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A STUDY OF SOME YOUNG CHARACTERS
IN THE EARLY WORK OF JEAN ANOUILH

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in French
at
Massey University, Palmerston North

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1975

To my Mother and my Father

ABSTRACT

The thesis presents some young characters from the early work of Jean Anouilh, and their dilemmas. These young characters embody many of the ideas and ideals of the young Anouilh, and his subjectivity adds depth and realism.

The first chapters each present one major work, along with one or more works of lesser importance, and in all these, characters take on similar characteristics, and modes of behaviour: all conform to a particular code of ethics, and this generally involves revolt of some kind against society, home or life. This study culminates in the chapter depicting the young Antigone, who epitomises youthful absolutes and romantic ideals.

Prior to the concluding chapter, some of the works of Jean Anouilh after Antigone, 1944, are presented. These works are chosen to give some impressions of the change in Anouilh's themes as he grows older. The works of the 1970's show a complete change of emphasis and viewpoint: now, the audience, instead of seeing the world through the eyes of a young man or woman, sees everything through the eyes of an older man. And, instead of youth either eagerly anticipating involvement with life, or willingly opting out of its corruptions and compromises, we see older characters, who, with age, have grown cynical, bitter and regretful. Now the youthful heroes and heroines are gone, and in their place are the older and sad Anouilhean victims.

The conclusion surveys the Anouilhean Theatre as a whole, and affords a final comment on Anouilh's impact as a young 20th Century dramatist and as an older 20th Century dramatist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Among all those who have in any way helped me to prepare this work, I should like to thank my parents and my sisters who have given me so much encouragement; Professor Dunmore who has given so readily of his time and scholarly advice; the staff of the French section of the Modern Languages Department, Massey University; the Library staff; and finally Marion Trevor for her very fine typing.

February, 1975

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INTRODUCTORY PREFACE

While studying some of Anouilh's more recent plays, I gradually became aware of how very different the younger characters appeared there, compared with how they had appeared in the plays of his youth. The plays of this early period, some of which I had read four years earlier, had some fragile, beautiful spirit which was somehow indefinably lacking in these later works. And it was not until a recent rereading of the earlier plays that the essential difference became clear to me. Anouilh's works can be divided into clearly differing spheres. The one is that resilient realm they call youth: here, the young protagonist is presented positively, and subjectively. More often, he is the hero: sometimes he is cast as anti-hero. But in this realm, no challenge is too great, no beauty too perfect. Within this sphere, the young Anouilh chanced to immortalize young moods, impressions, thoughts and actions. Because he too was young, this was his period of best youth portrayal. In the later sphere, while he still creates young characters, he has moved from a young world to an adult one, and to commenting on the human condition, in the light of social and political change. In these later works, it is the mature outlook that is depicted, and therefore it is the mature character now that has impetus.

This work studies some of those masterpieces of his youth, and through them a definite progression, climaxed in Antigone. Behind this progression of character,

thought and theatrical skills, one can sense the presence and, in many instances, the support, of a young, sympathetic playwright. Anouilh was only 19 years of age when he wrote his first play studied here, Humulus le Muet. Along with this short play, the first chapter will include a comment on the first of the four major plays to be studied in this thesis: L'Hermine. Chapter II includes the second major play Jézabel and also an insignificant play written at about the same time. Chapter III studies La Sauvage, the third important study, along with a further lesser important play, while Chapter IV covers those plays appearing after La Sauvage and before the major study in this work, Antigone in Chapter V. The final chapter, Chapter VI discusses some of Anouilh's later works, which provide a parallel to the youth theatre. The conclusion then follows.

*** Jean Anouilh was born in Bordeaux on 23 June, 1910. He went to Paris when he was young and attended Colbert Primary School and Chaptal College. He spent a year and a half at the Law Faculty in Paris, then two years in an advertising firm, where he learned to be ingenious and exact. But the era surrounding and enclosing his youth was that of the bleak pessimistic depression of the 1920's - 1930's. The influences of compromise and corruption were prevalent: youth fell easy prey to these, and Giraudoux fought back with his theory and presentation of the youthful, pure absolutist, who defies to the point of rebellion all such tainting of the ideal self. Anouilh reflects many of these aspects in his early works, owing much of his early thought to the influence

of Giraudoux. In his early characters, from 1929 to 1934, the idea of the protagonist refusing to soil the perfect self, and to reject all that is sordid and repulsive to the idealist, is beginning. Anouilh develops his skill in this direction gradually, until finally, with Antigone, he creates something epitomizing youth, purity, absolutes, and romantic ideals.

