawe (2006).

<sup>393</sup> Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, 778-91, Vellacott (1961:111) it is probably described in the lost *Oedipus* and this is what the chorus of the *Seven Against Thebes* are referring to cf. (Segal 1993: 46-7), Bowra (1944: 162-3).

<sup>394</sup> Segal (1993:47).

<sup>395</sup> cf. Carroll, M (1978). Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles and Polynices, were commonly depicted as the children of Oedipus and Jocasta on the Greek stage, however, there also existed an alternative tradition where they were born of a second wife Euryganeia, as in the lost *Oedipodeia*. See, West (2003: 39-41), Segal (1993:45).

and disease',<sup>396</sup> and it results in the quest to find the murderer of Laius. But the plague, though acknowledged as happening, is not at all central to the stories of Cocteau and Cixous, and both mention it just a couple of times. It is something characterised as happening outside the private world of Oedipus and Jocasta in these two adaptations - it is the pain of the city which calls Oedipus away from Jocasta in Cixous' play and it appears to have no visible effect on Oedipus in Cocteau's. However, it serves in both plays to situate the play in a point of Theban time. The plague does not arrive in Cocteau's play until the final act, the Voice clearly announces that the plague has struck, alerting the audience who may not have noticed the title of the act, that it is here that they catch up with Sophocles, and they were at last going to see *Oedipus Rex*. And although *The Name of Oedipus* isn't driven by plot, opening the play with Jocasta's plea to Oedipus to ignore the suffering town, provides both the impetus for crisis and a point from which to diverge from the traditional model.

Virtually, but not all the events Cocteau borrows from Sophocles occur in the final act 'Oedipus Rex'. The other acts reveal the details of the backstory, of the events that unfold in the telling. Neither adaptation seeks to capitalise on the tension generated by Sophocles in his gradual delivery of the clues to the murder mystery and masterful unravelling of the tragic plot. Cocteau deals with them and their information swiftly, using other measures to briefly prolong Oedipus' state of ignorance, Cixous chooses not to deal with them at all, or only to deal with them abstractly. The enquiries he makes all occur offstage and outside the relevance of the play. Cocteau's play is the opposite, and the first three acts of the *Infernal Machine* are crammed with action, snatches of the lives of the characters all happening in quick succession almost on top of each other. Then there is a pause before the last act, a seventeen year pause. At which point time

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<sup>396</sup> Segal (1993:47).

catches up with them, and the jokes and Freudian slips of the preceding acts are all show to be quite painfully true.

This final act is just nine pages long. It opens with the Voice announcing the great plague as 'the first set-back to that renowned good luck of Oedipus'.<sup>397</sup> But there is no mention of Creon being sent to Delphi for an answer, no mention of the price to win respite from the plague. In a newly dressed stage square - now representing an inner courtyard with Oedipus enclosed by walls and Jocasta's window open at the top of the centre wall<sup>398</sup> - the story is picked up at the end of a truncated Messenger's speech, and Oedipus is already in an argument with Tiresias who understandably disapproves of his joyous reaction to the news of his father's death. Jocasta chimes in to agree with Tiresias, but Oedipus is undeterred, and blithely explains that he left so long ago that he no longer has any particular feelings for his father. And so, the next piece of information is revealed, the messenger, apologising for not starting 'at the end of the story',<sup>399</sup> tells him of his adoption.

At this point Tiresias attempts to halt Oedipus in his questioning, something which always brings out the nasty streak out in him.<sup>400</sup> He presses onwards, ignoring further cautions by Jocasta, and finding himself reminded of his encounter at the cross roads exclaims:

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<sup>397</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 144 (FT 109) 'le premier échec à cetee fameuse chance d'Œdipe'.

<sup>398</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 145 (FT 111) Having used Picasso (he painted a simple, violet-blue backdrop with masks of men, women, children and Doric columns) and Chanel for the 1922 performance of *Antigone* at the Théâtre de l'Atelier, he employed the collaborative efforts of Christian Bérard for the *Infernal Machine*, who created a 'azure background and a small stage in the centre of the forestage draped in blue; the dominant colours of rocks and columes were white, grey and brown; the room for the wedding-night scene was draped in red.' **Sprigge & Kihm** (1968: 126), **Brown** (1969: 331).

<sup>399</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 146 (FT 112) 'J'aurais dû commencer par la fin.'

<sup>400</sup> **Sophocles**, *OT* (176-185) 302-462, cf. **Girard** (1972: 68-9).

There's the stuff to make up a magnificent catastrophe. That traveller must have been my father. 'Heavens, my father!'<sup>401</sup>

In keeping with the many anachronisms of the play, here, the 'Heavens my father' replaces Sophoclean horror with deliberate parody of 'Heavens, my husband!' from a bedroom farce.<sup>402</sup> Cocteau keeps Oedipus circling the truth, brushing against it, as if he subconsciously know where it was, whilst 'the omniscient audience can only wonder when the shock of contact will come.'<sup>403</sup> The still unwitting Oedipus, finding Jocasta has vanished - she '*disappears as if drowning*'<sup>404</sup> - accuses her of sulking over the humble origins of his birth. Creon now enters the fray only to be attacked by Oedipus for trying to usurp his crown, Oedipus discovers his dead wife and Creon brings on the Shepherd. Again, the arrival of the Shepherd and the questions asked of him are not motivated by Oedipus' desire for the truth. Creon has known for some time of the 'sordid drama of which I have last uncovered the plot'<sup>405</sup> and Tiresias encourages him to let all his information out.

But Oedipus stills fails to realise the magnitude of his crimes. Cocteau extends the moment of Oedipus' realisation that his wife is his mother by means of the story that in Sophocles, gives Oedipus his first hint that he might be the regicide.<sup>406</sup> He moves the telling of this story to the third act, to be told in the bedchamber on Jocasta and Oedipus' wedding night. The ugly scars on his feet prompt Jocasta to tell him a story about her

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<sup>401</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 147 (FT 114) 'Voilà de quoi fabriquer une magnifiqye catastrophe. Ce voyageur devait être mon père. «Ciel! Mon père!»'.

<sup>402</sup> **Burian** (1997b: 252), **Norrish** (1988: 20).

<sup>403</sup> **Lattimore** (1968: 42).

<sup>404</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 147 (FT114) 'Elle disparaît, comme on se noie.'

<sup>405</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 149 (FT 117) 'd'un drama abject dont j'ai fini par découvrir l'intrigue.'

