
Exploring the Intertextual Webs: A Comparative Study of Sophocles' *Antigone* and Bertold Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* (1948)

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ABSTRACT

As a matter of fact, it has always been claimed that there are voices embedded in any literary text. In other words, any literary text involves different layers of voices: that of the author and those to which the author reacts in his/ her text. This claim suggests the matter of textual influence which started in the mid of the 18th century with the growing interest in originality and genius asserted by Bloom's theory as stated by the art historian Michael Baxandall (1985). Therefore, 'influence' has to do with the author and the historical / socio-political context of the text, and studying it requires studying the context of the text. The study of 'influence' has proceeded anonymously and was neither able to accommodate for different analysis such as psychological, feminist, Marxist, and others, nor for studying two texts regardless of their historical priority. Hence, it lacks the benefits of implementing an interdisciplinary approach. This narrow form of 'influence' considering authors as agents and questioning their originality has begun to be obsolete as it shaped authors as authoritative disregarding the reader's role and promoting outworn humanism. Shifting the focus to the reader encouraged the procedure of 'intertextuality'. In fact, Julia Kristeva was the first to coin the term 'intertextuality' based on Bakhtin's dialogism which suggests multiple meanings in each text and even in each word and the continual dialogue with works of literature and authors. "Every word," Bakhtin wrote, "is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates". (18) This study aims at comparing Sophocles' *Antigone* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Antigone of Sophocles* highlighting the significance of the intertexts resulting from the different contexts in which these plays and adaptations were made, in addition to explaining the political and social dimensions in the adapted discourse. The study, therefore, highlights the intertextual webs in the examined texts, denoting the infinity of meanings in the adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Kristeva's intertextuality signifies focus on the text, the author, the reader, and correspondence with other works as well. For her, the meaning is mediated through by codes introduced to the writer and the reader by other texts rather than being directly transferred from the writer to the reader. In other words, the

meaning of a text is produced by the readers in relation to the text as well as the complex network of texts invoked in the reading process creating the reader's knowledge web. It can, thus, be suggested that according to Kristeva, the existence of any text is only in its relation with other texts; it is not the simple juxtaposition of texts, but as argued by Bloome and Hong (2012) in *Reading and Intertextuality* is "the deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant theories of semiotics, linguistics, hermeneutics, language, reasoning, and related topics including reading, composition, literary theory, and how a text is defined" (1). The suggestion that a text is constructed of a variety of other texts was anticipated by Roland Barthes (1977) in his *The Death of The Author* where he argues that the text is a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of cultures" (146). McGann (1991), as well, argued that "[a]ll texts are socially and historically relative including all Meta-texts such as scholarly commentaries and editions" (93). Therefore, intertextuality can be taken as a general term or a broad definition of 'influence' encompassing context, allusion, and tradition.

According to Linda Hutcheon (2006), adaptation is not a replication to the original text; it is kind of re-invention, and it involves the adapted product, the process of invention as well as the process of reception. Meanwhile, Julie Sanders in her *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) argued that any adapted text can be compared to other adaptations as well as to the original text highlighting that 'intertextuality' is the big umbrella for adaptation and appropriation. As a matter of fact, though adaptation keeps the relation with the original text, it is controlled by various factors: the target audience, the culture to which it is adapted and reasons for adaptations.

The political nature of adaptation and appropriation has become plainly obvious. Accordingly, postcolonial writers employed adaptations to express their political views. Almost any modification of historical cultural works is considered adaptation, which fits into the broader process of cultural recreation. The dominant class's voice tends to be the only one that is preserved by the cultural works and monuments that have survived. This cannot be done unless through reconstructing the dialogue and marginalizing the voices of the silenced and oppressed. Linda Hutcheon maintains in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* that "adaptation is a form of intertextuality" as readers interpret them through the "memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 8). Julia Kristeva asserts in her book *Desire in Language* that "Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them" (Kristeva 65).

