

## The scene and the unseen

In this paper I argue that the original Antigone of Sophocles promoted the ideal of a strong powerful woman, not in Antigone but her sister, Ismene. It can be argued that power comes from radical change but equally, the stronger position can be the person who stands as a rock against the Tempest and refuses to act childish or irrational. In this, the mild and the logical may seem less exciting but equally remain the underlying foundations of much of society. In comparing the works of Sophocles and Anouilh, it is possible to encapsulate many of the false ideas that have overrun politics in nihilist and existentialist opinions of society.

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## Antigone

Sophocles' *Antigone*<sup>1</sup> is just as much or more a play concerning familial relationships and the dysfunctional interactions of siblings as it is an allegory of the birth of Justice. Many authors have documented Antigone's heroism<sup>2</sup>, yet there are many aspects of her behaviour that are paradoxical and contradictory<sup>3</sup>. Antigone relies on a commitment to the *res familiaris* in defence of her actions contradicting the *res publica*. To which, Cicero had stated, "*Res familiaris sua quemque delectat: reliquae meae fortunae recuperatae plus mihi nunc voluptatis adferunt quam tum incolumes adferebant*"<sup>4</sup> (Cicero, 1948). This statement captures both the Greek and the Roman sentiment to family. They (family) are a sweet thing to remember, and it is through the family that both early communities represented their place in the world. Yet, as a woman, Antigone would leave the family and join and become one with another<sup>5</sup>. So even in this, it could be argued that her duty to family more strongly tied to her fiancé Haemon, who is Creon's son in the family she will join or at least to her sister Ismene who was indubitably her kin<sup>6</sup>.

In this story, we see the male-dominated polis counterpointed through the interactions of the female personas<sup>7</sup>. One aspect of the story that is difficult to reconcile in many contemporary interpretations derives from the incomplete projections of the characters and their conflict to modern concepts of identity<sup>8</sup>. Although Antigone is portrayed as heroic for facing death in support of a cause she believes in, we can question whether that is what she has accomplished. When she had first told her sister that she intended to bury Polynices, Antigone had not formulated a strategy that would have her proclaim her actions to the polis<sup>9</sup>. Preferably, this strategy is formulated in discussion with Ismene and integrates itself as a reaction to her sister

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<sup>1</sup> Sophocles: *Antigone*, trans. by David Franklin, commentary by John Harrison (with an introduction to Greek theatre by P.E. Easterling) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

<sup>2</sup> Knox, Bernard M., and Bernard Mac Gregor Walker Knox. *The heroic temper: studies in Sophoclean tragedy*. No. 35. Univ of California Press, 1964.; Kirkpatrick, Jennet. "The Safeguard of Silence: Un-Heroic Resistance in Sophocles' *Antigone*." Western Political Science Association 2010 Annual Meeting Paper, 2009.; Verkerk, Willow. "Heroism in Sophocles's *Antigone*." *Philosophy and Literature* 38, no. 1, 2014, p.282-291.

<sup>3</sup> Oudemans, Th CW, and André PMH Lardinois. *Tragic ambiguity: anthropology, philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone*. Vol. 4. Brill, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *Post reditum ad Quirites*. 1948.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher, Judith. "Citing the Law in Sophocles's *Antigone*." *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* (2008): 79-96.

<sup>6</sup> Morrison, Wayne. *Jurisprudence: From The Greeks To Post-Modernity*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Rehm, Rush. *Marriage to death: the conflation of wedding and funeral rituals in Greek tragedy*. Princeton University Press, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz. "Hegel's *Antigone*." *The owl of Minerva* 17.2 (1986): 131-152.

<sup>9</sup> Werman, David. "Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Literature: A Review of Studies on Sophocles' *Antigone*." *Essential papers on literature and psychoanalysis* 12 (1993): 217.

not embracing her reckless and impulsive strategy<sup>10</sup>. When Ismene proposes a clandestine pact that would allow Antigone to bury their brother, the offer is rejected, and Antigone's reaction to Ismene becomes increasingly zealous<sup>11</sup> and resolute<sup>12</sup>.

