

JEAN ANOUILH AND THE THEATRE OF REVOLT

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The purpose of this dissertation will be as follows: to analyse the theme of revolt as it is presented in seven of Jean Anouilh's plays -- namely, La Sauvage, Eurydice, L'Hermine, Le Voyageur sans bagage, L'Alouette, Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu, Antigone, and to assess the dramatic value and importance of this theme in Anouilh's theatre.

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T A B L E    O F    C O N T E N T S

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I    -    THE PRIVATE WORLD OF REVOLT	3
CHAPTER II    -    THE PUBLIC WORLD OF REVOLT	24
CHAPTER III   -    THE UNIVERSE OF REVOLT	40
CONCLUSION	49
APPENDIX	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	53

## INTRODUCTION

Jean Anouilh is unquestionably a distinguished French playwright whose dramatic output has captivated French audiences from the time when he made his debut in the theatre in 1932. Following in the footsteps of Salacrou, Lenormand and Giraudoux, Anouilh quickly became a well-known dramatist to the boulevard public in Paris. By 1944, subsequent to the first performance of Antigone, he enjoyed international repute. The vast output of his later works still appeals to a large theatre-going public.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the theme of revolt as expressed in seven of Anouilh's plays and to assess the dramatic value and importance of this theme in Anouilh's theatre. We feel that revolt is the preponderant theme of Anouilh's dramatic works and, hence, that our analysis will be rewarding for the purposes of an academic study. However, we wish to make it perfectly clear that Anouilh is above all a craftsman who intends to entertain his audience and that he does not claim to be didactic; concerning his task, he has stated:

Nous devons d'abord répondre à la nécessité où sont des comédiens de jouer chaque soir des pièces pour un public qui vient oublier ses ennuis et la mort. Ensuite, si, de temps à

autre, un chef-d'oeuvre s'affirme, tant mieux!<sup>1</sup>

Our study will deal with three major categories of revolt in Anouilh's theatre. For our analysis, we have chosen a series of plays which we feel are most representative of the author's works. In Chapter I revolt will be studied in four of Anouilh's early pièces noires, La Sauvage, Eurydice, L'Hermine and Le Voyageur sans bagage. This chapter will illustrate revolt which takes place in private worlds and will attempt to explain why this revolt occurs. An effort will also be made in this chapter to show how this theme is tied to some of Anouilh's other predominant themes. Chapter II will deal with revolt in two of Anouilh's pièces costumées, L'Alouette and Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu and will demonstrate that revolt for a cause in these plays happens in a historical-political context. In Chapter III Anouilh's presentation of revolt in Antigone will be analysed. In the conclusion Anouilh's merits as a man of the theatre will be considered with respect to the dramatic value and importance of revolt as theme in his plays.

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Anouilh in Paul-Louis Mignon, "Le Théâtre de A à Z: Anouilh, Jean", L'Avant-Scène, 210 (1959), p. 6.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PRIVATE WORLD OF REVOLT

It is our intention in this section of our dissertation to present an analytical study of the theme of revolt as it appears in four of Jean Anouilh's early pièces noires—namely, La Sauvage, Eurydice, L'Hermine, and Le Voyageur sans bagage. Firstly, we shall consider Anouilh's conception of humanity and outline the principal reason for which his "heroes" and "heroines" are manifestations of revolt. Thereafter, an examination will be undertaken to analyze the theme of revolt as it is presented in each of the four plays, and to show the intricate relationship that exists between this theme and the other predominant themes of Anouilh's works.

In Anouilh's dramatic works, humanity is composed of two kinds of people: a mass of nonentities who accept the banality of daily existence and "heroes". The first group<sup>1</sup> is motivated chiefly by a desire for happiness and material pleasures, and performs the daily routine of a humdrum human existence. In Eurydice, M. Henri describes this group:

Une race nombreuse, féconde, heureuse, une grosse  
pâte à pétrir, qui mange son saucisson, fait ses  
enfants, pousse ses outils, compte ses sous, bon

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<sup>1</sup>The members of this group resemble Camus' "l'homme quotidien". See: Albert Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 80.

an mal an, malgré les épidémies et les guerres,  
 jusqu'à la limite d'âge; des gens pour vivre,  
 des gens pour tous les jours, des gens qu'on  
 n' imagine pas morts.<sup>2</sup>

We shall retain this as our definition of Anouilh's "mediocre" man.