Bakhtin postulates the need for what he calls a translinguistic science, which, developed from the dialogism of language, would allow readers to understand intertextual relations; relationships that in the

19th century were labeled as social values or the moral message of literature. An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a time and place, society, and culture. The narrative is both different and the same when the setting, either in terms of time or location, changes. Readers repeatedly recount, demonstrate, and engage with stories; in the process, they alter with each telling while remaining recognizable as the same, as Hutcheon maintains that “[A]daptation, like evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon” (Hutcheon 32). Kristeva further maintains that any text is a trans-linguistic tool that is an intertext in its nature which is a set of utterances “taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 36). The earliest form of intertextuality was ‘influence’ which was replaced as it doesn’t provide a more comprehensive political understanding of texts. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein maintain in their article “Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality” that:

[A]lthough every text possesses countless points of intersection with other texts, these connections situate a work within existing networks of power, simultaneously creating and disciplining the text’s ability to signify. Foucault insists that we analyze the role of power in the production of textuality and of textuality in the production of power. This entails looking closely at those social and political institutions by which subjects are subjected, enabled and regulated in forming textual meaning (Clayton & Rothstein 25).

All these initiatives attempt to raise awareness of how intertextual networks influence not just how we perceive language but also how we live as social and political beings. Clayton and Rothstein added, “[f]or either the earlier or the later author, such influence as counts is likely to be a nonliterary, nonintellectual influence from infancy (let the Oedipus complex be its token), which in later life emerges in recognizably sublimated form or unrecognizably, when it remains concealed behind acts of rhetoric or ideological funneling” (Clayton & Rothstein 15).

Intertextuality becomes an activity focused on embodied and gendered agents rather than shifting reference fields, thus examining how a text's intertextual links evolve over time to record historical development is important. The concept includes principles of action which are part of a political and historical project. These matters can recover their original urgency for readers only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story. In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson states that in order to free one’s self from any constriction, one must recognize that everything is socially and historically rooted and that everything is in the end political. Jameson affirms that the political resonance of literary texts is important as he states that “[I]t conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today—the psychoanalytic or the mythcritical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural—but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation” (Jameson 1). He adds that “only a genuine philosophy of history is capable of respecting the specificity and radical difference of the social and cultural past while disclosing the solidarity of its politics

and passions, its forms, structures, experiences, and struggles, with those of the present day” (Jameson 2). He maintains that only Marxism offers a philosophically coherent and ideologically compelling solution to the above historicist dilemma and can adequately explain the essential mystery of the cultural past.

This study aims at comparing Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Bertolt Brecht’s *The Antigone of Sophocles* highlighting the significance of the intertexts resulting from the different contexts in which these plays and adaptations were made, in addition to explaining the political and social dimensions in the adapted discourse. The study, therefore, highlights the intertextual webs in the examined texts, denoting the infinity of meanings in the adaptations of Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

Antigone is perhaps the only play, classical or contemporary, that has been re-performed around the world and a vast number of these performances have reconsidered and redesigned the play for the modern era. It incorporates local and sometimes international and global concerns, which makes it universal. The story of *Antigone*, premiered by Sophocles, is so "timeless" or "universal" in its narrative, structure, or narrative that it seems as if the play existed outside of time or transcended its own history as if it has nothing to do with the present. *Antigone* is retold because certain human and social struggles repeat themselves in history, and the complex and rich structure of *Antigone's* narrative is, unfortunately, the terror of the unburied dead, and becomes repetitively meaningful to represent the casualties and wreckage of the civil war. History is shortened by the recurring injustices that cause human pain as well as the injustices that ultimately lead to that suffering in addition to the atrocities and the labor of survivors, often women, who come to bury the dead. Not only has it become thematically appropriate again, but this particular tragic form seems to have the ability to express the essence of catastrophe at every moment. In fact, understanding the world’s phenomenon of the "Antigone Fever" refers to the fascination and influence of the tragic figure of *Antigone* from Greek mythology in literature. This phenomenon has captivated authors and readers alike, inspiring numerous adaptations and reinterpretations of *Antigone's* story across different time periods and cultures. As a symbol of defiance against authority and a champion of individual moral duty, *Antigone* has resonated with audiences seeking to explore themes of justice, morality, and personal agency.

In a country where ritual mourning and public burials are living central traditions, *Antigone* has served as the embodiment of women's resistance to colonial oppression and patriarchy. The play featured an oppressive dictator who prioritizes economic development. In Sophocles' play, Antigone openly defies Creon's laws; this creates a difference between the laws of the land and a higher moral imperative that many see as a distinction. Antigone is often portrayed as a heroine because she opposes injustice and takes steps to overthrow oppressive regimes such as those represented by Creon. Antigone and Creon's family ties in

the play become an overwhelming metaphor between the old reformers now in power and those who remain dissidents appalled by the brutality of power for a close but painfully strained relationship.

