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The Reception of Sophocles' Creation in the Jean Anouilh's Dramaturgy

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The article deals with Jean Anouilh's interpretation of Sophocles' plot in the plays "Antigone" (1944) and "Oedipus, or Lame King" (1978). In the unstable period of the 1940s, including the Second World War, the writer appealed to the Sophocles' creation in order to reveal the modern life problems through his interpretation of Sophocles' great tragedy "Antigone" for the first time. But at the end of his dramatic career Anouilh appealed again to the creation of his great predecessor to revive his favorite rebellious hero in the image of Oedipus. In the play "Oedipus, or Lame King" the main character Oedipus proves the author's faith in a strong personality who is able to resist the world of compromise.

Keywords: dramaturgy, ancient tragedy, French literature, Sophocles, Anouilh Jean.

Introduction to the Research Problem

Sophocles was one of the most significant ancient playwrights, who during his life gained fame of the greatest poet and had significant influence on the literature of modern times. The playwright became an innovator in his ability to describe the inner world of the character. "With all the celebration of divine will in Sophocles, in the foreground we see a human who seeks to act independently, intelligently, while maintaining the ability to be responsible for his deeds" (Nicola, 1997, 265-269). The 20th century was full of historical and social cataclysms, and even though the most significant tradition for writers of that century was Euripides' tradition, the interest to the legacy of Sophocles remains. And drama works by a famous French writer Jean Anouilh are clear evidence for this.

Theoretical Grounds

A typical feature of the 20th century drama is modernization of mythological plots. The reference to the myth becomes well justified, because "history turns the world time into a timeless world of the myth" (Meletinskii, 2000). Meanwhile "a variety of its interpretations <...> is proof of the text's and culture's integrity, the author's [commentator's] affiliation with the circle of masters" (Kovtun, 2012, 1343-1356). Thus, the writers, when processing mythological plots, revealed their own outlook on the world and their attitude to the complex historical events of the 20th century, and the myth was filled with relevant content, losing its connection with the epoch of its appearance.

Throughout his quite long creative life Anouilh modernized two tragedies of Sophocles

by creating his own "Antigone" (Antigone, 1944) and "Oedipus, or Lame King" (Œdipe ou le Roi boiteux, 1978). In this paper, for the first time in the domestic literature we analyze these two Anouilh's plays in their unity and evolution from the first text to the second.

Modernization of Sophocles' Antigone in the Eponymous Play by Jean Anouilh

Anouilh appeals to antiquity in the unstable period of the 1940s, including the time of the Second World War. Scrutinizing Anouilh's creative life, L. Pronko rightly points out that the period from 1941 to 1946 was the time when the writer created some of his most important plays, which depict "a heroic personality to clash with the outer world" (Pronko, 1968). Indeed, the writer used the image of fearless young maximalist Antigone to express the spirit of resistance, which was so familiar to the French during the Vichy regime.

When creating Antigone Anouilh used Sophocles' tragedy as his initial source, but the characters, their life attitudes and language are not consistent with the ancient prototypes. The characters of Sophocles are always mature characters, maximalists performing their duty without any hesitation. Yet, for the writer of the 20th century an ambiguous personality was more interesting, a personality torn apart by internal contradictions. Thus, in contrast to the "entirely shaped, completed in their minds" (Yarkho, 1988, 5-26) characters of Sophocles, Anouilh psychologically creates unique characters who have both advantages and disadvantages. They are people of the 20th century, with their well-established sense of absurdity of existence (the influence of the philosophy of existentialism on Anouilh) and they understand the profound tragedy of the reality around them. Unlike Sophocles' characters, they do not make a hard choice adamantly and proudly, but as the author's

contemporaries they try to overcome inner doubts and inner torment.

In Sophocles' Antigone the main conflict is embodied in the confrontation between different life stances. This is unwavering will of King Creon, who followed civil laws, and absolute humanism of Antigone, who buried her brother. In contrast to the shaped characters of Sophocles, Anouilh depicts a hard struggle of his characters with their own life experience, and here lies an internal, dramatic content of the play.