The 1930's saw a renaissance in tragedy, with Giraudoux and Paul Claudel being among the foremost writers. Classical legends and historical subjects were used, with relevance to modern or contemporary life. Giraudoux himself became a dramatist in 1929 with Siegfried, and his reputation continued from that time. It was in fact his outstanding achievement that set a particular stamp on the theatre of the inter-war period. He and Cocteau well prepared the way for Anouilh's Antigone by their own successful depicting of the young, heroic protagonist. Giraudoux in Amphitryon 38 and Intermezzo incarnated much of his essentially youthful theatre, by which Anouilh could well have been greatly influenced. Such heroines as Alcmena and Isabelle "express well Giraudoux's constant creation of ideal values" as Inskip writes⁽¹⁾. He continues:

"The young girl, or the young woman, whose eager acceptance of life has not been shaken by the unpleasant necessity of reshaping dreams to fit reality, whose grace and charm are but the expression of her close kinship with Nature in its most youthful and spontaneously attractive forms - birds, young animals, the perfume of

flowers - is a natural incarnation of the artist's vision of a world of harmony and light."

Anouilh's *Antigone* reflects much of these qualities. She too loves Nature, animals, flowers and the sense of refuge she has always found outdoors, alone.

Giraudoux, therefore, had perhaps the greatest influence on the young Anouilh. Jean Cocteau also wrote on *Antigone*, and Anouilh shows signs of Cocteau's influence, though by no means to the extent of Giraudoux's. The major serious dramatists of the Occupation, along with Anouilh, were Camus and Sartre, and all three were primarily concerned with man and his place in the universe. Anouilh moves away from the tragic aura of depression, war and occupation, into maturity and peace; he loses youth and a sense of the tragic as he enters his theatre of social comment. He leaves behind him, for the most part, the heroic, courageous young characters, and he enters the world of the middle aged, highly objective writer, who is often sceptical, and cynical. He now comments on the human condition, using the retrospect device.

The protagonists now are older, and most of them have spent very ordinary, mediocre lives, doing all the ordinary things. They squabble and bicker, and regret. And they pass much time reflecting on their youth: in fact their present situations are for the most part those of the early anti-heroes, but aged. The final chapter will exemplify these statements.

Anouilh's works reflect the mood of the times in which he

was and is writing. He too was one of the poor youths who people his early works, and he too is one of older characters in the later plays. He could associate with Thérèse and Antigone, because in 1934 and 1942 he also was experiencing similar feelings of revolt, and absoluteness. To the people of war-torn France, Antigone gave courage and inspiration. To the man in the 1970's, I guess Antoine has constructive comments! I would not know. They do not mean much to me yet. Right now, Antigone is more relevant.

Inskip: Jean Giraudoux - the making of a Dramatist,
Oxford University Press, 1958.

CHAPTER I

The first theatrical work of Jean Anouilh was a very short play entitled Humulus le Muet written in 1929, in collaboration with Jean Aurenche. Since this time, the play has been frequently performed by amateur companies, being of extremely limited and simple actions, yet of considerable impact. And it is the impact created by the series of symbolic yet uncomplicated tableaux, that bears mention. Anouilh, at the age of 19, presents a solitary, clumsy, youthful hero, Humulus, the mute. In the first scene we meet a younger Humulus surrounded by older people, of extremely high class and social values, who impatiently await the youth's word, as he can say but one word a day.

The opening scene depicts hope, as they are all hoping that today, New Year's Day, the boy will say a new two syllable word, "bonheur". The situation is created skilfully. The atmosphere is tense, as the boy walks the line of servants to his grandmother, the Duchess, and his uncle, who are seated with his tutor. Scarlet with embarrassment, the boy wrestles inwardly with the word, and ultimately can but say "merci". Humulus, utterly dejected, despondent, is left alone in the middle of the stage.