Ismene [74] implores the system to keep the action secret. In this, both sisters would be guilty of breaching the *res publica*. Aitkens<sup>13</sup> notes the practice of the Greek *poleis* derived from the practice of the gods with Sparta having a constitution that was a gift from the Delphic Apollo<sup>14</sup> and that Cleisthenes receive the names of the tribes of Athens from the Pythia<sup>15</sup>. Through this, even where laws are uncertain and may be interpreted in different manners, the actions of Ismene in encouraging Antigone to maintain secrecy if she must do the act are a direct contradiction. In the *Memorabilia*<sup>16</sup>, Socrates argues that even when the laws prescribe an action that is not absolutely just, the right path remains to obey them and the relations in society form a mutual contract<sup>17</sup>. Hence, the actions of Ismene in seeking a pact with her sister allowing her to bury their brother Polynices in secrecy would have fulfilled the obligations of the sisters under *res familiares*, whilst simultaneously joining them in a pact of jointly breaching the laws defined under *res publica*.

Conversely, Antigone demonstrates spite and hubris towards her sister [76-77], not only rejecting the offer but by ensuring that she excludes her sister from the pact. Antigone is not seeking justice but revenge<sup>18</sup>. We can compare the two sisters to the Greek gods of Dionysus and Apollo<sup>19</sup>. Dionysus, like Antigone, was chaotic and headstrong and rash, whereas Apollo was the God of law and order and light. Santirocco<sup>20</sup> accounts how Antigone's love for Polynices belies the underlying rationalisation of their actions. In this, she is not acting heroic

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<sup>10</sup> Ledbetter, Grace M. "Sophocles, Antigone 1226-30." *The Classical Quarterly* 41.1 (1991): 26-29.

<sup>11</sup> de Fátima Silva, Maria. "A Brief 'Antigone': Eduarda Dionísio's Antes que a noite venha (Before the Night Comes)." *Portrayals of Antigone in Portugal*. Brill, 2017. 285-304.

<sup>12</sup> Goff, Barbara E. "The shields of Phoenissae." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 29.2 (1988): 135-152.

<sup>13</sup> Atkins, J. W. (2013). *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: the Republic and Laws*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Agard, Walter R. "Athens and Delphi (800-485 BC)." *The Classical Weekly* (1924): 209-211.

<sup>15</sup> McGregor, Malcolm F. "Cleisthenes of Sicyon and the panhellenic festivals." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*. American Philological Association, 1941.

<sup>16</sup> Bonnette, Amy L., and Christopher J. Bruell. *Memorabilia*. Cornell University Press, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Xenophon. *Mem.* IV, 4, 16: ὁμνυμι.; Stavru, A. (2008). Socrate et la confiance dans les 'Agraphoi nomoi' (Xénophon, *Mémorables*, 4.4.19-25): Réflexions sur les *socratica* de Walter Friedrich Otto. In M. Nancy and A. Tordesillas (eds.), *Xénophon et Socrate*. (pp. 65-85). Paris: Vrin.

<sup>18</sup> Revenge in Antigone is of a form familiar to Elizabethan tragedy: Bowers, Fredson Thayer. *Elizabethan revenge tragedy, 1587-1642*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Barrack, Charles M. "Nietzsche's Dionysus and Apollo: gods in transition." *Nietzsche-Studien* 3.1 (1974): 115-129.

<sup>20</sup> Santirocco, Matthew S. "Justice in Sophocles' Antigone." *Philosophy and Literature* 4.2 (1980): 180-198.

or rationally (Knox, 1964) but is merely seeking to justify her actions. When she first shares her intention with Ismene [45-77], Antigone does not initially justify her intentions using the unwritten laws of the gods<sup>21</sup>; instead, this concept builds in her mind to rationalize her actions<sup>22</sup>. In a very tiny some manner, Antigone is merely acting on instinct, fighting in grief to bury her brother and make certain that other people know that she has done this act<sup>23</sup>. In doing this, she will lash out at a sister and be willing to destroy her to have her way<sup>24</sup>.