The second group (that of "heroes" and "heroines") rejects the banality of everyday existence. The members of this group realize the imperfection of the human lot and they revolt against life and its petty pleasures. By refusing to accept life they condemn themselves to a tragic end. In Eurydice, M. Henri describes them to Orphée:

. . . les nobles, les héros. Ceux qu'on imagine très bien étendus, pâles, un trou rouge dans la tête, une minute triomphants avec une garde d'honneur ou entre deux gendarmes selon: le gratin.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the "mediocre" man, Anouilh's "hero" is unable to accept the society of which he is a part. Because of his quest for a purity unattainable in the material, adult world, Anouilh's hero refuses to compromise with men and the world in which he lives. Generally speaking, he revolts against an "impure" world -- a world of egoists and hypocrites, a world of social caste, a world in which a pure love relationship cannot exist. Moreover, some of Anouilh's heroes reject

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<sup>2</sup>Jean Anouilh, Eurydice, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 440.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 440.

life, because they believe that it taints and corrupts everything that is pure. An analysis of the theme of revolt in La Sauvage, Eurydice, L'Hermine, and Le Voyageur sans bagage documents these affirmations and allows us to understand more fully the hero's rebellious reaction to his social surroundings and, in some cases, to his very existence.

Thérèse Tarde, the heroine of La Sauvage, is an unsophisticated young girl who revolts against the vileness and materialistic values of her lower middle-class family. Pure by nature, innocent, she is unable to accept a sordid milieu in which every person's prime concern is self-aggrandizement. She is disgusted, for example, by her family's numerous ignoble schemes to procure a portion of Florent's money:

Mais qu'est-ce que vous croyez tous? Qu'il est une machine à vous faire gagner de l'argent, qu'il faut que je ne pense qu'à son argent?<sup>4</sup>

Unquestionably, Thérèse withstands the debilitating influences of her upbringing and her environment. Despite her difficult childhood and adolescence in poverty-stricken surroundings, she remains spiritually alienated from her avaricious parents. Her vulgar parents and venal companions, who form a group of debased café musicians, encourage her to

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<sup>4</sup>Jean Anouilh, La Sauvage, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 158.

exploit Florent to the fullest but she refuses to do so.

In the first act of La Sauvage, Thérèse is hopeful that her love relationship with Florent will permit her to reject the moral squalor of her past and bring her redemption from her discontent. Angoissée, she wishes to advance to a region where "tout au bout du désespoir, il y a une blanche clairière où l'on est presque heureux".<sup>5</sup> We note towards the end of this act, however, that Thérèse foresees the difficulties to be encountered in her transition into the respectable milieu of Florent. Although she expresses contempt for wealth and her milieu, she unhypocritically admits that she is a member of the poor race who covet money. When Florent tosses money on the café floor, she readily picks it up, saying:

Je dois les ramasser à genoux pour ne pas mentir,  
je suis de cette race.<sup>6</sup>

In the second and third acts of the play, Thérèse rejects the happiness of the bourgeois world represented by Florent. To be sure, her revolt against Florent's way of life is as complete as her revolt against her own family. While residing in Florent's luxurious home, she finds his riches and basic ignorance of human suffering unbearable because she has known the humiliations of being poor. When

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

Hartman, Florent's impresario, attempts to persuade her to forget her past life and to accept Florent's happiness, she rejects his suggestion of compromise and rebukes him, stating:

Vous me dégoûtez tous avec votre bonheur! On dirait qu'il n'y a que le bonheur sur la terre. Hé bien, oui, moi, je ne veux pas me laisser prendre par lui toute vivante. Je veux continuer à avoir mal et à souffrir, à crier, moi! C'est extraordinaire, n'est-ce pas? Vous ne pouvez pas comprendre, n'est-ce pas?<sup>7</sup>