By the end of the first scene, Humulus has become an interesting symbolic character, and already foreshadows the Anouilhean young man, tongue-tied and clumsy - frightened before the materialist world. Into a world of concrete materialism, he has tried to eject something abstract, aesthetic and lasting, "bonheur", but the combination of setting, atmosphere and clumsiness has

prevented it.

The second tableaux presents the same characters, including Humulus, in the same position, but all considerably older. Humulus, now a young man, enters, and is to pronounce the word "prospérité". He is, once again, tongue-tied, only this time his inability to speak is caused by his inability to express not only an abstract word, but an abstract feeling, love. So he has written it down, to be read. The Duchess is shocked. She then sees the reason for his silence:

"Ma triste infirmité ne me permettant de dire
qu'un seul mot par jour, je suis décidé, à partir
d'aujourd'hui, à m'abstenir de mots."⁽¹⁾

In the final scene, Anouilh demonstrates how Humulus uses his 30 words, in a supreme bid to express himself utterly. In the third scene, Humulus is with Hélène, the young woman with whom he has fallen in love; she asks him the way to the beach; he can only point the way, with one hand on his heart. She thanks him and gets back up on her bicycle, all smiles, and he follows. Then, in the final scene, set in the garden, the tutor approaches Humulus, a sheet of paper in his hand, and he informs Humulus of the very great difficulty he has had in trying to condense into 30 words all Humulus is to say to Hélène in explanation of his feelings for her. He has come up with the 30 words, which say in a complicated and heartless way, that he loves her:

"Mademoiselle. Un amour éclatant m'a pris aux

entrailles depuis l'autre jour. Que mes larmes
 et mes soupirs attendrissent votre beauté cruelle.
 Un seul geste de vous guérirait toutes mes
 blessures."⁽²⁾

Humulus now wants the tutor to move away, while he encounters the young maid alone. He goes towards her, rereading finally the piece of paper. And here we see the "mute" Humulus speaking the much revered 30 words, but moreover we see him, for the first time, uncontrollably pouring out words when love has moved him, not just the "mute" speaking, but spontaneously expressing himself. In these 30 words, the young man has first introduced himself: then he has answered her question, so long verbally unanswered, as to how far from the beach she was, and finally, in his remaining three word allowance, he has blurted out his simple declaration of love for her, "je vous aime".

In a final symbolic gesture, she smiles back at him, and explains, apologetically, that she cannot hear him, that she is a little hard of hearing. She opens the small black box she carries on her bicycle, and produces a hearing horn, and gently placing it to her ears she asks, "Voulez-vous répéter, s'il vous plaît?"⁽³⁾

The orchestra depicts audibly the utter despair of the young Humulus who has finally spoken spontaneously and sincerely, and who has exhausted his month's supply of words, without even being heard.

At the age of 21 years, Anouilh wrote L'Hermine, and this play serves as an interesting sequel to Anouilh's first work.

Frantz, the young protagonist, makes his entrance on to

the stage, and leaves after setting the stage for Anouilh's world, with all its dilemma and tragedy. Frantz introduces himself clearly as a young man with a problem. He loves or thinks he loves a childhood friend, Monime. She is an orphan, without means, and lives with an old aunt, the Duchess of Granat, who is very wealthy. Monime is the only heiress. Frantz also is an orphan, and is very poor. He wants to marry Monime, but since she is a minor, he wants to run away with her. For this he needs money. And money is the motivating force behind the protagonists in this play. For two years he has tried to make money in an industrial enterprise, which has advanced little. The play opens with Frantz confronting an influential American who, he hopes, will advance him the necessary funds for the enterprise. When these are not forthcoming, Frantz despairs, as did Hamulus; and in his youthful, blind desperation, both to realize his happiness, which is represented by money and Monime, and his thirst for absolutes, he murders her wealthy aunt, and is taken away by the police.

