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Antigone: 441 B.C. to 1958 A.D.

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A N T I G O N E
441 B.C. to 1958 A.D.

Honors Special Studies
Fall Semester 1969

Presented to
Mr. Dennis Holt
by
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Ouachita Baptist University
Arkadelphia, Arkansas
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A N T I G O N E

441 B.C. to 1958 A.D.

From 441 B.C. to 1958 A.D. is a long time, yet people have had basically the same problems for more years than that. In approximately 441 B.C., Sophocles wrote a story about a young girl who defied civil law in order to preserve the freedom of her convictions. In 1958 A.D., Mr. Dennis Holt restated this story in what he calls a "theater poem." Antigone is considered to be perhaps the first important statement of "civil disobedience" in the western world.

Sophocles did not create the story. The content of the Oedipus trilogy, of which Antigone is a part, was handed down to the Greek theater from ancient folklore. Many people since have been drawn down to this compelling story of a brave girl and a well-meaning king. Every generation and separate society seem to have found the conflict pertinent. There has never been a thoroughly satisfying solution to the conflict--hence its perennial fascination.¹

The following is a comparison of the version of Antigone by Sophocles and Mr. Holt's version. 2399 years separate the

¹Dennis Holt, Program Notes for the 1969 production of Antigone by the Ouachita Theater.

two, and probably so 2399 differences. Mr. Holt's script is a complete restatement, not a paraphrase. Both versions are beautiful in their message and the way each brings it out.

To start at the beginning with the list of characters. In the original by Sophocles there is a Guard whereas Mr. Holt's version has two Soldiers. Sophocles has a messenger and Mr. Holt has a page. The chorus is the big difference as far as the characters go. Sophocles used fifteen Theban elderly citizens. Mr. Holt used girls who might be interpreted as Antigone's contemporaries. The number of girls is variable.

(In the following comparison of the scripts, Mr. Holt's was compared to Sophocles' so the order of comparison will be based on the order of Mr. Holt's version.)

Mr. Holt uses the chorus in the very beginning to create the mood and give the necessary information to bring the audience up to date with the story. Sophocles used Antigone and Ismene for the same purposes, except that here Antigone and Ismene discuss her burying their brother. This appears later in Mr. Holt's version.

Mr. Holt puts Tiresias in after the chorus as he offers hope to the citizens, and Creon enters to hear some of his speech, this is not included in Sophocles' version. The next speech by Creon where he tells the chorus that he believes in the supremacy of the law of the State; that the highest loyalty expressible is that of loyalty and love of country, is virtually the same in both versions. Creon reads the edit from a scroll

in Mr. Holt's but he just states it in Sophocles'. The edit is different in that Mr. Holt's simply states that whoever violates the decree will have as his fate death and later has as that means of death being entombed alive. Sophocles uses stoning as his means and later changes it to being entombed alive.

Mr. Holt has a scene where Antigone pleads with Creon to bury her brother, but there is no such scene in Sophocles' version. Both the Chorus of Mr. Holt and Sophocles talk about the marvels of man, but Mr. Holt's Chorus speaks before the burial of Polyneices and Sophocles' speaks after the burial.

As I've said before, the scene in which Antigone and Ismene discuss the burial of their brother and where Antigone pleads with Ismene to help her and is refused is at the beginning of Sophocles' version, but is after the Chorus' talk on man in Mr. Holt's version.

Mr. Holt has included a beautiful Chorus part in which they discuss love and this is not in Sophocles'.

The soldier that informs Creon of the first burial of Polyneices is a major point of discrepancy in that in Sophocles' version he is portrayed as being almost comical and stupid. Mr. Holt sees him as being typical of a soldier trying to do his best.

The scenes in which Antigone is brought to Creon for having buried her brother and where Ismene offers to share the blame are essentially the same in both versions as far as

content is concerned. Mr. Holt's Creon gives Antigone a choice: she can publicly apologize for her crime or die. Sophocles does not do this.

Mr. Holt's Chorus laments on the beautiful city and this is not a subject in Sophocles' version.

Both versions contain the scene where Tiresias denounces Creon for leaving the body of Polyneices unburied, and for his treatment of Antigone, but this scene in Sophocles' version is after Haimon has talked to Creon and she has already been sentenced. Mr. Holt has the two just reversed; Haimon talks to his father after Tiresias. Sophocles' version has Haimon telling his father that he will never see him again if he allows Antigone to die, there is no mention of this in Mr. Holt's version.

Mr. Holt has added a beautiful scene where Antigone and Haimon see each other for the last time, and then Creon asks her about her choice (remember that Sophocles did not give her one) and then he sentences her to entombment alive.

In Sophocles' version after Creon talks to Tiresias the leader of the Chorus advises Creon to heed good counsel, and Creon changes his mind and he and his servants rush off to free Antigone from her vault. This is omitted in Mr. Holt's version.

Mr. Holt has Eurydice and Creon talking before the news of the death of their son, Haimon, and Antigone is brought to them. Sophocles has a messenger telling the Chorus and Eurydice about the death of Antigone and Haimon and Creon enters with the body of Haimon. Mr. Holt has a page telling Creon about the deaths with Eurydice accidentally over-hearing. The body of

Haimon is brought in on a stretcher. The method of the deaths is different in that Sophocles has Antigone hanging herself by the neck and Haimon at seeing her was so torn with grief that he leaned upon his sword and thus killed himself. Mr. Holt has them being killed as Haimon tries to find a passage into the tomb and a bolder he dislodges causes a rock slide in which both he and Antigone are killed. Mr. Holt also has Haimon sending a message to Creon that he has killed both of them.

The mode of Eurydice's death is the same, but in Sophocles' version, her body is shown and it is never seen in Mr. Holt's version.

Perhaps the difference in the two versions that means the most to me is that Mr. Holt had Creon giving Polyneices a "quiet burial on the plain." After reading Sophocles' version there was no more mention of Polyneices and I remember asking my teacher if he stayed buried the second time Antigone buried him and she couldn't answer me. Now I know.

The chorus closes both versions. The chorus parts are the most contrasted between the two versions. Mr. Holt has said of his version, "All of the chorus passages are drastically restated (some outright created), and set in lyrical free verse."²

Mr. Holt goes on to say, "A strong emphasis is placed on love, in its broadest concept. The theme of youth vs. age,

²Ibid.

or the truth of innocence us. the truth of experience, is given full sway. Perhaps the most important element of the original play is kept inviolable--the clash of two laws: the law of government (civil law), and the law of conscience (spiritual law). This clash, with an inability of the protagonists to compromise, leads to disaster."³

Mr. Holt has done with this play what composers do when they base a new arrangement on an old master's theme, they take it in its purity and fancy it up to suit their mood and the time. But, still in there is the pure melody of the old master. The combination of old and new is fascinating to me and so is this study of Antigone, as incomplete as it is. One thing Mr. Holt left out was the Strophes and the Antistrophes, which is just as well since I can't remember which is left or which is right.

Perhaps the following excerpt from the Chorus part of Mr. Holt's version sums up the moral of Antigone and this comparison:

"Peace is a wild bird
Flying in the winds of the night,
Defying the storm and the darkness!
Man will find his freedom;
He will find his identity;
He will find the face of God!

We must always be grateful for having the chance to see different men's version of things, to recognize each man's freedom to interpret things differently, to let each man discover and develop his own identity, his own way of doing things, his own way and path of finding the face of God.

³Ibid.