In Florent's world, Thérèse discovers that happiness is possible only for those who are blind to the suffering and unpleasant realities endured by the poor. She realizes that Florent, who is happy and rich, cannot understand what her past has been:

Tu ne sais rien! Tu comprends . . . je veux te crier une fois encore; c'est ce qui m'a fait le plus de mal. Tu ne sais rien. Vous ne savez rien vous autres, vous avez ce privilège de ne rien savoir. Ah! Je me sens grosse ce soir de toute la peine qui a dû serrer, depuis toujours, le coeur des pauvres quand ils se sont aperçu que les gens heureux ne savaient rien, qu'il n'y avait pas d'espoir qu'un jour ils sachent!<sup>8</sup>

Unable to cast off her sordid recollections, she attempts to shatter Florent out of his complacency and joie de vivre by challenging him to take an interest in her past life. To this end, she recites sordid details about her former milieu and urges her father to indulge in extremes of vulgarity

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

when he visits Florent's home:

J'aurais voulu que tu fasses plus fort encore.  
Que tu te déculottes pour nous faire rire. Que  
tu sois malade, que tu vomisses à force de  
boire....<sup>9</sup>

Thérèse perceives that she will always be kept back from happiness in Florent's world by the thought of other people's suffering and degradation. She feels "moins pure"<sup>10</sup> in his society and understands that she must reject it if she is to remain true to herself and to her ideal of purity. Edward Owen Marsh explains the nature of this purity which Thérèse desires:

Thérèse's character is one of pure revolt. Reason, inclination and good luck all point the easy way. Against all of these she defends her integrity -- an integrity wounded but made more sensitive and compassionate by experience. Her sense of what is 'fitting' -- what sort of happiness she is capable of enjoying and giving -- decides her actions. This sense is something pure and fine which is in touch with life at a point beyond considerations of justice and happiness; by it she apprehends a meaning or pattern in life, a purity which has its own laws in relation to each individual soul. The ordinary pursuit of justice and happiness dulls this sense in most people, dulls them to the deeper knowledge of the 'fitting'. Thérèse perceives it intact. Ordinary notions of happiness are irrelevances. Happiness in any sense is irrelevant. It is only this sense of the purity by which her soul will remain whole that can give life a meaning and direction.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>11</sup>Edward O. Marsh, Jean Anouilh, Poet of Pierrot and Pantaloon (London: W. H. Allen, 1953), p. 57.

It is important to note that Thérèse's longing for contentment cannot overpower the inexorable grip of her past life. Although she manifests a sincere desire to understand the world of the rich she is unable to adjust to an atmosphere which is not hers. In the last act of the play, when she is confronted by her wretched father and Gosta, she realizes that they represent her own inescapable past and that she cannot hypocritically reject them. She feels that she would be deserting humanity by attaching herself to Florent. Consequently, she degrades herself in his eyes and admonishes him:

Si, maintenant que je suis au désespoir, je t'ai échappé, Florent. Je viens d'entrer dans un royaume où tu n'es jamais venu, où tu ne saurais pas me suivre pour me reprendre. Parce que tu ne sais pas ce que c'est que d'avoir mal et de s'enfoncer. Tu ne sais pas ce que c'est que se noyer, se salir, se vautrer....Tu ne sais rien d'humain, Florent....<sup>12</sup>

In the preceding analysis of La Sauvage it becomes quite apparent that Thérèse rejects both her family's society and Florent's society because they possess corrupting forces which offend her ideal of purity. In particular, she is in revolt against a social system in which money humiliates and debases poor men (such as Gosta and M. Tarde) and renders rich men (such as Florent) oblivious to the plight of the poor. But, because she is unable to escape from the memories of her past life of sordidness and

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<sup>12</sup>Jean Anouilh, La Sauvage, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 207.

degradation, Thérèse returns to the milieu which she had originally hoped to reject:

Il y aura toujours un chien perdu quelque part  
qui m'empêchera d'être heureuse....<sup>13</sup>

She accepts, as Joseph Chiari points out, "suffering as a refining fire which will consume the dross into the ashes of a life devoted to an ideal".<sup>14</sup>

Thérèse, then, is a révoltée in the narrow perspective of her immediate environment. Her revolt is directed against a limited social situation which is directly responsible for her angoisse, for the limitations imposed by poverty and for the moral squalor of her past life. Her revolt, which takes place in a "private world" is of a lesser order than the type of revolt to be discussed in the following chapters of our dissertation.