Anouilh, perhaps in an attempt to fulfil the aims ultimately realized in Antigone, presents the first part of the dilemma in this work in a concrete way. The conflict is established here. Frantz's problem is eclipsed when he suddenly realizes the heavy burden of heredity's influence and condition, while at the same time being aware of a better, finer heredity in another totally different class. First this young man, who has grown away from his lower class origins, in favour of a higher class or way of life, expresses utter disillusionment. Frantz cannot quite relinquish his hold on this new found existence, and he

elects absolutes, which here unfortunately involve criminal action, and he is convicted. Following Humulus, his role is the establishing of the setting, the life, the climate, the dilemma: young people who are confronted with life, the challenges they have to meet on their own in the midst of mature, successful and complacently unhelpful "salauds". Anouilh aims to place these confrontations in an arena in which the physical and spiritual fight will be played to the end, and where he can present his manifesto. This same manifesto, as we saw in the introductory chapter, is that followed by all the young heroes and heroines of Anouilh.

Frantz gives us the first glimpse of the workings and intentions of the young Anouilh. In Frantz Anouilh presents a young man not yet 25, and we meet him at a very critical stage in his development, open to all present corrupting influences. Whether or not Anouilh intended this as something autobiographical, we do not know. That they are both young, poor and probably in love at this stage, we do. There are other similarities. Frantz has a concrete goal, in keeping with Anouilh's plan. Frantz is to pave the way for the more solid thinkers, emotionally and psychologically, who are to succeed him. Frantz interprets his goal as money, which will, he is sure, give him happiness - Monime somehow falls between the two - whereas Anouilh's goal is aesthetic, literary, spiritual, and he realizes his goal in theatrical self-fulfillment and success. Frantz knows he has failed, when he accepts compromise, and realizes Monime has rejected his action.

In the first act, Frantz is seen clearly as the desperate youth who urgently needs money as a means to beginning life and happiness. We meet the older, complacent Bentz, who is not concerned enough to help the young man. Only later does he act, and then it is too late. Bentz tells him he must be patient. Frantz appeals: "Si je vous disais que je suis à bout?"⁽⁴⁾ Bentz replies: "Je vous répondrais que tous les jeunes gens disent cela."⁽⁵⁾ Here is youth and the predicament of the young. Right now, Frantz thinks money will solve all his problems:

"Je ne sais ce que je suis, sinon un jeune homme qui veut se procurer les quelques milliers de francs de son bonheur."⁽⁶⁾

Bentz repulses Frantz with his long-term acceptance of compromise. And Frantz hates himself for having to crawl to this man in order to achieve an absolute. Compromise seems the only means of escape: in order to reach the position in which only absolutes exist, he must face a dilemma involving some form of compromise to effect any progress at all. Is this compromise necessary, and is it really a compromise? Or where does compromise cease to be compromise and become transaction? Bentz makes an interesting statement at this stage to Monime.

"Mademoiselle, vous étiez en train de raconter des histoires charmantes où notre ami Frantz a eu peur d'être compromis."⁽⁷⁾

The use of the past tense is highly significant here. It indicates Bentz' anticipation of physical and moral victory over youthful absolutes and purity. Bentz symbolises the bourgeois' total commitment to material

demands. Frantz wants to remain aloof from all such bonds. This is part of the youthful illusion. He is prepared to discuss, and to change tactics and in this sense, he contemplates compromise, in order to escape from his youthful dilemma - thus he cannot be an Anouilh hero. Frantz, with his intentions and desires, has no alternative. He awakens to the ethics of the situation at this stage, and hates himself for it. Bentz tells him:

"Dans le cas présent, votre situation est extrêmement compromise: je vous conseille même de renoncer à cette jeune fille."⁽⁸⁾

Frantz replies,

"Cela me faisait mal, mais je croyais que vous alliez m'acheter mes confidences avec de l'argent."⁽⁹⁾

To Philippe he says,

"J'ai compris quelle sinistre farce c'était, une jeunesse pauvre."⁽¹⁰⁾

Poverty has, for him, become a living reality. Poverty and youth have become inseparable and incompatible. In the student cafes, it was different. This leads on to the contemplation of crime and the entry of moral choice. He will now try to compromise with the forces of evil.

"J'ai su voir mon bonheur, en déblayer le chemin à travers mes fausses idées d'adolescent, et je n'aurai pas la force de le réaliser."⁽¹¹⁾

and further, "c'est trop pour moi tout seul."⁽¹²⁾

Act II opens outside the home of Monime's aunt, and in her we see signs of a long ingrained awareness of class differences. Monime says: "Cela m'est bien égal d'être pauvre."⁽¹³⁾ But she has never been poor. She does however present a strong contrast to Frantz, who could be seen as a realist - foreseeing too clearly all the trials to which poverty would subject her.