<sup>406</sup> **Sophocles**, *OT* (201) 707-725.

foster-sister, her linen-maiden. A girl who worshipped her husband, and fell pregnant at the same time she did. The story, transparent as it is, dupes Oedipus completely. He makes a comic fool out of himself in the last act, in his complete inability to join up the dots. Tiresias has to reveal for him that the man at the cross roads was King Laius, and even then he still insists that this linen-maiden must be his mother. Finally the shepherd tells him of his role in the affair, leaving Oedipus with the words:

I have killed whom I should not. I have married whom I should not. I have perpetuated what I should not. All is clear...<sup>407</sup>

And now that it is all clear, now that he at last sees what it is he has done, he leaves the stage again and proceeds to blind himself with the brooch which has been waiting all play to strike him. We now hear the voice of the young Antigone, calling out for her uncle and crying that mummy wont move and daddy is poking his eyes out with her brooch pin.<sup>408</sup> But Tiresias will not allow Creon to help, his role at this point corresponds to that of the Voice, both in sentiment and style. He calls the unfolding events 'the finishing touches to a masterpiece of horror', and cautions Creon against casting across it a single shadow of himself.<sup>409</sup> The play closes with a blind Oedipus led by the ghost of his mother and his daughter out through the town, with Antigone and her mother speaking as one as they count the steps of the terrace.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 150 (FT 118) 'J'ai tué celui qu'il ne fallait pas. J'ai époisé celle qu'il ne fallait pas. J'a perpétué ce qu'il ne fallait pas. Lumière est fait...'

<sup>408</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 150 (FT 118).

<sup>409</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 151 (FT 199) 'un chef-d'œuvre d'horreur s'achève.'

<sup>410</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 153 (FT 123).

Cocteau's explosion of Sophocles' play, rather than slowing the pace of the play by showing the incidences of Jocasta's and Oedipus' lives accelerates it. Most particularly in the final act, everything happens apace, and in this version, it is not the enquiries of Oedipus that push the actions forward, but the power of the gods, who have been planning this trap for a long while. The arrival and revelations of the messenger from Corinth are replaced by a brief explanation by the Voice, and wherever possible Cocteau cuts out speeches and shortens exchanges. It heaps comedy on the length of time it takes Oedipus to grasp the truth of what has happened. Only in the third act does Oedipus display his customary drive to discover the truth. Speaking with Tiresias on his wedding night, Oedipus tries to 'read by force the secrets [Tiresias'] diseased eyes hold',<sup>411</sup> and in punishment for this sacrilege he is rendered temporarily sightless. But this foreshadowing of his blindness doesn't help Oedipus to realise his metaphorical blindness any more than Jocasta's exclamations about the dangers of her jewellery. Cocteau's Oedipus stumbles upon the truth of his life much later than his counterpart in Sophocles. He presses it from the unwilling Shepherd, not as part of a desperate bid to exonerate himself, but rather because he is wholly confused as to what is going on. Cocteau makes his Oedipus look quite wonderfully daft.

The resetting of the pace and order of the events is a clever presentation of the play. It leaves Oedipus so far behind everyone else. It is not his hunting for the truth, driving onward the investigation, but a simple culmination of events that allows the truth to come to light. The truth is foisted upon him by others who have all known parts of the secret for a while. Even Creon has had his ear to the ground, though it is only now his sister is dead that he has broken his silence. Cocteau develops the character of

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<sup>411</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 132 (FT 88) 'Vous avez voulu lire de force ce que contiennent mes yeux malades'. cf. **Knowles** (1967: 55), **Guicharnaud** (1969: 54).

Oedipus throughout these three scenes as of one being spoilt and with an overly well developed opinion of himself. He is all postures and no achievement, when he 'kills' the Sphinx he debates a number of ways of carrying the body, the prize he won without having to try, before settling on throwing it across his shoulder like Hercules with his lion.<sup>412</sup> The only honest and uncalculated (by either Oedipus or the gods) action Oedipus makes in the play is that of poking his eyes out. The free act of punishment and liberation Oedipus makes in Sophocles remains, though he no longer makes the statement that the deed belonged to him alone, that he 'did it all myself!'<sup>413</sup> Indeed, as an weapon of fate, it was the brooch pin that did it.<sup>414</sup> As Jocasta says:

Would you believe it? That wicked scarf and that horrible brooch! Hadn't I said so time and again? <sup>415</sup>

The long and trailing scarf, like the one that snapped Isadora Duncan's neck in 1927,<sup>416</sup> tries to strangle her a few times during the play. Both the young soldier and Tiresias stand on the end of it during the first act. But it is an object that she dare not be separated from, though it catches in trees and gets caught in her carriage wheels,<sup>417</sup> just like Isadora and her sports car. During this first act, she is also led to exclaim that she couldn't possibly leave a brooch at home that 'strikes everybody's eye'.<sup>418</sup> Cocteau

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<sup>412</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 125 (FT 73). cf. Knox (1988: 6).

<sup>413</sup> **Sophocles**, *OT* (241) 1331-1332.

<sup>414</sup> **Guicharnaud** (1969:49), **Cocteau**, introduction to *Orpheus*, 28 'even familiar objects have a suspicious air'.

<sup>415</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM* 152 (FT 122) 'Crois tu! Cette méchante écharpe et cette affreuse broche! L'avais-je assez prédit.'

<sup>416</sup> **Brown** (1969: 309).

<sup>417</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 93 (FT 22).

<sup>418</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 102 (FT 35).

throws in such references with abandon, never losing a chance to undercut any tragic sentiment that might be developing on stage.

Cixous' play opens with Jocasta begging Oedipus to 'Stay for me', to 'not go outside', 'not answer anyone', to hear nothing but her voice.<sup>419</sup> Oedipus has yet to go outside and enter the world of Sophocles' play, to answer the pleas of the plague ridden citizens, to set in motion the events that will take him away from her. The events of Sophocles' play do happen, but they do so in the background; Tiresias arrives, Oedipus discovers that he killed his father and finally he discovers that Jocasta was his mother before she was his wife. But their entrance into the play is one through language. Oedipus enters the seventh movement with the words 'What if I told her',<sup>420</sup> he has discovered the murder of Laius to be himself, but he now has to find a way to speak this in words. He and Jocasta sing with the chorus a circling song, returning and separating from each other, coming close to the secrets, yet being unable to speak them - for to voice them would be to make them real.

Five pages later the story of the cross roads and the fight emerge and Oedipus finally asks, 'What if I were to tell you? If he had been? . . . Your husband?'<sup>421</sup> Jocasta answers 'Do not say "Your husband"', a line which repeats and echoes throughout the text, each time ending with a new word. She tells him nothing will break her love for him, the names of previous relationships are not relevant to their love.<sup>422</sup> She refuses to let such revelations have an impact on her. Her understanding of the events that will unfold before her is established in the opening movement, she asks Oedipus to stay for

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<sup>419</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 254-255.

<sup>420</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 270.

<sup>421</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 275.

<sup>422</sup> Freeman (1998: 243).

‘not even for an hour, only for a time... Time without length, barely a minute’ and calls him ‘my lover son, my husband son’.<sup>423</sup> Like Anouilh’s repeat Antigone, she has done all this before. She knows that the city will call him away and that she will lose him.