An analysis of Eurydice reveals that the theme of revolt in this play is vitally linked to the impossible union of the two young lovers, Orphée and Eurydice.

At the beginning of the play it is quite apparent that both Orphée and Eurydice, like Thérèse in La Sauvage, are angoissés. Orphée is discontented at the prospect of spending his days as an itinerant musician in the company of

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Chiari, The Contemporary French Theatre, The Flight From Naturalism (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 177.

his father, because he realizes the absurdity of a life without purpose:

Je pense que depuis que maman est morte, je te suis aux terrasses des cafés avec mon violon, je te regarde te débattre avec tes additions le soir. Je t'écoute parler du menu du prix fixe et puis je me couche et je me relève le lendemain.<sup>15</sup>

Eurydice, who shares her mother's nomadic existence in a troupe of comedians, is "malheureuse"<sup>16</sup> and manifests her desire to free herself from her milieu as well as from her liaison with Mathias.

From the moment that Orphée and Eurydice meet, they attempt to find happiness in a pure love relationship and to seal themselves off from the realities of the everyday world. They begin by trying to banish from their minds all thoughts of their loathsome parents and associates, who, for them, represent the impurity of life:

Eurydice sort de sa cachette. -

Ah! qu'ils étaient laids, n'est-ce pas? qu'ils étaient laids, qu'ils étaient bêtes!

Orphée se retourne vers elle, souriant. -

Chut! Ne parlons plus d'eux. Comme tout prend sa place maintenant que nous sommes seuls, comme tout est lumineux et simple!..<sup>17</sup>

For a short while, love blinds the couple to reality,

<sup>15</sup>Jean Anouilh, *Eurydice*, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 369.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

makes them happy, and transfigures everything that surrounds them:

Orphée la prend dans ses bras en criant -  
 . . .c'est extraordinaire. Tout est devenu  
 extraordinaire tout d'un coup autour de nous.  
 Regardez . . .comme la caissière est belle  
 avec ses deux gros seins posés délicatement sur  
 le marbre du comptoir....<sup>18</sup>

After their first night of love in a dingy hotel in Marseille, however, Orphée develops an obsession to penetrate every secret of Eurydice's soul, and questions her about her past. As a result, Eurydice remembers how she wallowed in vice with Dulac and feels unworthy of Orphée's love. She realizes that Orphée has an unreal image of her in his mind and that she can never resemble this ideal Eurydice. Like Thérèse in La Sauvage, she attempts, in vain, to reject her memories of her miserable past:

Si tous les mots sont là, tous les sales éclats  
 de rire, si toutes les mains qui vous ont touchée  
 sont encore collées à votre peau, alors on ne  
 peut jamais devenir une autre?<sup>19</sup>

In order to purify herself from the stains of the past Eurydice feels that she must confess, but she does not believe in the purifying virtue of a religious act, fearing that her recollections might continue "à vivre deux

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 423.

fois plus fortes, deux fois plus vivantes".<sup>20</sup> Further, she is too weak to make the confession to Orphée.

When Dulac leaves a message for her in the hotel, the past comes alive in the present and ruins her love relationship with Orphée. She is unable to bear the weight of the truth about her past and, realizing that she can never know Orphée in a state of purity, she flees and is killed in a bus accident. So it is that her revolt ends tragically.

