

Emmet's Latest Production: Anne Carson's Antigonick

EMMET – THE ENGLISH DEPT. THEATRE GROUP

Last semester, Emmet focused on Anne Carson's play *Antigonick* (2012). The English theatre workshop, which began in October 2014, culminated in three productions of *Antigonick* in the final week of December. The casting for the play took place on October 10th and a cast of 13 actors were selected for the production. As a prelude to the final production, Emmet took part in "Version Originale," during La Fête du Théâtre 2014, on October 31st, where an excerpt from *Antigonick* was performed in front of a full crowd.

Anne Carson's rendition of Sophocles' timeless tragedy *Antigone*, goes beyond translation. Carson not only updates the language and quickens the pace, she reinterprets the play. Though a tragedy, the text is very playful. Carson uses absurd one-liners that emerge at strange times in the play. Judith Butler remarks that "the lines often stand alone, as if broken off from the original text, stricken monuments" ("Can't Stop Screaming" n.p.).

Antigone has been reworked by a number of dramatists: Sophocles, Euripides, Jean Anouilh, Bertolt Brecht, Antonio D'Alfonso. Throughout the ages, she is fashioned by a male gaze. *Antigone*, lying in her "burial chamber" (signified by a square on stage), addresses the chorus. She proclaims that she doesn't want to talk about any of the male dramatists who have portrayed her: "Oh, I don't want to talk about him, or him, or Him" (*Antigonick*).



The play is a series of conflicts, which stem from the major theme of the play: the conflict between the man-made laws and the “unwritten, unfailing, eternal ordinances of the Gods” (*Antigonick*). Carson makes the staccato dialogues between the Guard and Kreon, Antigone and Kreon, Haimon and Kreon, Teiresias and Kreon, razor sharp. In one conflict, Kreon asserts, “enemy is always enemy, alive or dead,” to which Antigone responds, “I am born of love not hatred.” Emmet’s production explored the nuances of these conflicts, and brought these give-and-take exchanges to life with great intensity.

“WE ARE STANDING IN THE NICK OF TIME”

Carson’s version of the play begins with the mute character Nick, who does nothing but measure throughout the play. It has been suggested that Nick is a representation of time: how time measures the human world by seconds, minutes, hours, and days. Emmet’s “Nick” started his measurements with the audience, measuring the distance between audience members; some were bewildered, some were partly amused (if they were uncomfortable they hid it well). Nick, invisible to the characters of the play, appeared from time to time (no pun intended) to measure things like the raised eyebrow of Kreon, the distance between Kreon and Antigone, and the height of the Guard. One of the most striking still images of the play features Nick’s handiwork when he ran around Kreon and Haimon, and tied them together with tape.



“HOW IS A GREEK CHORUS LIKE A LAWYER? THEY ARE BOTH IN THE BUSINESS OF SEARCHING FOR A PRECEDENT.”

In Greek tragedy, the chorus can be regarded as an additional character. The chorus is the voice of reason, the moral compass, the public opinion, and mirrors to/of the characters.

The chorus of *Antigonick* was made up of four cast members, identically attired, with their faces painted in abstract shapes. Between scenes, they came together as a collective unit to deliver the choral odes on varied themes: Victory, Man, Love, Fate, and Time. The four members of the chorus marked the boundaries of the theatrical space, at times invading the space of the audience. Emmet's production explored the simultaneous individuality and collectiveness of the chorus.



Additionally, Emmet's production was inspired by Carson's *NOX* (2010). The production incorporated several extracts from this text, which was written as an epitaph to her estranged brother who died in 2000. The story behind *NOX* bears an almost eerie resemblance to the plot of *Antigone*. Recordings of two telephone conversations between Carson and her brother were used to begin and end the play. Moreover, Carson problematizes the notion of translation in both *NOX* and *Antigonick*. Emmet's production integrated Carson's attitude towards translation by using the Roman elegy "Catullus 101." Carson devotes the whole of *NOX* to the translation of the Catullan elegy from Latin to English. It could be argued that the production itself was a translation of Carson's (Sophocles') words into performance. During the production, "Catullus 101" was recited in Latin and English, and it was signed using the French sign language, indicating to the audience the different layers of translation that were present within the text. The play ended with the whole cast signing Antigone's penultimate line: "I am born of love not hatred," which gave new meaning to the expression "signing off in style."



If you missed Emmet's production of *Antigonick* last December, fear not; more shows are yet to come this year. Emmet will perform on May 8th, at the Festival d'Ateliers-Théâtre 2015, to be held at the Théâtre la Comédie. We are also hoping to perform at the Festival Féculé, in Lausanne. In the spring semester, the English Theatre workshop will kick off February 20th. We will continue to work on *Antigonick*, along with a variety of theatre games and exercises based on the teachings of Sanford Meisner and Konstantin Stanislavsky.

Students, alumni, and outside participants who would like to join Emmet can register for the workshop at <http://www.a-c.ch/>.

For more details please go to <http://emmet.ch/> or contact marlon.ariyasinghe@gmail.com.

Butler, Judith. "Can't Stop Screaming." *Public Books*. 5 Sept. 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2014.
<http://www.publicbooks.org/fiction/cant-stop-screaming>

Sophokles. *Antigonick*. Trans. Anne Carson. Illust. Bianca Stone. Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2012.