Set against a muted background of Sophocles’ story, Cixous gives Jocasta new material to work with. She uncovers the story of Menoeceus, Jocasta’s father,<sup>424</sup> and amalgamates it with the story of Creon’s son Menoeceus, who sacrificed himself to save the city, by throwing himself from the city walls into the dragon’s lair to appease the wrath of Ares.<sup>425</sup> The second, third and fourth movements are concerned with the telling by Jocasta of the night he left her, when she saw him turn away, of the moment ‘between the moment before death and the moment of death’,<sup>426</sup> of his answering the call of the city instead of her own.<sup>427</sup> This moment that the child Jocasta found herself trapped in, ‘suspended between his life and his death, a death that will never be real to me’,<sup>428</sup> watching the man she loves turn away and ‘to be unable to call you back to me’<sup>429</sup> is repeated like a never ending loop in the play. Twice, the city has called, and twice she watches her kin turn away.

In Freud’s theory, the girl, having been castrated by her discovery that she lacks a penis, turns away from the mother (indeed, Jocasta’s mother is not mentioned once in the play, despite the emphasis on her father) and towards the father. In doing so, ‘she

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<sup>423</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 256.

<sup>424</sup> Euripides, *Phoenician Women*, 10.

<sup>425</sup> Euripides, *Phoenician Women*, 903-959. cf. Morford & Lenardon (1971: 297), Gantz (1993 vol 2: 519).

<sup>426</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 260.

<sup>427</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 264, cf. Freeman (1998: 243).

<sup>428</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 260.

<sup>429</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 260.

assumes the 'normal' passive feminine sexuality, desiring the father to give her a baby as a substitute for a penis'.<sup>430</sup> But Jocasta watches her father die, and with it she loses her place in society under the Freudian framework of patriarchal dominance. Jocasta rejects paternal law and by doing so rejects reality,<sup>431</sup> choosing instead to create her own quasi-dreamlike world and live apart from the rules governing the rest of society.

Oedipus, unlike Jocasta's father, tries to turn, but he is unable to do. Jocasta has been able to turn away from the sexual norms delineated by a patriarchal society, founded on the need to trade women outside of the family and maintained through a language that has man at the centre.<sup>432</sup> She creates for herself the world as she wishes it to be through her use of language. Through naming, she creates things anew, and she rejects the fundamental taboo and refuses to accept incest as wrong.<sup>433</sup> Oedipus finds himself incapable of doing this, he is unable to redefine himself as something other than Oedipus. Miller states that it is 'the acquisition of language' rather than the Oedipus' quest for self-discovery that forms 'what might be called the "plot"'.<sup>434</sup> Finally, after Jocasta's voice burns out in death, Oedipus is able to return, and haltingly, finds new words. His eyes closed he sees them, rising in each other,<sup>435</sup> he speaks in terms of 'us' and 'we' and 'our'. Oedipus does not blind himself with a brooch pin and exile himself from his city, but through language he changes his sight, he blinds himself to the patriarchal society that finds it wrong, exiling himself from community to find freedom in his union with his dead wife.

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<sup>430</sup> **Morris** (1993: 97).

<sup>431</sup> **Morris** (1993: 98).

<sup>432</sup> **Skinner** (1993: 125), **Sellers** (1991: 15-19).

<sup>433</sup> **Miller** (1985: 209).

<sup>434</sup> **Miller** (1985: 209).

<sup>435</sup> **Cixous**, *Le Nom*, 325.

## II

### THE SINGING OF THE CHORUS LINE

The chorus represents a huge creative question and as I have shown in the previous chapters, they can be ‘an extraordinary and thrilling theatrical resource’<sup>436</sup> And though the rules governing the chorus in Greek tragedy are hardly naturalistic, there is always a reason for their presence, some connection to the people, place or events about unfold. In some instances their presence in conversations that might more naturally be held in private are directly explained. For instance Oedipus’ response to Creon’s request to reveal his news from Delphi inside, that he may ‘Speak out, speak to us all.’<sup>437</sup> But the naturalistic approach to explaining their role in the proceedings doesn’t even begin to explain their role in the play. They interact with the speaking characters both through their leader and as a group, generally representative of a section of ‘the collective citizen body’,<sup>438</sup> and as both they are able to express anxiety, encouragement, disapproval and advice. They can be interpreted as being the voice of reason, of moral guidance,<sup>439</sup> with the ability to set the ‘truth’ that they represent against

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<sup>436</sup> Goldhill (2007: 79)

<sup>437</sup> Sophocles, *OT*, (163), 93-94.

<sup>438</sup> Longo (1990: 17).

<sup>439</sup> Burton (1980:138-185).

the ‘excess’ of the heroic figure.<sup>440</sup> But they are also able to address the audience and give lyrical odes celebrating the gods. Their place is one that straddles the world of the audience and the stage, they are both ‘collective’ and ‘other’,<sup>441</sup> and the rules that govern them are not the same as those that shape the roles of the lead speaking characters.

That the chorus are able to straddle the worlds of audience and stage can be a hugely attractive idea, and it is one Cocteau takes notice of. Strictly speaking there is no chorus in the *Infernal Machine*, but there is a partial substitute in ‘The Voice’.<sup>442</sup> The Voice, played by Cocteau,<sup>443</sup> introduces the play, outlines the plot and sets the tone of the piece. He continues to introduce each act, but does not interfere any further in the progress of the play. He also forms the only constant in a play that persists in reinventing itself for each act: ‘it is the Voice which holds it all together’.<sup>444</sup> He talks directly to the audience, addressing them as ‘Spectator’,<sup>445</sup> and he also makes the sort of comments about the nature of Greek tragedy and the trap that has been set for Oedipus that Anouilh couldn’t help but be inspired with when writing his *Antigone* years later.

Spectator, see, wound up to the full so that the spring will slowly unwind the whole length of a human life, one of the most perfect machines constructed by the infernal gods for the mathematical destruction of a mortal.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Gould (1996: 219).

<sup>441</sup> Gould (1996: 219).

<sup>442</sup> Landers (1967: 124)

<sup>443</sup> Landers (1967: xx), Brown (1969: 331).

<sup>444</sup> Oxenhandler (1984: 141).

<sup>445</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 84, 105 (FT 9, 45).

<sup>446</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 84 (FT 6) ‘Regarde, spectateur, remontée à bloc, de telle sorte que le ressort se déroule avec lenteur tout le long d’une vie humaine, une des plus parfaites machines construites par les dieux infernaux pour l’anéantissement mathématique d’un mortel.’

The audience are spectators in this, the sport of the gods; beings who only really enjoy themselves when their victim falls from a great height.<sup>447</sup> In Sophocles' play, the chorus give us to understand that their belief in the existence of the gods is subject to their ability to see the future.<sup>448</sup> But their enjoyment of it or otherwise and personal investment in Oedipus' downfall is not questioned. We, however, watch with dreadful amusement as the characters in this irreverent play are lead on a merry dance to destruction. In fact, such stress is put on the caprices of the gods and the demands of destiny that Oedipus' tragic heroism is completely subsumed to Cocteau's thrall to mechanical victimisation.<sup>449</sup> Despite the Voice not involving himself in the action on stage in the same manner the chorus do, he is not without inspiration in the Sophoclean original. The chorus talk of 'Apollo the son of the Father' lunging on him, 'lightning bolts afire! And the grim unerring Furies closing for the kill.'<sup>450</sup> They sing also of the need for arrogant men to be brought down:

But if any man comes striding, high and mighty  
in all he says and does,  
no fear of justice, no reverence,  
for the temples of the gods—  
let a rough doom tear him down,  
replay his pride, breakneck ruinous pride!<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 84 (FT 6).