The analyses and evocations of myths and variants of Sophocles that have been drawn over the centuries show no signs of breaking. An adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* evokes the political issues raised by the play. These very powerful works provide examples of *Antigone* being used to challenge oppressive governments and individual dictators. In Eastern Europe, Brecht's 1948 version of *Antigone* (which identified Creon with Adolf Hitler) was a clear paradigm. Playwrights and directors saw it as a safe means of exploring forbidden ideas closer to home, often turned to Greek tragedy. In 1948, Bertolt Brecht staged a German version of Sophocles' *Antigone* where the setting of the play politicized the play for the political turmoil at the time as the play had many significations related to Nazism and Hitler. Brecht's version of Sophocles, which emphasizes human greed and atrocity, addresses the issue of Sophocles' conflicting views of leadership. Brecht adds a prologue which prepares the audience to associate this version with 1945 Germany where two sisters discover that their brother, who deserted Hitler's army, has been hung. Creon was called "Führer" all through, and the chorus wore Nazi uniforms. These events are related to what happened in Nazi occupied areas, as soldiers were hung from Berlin lampposts and any attempt to release their bodies would be immediately executed. Also, in December 1943, German forces invaded the village of Kalavrita and gathered all the men and killed them. Defying their orders, the women of the village escaped from the schools in which they were imprisoned, risking their lives to mourn and bury those who had been murdered. These events were the outset of Brecht's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Brecht was always against dictatorship and never missed an opportunity to criticize Hitler in his works. In an interview, he says:

Question: Did you show how the individual should act toward the state?

Answer: Only how Antigone acts toward the state of Creon and the elders,

Question: Nothing else?

Answer: Other things.

Not surprisingly, parallels can be drawn between Creon and Adolf Hitler, as Brecht's adaptation depicts Creon as a tyrant modeled after Hitler who only wants power. Creon was portrayed in Sophocles' play as a ruler who wanted to ensure the security of Thebes and saw himself as a protector of Thebes who considered it his duty to work for the best interests of the state. This is evident in the following lines:

Creon: So there's no war?

Antigone: Yes, yours.

Creon: Not for the country? (Brecht 22)

Contrary to Sophocles' Creon, Brecht's Creon waged a war to obtain the metal of Argos, and represented imperialism, as he admits that his motives for attacking Argos are financial. The play can be considered a discourse on imperialism with references to Hitler. One can clearly see his motives for his war with Argos are economic as he repeatedly mentions Argos as "rich". By revealing a materialistic Creon, Brecht confirmed that Antigone was a clashing figure who was for peace and stood for the people.

In Sophocles' version, he was accused by Antigone for his disregard for the gods and favoring the laws of the land to the laws of the gods; however, Brecht emphasizes Creon's inhumanity in his adaptation. But both playwrights reach the same conclusion that justice is part of the way things work. The difference is that Sophocles' basis is God and Brecht's is humanity as in Sophocles, Creon disregards religion and family and in the Brechtian version the law and the people are ignored. In Brecht's version, she feuds with Creon for being humane rather than pious:

Creon: The state's order, that is from God, you do not see.

Antigone: From God it may be but I'd rather have it human and humane." (Brecht 25)

This was an attempt from Brecht to modernize the discourse. This is what Julie Sanders maintained in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* stating that adaptations "can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating" (Sanders 19). According to Clayton & Rothstein, "[a] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not... the author" (Clayton and Rothstein 20). Brecht's concern was how to make Antigone attainable to modern audiences. This is perceived by him to be done through alternating the myth into politics and eliminating the element of fate.

The result of Brecht's plan is his alienation effect which discards the tragic effect that would bring about sympathy for any of the characters as he was against any kind of emotional engagement with the audience. Brecht attempted to do this through making the chorus have a neutral viewpoint and leaving out Eurydice's death. This is in addition to the scene when Creon grieves for his son and more for his doomed Thebes:

Creon: So now Thebes falls. And let it fall, let it with me, let it be finished (Brecht 50).

Brecht's method has a policy as it interprets the world as unstable and therefore changeable. Such a position suggests that situations or behaviors do not represent an eternal state but are subject to human influence. He foregrounds the argument that a man is accountable for his personal situations. This leads the audience to ponder over Creon's actions, concluding that it was his own action and not the work of fate.