Sophocles' Antigone is proud that she is going to give her life for the sake of the duty she fulfilled. Although her struggle is vain in its essence, yet it gives meaning to human existence, so the antique audience admired the female character and felt sympathy for her. Although Anouilh's Antigone is like her prototype, the same uncompromising and proud character, but still, nevertheless she is a child, a little ugly, "savage" girl, which "has changed under the influence of her childhood, <...> who is stubborn and persistent in achieving her goals, but she does not do it so voluntarily" (Luppé, 1959), as Sophocles' Antigone. She is "little Antigone", – this is the way she is pleased to call herself. She is "very little", because she remains "attached" to her past, whereas the character of Sophocles, on the contrary, strives for becoming a future ideal woman who fulfils her human duty" (Luppé, 1959). Anouilh's Antigone is actually afraid of death, and realizing that such an end is inevitable, still she "does not know what she is dying for" (Anouilh, 2012). However, H. Gignoux aptly remarked, that there is something what always drives Anouilh's favorite characters: it is their desire to achieve the ideal – "childish purity" (Gignoux, 1946). And this internal rebellion arises from that – the only thing that the cruel world cannot take away from the young maximalists "is their way to rebel against the world, against oneself, against what is called life" (Vandromme, 1965).

Antigone. Nous sommes de ceux qui posent les questions jusqu'au bout. Jusqu'à ce qu'il ne reste vraiment plus la petite chance d'espoir vivante, la plus petite chance d'espoir à étrangler. Nous sommes de ceux qui lui sautent dessus quand ils le rencontrent, votre espoir, votre cher espoir, votre sale espoir! (Anouilh, 2012)

Antigone. We are of the tribe that asks questions, and we ask them to the bitter end. Until no tiniest chance of hope remains to be strangled by our hands. We are of the tribe that hates your filthy hope, your docile, female hope; hope, your whore (Anouilh, 1947, 43 – we use the published translation of Lewis Galantière hereinafter).

We shall note that most of early Anouilh's female characters prepared him for his Antigone, and for his later Joan of Arc ("The Skylark", 1953). Indeed, they are very similar to Theresa Tarde ("The Savage", 1934) and Eurydice ("Eurydice", 1942), who rebelled against the dirty, in their view, human morality and truth and chose hermit's life (Theresa) or death (Eurydice). And the Antigone has little in common with the main character of Sophocles, who is also proud, but is still dignified and attentive to the voice of the gods. Anouilh's Antigone is a controversial girl of the 20th century, a human, but disappointed in life, which is much closer and more understandable for modern audiences. "Antigone is a symbol of unconditional, absolute passion and rebellion of the pure-hearted demanding youth, which rejects any compromise" (Tercero, 2002).

Just like with Sophocles' Antigone here the main opponent is Creon, but in this modernized Anouilh's character the greatness and intransigence of the ancient king almost vanished. The playwright portrayed Creon as a man for whom a choice in favor of the law becomes very difficult to make. And he makes this choice only to prevent others from violating the steadfast rules. He is just a worker, who is also

disillusioned with life, and adherence to the law and conformity are costs of his profession.

Créon. Tu penses bien que je l'aurais fait enterrer, ton frère, ne fût-ce que pour l'hygiène! Mais pour que les brutes que je gouverne comprennent, il faut que cela pue le cadavre de Polynice dans toute la ville, pendant un mois. (Anouilh, 2012)

Creon. If it was up to me, I should have had then bury brother long ago as a mere matter of public hygiene. But if the featherheaded rabble I govern are to understand what's what, the stench has got to fill the town for a month (Anouilh, 1947).

Sophocles' Creon from the beginning knows that he should certainly execute Antigone, whereas Anouilh's Theban king, tired of pointless bloodshed, wishes to save his niece, so the play has no longer the victim nor her cruel executioner.

Créon. Te faire mourir! Tu ne t'es pas regardée, moineau! Tu es trop maigre. <...> Mais je t'aime bien tout de même avec ton sale caractère. (Anouilh, 2012)

Creon. Hand you over to be killed. <...> But the fact is, I have always been fond of you, stubborn though you always were (Anouilh, 1947).

Sophocles' Antigone dies a hero. Anouilh shows that the death of the innocent girl is meaningless. In the tragedy of the French playwright the conflict is the very problem of human existence in the world. This is evidenced by the playwright's appeal to existential philosophy and, consequently, to the problems of absurdity of existence and freedom of choice. Knowing about her predestined fate, Antigone does not want to die and fights for her life. But the meaning of life of Anouilh's favorite characters is in this seemingly meaningless death, which still allows them to break free from the burden of everyday existence, to receive long-awaited freedom and to remain in memory of such people as Creon. Although, of course, there is another morality in the play: the two main characters are victims of the absurd world, which is ruled by guards and

nurses – mediocre people, for whom the highest joy is to have a drink and play cards. Antigone and Creon are trying hard to follow the chosen path, but any of the paths turns out to be hopeless and meaningless, because they are still equally unhappy.