<sup>448</sup> Sophocles, *OT*, (210) 895-910.

<sup>449</sup> Guicharnaud (1969:54).

<sup>450</sup> Sophocles, *OT*, (186), 470-475.

<sup>451</sup> Sophocles, *OT*, (210), 883-891.

Though there are evidently some roots of Cocteau's Voice to be found in the lyrical understanding of the situation that Sophocles' chorus provide. There is also a second factor of inspiration and borrowing, Cocteau's own *Oedipus Rex*, his Opera-Oratorio in two acts.<sup>452</sup> A collaboration with Stravinsky, most of the text was translated into Latin with only the words of the narrator remaining in French. This narrator too addresses his audience as 'Spectators!'<sup>453</sup> and talks of the trap the 'watchful forces from beyond the realm of death' set for Oedipus on the day of his birth.<sup>454</sup> Just as the opening of the *Infernal Machine* plays on the start of *Hamlet*, the opening scene of his *Oedipus Rex* too has a slightly Shakespearian character. Like the sonnet that opens *Romeo and Juliet*, here the narrator with no explained attachment to the piece lays out the traffic of the stage.

The development of the The Voice of the *Infernal Machine* can also be seen in another of Cocteau's Greek adaptations, his 1922 production of *Antigone*. This was his first attempt at 'restitching the hide of classical Greek tragedy, and setting it to the rhythm of our age'.<sup>455</sup> In his later years he thought paradoxical that he should have written *Antigone* before his *Oedipus*,<sup>456</sup> but in it we see the start of the journey by which the chorus of Greek tragedy becomes the hidden voice of the *Infernal Machine*. The stage directions read:

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<sup>452</sup> Composed with Stravinsky and first performed at the Kroll Oper, Berlin, in 1927. cf. **Bauschatz** (1991).

<sup>453</sup> **Cocteau**, *Oedipus Rex*, 67.

<sup>454</sup> cf. **Knowles** (1967: 54).

<sup>455</sup> **Brown** (1969:257-8).

<sup>456</sup> **Brown** (1969:310-11); But Cocteau found an, 'elegant analogy of his method in the double pyramid of Dashur, where Egyptian architects created a kind of temporal chain by using the height of one mausoleum as the apothegm of a larger mausoleum enclosing it.'

The CHORUS and its leader are concentrated into a single voice which speaks very loudly and quickly as if reading a newspaper article. This voice issues from a hole in the centre of the scenery.<sup>457</sup>

This single chorus makes comments of a similar, though less developed, nature to the Voice of the *Infernal Machine*, with lines like: 'I wonder if this isn't a plot hatched by the gods.'<sup>458</sup> The chorus fills a number of capacities, creating the 'shifting voice' essential to the dynamic of a chorus<sup>459</sup>; it narrates, 'Here is poor Ismene in tears. Grief disfigures her and waters her cheeks';<sup>460</sup> it engages in the conversations on stage:

**Chorus:** What! Are you condemning Ismene as well as Antigone?

**Creon:** No. Not her who has not touched the corpse. Your remark is just.<sup>461</sup>

And at other times, the chorus performs functions expected in the Greek chorus: they talk of other heroes and gods and compare Antigone's death to Danaë and the son of Dryas.<sup>462</sup>

But it is the narrator of *Oedipus Rex* who prefigures the Voice most clearly. His words in the last scene are the kernels of all the theatrics to be seen in *The Infernal Machine*. Just after Jocasta has just left, upon hearing from the messenger of Oedipus' adoption, the Chorus says the following:

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<sup>457</sup> Cocteau, *Antigone*, in *Four Plays* (1962: 11).

<sup>458</sup> Cocteau, *Antigone*, 19.

<sup>459</sup> Goldhill (2007: 78) 'The chorus's ability to shift between a more naturalistic engagement with the action, and a more abstract reflection'.

<sup>460</sup> Cocteau, *Antigone*, 19.

<sup>461</sup> Cocteau, *Antigone*, 23.

<sup>462</sup> Cocteau, *Antigone*, 25.

This Oedipus, so proud of understanding everything, is in the trap. He is the only one not to realise it.'

A final piece of theatrics is left for the end, the narrator renames himself 'Epilogue' and announces that:

The King is caught. He wants to be seen by all—to put on show the foul monster, incestuous, parricide, mad. He is driven out. He is driven out with great tenderness. Farewell, farewell, poor Oedipus! Farewell, Oedipus, we loved you.<sup>463</sup>

The narration of the final act, aside from the reference to the chorus, could almost be a blow for blow account of the final act of the *Infernal Machine*. There are certain dissimilarities, for instance the inclusion of Tiresias. But the breakneck pace of the action and the general tone of the joke being on Oedipus are alike in both. Of course the *Infernal Machine* ends with the ghost of Jocasta walking with Antigone and Oedipus, and as mother to them both, guiding them down to the terrace and away from the city, an epilogue well received by reviewers for its 'tip of the hat to motherhood'.<sup>464</sup> And the operatic *Oedipus Rex* closes with the Latin singing of the Messenger and the chorus in their magnificent costumes.

Perhaps it is that a full chorus might have tipped the balance too far and been just one too many for the *Infernal Machine* to hold. It is a play already overflowing with allusions, references and homages to other plays, literary forms and real life. And a full chorus would also have proved problematic as it would have undercut the nature of the

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<sup>463</sup> Cocteau, *Oedipus Rex*, 74.

<sup>464</sup> Brown (1969: 311).

Voice. Miller suggest that the three cautious soldiers of Act One form a brief chorus,<sup>465</sup> but they converse with one another, and they only exist for an act. We do hear of the young soldier again though, in Act Three he is asleep at his post outside Jocasta's window and fails to stop the drunk from singing his cruel Flaubertian ditty about women who marry younger men.<sup>466</sup> The Voice, as played by Cocteau himself, is both the overriding voice of the play and the poet. Like Heaney's *The Cure*, and Anouilh's *Antigone*, where the voices of the chorus represent the voice of the poet, although Cocteau's Voice is not a chorus per se, it functions as a privileged voice within the text.

It is difficult to describe the role of the chorus in *The Name of Oedipus*, partly because it is difficult to qualify any of the roles. Together they work like a choir, and even without music they chase each other's melodies, repeating, echoing and altering each others words. But it is possible to tease apart the strands, to see the relationships of this song, Jocasta's song of the forbidden body. The chorus take a secondary role to the ultimate centre of this show, Jocasta and, to a lesser extent, Oedipus. At times they ask questions, and at others they provide another point from which to start from, nudging Jocasta and Oedipus into their next lyrical outburst. They take turns with Jocasta and Oedipus in telling the story, narrating out the movements between love and death, interpreting the words and forming them into a tale.