Eurydice's revolt against the ties which connect her with her humiliating past is similar to Thérèse's revolt against her family and companions, and is typical of many of Anouilh's heroes and heroines. Hubert Gignoux explains this revolt:

. . .la personne humaine est contaminée par le voisinage familial ou social qui la presse dans l'immédiat et par le souvenir. Désespérant de jamais se saisir soi-même (ni de connaître son prochain) dans sa pureté, sa singularité intactes, l'homme rêve d'une libération purificatrice dont la fuite et l'oubli seraient les meilleurs agents.<sup>21</sup>

When Eurydice is returned from death (through the workings of Monsieur Henri, who represents Destiny), Orphée demands every detail of her earthly life. His mind is full

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 424.

<sup>21</sup>Hubert Gignoux, Jean Anouilh (Paris: Editions du Temps Présent, 1946), p. 18.

of the perfection of his love for Eurydice and his idealism will not accept any compromise. When Eurydice requests that he not look at her (symbolically, that he not ask questions about her past life), Orphée rejects her request, because he is not willing to accept an impure love:

Vivre, vivre! Comme ta mère et son amant, peut-être, avec des attendrissements, des sourires, des indulgences, et puis de bon repas, après lesquels on fait l'amour et tout s'arrange.  
Ah! Non! Je t'aime trop pour vivre.<sup>22</sup>

He realizes that their love will be defiled by contact with the outside world:

C'est vrai. C'est trop difficile; tous les gens qui t'ont connue sont autour de toi; toutes les mains qui t'ont touchée sont là, qui rampent sur toi. Et tous les mots que tu as dits sur tes lèvres.<sup>23</sup>

After Eurydice's "second" death, Monsieur Henri and Orphée's father attempt to convince Orphée to trust in the forgetfulness which time will cast over his sorrow. His father, whose middle-class mentality and ideals resemble those of Père Tarde in La Sauvage, tells him to accept the simple pleasures that life will likely offer him:

Ah! l'argent, l'argent! mais c'est toute la vie, mon cher! Tu as du chagrin, mais tu es jeune. Songe que tu peux devenir riche. Le luxe,

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<sup>22</sup>Jean Anouilh, Eurydice, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 468.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 475.

l'élégance, la table, les femmes. Songe aux  
femmes, fiston, songe à l'amour!<sup>24</sup>

Monsieur Henri assures Orphée that a pure love relationship can only exist in the realm of death and he explains the absurdity of the human condition to him:

Tu es injuste. Pourquoi hais-tu la mort?  
La mort est belle. Elle seule donne à l'amour  
son vrai climat. Tu as écouté ton père te  
parler de la vie tout à l'heure. C'était  
grotesque, n'est-ce pas, c'était lamentable?  
Hé bien, c'était cela . . . Cette pitrerie,  
ce mélo absurde, c'est la vie....<sup>25</sup>

Orphée will not accept the vulgar happiness of a life which demands compromise as its price. He chooses death for himself and Eurydice rather than compromise with banality. Acting according to his own inner compulsion, he rejects life, commits suicide, and confirms his entry into Anouilh's "heroic" race.

The foregoing examination of the theme of revolt in Eurydice reveals that Orphée and Eurydice reject the sordidness of life. They are unable to enjoy a pure love relationship because purity of love cannot exist in the world which Anouilh presents. They perceive that man's upbringing, family and milieu all leave permanent stains on man, and that it is only in the realm of death that their love can be realized in all of its purity.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 493.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 500.

Decidedly then, revolt is the preponderant theme of Eurydice. Like Thérèse, Orphée and Eurydice reject their degraded parents and struggle against the shame of lowliness. Eurydice revolts against the memories of a sordid past and Orphée refuses to accept the compromises demanded by life. Their revolt takes place, moreover, in their immediate environment, in their private world; the people around them are indifferent to the intensity of their passion.

