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Elders, Make Room for Social Media

Alexandra Berardelli

Contemporary reinventions of Classical tragedy have stretched millennia, conserving and reimagining certain aspects of the original work and deepening the audience's understanding of the material. In connecting with contemporary works, it is crucial for an audience's interpretation that reception remains consistent in the original's foundational themes. However, not restricting itself within modern adaptation, whether redefining features or leaving them out, may give the audience a fresh analysis of the ancient material. With the modernization of the Greek chorus through social media, Sophie Deraspe's *Antigone* demonstrates that the chorus can influence the audience's interpretation of the ancient story as a personal, legal, and defiant story.

A common goal of Greek tragedy has been to establish a relationship with the audience to comment on the play. There are relationships between the audience and Sophocles' and Deraspe's *Antigone*. However, the medium by which the chorus is depicted changes the intimacy of a personal connection. In the choral ode toward the end of the film, there are striking images of several people on social media defending Antigone during her trial. The impact of Antigone and her defenses is evident as many articulate their support for her by publicly showing signs that read, "mon coeur me dit" and "free Antigone." (*Antigone*, 01:19:14-01:20:30). Compared to Sophocles' chorus, Deraspe's chorus is more involved in commenting on Antigone's defense. When Sophocles' chorus sees that Antigone was the one who buried Polynices, they are initially shocked. After Antigone defends herself verbally, the chorus states, "Now we see the girl's as wild by birth as her father. She has no idea how to bow her head to trouble." (Sophocles, v. 471-472). This claims that Antigone should have stayed out of the situation as a whole. In

contrast, the film's chorus surpasses this argument, visually showing overwhelming support from the public by its social media presence.

Deraspe knows that social media is a common ground for most in our generation, so illustrating critical aspects can effectively be done in this manner. In an interview with Seana Stevenson, Deraspe explains why she values the importance of social media as defined in relationships. She says, "In my previous film, which is called *The Anima Profile*, I experienced an online relationship between two women, one in Syria and one in Montreal. It was not only their love and political relationship but when the Syrian woman was abducted, then activists and journalists all over the world, many people got involved only via social media. It's part of how we live nowadays, it's part of our lives." (Deraspe). She is correct. Social media is an integral part of society today, and it makes sense why she would write the chorus like this. Although it seems like an unusual outlet for social commentary, at first glance, it may be more effective for interpretation than simply reading Sophocles' chorus. Since it is so contemporary, I can see people like myself commenting about a determined young woman, not reading about elders' commentary, which supports why I too support Antigone. Considering this choral ode is established through social media, it is easier for some to connect with the material, making a more intimate connection with the audience.

The film chorus's intimacy that strengthens our relationship with the play may also help our understanding of it as a legal story, precisely aiming for reform. The film preserves the central struggle about facing authority, like Sophocles, but uses a broader system instead of a single figure, Creon. It digs deeper into the conflicts of legal processes with Antigone and her family's personal experiences in the immigration system. The film's chorus emphasizes the need for reform as it shows people supporting Antigone and willingness to work together through

social media. Whereas Sophocles' chorus comments on Antigone's fate, saying, "But once a house is shaken by the gods, then madness stalks the family without fail, disaster for many generations...Now and for time to come, as it was before: Madness stalks mortals who are great, leaves no escape from disaster." (Sophocles, v. 584-5; v. 612-614). Thus, Sophocles' chorus shares an unfortunate fate that authority, especially the gods, has no escape. Similarly, the legal system in the film can serve as an authority that has no escape.

In contrast to the play's choral statements, analyzing the slogan frequently seen in Deraspe's social media scene, "Justice for Antigone," shows the magnitude of people who support this. It displays the need for legal reform of a damaged system or a polluted kingdom, which is necessary to save people's lives. Social media can reach many people with diverse backgrounds and experiences, and if enough people support something, change can happen. In my interpretation of the play, Antigone may have a small window of opportunity to be understood and supported by the kingdom and authority since those pushing for a change are the public realm. Reform needs a support system, and an outlet such as social media, or less contemporary, an informed public can carry out legal reform.

In light of those who strongly support what they believe in, Antigone truly embodies the spirit of a hard worker and a rebellious woman. In the same choral ode, the second repeated slogan, "mon coeur me dit," ("my heart tells me"), offers insight into how Antigone's values can help our interpretation of her character's concept of rebellion in the play. As in Sophocles' play, no one tells Antigone that she needs to do anything about burying her brother, but she internally feels that she should. So she determinedly makes it her mission to do so. In an interview with Alex Heeney, Deraspe interestingly explains how she tried to balance the Greek play and her contemporary version from a feministic, radical viewpoint. She says, "I think it says something

about our shared humanity that such a story with a young female character [who is] so intelligent was written more than 2000 years ago...there are young female characters in our contemporary world fighting when they feel the system is unfair or not doing what it should for the people. Some [young women] have the courage to step aside from their normal life and just fight for what they think is the right thing to do.” (Deraspe). In dialogue with the film's choral ode, this slogan has an inspiring message and recommends that we interpret Antigone's actions as defiant against the nature of the state and femininity.

It is quite inspiring for people, especially young women, to see a strong female character believing in her actions and doing what she wants from her heart. It likely was not a broadly acceptable belief at all times, but through the choral ode, it is demonstrated that the public took comfort in this idea and supported Antigone. Therefore, in my reading of the play, I support Antigone and her actions, however rebellious they may seem to the authority because she follows her heart. Deraspe making Antigone more determined in the film reinforces that she is defiant and thus makes Sophocles' play a defiant story.

Classical reception should not be a separate outlet for looking at a reinvention of a Classical work. Instead, it should be used in union with the original work to maximize the audience's interpretation of it. Deraspe's *Antigone* film certainly enhances my interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, not only because it is a modern adaptation. Its reinvention of the chorus through social media draws me toward a new understanding of the original text. The chorus through a social media medium aids our interpretation because it is more common to us. If we want to understand a world millennia ago, it might be worth examining it through a lens similar to us.

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