

José Watanabe's *Antigona* and Anne Carson's *Antigonick*:

The Power of the Powerless

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Abstract

Ancient Greek theater is a considerable and an outstanding form of art of which heritage inspires generations, and of which realm surpasses amusement to politics and religion, especially the works of playwrights such as Sophocles. An explicitly renowned example of the influence of Sophocles, Greek theater, and Greek mythology is their entities as the source on which Sigmund Freud rests to develop a universal human psycho- sexual theory, the basis of which is the Oedipus myth. In addition to Oedipus, Sophocles' Oedipus' daughter, Antigone, constructs the inspiration for robustly ongoing proliferated reception and adaptation of Sophocles' Antigone across languages, cultures, and interpretations. In fact, Sophocles' Antigone and its numerous adaptations manifest the 'productivity' of texts assimilating and transmuting one another. They constitute a myriad of versions of which a couple of years' production (1978-1979) is called the years of 'Antigone- fever'. Sophocles' Antigone is a play that centralizes the question of civil disobedience of Antigone's character, the daughter of Oedipus, against Creon's rules. Jose Watanabe's *Antigona* is a script written in joining the creative members of the Peruvian experimental theater "Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani," who, long before cooperating with Watanabe, relied on a Spanish translation script of the Sophoclean one. In addition, the text that is compared to Watanabe's in this paper is *Antigonick*, Anne Carson's translation of Sophocles' Antigone, renowned as exceptional translation. Watanabe and Carson have generated adaptation and translation of Sophocles' Antigone, redacting their texts in the same genre of poetry, and generating more associations and layers of meanings by suggesting intertexts that are highly significant.

Keywords: Antigone; intertextuality; adaptation; dialogism; heteroglossia; powerless.

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1. Introduction

Greek theater, and broadly Greek culture, used to have and always has a timeless impact on Western culture and generally on literature. Ancient Greek theater is a considerable and an outstanding form of art of which heritage inspires generations, and of which realm surpasses amusement to politics and religion, especially the works of playwrights such as Sophocles. An explicitly renowned example of the influence of Sophocles, Greek theater, and Greek mythology is their entities as the source on which Sigmund Freud rests to develop a universal human psycho- sexual theory, the basis of which is the Oedipus myth. In addition to Oedipus, Sophocles' Oedipus' daughter, Antigone, constructs the inspiration for robustly ongoing proliferated reception and adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* across languages, cultures, and interpretations. Thus, such texts as *Oedipus* and *Antigone* are not just 'products' of a state of momentary exhaustion; they are rather in persistent 'production' conditions, according to Kristeva's conception of intertextuality. Kristeva's intertextuality, which is inspired by and built on Bakhtin's dialogism, is the leading reference for my analysis and comparison between the two adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*, namely the Peruvian poet Jose Watanabe's script *Antigona* (2000) and the Canadian poet Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (2012), to discuss the power of resoluteness of Antigone's character who defies the powerful ruler Creon.

Intertextuality has been introduced to French criticism by the Bulgarian philosopher Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s, reviewing the concepts of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, mainly his theory of dialogism and 'heteroglossia.' Bakhtin's dialogism is based on his scrutinizing Dostoyevsky's novels and could be elucidated through Bakhtin's concept of the 'polyphonic novel,' and thus maintaining the connection to the other texts and discourses [1:312]. Furthermore, Bakhtin's theory is supported by an explanation to his heteroglossia as the multiplicity of meanings that are inherent in the polyphonic novel. Hence, the purport of plural meanings is the principle of Kristeva's intertextuality, and both Kristeva and Bakhtin corroborate the dialogic feature of words [2:79], "Bakhtin's idea that every text is in a dialogical relationship with the other text sounds intertextual enough" [1: 313]. Such a prefatory summation of the origin of intertextuality could elaborate Kristeva's productivity of the text: "The text is therefore a productivity ... an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" [3:37]. In this sense, Sophocles' *Antigone* and its numerous adaptations manifest the 'productivity' of texts assimilating and transmuting one another. They constitute a myriad of versions of which a couple of years' production (1978-1979) is called the years of 'Antigone- fever,' according to George Steiner's *Antigones*. In his *Antigones*, the American critic George Steiner explores diverse adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*, for instance, in French, German, and other different contexts and cultures, with a splendid elaboration of the role of myth associated with the Antigone theme. He also sheds light on the Creon- Antigone conflict that centers the Western discourse of man and society [4:31], subtly reflecting what Zengin clarifies about Kristeva's notion of a 'word' in a text: "it must be read not only in terms of a meaning presumed to locate in the text, but also in terms of the relations between the text and other cultural discourses existing outside the text" [1:315].