Coupled with Frantz's essential problem of how to get the money necessary to wed and provide for Monime, is his regret that she must leave this world of wealth and comfort. But he needs the money because this will bring him "happiness". Frantz sees but one action, which will deliver him from this dilemma - murder. He ceases to be aware of right or wrong. He can choose active evil, or remain stagnating within the inactive forces of good in his life. His need is urgent, thus the passive forces of good have no immediate appeal. He has but one path to follow now: to poison Monime morally against all sense of crime, and then to poison the aunt herself. He shouts, in front of Monime:

"Pourquoi m'avez-vous donné cet amour puisque vous ne m'avez pas donné avec lui toutes les crédulités nécessaires?"⁽¹⁴⁾

His anguish reflects his victimisation by his environment.

"S'aimer, c'est lutter constamment contre des milliers de forces cachées qui viennent de vous ou du monde."⁽¹⁵⁾

She adds, "Nous sommes assez forts pour lutter", to which he replies, "pas avec la pauvreté à nos côtés".

He commits himself to the consequences. They have become too powerful to fight; he accepts them. The aunt's death was to equate happiness, until the thought of it makes him sadistic, depraved. Monime remains perceptive, despite an intensity of emotion:

"Nous nous aimons mal, Frantz ... Nous ne nous aimons que de tendresse et, pour de la tendresse, on ne tue pas."⁽¹⁶⁾

He cannot understand the real truth of her statement:

"Tu mens, tu mens."⁽¹⁷⁾

He has become unreasonable at this stage, and it is this very unreasonableness that typifies Frantz as youthful. Act III opens with the intrusion of the outside world, and its strict code of ethics: Frantz is shown as compelled to confront them and to comply. His clever line of argument permits him to answer and evade each issue, but he is anguished and conscious of a still greater dilemma. The old man is charged with the murder, and Frantz confesses to Philippe:

"Si je l'ai tuée, ce n'est pas pour son argent, c'est parce que son argent ... était devenue le prix exact de notre pureté. Je voulais que mon amour vive, qu'il soit beau, qu'il soit pur, et, pour qu'il vive, j'aurais accompli les tâches les plus horribles."⁽¹⁸⁾

Once they have the money - which is the physical answer to the physical problem - something is dead between them. Monime can no longer accept him:

"Moi, je t'aurais aimé pauvre."⁽¹⁹⁾

She is a contrasting character to him, in that she has depth.

Frantz, young, stands as the Anouilh prototype, the physical embodiment of Anouilh's original thought: a boy just become man, poverty-stricken still, without obvious forthcoming financial aid, anguished, absurdly conscious of an inferior inherent social disposition, which he desperately wants to forget. Frantz is a physical character with a very physical, concrete problem: he firmly believes that love and happiness are dependent upon money. So he appears to live out his dilemma on the surface of existence. He stands trapped on the threshold of another world, caught up in the bitter web of disillusionment with which he is not equipped to cope. Physically torn by all the torments of the flesh, whilst possessing neither the ability to accept differences, nor the desire to rationalize, he exists, and loathes what he sees, what he has seen, what he knows, what he will never see, and what he will see forever unless he breaks free and revolts. In this way, Frantz, the first Anouilhean protagonist to face the harsh world through the theatre, experiences the anguish which Anouilh pursues further in his later works.

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| (1) | <u>Pièces Roses</u> | page 18 |
| (2) | ibid. | 21 |
| (3) | ibid. | 22 |

(4)	<u>Pièces noires</u>	Page 12
(5)	ibid.	13
(6)	ibid.	13
(7)	ibid.	26
(8)	ibid.	35
(9)	ibid.	36
(10)	ibid.	40
(11)	ibid.	50
(12)	ibid.	52
(13)	ibid.	79
(14)	ibid.	80
(15)	ibid.	81
(16)	ibid.	96
(17)	ibid.	96
(18)	ibid.	116
(19)	ibid.	129