Through this process, Sophocles demonstrates many of the ways that the human mind creates a cohesive and coherent story that develops over time<sup>25</sup>. Towards the end of the play, as Antigone confronts Creon, the same narrative starts to dissolve, and a new vision is formulated as Antigone comes to understand the cost that is attributed to her sacrifice. Ismene demonstrates a proper understanding of the meaning of being willing to honour a tie of kinship and formulates a plan that would allow both sisters to enjoin in sorority<sup>26</sup>. Many authors have noted that Antigone's treatment of her sister and hence kin are problematic<sup>27</sup>. Antigone sternly rebukes Ismene [69] only to explain her reasons and to be further rebuked and rejected [69-70]. Worse still, Ismene's entreatings emboldens Antigone, who both snubs her sister and acts to impulsively argue how she will broadcast what she has done to everyone [77].

Although many authors have depicted Ismene as passive and resigned<sup>28</sup>, she forms a more rational counterpoint to Antigone's rash anger<sup>29</sup>. Ismene demonstrates filial duty throughout the series of plays, while her devotion is often portrayed as being less than that of Antigone. The question to consider is whether Antigone is sacrificing to her brother or herself. In her grief and anger she lashes out to the world, and the power of her anger hurts both her fiancé who

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<sup>21</sup> Neuburg, Matt. "How like a woman: Antigone's 'inconsistency'." *The Classical Quarterly* 40.1 (1990): 54-76.

<sup>22</sup> Almansi, Renato J. "A psychoanalytic study of Sophocles' Antigone." *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 60.1 (1991): 69-85.

<sup>23</sup> Howenstein, Mark S. "The Tragedy of Law and the Law of Tragedy in Sophocles' Antigone." *Legal Stud. F.* 24 (2000): 493.

<sup>24</sup> Reidy, David A. "Antigone, Hegel & (and) the Law: An Essay." *Legal Stud. F.* 19 (1995): 239.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, Craig R. *Rhetoric and human consciousness: A history*. Waveland Press, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Honig, Bonnie. "Ismene's forced choice: Sacrifice and sorority in Sophocles' Antigone." *Arethusa* 44, no. 1 (2011): 29-68.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, Patricia J. "Woman's third face: a psycho/social reconsideration of Sophocles' Antigone." *Arethusa* 30.3 (1997): 369-398.; Butler, Judith. *Antigone's claim: Kinship between life and death*. Columbia University Press, 2002.; Locke, Patricia M. "Antigone's Claim, Kinship Between Life and Death." *The Owl of Minerva* 33.2 (2002): 251-254.

<sup>28</sup> Shainess, Natalie. "Antigone, the neglected daughter of Oedipus: Freud's gender concepts in theory." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 10.3 (1982): 443-455.

<sup>29</sup> As may be implied from the concepts in, Foley, Helene P. "Euripides, Suppliant Women." (1995): 299-302.

ends up committing suicide and her sister Ismene who is the rational realist understanding what needs to be done in the real world<sup>30</sup>.

Anouilh understood the distinction between Antigone's rashness and Ismene's rationality well<sup>31</sup>. In his re-envisioning of Sophocles' play Anouilh has Ismene state this. "Listen to me, Antigone. I thought about it all night. I may be younger than you are, but I always think things over, and you don't" [p. 11]. Whereas Sophocles has Antigone rebuke her sister in morality in "Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven." [73], Anouilh already has Antigone with a formulated concept of her actions in law, "That's an offense against every decent human instinct; against the laws of God and Man." [p. 11].

Anouilh further develops this perspective through Antigone's internal dialogue on understanding [p. 12]. In this internal monologue, Antigone juxtaposes the romantic and the Dionysian against the Apollonian and civilised aspects of society. Antigone seeks a world that never existed, one where she can be free without cares. One where dirt and water do not matter, and she can act as an eternal child or Peter Pan<sup>32</sup>. Simone de Beauvoir asserted that gender traits were merely social conditioning and not genetic<sup>33</sup>. In this rejection of femininity, Anouilh embraces the existentialist concept of learned gender assigning the role of the heroic resistance protagonist to Antigone and that of the cowardly yet traditionally girlish role to Ismene.