Sophocles' *Antigone* is a play that centralizes the question of civil disobedience of Antigone's character, the daughter of Oedipus, against Creon's rules. She revolts against him when she grants her brother, Polyneices, the burial of which he is deprived. Oedipus' sons, Polyneices and Eteocles killed each other in a battle, and

therefore, Creon accuses Polyneices of betraying his country at the time of war and forbids his burial. Jose Watanabe's *Antigona*, however, is a script written in joining the creative members of the Peruvian experimental theater "Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani," who, long before cooperating with Watanabe, relied on a Spanish translation script of the Sophoclean one. The protracted anguish which Peru had been enduring composes the historical context of armed combating between successive governments and political parties, which Watanabe's script denotes. Jose Watanabe (1945- 2007), a venerated contemporary poet of Peru, won several literary awards, and he is known for his adaptation of *Antigona* written in free verse. In addition, the text that is compared to Watanabe's in this paper is *Antigonick*, Anne Carson's translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, renowned as exceptional translation. Anne Carson, born in 1950, is a Canadian poet, translator, and professor. She is a considerable translator of classical writers, and she has also taught classical languages and literature. Her *Antigonick*, a 'retelling' of *Antigone*, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, is not her only Sophoclean translation production; Sophocles' *Electra* (2001) is included in her works, too. Sharing the same age category, thus witnessing the contemporary world literature, the two poets, Watanabe and Carson have generated adaptation and translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, redacting their texts in the same genre of poetry – the two texts which are investigated in this paper.

It is unavoidable to begin with the connotation of the title of the two texts and how it contributes to the significance of power inside Antigone's character. In the first place, *Antigona* indicates the culturally specific name which is derived from the Sophoclean one, but at the same time belongs to the Spanish accent that represents not only the Peruvian culture, but also the entire region of other countries in Latin America. This is what Diaz calls "Antigona, with an accent," in the introduction of *Antigona by José Watanabe: A Bilingual Edition with Critical Essays*. The Latin American accent in the title could be inspected as Antigona expressing her rebellion against the oppression and the atrocities of the civil war, which had been agonizing her Peruvian society in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Diaz has gathered data about the armed conflict between governments in the introduction of *Antigona by José Watanabe: A Bilingual Edition with Critical Essays*. He, therefore, stated, "[t]his conflict, as *The Final Report by the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation* (CVR) would later reveal in 2003, left a toll of 69,280 violently murdered people and/or *desaparecidos* as well as 600,000 displaced peasants, 40,000 orphan children, 20,000 widows, and many other human rights violations, including torture and rape" [5:2].

On the other hand, the tale of Antigone in Watanabe's text is narrated by Ismene. Ismene is the narrator in *Antigona*, and her argument with her sister Antigone at the beginning of Sophocles' play is reversed in Watanabe's script, to present Ismene revealing her fear and guilt at the end:

In your heightened kingdom ask

Polyneices to forgive me for not fulfilling

my duty on time, because power's grip

made me a coward,

and tell him that I am greatly punished:

I am tortured and embarrassed every day

as I remember your deed [6]

She is Antigona “with accent,” and at the same time there is the disclosure at the end of Watanabe’s text that the narrator is Antigona’s sister, Ismene. Lambright states that Ismene is the surviving narrator but also the dead Antigona, which signifies the “living dead” Peruvians during the outrageous years of battling governments [7:34]. Moreover, it could be pointed out that Antigona’s weakness is ostensible; she has died, but she has struggled against the atrocious act of prohibiting her brother’s burial, while Ismene, who obeys the ruling power, is powerless and shameful. Indeed, Watanabe’s text is in dialogical relationship with the Peruvian agony and with the Sophoclean text as well. Unlike Carson’s *Antigonick*, Watanabe’s text does not include chorus, nor stage directions, and only Ismene is the narrator, but both texts share the deep significance of their titles. In fact, there is a lot that could be said and written about different performances of both texts, yet since the focus is intertextuality, it turns “from the stage to the page,” as stated in Diaz’s introduction.