The narrating facet of the chorus acts in a way that is a reminiscent of the *Antigone Legend* that Brecht wrote to aid his actors rehearse. As Jocasta is trying to explain the moment and the significance of the loss of her father, the chorus say:

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<sup>465</sup> Miller (1985: 207).

<sup>466</sup> Brown (1969: 310), Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 305.

When she heard how the city  
Had called him out  
In a low voice, had spoken his name  
In a trembling voice  
Of love, of shyness,  
she suffered.<sup>467</sup>

The chorus are able, and have been able to see Jocasta in a way that the audience is unable to. They have seen her watch her father walk towards his death and the crisis this wrought in her. Jocasta tells us what happened in her words, but the chorus' telling gives us a slightly different perspective, a perspective outside of herself.

Freeman writes that Jocasta in her refusal of the incest taboo, is an enemy of the 'society personified by Tiresias and the chorus.'<sup>468</sup> But this cannot be the case, the chorus, and Tiresias, and sometimes both together, support Jocasta, holding up her words as she comes to her end. In places all three speak as one, and words that resonate so closely can surely not be the enemies of one another, and in her closing moments Jocasta asks for a song and the chorus encourage Tiresias to sing it. Their understanding of Jocasta and her unlawful love is not complete, but neither is it alien to them, they never express shock or awe, but keep singing, questioning and narrating the actions of Jocasta of Oedipus. In other places they actively support Jocasta, they urge Oedipus to 'listen to her', listen to Jocasta and stay away from the city, to stay away from questioning. Miller also questions Tiresias' autonomy from the chorus.<sup>469</sup> In Sophocles, he is almost the ultimate outsider, blind, living beyond the city and seeing of the future.

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<sup>467</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 261.

<sup>468</sup> Freeman (1998: 245).

<sup>469</sup> Makward & Millar (1994: 250).

But here his relationship to Jocasta is much closer, as indeed it is in Cocteau's production, and though he is quite abrupt in his interactions with Oedipus, he is tender in his words to Jocasta.

### III

#### **Fate, the Gods and death**

Fate in *Oedipus* is shown to be, more than in almost any other play, inescapable. The separate evasive manoeuvres made by Laius, Jocasta and Oedipus are all shown to have been futile, they are caught in an eternal catch 22. But Sophocles' play is not a 'tragedy of fate', that which was fated has already come to pass. The events that comprise *Oedipus* are not ones already prophesied, neither Jocasta's suicide nor the blinding of Oedipus are mentioned as fated during the play, although the story of Jocasta's death was an established part of the myth.<sup>470</sup> The true catastrophe of Oedipus is that he discovers his own identity, and for this 'he is the first and last responsible.'<sup>471</sup> Cocteau and Cixous both deal with the ideas of fate in manners quite different to Sophocles. Cocteau is completely enthralled by the mechanics of fate, of the means employed in order to close the trap on Oedipus. He side-steps the issue of why Laius was doomed to have a son that would kill him, as does Cixous, but neither is it a question Sophocles addresses in his *Oedipus*.

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<sup>470</sup> **Homer**, *Odyssey*, 11.271-280, **Rieu** (1946: 147).

<sup>471</sup> **Knox** (1998: 6).

The arbitrariness of fate is something that Cocteau plays upon throughout his play to create comic effects. Fate is characterised in a manner similar to that later employed by Anouilh for his *Antigone*. It is a fate that ‘has no explanatory function or value; it serves primarily to create a metatragic irony, a counterforce that outweighs rational choice and defeats good intentions.’<sup>472</sup> However, Cocteau has a series of gods pulling the strings whereas they are remarkably absent in Anouilh’s version. But the nature of fate is essentially synonymous with that of the gods, they are there, and they are absolute and they are beyond us mortals. Anouilh confines himself to using the chorus as a mouthpiece through which to inform the audience of the nature of the trap his characters have fallen into, but in his play, the theatrical rules governing the stage world remain essentially the same throughout. Cocteau’s play comprises ‘four acts in which are four distinct plays’,<sup>473</sup> each with its own slightly bizarre moments and tangential thoughts. Cocteau fills his world to the brim, pulling off pieces of bravura, as the reviewer from *Figaro* puts it ‘like a magician drawing brilliant baubles out of his hat.’<sup>474</sup> Cocteau utilises the Voice to explain some of the situation, but he leaves it to the enigmatic Anubis to inform us just how deep the trap goes. This trap is one that has been set long ago by a force way above his pay grade. The Sphinx complains that she has had ‘enough of killing, enough of dealing out death’,<sup>475</sup> and pretends that that the last trumpet has been called, and the gates of Thebes closed so she can be free for the night. Anubis’ reply is as follows:

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<sup>472</sup> Burian (1997b: 253).

<sup>473</sup> Sprigge & Kihm (1968: 125) Cocteau writing in *Echo*, 11.4.1934.

<sup>474</sup> Brown (1969:311).

<sup>475</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 105 (FT 46) ‘J’en ai assez tuer. J’en ai assez de donner la mort.’

We must obey. Mystery has its mysteries, the gods have their gods. We have ours, they have theirs. That's what is called infinity.<sup>476</sup>

They are under orders to be there, and to be seen in the guises they are. Cocteau might be a master puppeteer, but here he can only do what he does best, which is to maniacally decorate this trap, adorning it like his best tapestries. It is a trap that has in some respects been forever in the making, handed down by a being far beyond our knowledge and growing more powerful with the centuries since its conception and the innumerable versions and tellings it has lived through.

The poet elucidates this trap, their power is in the telling and as Cocteau posits through Anubis and Nemesis: the power to create the trap is one far exceeding the poet, despite the seemingly contradictory fact that it has been the poets that have created it through the telling since time immemorial. The power of the fated trap is that it fixes the ending, meaning the flexibility of Greek tragedy is in the middle not the end,<sup>477</sup> and this is perhaps why Cocteau chooses to expand the other stories of the play and contract the events that comprise Sophocles' play to the short last act. With fewer set facts to work from, Cocteau is free to write the events without compromise. Anubis demonstrates Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx using one of Cocteau's favourite motifs:

*[Holding up the Sphinx's dress]* Look at the folds in this cloth. Press them together.

Now if you pierce this bundle with a pin, remove the pin, smooth the cloth till all trace

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<sup>476</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 106 (FT 46) 'Obéissons. Le mystère a ses mystères. Les dieux possèdent leurs dieux. Nous avons les nôtres. Ils ont les leurs. C'est ce qui s'appelle l'infini.'