However, Anouilh's Ismene is far more coquettish<sup>34</sup>. She is undoubtedly displaying a more substantial extent of cowardice than Sophocles' character and even expresses as much when she states, "I'm an awful coward, Antigone." [p. 13]. Ismene has been stripped of her power. To Anouilh, Ismene does not express his concept of an existentialist-feminist such as Simone de Beauvoir. Working within the law and the mere proposition of doing that which is legal is seen as a collaboration to Anouilh<sup>35</sup>. As a result, the author re-invents both characters. Antigone is no longer Dionysian, through this transfiguration, Antigone becomes empowered as a

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<sup>30</sup> This is detailed in Jones, Daniel R. "Edward Bond's" Rational Theatre". *Theatre Journal* 32.4 (1980): 505-517, with the revisioning of Ismene.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Anouilh: *Antigone*, trans. by Barbara Bray, commentary and notes by Ted Freeman (London: Methuen Drama, 2005)

<sup>32</sup> Waters, Harold A. "Philosophic Progression in Anouilh's Plays." *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*. Vol. 16. No. 2. Taylor & Francis, 1962.

<sup>33</sup> Fischer, Sara Elizabeth. *Beyond born and becoming: Feminism and gender bias*. Diss. University of Colorado at Boulder, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Alhiyari, Ibrahim. "Female Struggle and Triumph: The Cases of Antigone, Desdemona, and Erminia." *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies, Volume3, Number1* (2019).

<sup>35</sup> Anouilh's, Jean. "The Politics of Intention: Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* via Oreste." *The Drama of Fallen France: Reading la Comedie sans Tickets* (2012): 105.

resistance femme fatale. Creon becomes the Nazi occupier, the evil that must be resisted even when it is not talked about. While equally, Ismene is consigned to the role of the coquette and coward. What may be constancy and rational thought from Sophocles becomes collaboration and submission through Anouilh as Ismene is stripped of all genuine power.

In this reimagining, only action itself is valued. Gender is treated as a learned position, and hence Ismene in accepting her role as the feminine character is also representing a state of submission and collaboration with the enemy<sup>36</sup>. In this reassignment of roles, Anouilh has painted the bourgeois classes of French society as feminine. They are represented through Ismene<sup>37</sup>. However, at the time, many thought that Anouilh had produced a Nazi play<sup>38</sup>. Critics had argued that the discourse between Antigone and Creon allowed Creon to present the better case. However, over time this argument changed, and Antigone became the “indomitable rebel” who “resolutely said no.”<sup>39</sup>

Anouilh’s reimagining of Sophocles play must be taken in the context of the time. As Sachs<sup>40</sup> documents, the theatrical elements of the play express an underlying discord through a series of anachronisms that simultaneously blend with direct references to Thebes and Oedipus. Whereas many of the characters remain faithful to the original, the nature of Antigone and Ismene have radically changed. In each version, that of Sophocles and that of Anouilh, is the use of allusion. Whereas Sophocles make solutions to Dionysus and Thrace as stated previously<sup>41</sup> and to the ongoing problems within Athens at the time, Anouilh is seeking to re-envision the Nazi occupation of France through the characters and their resistance<sup>42</sup>.

Each author utilises symbolism with both representing the conceptualised rebel in Antigone. Sophocles represents Ismene as the status quo, whereas Anouilh has recast this character into the role of the bourgeois<sup>43</sup>. Equally, Anouilh takes gender concepts that had been developed

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<sup>36</sup> Anouilh’s, Jean. "The Politics of Intention: Jean Anouilh’s Antigone via Oreste." *The Drama of Fallen France: Reading la Comedie sans Tickets* (2012): 105.

<sup>37</sup> FreseWitt, Mary Ann. "Fascist ideology and theatre under the Occupation: the case of Anouilh." *Journal of European Studies* 23.1 (1993): 49-69.

<sup>38</sup> Krauss, Kenneth. *The Drama of Fallen France: Reading la comédie sans tickets*. SUNY Press, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> Sachs, Murray. "Notes on the Theatricality of Jean Anouilh's" Antigone"." *The French Review* 36.1 (1962): 3-11. On p. 3, it is noted that the initial production was conducted in occupied Paris (1944) and that this play was built to follow the existentialist trend of literary French society.