In Eurydice, as in La Sauvage, love offers no answer to the couple's angoisse or to their awareness of the absurdity of the human condition. Those who seek in love a reason for which to live ("une blanche clairière") must necessarily fail, for purity of love cannot exist even among members of the same social station.<sup>26</sup>

While considering Eurydice, it is also important to note Anouilh's evident intention to make Greek myth relevant to the twentieth century. Anouilh uses the myth in a modern setting in order to present the human condition.<sup>27</sup>

Anouilh's revolt against the corrupt role of money in society is perhaps best suggested in his first play, L'Hermine. Frantz, the protagonist in this play, is a poor

<sup>26</sup>In La Sauvage we noted that Florent and Thérèse were members of different social milieux. In Eurydice, the protagonists are both from milieux where poverty is prevalent.

<sup>27</sup>See: Chapter III, pp. 40-41.

young man who is brought up by an abusive wealthy Duchess. Like Thérèse, Eurydice, and Orphée, Frantz experiences the humiliation of being poor throughout his life:

La pauvreté a fait de ma jeunesse une longue  
succession de mesquineries et de dégoûts....<sup>28</sup>

Tous les jours, pour le geste le plus insignifiant,  
se heurter à ce mur: je suis pauvre....<sup>29</sup>

Frantz aspires to a pure love relationship with Monime, the niece of his rich protectress, and he does not want the purity of his love for Monime to be diseased by a life of poverty. He becomes more and more conscious of his poverty as the play progresses, and realizes that he must obtain vast sums of money in order to erase his shame and angoisse. He understands that the Duchess will accept him as a husband for Monime, only if he possesses wealth:

Philippe, j'aime Monime. C'est pour elle que  
j'ai essayé de gagner de l'argent. En renonçant  
à l'argent, c'est à elle qu'il faut que je  
renonce.<sup>30</sup>

Because of his love for Monime, Frantz is determined to ameliorate his condition. Compelled by poverty to reckon all aspects of human happiness in terms of money, he brutally murders the Duchess so that Monime may inherit her

<sup>28</sup> Jean Anouilh, L'Hermine, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

fortune. He prefers to kill rather than to accept the degradation of being without money. Towards the end of the play, Frantz confesses his crime to his confidant, Philippe, in the following manner:

. . .Si je l'ai tuée, ce n'est pas pour son argent, c'est parce que son argent, dans la mystérieuse balance des choses, était devenu le prix exact de notre pureté....Seulement, 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.<sup>31</sup>

After the crime is committed, Monime rejects Frantz and considers him to be a man who murders solely for money. It is precisely at this point in the play that Frantz fully comprehends the nature of the wealthy classes. He understands that his unsullied Monime cannot determine the real motive for his crime. He also realizes that his desire to share a pure love relationship with Monime is doomed to failure since she is a member of what he calls "la bonne race". This class difference is responsible for his revolt:

. . .Vous êtes de la bonne race, sans doute . . .Je me demande ce que je fais parmi vous, à être odieux, à réclamer l'amitié ou l'amour, comme si c'étaient des choses qui existent. Je suis ridicule. Je suis absolument ridicule. Pardon.<sup>32</sup>

In L'Hermine, then, Anouilh shows us a hero who revolts against poverty and attempts to find happiness with

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

a member of "la bonne race". Like Thérèse, Orphée, and Eurydice, Frantz revolts in a private world. Moreover, Frantz's revolt is unsuccessful, and he resigns himself to his original social station.

In the three pièces noires which we have examined thus far in our study it is quite evident that the hero seeks love, in accordance with his ideal of purity, for happiness and as a redemption from angoisse.<sup>33</sup> While aspiring to an ideal love relationship the hero revolts against his environment, past life, and poverty. Further, his revolt, which takes place in the private world, that is to say, within the immediate environment, is unsuccessful and ends tragically; Anouilh demonstrates that a pure love relationship cannot exist in the world and he shows the futility of attempting to reject one's past life and social milieu.

In Le Voyageur sans bagage, however, Anouilh presents us with a hero who seems to break the ties which connect him to his past. It remains to be seen to what extent Gaston's revolt is successful.