<sup>477</sup> **Lowe** (2000: 158).

of the old crease disappears, do you think a simple peasant would believe that the innumerable holes recurring at intervals result from a single thrust of a pin?<sup>478</sup>

This pierced cloth symbolises the life of Oedipus and his family. The episodes in his life that mark him. We care not for his actions at either the court of Corinth or at Thebes, though Oedipus give a little background on his behaviour there. It is the points at which the cloth is pierced we are interested in, and these are the episodes displayed before us on the platform in the centre of the stage. Cocteau's fondness for 'demonstrating existence' with this particular illusion<sup>479</sup> makes us wonder whether he had written the role of Anubis as himself. It is the enigmatic character of Anubis who provides us with the most information on the infernal machine that runs the show. The Jackal headed god of the dead has been sent watch over the Sphinx, or rather Nemesis, in the guise of the Sphinx, to ensure that Oedipus walks into his trap. Nemesis, or the Sphinx, fulfils her role of the 'Tight-binder'<sup>480</sup> with a talent for composing spell-binding songs;<sup>481</sup>

And I speak, I work, I wind, I unwind, I calculate, I meditate, I weave, I winnow, I knit, I plait, I cross, I go over it again and again, I tie and untie and tie again, retaining the tightest knots that later I'll have to untie against for you on pain of death; I pull tight, I loosen, I make mistakes, I go back, I hesitate, I correct, entangle, disentangle, unlace, lace up, begin anew...<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 121 (FT 68) 'Regardez les plis de cette étoffe. Pressez-les les uns contre les autres. Et maintenant, si vous traversez cette masse d'une épingle, si vous enlevez l'épingle, si vous lissez l'étoffe jusqu'à faire disparaître toute trace des anciens plis, pensez-vous qu'un nigaud de campagne puisse croire que les innombrables trous qui se répètent de distance résultent d'un seul coup d'épingle?'

<sup>479</sup> **Brown** (1969:331).

<sup>480</sup> **Onians** (1951: 369), cf. **Brody** (1985: 36-37).

<sup>481</sup> **Brody** (1985: 37).

<sup>482</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 119 (FT 65) 'Et je parle, je travaille, je dévide, je déroule, je calcule, je médite, je tresse, je vanna, je tricote, je natte, je croise, je passe, je repasse, je noue et dénoue et renoue...'

She binds her victims in words, immobilising them, before asking her riddle and watching Anubis take off their heads. But the Sphinx is reluctant this evening, and wishing to fall in love, allows Oedipus to defeat her. If he is manipulated by chance and destiny then so is Nemesis, this is a event orchestrated by infinite gods. But everything is not left in the hands of the gods, in the closing moment of his play, Cocteau again establishes the role of the poet, and of that unquantifiable power of fame. Tiresias tells Creon to let Oedipus leave and take Antigone with him, for they now belong to the 'people, the poets and the pure at heart.'<sup>483</sup> Creon replies:

**Creon:** And even supposing they do leave the town, who will have them, who will look after them?

**Tiresias:** Fame.

**Creon:** You mean shame, dishonour....

**Tiresias:** Who knows? <sup>484</sup>

The fates that govern Cixous' play also share two aspects of similarity with Anouilh's *Antigone*, but they are not the same details Anouilh inherits from Cocteau. Antigone's death is a little like Jocasta's death, it is not the finality of the myth - Antigone's death was never as fixed as the fall of Troy - but the perpetuation of Sophocles' play that locks their fates. Jocasta has lived this death before, she knows what is happening and that she will be unable to call Oedipus back to her, be unable to maintain their love after the revelation that bestows upon them new identities, new words that usurp the old ones. This Jocasta has a level of self-awareness of her position in myth and theatre, she knows that her creation, her entry on to the stage and into

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<sup>483</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 153 (122) 'Aux peuple, aux poètes, aux curs pur.'

<sup>484</sup> **Cocteau**, *IM*, 153 (123) '**C**: Et en admettant qu'ils sortent de la ville, qui s'en chargera, qui les recueillera?... **T**: La gloire. **C**: Dites plutôt le déshonneur, la honte... **T**: Qui sait?'

poetry, no matter how she creates that poetry, will always end in her death. But Cixous is not aiming to free her from fate, rather, she frees her from 'self-denial and the names and identities given her by men.'<sup>485</sup>

The second factor is that of names; Antigone is unable to escape from her destiny, so intertwined is it with her name, and the Oedipus of Cixous' play, remains the 'man of agony' given to us by Sophocles. Jocasta never names him as such, in fact she asks Tiresias to make sure he knows she doesn't blame or hate him,<sup>486</sup> but nonetheless his discovery leaves both in great pain. Neither of them are able to escape from their names, and that Oedipus will be unable to deny his name is hinted at in the title of the work. It is not just the letters of the word Oedipus he is named by, there is the literal translation of 'pierced feet' , and poetic lines such as 'man of agony', but also husband, father, son, king. Cixous' linguistic ability is at the central of her work, but their translation can disguise meanings hidden in the homophonic qualities and 'slipperiness of language'.<sup>487</sup>

The translation of the title provides a good example: *Le Nom d'Oedipe, chant du corps interdit*. In English the distinction between the pronunciation of 'name' and 'no' prohibits any slippage between them. However, the similarity of the sounds in French, 'nom' and 'non' allows for a slippage and a simultaneous meaning. The name of Oedipus also prescribes the no of Oedipus, his refusal, for just like Antigone, Oedipus' name delineates his possibilities.<sup>488</sup> His name obliges him to say no to Jocasta, no to their love, and no to the new life she is offering him beyond prescribed norms. Jocasta

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<sup>485</sup> **Foley** (2004: 86).

<sup>486</sup> **Cixous**, *Le Nom*, 314.

<sup>487</sup> **Makward & Miller** (1994: 147).

<sup>488</sup> **Makward & Miller** (1994: 149).

tries to develop a new system of signified and signifiers, but ultimately, neither her nor Cixous are able to undo the name of Oedipus. Neither have the power to change the ending of the play. But Oedipus is more than just the sum of his actions in this piece, unlike Cocteau, Cixous maintains the inquisitive force to his character, 'he had to call forth the horrors. To get close to them with open eyes... In total surrender to disaster',<sup>489</sup> it is in his blood, his nature is to search and to learn the history of his birth.<sup>490</sup>

#### IV

**If Feminism is the discovery of a new world, then mythology provides,  
in Cixous' metaphor, 'maps' by which the journey must be taken'**<sup>491</sup>

To discuss Cixous, we must look at her words. Her words in this play wrap around and bind you, a little like the Sphinx in *The Infernal Machine*. And this is poetry, Cixous isn't interested in the transparent though entertaining quips that come from Cocteau's heroes, each word has as many meanings as the reader can give it, and the passages of verse seem to mutate into different forms on each reading. The constant lyrical poetry means that each passage is as significant as any other, and there are few elements that stand out to be picked like the little gifts to the reviewer that Cocteau does so well. The following passage is one that contains many of the themes present in this

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<sup>489</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 295.

<sup>490</sup> Sophocles, *OT*, (224), 1082-1085.

<sup>491</sup> Zajko (2006: 128).

play, and I hope that by displaying it, I might be able to demonstrate both some of the particular beauty of this play as well as some the messages contained within it. The extract is from a movement near the centre of the play, Oedipus has discovered the secrets of his birth and is unable to come to Jocasta, to speak to her. The corresponding point in the Sophocles is the point at which Jocasta is most silent. Her exit is swift and final as she runs, terrified of what is being brought to light, from the stage.

**Jocasta:** I wanted to deliver him from names.

All the names that pass for gods.