Such an ambiguous understanding of the play was justified by events in the personal life of the playwright. “Anouilh’s biography proves that life and career of the writer became interlinked from early 1940s, and much more connected since 1950s” (Beugnot, 2007). In the 1940s and 50s the writer faces problems in both personal and professional spheres, and his favorite characters start to change. Anouilh, torn by internal contradictions in creating the “right” character, draws heroes – conformists, with whose philosophy he often agrees, but finally these characters tend to die, because of the evil things they have done in their life (Ornifl from the eponymic play, Marie-Jeanne from “The Cellar”, etc.). However, they did not die heroically as Eurydice, Antigone or Medea, but died because of an absurd accident, and their death does not provoke much sympathy. The turning point in the fate of the playwright was the staging of the play on his script “Long live Henry IV!”, which was directed by his second wife – Nicole Anouilh. The joint project with his wife was warmly received by critics, unlike the plays written in the 1960s. It revived the writer’s faith in himself. In 1978, Anouilh wrote the drama “Oedipus, of Lame King”, where he re-created his uncompromising rebel hero with the help of Oedipus.

Idealistic Hero’s Revival in J. Anouilh’s Drama “Oedipus, or Lame King”

So, in his declining years Anouilh reiterates to Sophocles’ most famous tragedy “Oedipus Rex” – “Lame King”. Sophocles’

Oedipus is a “responsible, administrative, ruler with sincere concern for citizens’ life, listening to their opinions” (Nicola, 1997), and despite the fact that he was defeated in the struggle against fate, his image before the end of the play remains magnificent. Oedipus is saved by his “extraordinary endurance and ability to withstand suffering” (Mitchell-Boyask, 2012, 158-163). Now Anouilh looks to the classical text of Sophocles and practically does not deviate from the original (as in “Antigone”), since he wants to revive his beloved rebel hero similar to Antigone or Joan of Arc. However Anouilh’s Oedipus is not like the small Antigone, who does not know what she dies for. This is a character of a mature playwright, and Oedipus’ choice does not seem pointless, like the choice of his daughter.

Interestingly, in 1944 Anouilh described his future Oedipus’ character in one of the lines belonging to the young female character of “Antigone”:

Antigone. Papa n’est devenu beau qu’après, quand il a été bien sûr, enfin, qu’il avait tué son père, que c’était bien avec sa mère qu’il avait couché, et que rien, plus rien, ne pouvait le sauver. Alors, il s’est calmé tout d’un coup, il a eu comme un sourire, et il est devenu beau. C’était fini. Il n’a plus eu qu’à fermer les yeux pour ne plus vous voir ! Ah ! vos têtes, vos pauvres têtes de candidats au bonheur ! C’est vous qui êtes laids, même les plus beaux. <...> Vous avez des têtes de cuisiniers! (Anouilh, 2012)

Antigone. But Father became beautiful. And do you know when? At the very end. When all his questions had been answered. When he could no longer doubt that he had killed his own father; that he had gone to bed with his own mother. When all hope was gone, stamped out like a beetle. When it was absolutely certain that nothing, nothing could save him. Then he was at peace; then he could smile, almost; then he became beautiful... Whereas you! Ah, those faces of yours, you candidates for election to happiness! It’s

you who are the ugly ones, even the handsomest of you. <...> The kitchen of politics: you look it and you smell of it (Anouilh, 1947).

Indeed, Oedipus, which appeared in 1978, differs from the young Antigone of young Anouilh (1944). Oedipus knows what for he deprives himself of sight. His pride does not allow him to accept what his destiny has done to him. And in order to make descendants remember him not only as a toy in the hands of gods, but as a heroic personality, he invents a most painful punishment, rather than a simple suicide, which would have confirmed his weak will. Creon in 1944 told Antigone that she clearly has the self-pride and will of Oedipus.