<sup>41</sup> Cullyer, Helen. "A Wind That Blows from Thrace: Dionysus in the Fifth Stasimon of Sophocles" Antigone"." *The Classical World* 99.1 (2005): 3-20.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly, R. "Antigone, Jean Anouilh (1944) - study of the prologue." *Pimido Publications* (2010).

<sup>43</sup> Cox, Owen. *The Problem with Antigone: Martyrdom, Resistance and Revolution in Slavoj Žižek’s Antigone*. Diss. University of Bristol, 2018.

within existentialist literature and symbolises Antigone as not only being a rebel against a tyrannical government but also against the constraints on her sex<sup>44</sup>. Conversely, Sophocles reminds the audience that we are human and not immortal. Excessive pride and hubris as were displayed by Antigone, leading her punishment by the gods. In this, Antigone's acting as if she is immortal brought about her doom.

Many of the key themes created by Sophocles have been transformed into something else in Anouilh's re-envisioning of the play. While Sophocles has a concept of compassion and restraint while using the strong character of Ismene who remains constant and logical, a series of tragedies Before the more Dionysian Antigone<sup>45</sup>. Antigone's a stance destabilises family roles<sup>46</sup>. Anouilh's characters take a different role. The thematic death of Antigone is that of the heroic martyr. As the archetype of the rebel, both rejecting her gender stereotype and the imposed rules; Antigone rises above-occupied societies. Equally, Ismene encapsulates the bourgeois capitulation<sup>47</sup> and "two Frances. She lives, but she is weak and powerless. In Anouilh's dialogue between Ismene and Antigone [p. 11 – 12], Antigone states "I'd prefer not to die, myself" as a response to Ismene's more fearful exaltation "I don't want to die". In this, the characters capture the capitulation as expressed in Marxist ideas of capitalism<sup>48</sup>. As Joseph<sup>49</sup> remarks, there is a chasm between the Antigone of Sophocles and Anouilh.

When Ismene expounds [p12] "I'm right off note than you are", Anouilh is expressing the French existentialist view of both bourgeois society and capitalism<sup>50</sup>. Antigone's response, "I don't want to be right!" encapsulates the romantic rejection of capitalist rationality that was expressed in bourgeois society. To Anouilh, as with Simone de Beauvoir, it did not matter that it was right. Each sought a utopia. In contradiction to Sophocles who extorted us not to rebel against the gods, Anouilh illustrates a position of puerile insurrection. What they saw in France was not right, so the reaction to what was right could not be accepted. In Anouilh, the

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<sup>44</sup> Sjöholm, Cecilia. *The Antigone complex: Ethics and the invention of feminine desire*. Stanford University Press, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Macedo, José Marcos. "In between poetry and ritual: The hymn to Dionysus in Sophocles' Antigone (1115–54)." *The Classical Quarterly* 61.2 (2011): 402-411.

<sup>46</sup> Ristroph, Alice, and Melissa Murray. "Disestablishing the Family." *The Yale Law Journal* (2010): 1236-1279.

<sup>47</sup> Nelson, Robert J. "Two Frances: Impressed and Suppressed Voices in French Literature from "The Song of Roland to Waiting for Godot"." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 30.2 (1996): 93-118.

<sup>48</sup> Irwin, William. *The free market existentialist: Capitalism without consumerism*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph, Sister Emily. "The Two Antigones: Sophocles and Anouilh." *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 38.4 (1963): 578-606.

<sup>50</sup> Sayre, Robert, and Michael Löwy. "Figures of romantic anti-capitalism." *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 42-92.

expression of power envisioned in Sophocles' Ismene has been neutered<sup>51</sup>. Anouilh's version of Ismene has been transformed into a coquette, and in true feminist form, Antigone has embraced the male gender role becoming the un-gendered Peter Pan that will never grow up.

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<sup>51</sup> Alhiyari, Ibrahim. "Female Struggle and Triumph: The Cases of Antigone, Desdemona, and Erminia." *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies, Volume3, Number1* (2019).

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