This insight seems very important, because Brecht thought that audiences would relate the same rationale to their condition outside the theater and try to act upon it, as he is concerned with dealing with individuals as part of dynamic systems. By alluding to instability, Brecht meant to indicate that changes can be made. This has greatly influenced Brecht's understanding of theater and politics, as he directly linked the type of theatre which gives rise to emotions to the rise of fascism which silences masses. Brecht set himself the task of countering this sentimentality in his theater. He developed his alienation effect to avert audiences from empathizing with the characters and to force them to think rationally. David Barnett maintains in his book *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* that:

[M]arxism is a political philosophy with a long history and a complex set of principles. Its most important features for Brecht were: Marxism addresses inequalities in society and proposes ways of overcoming them. These ways are not based on reforming an already flawed system (capitalism), but fashioning a new and better one (socialism). The hope for change is based on the instability of any social system and is brought about by an unchanging methodology: dialectics" (Barnett 19).

Brecht was a Marxist following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. Marxism itself was downplayed and dismissed as a set of unworkable and unworkable ideas. If "Brechtian" has become synonymous with "Marxist," then such an association may entrench Brecht in a discredited politics that many see as superfluous or superfluous. Conversely, a successful Brechtian staging might well help rehabilitate the tenets of Marxism, at least for some in the auditorium.

These changes go a long way toward keeping the public from feeling sorry for Brecht's Creon. He states:

Question: This, surely, is the point at which the public at large can sympathize with Antigone, for it will feel what she feels, and share her arguments?

Answer: It is more important that here Antigone feels what the public at large feels, and shares its arguments.

For Brecht, this was the type of theatre that Hitler used to be in control. In Gustave Le Bon's book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, he states:

[T]he evolution of the present age—The great changes in civilisation are the consequence of changes in National thought—Modern belief in the power of crowds—It transforms the traditional policy of the European states—How the rise of the popular classes comes about, and the manner in which they exercise their power—The necessary consequences of the power of the crowd (Le Bon ix).

He adds that “[T]he progressive growth of the power of the masses took place at first by the propagation of certain ideas, which have slowly implanted themselves in men's minds, and afterwards by the gradual association of individuals bent on bringing about the realisation of theoretical conceptions” (Le Bon xi). Adolf Hitler used theatre of empathy for mass mobilization and propaganda purposes, as crowd theory paved the way for Nazism. His aim was to exploit the crowds as a means of commanding masses which mobilize them for his own interest and bring him to power in addition to manipulating the masses for dictatorial political ends. Hitler recognizes the importance of political propaganda during World War I; so, he had to think carefully about what message to spread and how. The importance of propaganda and maneuvering was only a part of Hitler's plan and Brecht's purpose through the play is to apply theatre as a means for enlightening people.

To conclude, since the first production of Sophocles' *Antigone*, each production has been a dynamic enactment of comprehension. In performance, drama is born and reborn, as art reveals a specific practice crystallized into modes of production with highly diversified and multiplied manifestations. The Antigones that have been retold for years are, in large, part of the re-creations of different political contexts. This discourse invariably strikes a raw nerve exposed in all cultures and regimes at some point. This nerve appears to be inextricably linked with the ethics of personal and political responsibility; however, these are interpreted in different places and times. As a result, the play's primary pulse has a strong tendency to deconstruct whatever set of contingent categories we decide to impose on it. If there is anything 'universal' about *Antigone*, it is in the way both the play and the characters are mobilized, as it has been shown to exceed inventory. The play's transhistorical, transcultural, translingual elements paved the way for its assimilation and alteration. The relationship of *Antigone* and Creon and the myths in which they appear are considered universal and they change over the centuries. Named or implied, the two figures and the deadly dispute between them illustrate fundamental elements of the discourse on man and society. In addition, productions of *Antigone* have been used to fight for the legitimacy and recognition of local cultures in contradistinction to hegemonic national, colonial, and global cultures. Even more pervasive was the role of the 'Antigone' in the real lives of individuals and communities. It has become a vehicle for articulating the problems of modern nations as it belongs to many nations. *Antigone's* narrative is global in response to specific historical, cultural, and artistic needs, as an adaptation can be used to respond to broader social or cultural criticism. In every way, Brecht's version is free of tragic overtones, as what is presented to the spectator is not an emotional experience of events, but rather a more intellectual kind of experience, as what he wanted to do was to save the work from the label of tragedy. He wanted to make it clear that tragedy leads to catharsis, leaving the audience unable to think critically about the situations being enacted. His

adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* presents an interesting combination of ancient and contemporary elements. This production represented a first step in examining the question of complicity through a play which is distant in time and place from the present of Germany, this transhistorical element was crucial.

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