Gaston, thirty-five years old, is a victim of

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<sup>33</sup>Angoisse resulting not only from the hero's humiliation but also from his consciousness of the absurdity of the human condition. We noted the fallacy of a quest for pure love, the weight of environment and one's past, and the difference in social classes, all of which have a profound influence on Anouilh's heroes.

amnesia who is obliged by his doctor to find his family. After spending eighteen contented years in a rest home, he is introduced to the wealthy bourgeois Renaud family who immediately recognize Gaston as being Jacques Renaud.

While Gaston visits the Renauds' home he begins to ask questions about the childhood of Jacques Renaud, constantly hoping that his past life has been one of happiness and purity. We note that he has no impending desire to revolt against a "respectable" past:

C'est bête. Mais entre des milliers de souvenirs possibles, c'est justement le souvenir d'un ami que j'appelais avec le plus de tendresse. J'ai tout échafaudé sur le souvenir de cet ami imaginaire. Nos promenades passionnées, les livres que nous avons découverts ensemble, une jeune fille qu'il avait aimée en même temps que moi et que je lui avais sacrifiée, et même -- vous allez rire -- que je lui avais sauvé la vie un jour en barque.<sup>34</sup>

He discovers from members of the Renaud household, however, that Jacques Renaud had been a most despicable youth who tortured animals, fought with his mother, and seduced his brother's wife. He realizes with horror the young man he was and he refuses to accept possession of his past. His sentiments toward the Renaud family become hateful and he becomes more and more angoissé, realizing that such a past is in total contradiction to his ideal of purity. The past

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<sup>34</sup>Jean Anouilh, Le Voyageur sans bagage, Pièces Noires (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1942), p. 300.

recreated for Gaston is so repulsive that he revolts against it; he refuses to identify himself with a person who is different from his present self. When his sister-in-law, Valentine, proves to him that he is Jacques Renaud and commands him to assume responsibility for his past, he rebukes her:

Oui. Je suis en train de refuser mon passé et ses personnages -- moi compris. Vous êtes peut-être ma famille, mes amours, ma véridique histoire. Oui, mais seulement, voilà . . . vous ne me plaisez pas. Je vous refuse.<sup>35</sup>

Gaston refuses his past because he believes that if he is liberated from it happiness would be possible:

Je suis sans doute le seul homme, c'est vrai, auquel le destin aura donné la possibilité d'accomplir ce rêve de chacun . . . Je suis un homme et je peux être, si je veux, aussi neuf qu'un enfant! C'est un privilège dont il serait criminel de ne pas user. Je vous refuse. Je n'ai déjà depuis hier que trop de choses à oublier sur mon compte.<sup>36</sup>

Unimpeded by any memories, Gaston is determined to become a new person, starting from a state of childhood. He pretends to discover his true family in the person of a young English boy who has no relatives. Both Gaston and the young lad leave the Renaud home and begin their search for a realm of purity ("le petit endroit"<sup>37</sup>). Like Thérèse, who

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

seeks "la blanche clairière",<sup>38</sup> Gaston hopes to defy the absurdity of the human condition.

Clearly, Gaston has the good fortune to choose his past. He brings about the symbolic death of Jacques Renaud (his past) and frees himself from the Renaud family. His revolt against his past and his rejection of a society in which one is obliged to have a past appear to be successful. But the unreal ending of the play (or what De Luppé calls the "situation invraisemblable"), suggests that Gaston's success will only be temporary. He forgets that he, too, has a memory and that in the daily experiences which await him he will inevitably recall a past.

In each of the four plays which we have analyzed, the dynamic principle of the action proceeds from the hero's revolt. In these plays, Anouilh is chiefly concerned with showing us the tragic revolt of an essentially pure angoissé against an impure, absurd world. The heroes struggle to maintain their ideal of purity in a world where purity cannot exist. They revolt against the corruptions of life (the power of money, the debased family, sordid environments, bourgeois society and interests) as well as against the absurdity of the human condition (man's angoisse, the inescapable past, the fallacy of the quest for love).

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<sup>38</sup>Jean Anouilh, La Sauvage, p. 245.

Moreover, as we have already stated, their revolt takes place in the narrow perspective of their immediate environments, in their "private worlds", and is, in essence, non-altruistic.