The onset of words in the Sophoclean text travels then, from Latin America to the translation text of the Canadian pot, Carson who gives her version the name *Antigonick*, also split on the cover of the text as *Antigo nick*, suggesting pluralism of denotations. Thanks to the contributions of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, and consequently Kristeva’s intertextuality, such pluralism could be discussed within the lexical senses of Carson’s “nick” in her text. Among the lexical entries for “nick,” other than the ‘split’ or the ‘cut,’ as in the word *Antigo nick*, and as Antigone has split herself to be detached from being obedient to Creon, it is the one which means a “case,” or a “state,” implying that the conditions of Antigone make her a special case – in Carson’s text even a more rebellious one, to the extent that she could lose her mind:

Ismene: you are a person in love with the impossible

Antigone: and when my strength is gone I’ll stop

Ismene: it’s wrong

Antigone: don’t say that or I’ll have to hate you

he will hate you too

just let me go

for I’ll not endure anything so grievous as what robs me of a

noble death

Ismene: go then but know

you go as one beloved although

you go without your mind [8]

In the British slang, however, “nick” means to “arrest,” as occurred to Antigone by Creon. This could parallel analyzing Mary Shelley’s sentences in her novel *The Last Man* (1826), which is exemplified by Allen to elaborate Kristeva’s semiotic approach: “Kristeva’s semiotic approach seeks to study the text as a textual arrangement of elements which possess a double meaning: a meaning in the text itself and a meaning in what she calls ‘the historical and social text’” [9:37]. In addition, Carson ironically uses the expression ‘nick of time,’ said by the chorus near the end of the play, whereas they are by no means on time, since Antigone is already sentenced to death by Creon. It is interesting though, that the surprise at realizing the identity of the narrator as Ismene at the end of Watanabe’s script corresponds to an analogous surprise in Carson’s version, which is the character whose name is Nick, mentioned in Carson’s stage directions: [exeunt omnes except Nick who continues measuring] and whose role is merely measuring. This could ironically represent communities keeping measuring time without being in the nick of time, similarly as the “surviving” Ismene symbolizes the “living dead” Peruvians in *Antigona*, as formerly stated.

Distinguishing the two texts, *Antigona* is identified with memory and *Antigonick* with translation. Nevertheless, the relationship between translation and memory is intrinsic. Silverblank displays Carson’s preface to her 2012 text of *Antigonick*, “Carson designates her task as one of protecting Antigone, both as character and as text, from vocal oblivion” [10:343]. Such oblivion, moreover, is what Watanabe resists, becoming unified with his Peruvian people, “when so many official forces urged the nation to forget and so many bodies went unburied” [11:146]. Both Watanabe and Carson’s texts intersect and could be analyzed together at the point of discussing translation and memory. Antigone’s sacrifice is all for her brother’s dead body. She confronts death for the sake of eternalizing the divine rules of graving the dead: / I was caught in an act of perfect piety/ [8]/ This and death must I pay for the piety of my pity. / [6] Carson and Watanabe’s adaptations immortalize Antigone in return – in Watanabe’s text, for the Peruvian dead bodies, and through the regression of Ismene, and in Carson’s, by means of translation. Translation as a form of adaptation and as an act of interpretation assures Kristeva’s perception of texts as “mosaics of quotations” that are interpreted differently [12:90]. An interpretation of Carson’s *Antigonick* as commemoration of Antigone is even though personally allocated to memorializing Carson’s late brother. Campbell and Vidal remark critics’ pondering “Nick’s presence in the title,” which is previously analyzed in this paper in relation to heteroglossia, as an act of Carson’s conferring her brother a “public mourning,” thus integrating “the personal story of the translator and poet with Antigone’s loss” [13:18].

It is worthwhile in comparing Watanabe and Carson’s texts to highlight the representation of dead, alive, male, and female characters, to examine the universal timeless cause of the relationship between tyranny and the marginalized female gender. Exploring the reproduction of *Antigone*, Mee, and his colleagues note in their introduction stated:

If the story of Antigone is told again it is because certain human, social struggles repeat themselves at intervals in history, and a complex, rich structure like the narrative of Antigone becomes—sadly—meaningful, again and

again, to express the horror of the unburied dead, the costs of civil war, the wrack of atrocity, and the work of the survivors, so often women, who come after looking to bury the dead. [14:5]

In Watanabe's *Antigona*, the emphasis on selecting the female character of Ismene for solely being the narrator intensifies the feminist role in making changes in societies. In the Sophoclean text, the chorus ends the play describing the justice of gods embodied in the tragedy of Creon losing his son and wife. Instead, the ending of Watanabe's *Antigona* is Ismene's repentance, the repentance of her /small and guilty soul/ for not assisting her sister. Such repentance could be viewed as the change that the stubborn Antigone succeeds in, since Ismene regrets fearing the imperious power of Creon. Taking into consideration devoting Watanabe's script to Yuyachkani's performance team, an example from Yuyachkani's *Antigona* could be relied on. According to Lambright, Yuyachkani's team clarifies that Yuyachkani's *Antigona* is fundamentally about Peruvian women bearing national violence, and the play concentrates on the body of a single woman, Ismene the narrator [7:32]. Further interpretation of male and female bodies in *Antigona* is explored by Lambright about the voiceless omnipresent Polyneices's dead body, yet inducing the principal actions and Eteocles, the dead masculine national hero. Thus, all male voices are silent except the tyrant Creon. Even Haemon, who describes his father as /a multi-talented arrogant who when cracked, is empty/ (Watanabe), kills himself after Antigone's death. Moreover, the only reference to Antigone's body is the core of the play, at which Ismene aims in her narration.