V.N. Yarkho, Sophocles scholar, wrote that the greatness of Sophocles' tragic hero consists of the fact that "all of these steps of Oedipus < ... > indicate his continued effort – despite all obstacles – to the ultimate truth" (Yarkho, 1988, 5-26). Large and uncompromising Anouilh's Oedipus – until the very end, he repeats: "I need to know". Even when his loving Jocasta begs him to leave the search for truth, and to dedicate his life to her and the children, Oedipus strongly denies it. "My poor baby," – says Anouilh's Jocasta, highlighting the childlike characteristic of the early favorite Anouilh's characters, which allowed them to go against the whole world. Jocasta already guessed that Oedipus – her son goes to the palace to die with the words: "I am waiting for you at home", which once again underlines the only place where Anouilh's characters can find peace – the world of death, which they are looking for.

Anouilh's play closing is the only episode where the playwright departs from the text of his great predecessor, since till the very final the writer almost exactly follows the story of Sophocles' tragedy. In the final a dialogue occurs between Oedipus and Creon:

Créon. Il faut gratter son petit bonheur chaque jour sans faire de bruit – danser pendant que la musique joue, c'est tout.

Œdipe. C'est ignoble.<...>

Créon. Il n'est pas décent d'étaler le malheur sur la place publique.

Œdipe. Les hommes et les dieux ont droit au spectacle.

Créon. Orgueilleux, orgueilleux encore.

Œdipe. Oui. C'est tout ce qu'il me reste. <...>

Créon. Qu'avez-vous donc à vous tenir si raides, les Œdipes, les Antigones? (Anouilh, 2012)

Creon. Every day it is necessary to scrape a little happiness without making noise – dance while the music is playing, that's all.

Oedipus. It's disgusting. <...>

Creon. You mustn't demonstrate your trouble to the public review.

Oedipus. The men and the Gods must have their show.

Creon. Proud, you are still proud ...

Oedipus. Yes. That's all I have. <...>

Creon. How can you be so adamant, Oedipus, Antigones ... (Here we use our translation of Anouilh's French text)

As can be seen, the image of Creon did not change since "Antigone", he is still the same miserable supporter of conformists who still dreams of becoming happy. Creon leaves Oedipus and returns, as he says, "to order". Oedipus also predicts a great future for his beloved daughter Antigone and goes with her to tell their story to the world. The idea of absurd fatality that haunts the best people, according to Anouilh, goes all the way through the drama. However, the writer reiterates that only a person with a great destiny is entitled to meet great misfortunes. Overcoming them, he towers over the mediocre people of the world, and his life becomes a legend, which means his spiritual victory. Thus, the revival of Anouilh's main conflict – between a man in the street and a

rebel – in the play is resolved in favor of the latter – Oedipus, who was originally destined to have an extraordinary fate.

Conclusion

So, for Anouilh “Antigone” was his play, where he asserted the idea of meaninglessness existence of a heroic personality in the world, whereas in his drama “Oedipus, or Lame King”, the writer emphasizes the importance of appearance of such a person. The fearless and proud character, who nevertheless is doomed to torment or death, yet he becomes the only way to deal with the world of compromise. Absurd

seems to be no longer present in his opposition to this world, but this opposition turns into a really necessary riot, which should inspire Anouilh's contemporaries to defend their interests to the very end.

Thus, despite the overt pessimism of his later works, the playwright does not lose faith in the ideal human, who is able to withstand the world of mediocre people. In his latest play, “*Thomas More, ou l'Homme Libre*” (1987), which Anouilh wrote almost for 15 years, he re-introduced his favorite hero, who was able to say “NO” to the world and to accept death, thereby to immortalize his own image.

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Рецепция творчества Софокла в драматургии Ж. Ануя

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В статье рассматривается интерпретация сюжетов трагедий Софокла в пьесах французского писателя Ж. Ануя "Antigone" (1944) и "Эдип, или Хромой царь" (1978). В нестабильный период 1940-х гг., захвативший в том числе и Вторую мировую войну, писатель впервые обратился к творчеству Софокла, чтобы через свою интерпретацию его великой трагедии "Antigone" раскрыть проблемы современной ему жизни. Но и в конце своего творческого пути Ануй вновь обращается к творчеству своего великого предшественника, чтобы возродить любимого бунтующего героя в образе Эдипа, который доказывает веру автора в сильную личность, способную противостоять миру компромисса.

Ключевые слова: драматургия, античная трагедия, французская литература, Софокл, Ануй Жан.