That impose themselves by fraud,

That we adore and obey as “pure beings”:

Father, mother, truth, life, death, fault, debt, wife, truth

Husband, king, birth, what man can say which he is?

It is words that rule.

I wanted to free him.

There is a separation, a gap, between the world of reality and the world of language,<sup>492</sup> and Jocasta exists in this gap, in this dream state where words and their meanings mutate and separate from one another. She seeks to break their power<sup>493</sup> and to liberate Oedipus from names, from the signified concepts imposed by society, and most especially those that exist around the basic binary of male/female in which it is always the female who is reduced to the lesser role.<sup>494</sup> We all have so many names, I am daughter, sister, friend, lover, each defining my existence as related to some

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<sup>492</sup> **Morris** (1993: 97).

<sup>493</sup> **Freeman** (1998: 243).

<sup>494</sup> **Birkett** (1992: 174).

other.<sup>495</sup> Cixous' Jocasta seeks to go beyond these binaries creating a set of plurals, defining together not in opposition, to transcend the language that would impose a hierarchy of import, where to be mother-son trumps husband-wife like a royal flush to a full house.

The Greeks imposed further significant names on their men. Rather than having surnames, the more explicit 'son of' was the accepted form of full address. This is of particular consequence when applied to the problem of Oedipus. He quite literally doesn't know his own name. A name is the foundation of identity, and as an individual interacting with the world, he must begin again, once he accepts the new signifier of 'son of Laius'. Jocasta wants to share with him their 'true names',<sup>496</sup> but it is not until she is gone that he begins to understand how to escape from that what he has been named by other, and create new meanings and uses for signs.

Names are also of great importance in the other plays I have looked at. Even with him dead, Neoptolemus is bound to his father's name and the expectation of honour that accompanies it. Anouilh's Antigone ends her life because she is Antigone, and she cannot say anything but no. You cannot escape from names in Greek myth, and now, with another two millennia of repetition, to escape from them is tantamount to impossible. Of the six plays and their eponymous heroes, it is only Gide's Philoctetes that manages to escape his name and deny his myth. Like the escape that Cixous' Jocasta implores Oedipus to make, Philoctetes finds his liberation through language. His escape is the escape Jocasta urges, to forget the world, to stay away from those

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<sup>495</sup> **Morris** (1993: 104) 'Even before we are born.. language 'expects' us; we are already being positioned within its grid of difference as 'son' or 'daughter', 'boy' or 'girl'. To enter the symbolic order is to be placed in a restrictive and repressive subject/ed position within the structure of meaning encoding patriarchal law.'

<sup>496</sup> **Cixous**, *Le Nom*, 256.

that would name you. Philoctetes remains on the island and ceases to become, as there is no one to utter his name.

**Chorus:** And yet the father has died!

Which father?

What death?

**Jocasta:** As if there were only one death.

As if I had ever ceased dying!

As if I had not already lived this dying:

Have I not already lost this life?

**Chorus:** Already more than one death

Through exile. Through absence. Through forgetfulness.

What woman has not suffered these deaths.

Again, we are shown the merry-go-round the endless cycle of revision and repetition. Death in Greek tragedy is only as permanent as the night of performance, they start up alive again each day, ready to 'repeat themselves and their every last mistake'.<sup>497</sup> Cixous in her essay 'Enter the Theatre' recounts wondering as a child, 'Is there somewhere else, which can escape the infernal practice of repetition... then it is there that new worlds are written, dreamed, invented.'<sup>498</sup> The theatre is a world where repetition can be confronted and broken, but it is not the world of Greek tragedy. Certain cycles can be amended, changed and the fear that characterises both Jocasta's and Oedipus' opening verses have altered by the end of the play.<sup>499</sup> Jocasta dies,

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<sup>497</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, 1.

<sup>498</sup> Cixous (2004: 25).

<sup>499</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 253.

‘content at last’,<sup>500</sup> not hung by her own hand in terror, and Oedipus does not turn to self violence, but to the liberation of his psyche, escaping the binaries and reforming his nature as double sexed.

Jocasta, Tiresias and the chorus all have a position privileged over Oedipus. They understand what is happening, they understand the necessity of the vocalisation. They have been with her all along, comforting her behind the closed doors of the *skēnē*. Jocasta in particular understands her story, she wants to keep as many last moments with Oedipus as she can before she watches her life disintegrate. At the start of the play she begs Oedipus to stay, ‘but a moment... Profound enough, Present, ancient enough. So that our entire story may be relived in it.’<sup>501</sup>

Time is not a constant in this play, it does not march forward at the same relentless pace as Cocteau’s play, or indeed Sophocles’. For Jocasta it has now been ‘three weeks without a word’, but Oedipus is thinking ‘how brief life will have been’,<sup>502</sup> what she perceives is not the same as what he does. This is one of the few places in the play where a specific time is mentioned. For the rest of the time, the play seems to exist in a limbo, a stretched out moment unattached to the rhythms of day and night in the world.

The mention of ‘the father’ at this point is again bringing back the nature of her relationship to her father, and the nature of her relationship to his death. Because she wasn’t allowed to see the finality of it, she is stuck there, constantly reliving it. For

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<sup>500</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 319.

<sup>501</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 257.

<sup>502</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 394.

Cixous, 'the Theatre is by definition of the stage where the living meet and confront the dead, the forgotten and the forgetters, the buried and the ghosts, the present, the passing, the present past and the passed past.' it is a place in which the 'dead are not always as dead as we think nor the living as living as they think.'<sup>503</sup> In facing her father's death, she faces her own death, her loss of Oedipus, which in this world of fluctuating relationship essentially means his death.

Through exile, and through absence, through forgetfulness. Jocasta has been exiled from her world, because her world is Oedipus. She has been thrown beyond it, out of the castle but those who renamed Oedipus and stole him away from his place by her side. But each woman has also been exiled from common world. We have allowed ourselves to lose our true place, allowed ourselves to become exiled through the hierarchies in language, we have forgotten that we were once equal to men. We must speak, and reconstruct our language and by doing so change our forms.

**Chorus/**

**Tiresias:** *Do not say love,*

*Do not say mine, our,*

*My love, our room,*

*Our luck, the light of life*

*Do not say child, father, kin.*

*Let not the merciless,*

*Familiar words be heard.*

*What is done must not be said.*

*No longer say the delightful*

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<sup>503</sup> Cixous (2004: 28-29).

*Ancient words; spit them out.*

*What was done must be erased.*

*Buried*

*In silent sand.* <sup>504</sup>

Here we see at the end, in the voices of the understanding, not defying, chorus, the transition that we will witness at the end in the 'new language' Oedipus acquires. And in acquiring this language he goes from being uniquely male, to 'a dual-sexed person, psychologically bisexual, capable at last of speech'<sup>505</sup> Tiresias is of course frequently portrayed as hermaphroditic, physically dual sexed in the Greek myths, so his support for Jocasta in her attempt to escape from prescribed sexual norms is not altogether surprising.