On the other hand, how Carson is tied to a feminine significance in *Antigonick* is launched in her preface, named "the task of the translator of Antigone," stressing the uniqueness of Antigone's circumstances as being born of a father who married his mother. Complementing what is previously elucidated in this paper about Carson's declaration of "protecting Antigone," it could be inferred that part of such protection is the voice given by Carson to the marginalized Antigone, and part of being marginalized is Antigone's distinction to have a mother who is her grandmother:

for the family who lives there, things have gone irretrievably wrong

to have a father who is also your brother

means having a mother who is your grandmother

a sister who is both your niece and your aunt [8].

In a form of an epitaph, Carson inaugurates *Antigonick* with "dear Antigone," explaining the meaning of Antigone's name in Greek, which is close to being born to die: "against birth." In this mesmerizing free verse, Antigone's name is written in lowercase in "the task of the translator" title, whereas after "dear," it is written as normally as proper nouns in uppercase, as if Carson announces that she is the one who awards Antigone voice. Different allusions are also included in this epitaph such as Hegel, Beckett, Lacan, Brecht, and George Eliot, in addition to names of tyrants such as Stalin. In addressing Antigone, Carson continues: / to quote Kreon you are autonomous a word made up of autos "self" and nomos "law"/. Unlike Watanabe's text, Carson's *Antigonick* begins with the same Sophoclean dialogue between Antigone and Ismene, but with the inclusion of the same allusions to Hegel and Beckett, which are previously implicated in the epitaph:

Antigone: we begin in the dark

and birth is the death of us

Ismene: who said that

Antigone: Hegel

Ismene: sounds more like Beckett

Antigone: he was paraphrasing Hegel

Ismene: I don't think so [8].

Relying on the “multiplicity of interpretations,” these allusions in Carson’s text could not only be paraphrased as signifying that *Antigone* is timeless, but could also indicate that Carson reassures her “dear Antigone” by reinforcing her role and her autonomy, resisting against whoever could marginalize her: / and let’s footnote here Hegel calling Woman “the eternal irony of the community” how seriously can we take you? /. This could manifest what Campbell and Vidal call “translation as dialogue” [13:20]. They demonstrate what could respond to Bakhtin’s perception of poetry as monologic; on the contrary, Carson’s text exhibits multiplicity of voices.

Summarizing *Antigone* means recapping a unified though distinct history of humanity, sufferings, beliefs, and actions. The character of Antigone conceives all possible symbols and metaphors which are being reproduced in continuation of creating world literary works. Scrutinizing *Antigone* is dialogical and multivocal; it lasts in dialogue with all its rewritings, retellings, and adaptations.

Comparing various versions of *Antigone* demands a broad scope of investigation and research to cope with disparate levels of the multiplicity of interpretations. Among these levels are several types of analyses, multimodality, intertextuality, and performances. The limit of this paper is within the framework of intertextuality, mainly Kristeva’s which is owed to Bakhtin’s dialogism. Such a framework is selected to meet the focus on the text. Centralizing the text is a proper device in this paper to examine two scripts written in poetry adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. The two comparable scripts of Watanabe’s *Antigona* and Carson’s *Antigonick* are oriented, in this paper, to explore the emphasis of Antigone’s commitment to her faith for performing a mere humane act toward her brother, which is to bury him. This act, which should be considered in the principles of human rights of the modern world, is still violated in the same modern world that still offers the planet oppression and injustice. It is valuable to discuss Antigone’s belief in these human rights, as she insists on advocating these rights, believing she is doing the right thing. Her resoluteness is questioned in this paper through the ideas of memory, translation, oppression, and female gender marginalization in addition to the resistant connotations of the titles of the two examined scripts. Watanabe’s script is void of stage directions, since it assigns the whole narration to Ismene, of which significance is analyzed in this research paper. Carson’s *Antigonick*, however, is more oriented to modernism in translating the Sophoclean text. The two texts, nevertheless, share the emphasis which is put on the researched points in this paper, yet each text harnesses discrete tools.

They finally create layers of multiple meanings, interpretations, and voices that share cultural, social, and rhetorical intertexts.

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