'The merciless familiar words'; the words of Sophocles, the words that are always spoken in regard to Oedipus, the words of Jocasta, that would have been both written by and performed by a man. These are the familiar words, but they are not the words of this Jocasta, they must be replaced with new ones, new meanings, new perspectives on history. They call for child, father and kin, relationship and status words, to be buried, they no longer have any meaning in Jocasta's world. But they also stand at a point where these words can be interpreted as a tirade against Jocasta and her unholy love. What she has done transgresses so far that it must not be even said. Cixous doesn't try and impose a viewpoint on her reader. We are encouraged to respond to Jocasta and her song, but her point of view is not enforced upon us.

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<sup>504</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 294-297 (extracts from the eleventh movement).

<sup>505</sup> Miller (1985: 210).

## V

### Conclusion

These two plays are the most radical adaptations of the six. They are socially, and not politically minded like the two *Antigone*'s and Heaney's *Philoctetes*. Much less attention is played to where they are set, where, and why Thebes is, and the nature of their relationship with Sophocles is somewhat harder to untangle. None of these characters speak or act like their Sophoclean counterparts, and the progression of the plot is only loosely inspired by the events of *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

It is the voice of these plays that make them unique and interesting. Cocteau brings out his poetic voice through *The Voice*; hidden behind the scenes he is the 'infernal machine', 'present and in control throughout in the summing up and situating the play', dropping the hints of destiny that will realise themselves at the play's inevitable end.<sup>506</sup> Cixous' voice *is* the play, she is Jocasta, Oedipus, the Chorus, constantly breaking down and reforming the story; words, plot and subtext.

Though Cixous breaks the play down and rebuilds it around the stream of consciousness that is Jocasta, Jocasta herself can not escape her fate. She can escape from language and the names given to her, rewriting and remaking her story, but the end point is ultimately the same. Cixous writes that 'as I ran, searched, struggled, committed myself to action, something calm hollowed out in me, calm in opposition to

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<sup>506</sup> Miller (1985: 207).

dramatic, something with which there is no negotiation: since the tragic is, and since it is *implacable*, there is no decision that wins the day, it is unquestionable'<sup>507</sup> And Jocasta is calm at the end, calm and undramatic, untheatrical in comparison to Cocteau's Jocasta who is not silenced even in death.

A few character traits are left over from their Sophoclean inspiration. Cixous' Oedipus is unable to halt his search for the truth and repudiate his responsibility to the town. Oddly, though Cocteau's Oedipus says more of the things Sophocles' did, is further removed from character. He questions the messenger and shepherd on stage, gets angry with both Creon and Tiresias and briefly believes Jocasta is upset about him having a lowly birth. He is brash, headstrong, daft, and appears to care for little other than himself, hunting fame, though perhaps not the sort Tiresias credits to his name in the final lines. And like many of Cocteau's characters, these are borrowed lives, parodies lives, and they are perhaps 'nothing if not style, their authors signature.'<sup>508</sup>

Jocasta and her death are quite different in each play, and differ greatly from Sophocles. Jocasta's death in Cixous is one brought about by her separation from Oedipus, from her slowly falling silent. She refuses to kill herself to deny her sexual love for Oedipus as well as her maternal love, she sees no conflict between the two, though she doesn't blame Oedipus for being unable to move beyond it as she has. Cocteau on the other hand gives Jocasta a comic redemption. He has her kill her wife-self, such that her mother-self is able to return to Oedipus and comfort and guide him. Both playwrights give Jocasta a new relationship with Tiresias, common to both plays is his increased presence and he is there from the opening acts of both. He isn't sent for as

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<sup>507</sup> **Cixous** (2004: 26).

<sup>508</sup> **Brown** (1969: 208)

he is in Sophocles, but part of Jocasta's court, her closest advisor. In Cocteau's play, he is able to see Jocasta's ghost, though a little more faintly than Oedipus, because he loves her.<sup>509</sup> And it is a similar story in Cixous' play, Tiresias is able to see Jocasta in a way Oedipus is unable to because he is blinded by the problem of incest. The stage direction for the 14th movement read '*Tiresias at this time is {why?} a tall, trim, and handsome young man who seems to be drawn to her.*'<sup>510</sup> Oedipus is unable to return to Jocasta, but Tiresias never leaves her side.

Cocteau harnesses the people and the power of *Oedipus* to a comic force. He manages to stay just this side of comic farce, but creating a captivating tragicomedy. He shows us scenes that we have never seen before, the full run up to *Oedipus Rex*, which itself essentially a play in which the story is already over. Cixous' play I find hard to quantify, if Cocteau is showing us scenes we have not seen before, then Cixous is showing us words we have never heard before. Put together to create meanings that are fluid and unfixable, as opposed to the rigid forms of meaning present in other interpretations of the text. Both plays are bold and new, springing forth from the inter-war years and the French feminist rise of the seventies. Both bring colour and words into places previously dark and silent in our inheritance from Sophocles, trying to write 'History in which "there is still some blank space" - still some indetermination.'<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Cocteau, *IM*, 153 (120).

<sup>510</sup> Cixous, *Le Nom*, 313.

<sup>511</sup> Cixous (2004: 30).



Two photos from 1934 production of *La Machine Infernale* in Paris



## Here's to you, Dionysus

'Poetry allowed the god to speak'<sup>512</sup>

Although it is unrealistic to believe that there is a god of poetry, it is also difficult to believe that there is nothing divine about poetry. Each of these plays opens onto a fantasy land in which mythical heroes exist. No matter the angle they are approaching their task from, each poet acknowledges the history that has gone into the making of the characters and their stories. Each place and person has a rich, contradictory, fractured history, one that is both very real and quite intangible, and I have found it difficult to discuss Antigone, Creon, Odysseus, Oedipus, Jocasta and the other figures from these myths and plays as just 'characters'. It seems somewhat inappropriate to refer to them with a word that also designates a single letter.

Whether you would call them, life forces existing in a collective consciousness, signifiers imbued with a tremendous number of connotations or a series of memplexes, their possession of something beyond what is written on the page is not something any of these six authors would deny. Cixous calls them 'beings' whose 'presence around us is so strong and effective that the Greeks gave these presences proper names and the states of divine entities.'<sup>513</sup> However, should they have been left to live in Sophocles' text alone, they would have died by now, and they need to be re-written, as much as the author need to write them.

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<sup>512</sup> Heaney, *The Cure*, 2.

<sup>513</sup> Cixous (2004: 33).

The most fascinating aspect of this work, for me, has been discovering the ways in which a world is created for a new play and her characters to inhabit. That is the first thing that must be accomplished before any stories can be told. It strikes me that each of these plays has been formed like a dance to three drums. First there is the drum of Sophocles, made from a sacred oak, revered and standing in the centre. Second there is that of the modern poet, keeping irregular time and enforcing its' personality on the dancers movements, and third is the beat of the world, 'the rhythm of [the] age'<sup>514</sup> And the culmination of these three elements produces a play with a distinctive voice that is part of a cultural legacy and is relevant to the time of its production.

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<sup>514</sup> **Brown** (1969: 257).

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