In the second chapter of our dissertation we shall deal with two of Anouilh's plays in which the hero's revolt occurs in a political-historical context; the hero takes his revolt into the public arena.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PUBLIC WORLD OF REVOLT

Anouilh extends the area covered by revolt beyond the private world in two of his pièces costumées. L'Alouette and Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu bring the problem of revolt into the public world. In both of these plays Anouilh presents us with a historical hero who, after identifying himself with his public role or duty, revolts for a specific cause. Jeanne and Becket clash with those who uphold well-established orders, defending their ideals against Church and State, against historical and political forces. The private element of their revolt (the fact that they rebel, in part, for their own self-fulfillment) is subservient to the public stress; they revolt in the public arena.

It is important to keep in mind that although Anouilh employs historical data in L'Alouette, he is less concerned with factual accuracy than he is with the revolt of the central character, Jeanne d'Arc. To be sure, he ignores certain events in Jeanne's life and arranges the various episodes of his drama to suit his own vision of the subject at hand.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of Anouilh's "historical" modifications and a comparison of L'Alouette and Shaw's Saint Joan, see Jean Anouilh, L'Alouette ed. Merlin Thomas and Simon Lee (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 11.

When L'Alouette begins, we notice that Jeanne's private difficulties have ceased to exist. In the public tribunal she is condemned by Warwick as being a "petite sorcière crasseuse"<sup>2</sup> and awaits judgement at the hands of the Church authorities. From the outset of the play, she is precisely identified as a former leader of French troops and, hence, as a public figure: "la tendre et dure vierge guerrière".<sup>3</sup>

The play is constructed as a continuous narrative which recounts, through the use of flash-backs, the childhood, adolescence and various undertakings of Jeanne d'Arc up to the time when she commands French troops against English invaders and is judged as a heretic. Although the outcome of Jeanne's trial for heresy is made public near the beginning of the action, the play evokes pathos as its heroine relives her past in the courtroom.

Early in the play we are made familiar with the mystical voices that Jeanne has heard at a young age, as she retells the arrival of her first divine calling:

C'est après l'Angélus du soir. Je suis toute petite. J'ai encore ma tresse. Je ne pense à rien. Dieu est bon, qui me garde toute pure et heureuse . . . Je me suis retournée, il y avait une grande et éblouissante lumière du côté de l'ombre, derrière moi. La voix était

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<sup>2</sup>Jean Anouilh, L'Alouette, ed. Merlin Thomas and Simon Lee (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

douce et grave et je ne la connaissais pas;  
elle dit seulement ce jour-là: - Jeanne, sois  
bonne et sage enfant, va souvent à l'église.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, we learn that these voices have persisted in calling Jeanne and that they have spurred her on to the fulfillment of a particular mission -- she has been told to save France from the attacks of English soldiers:

- Jeanne, va au secours du roi de France et  
tu lui rendras son royaume.<sup>5</sup>

These spiritual voices (which Jeanne identifies as being those of Saint Michel, Sainte Catherine and Sainte Marguerite) thereby have set her up for "public" duty and have urged her to take the first steps of her revolt.

In response to her spiritual calling Jeanne must first reject all pleas put forth by her parents. A humble, God-fearing shepherdess in Domrémy, she strives insofar as she is able to satisfy the longings of her parents but refuses to yield to their false accusation that the voices she hears are those of a lover. In spite of their threats, she remains firm in her conviction that her mission is ordained by God:

Je ne veux pas me marier mère. Monseigneur  
Saint Michel m'a dit que je dois partir,  
prendre un habit d'homme et aller trouver

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

notre Sire le Dauphin pour sauver le royaume de France.<sup>6</sup>

The next sequence of flash-backs in the play describes the trials and tribulations that Jeanne has had to endure in order to obtain command of French forces. She skilfully convinces Beaudricourt of her sincerity and, as the mystical voices had foretold, receives an army escort from him. Thereafter, she meets with Charles VII at Chinon, wins his confidence, and explains to him the persistent fears which she has had to overcome, while carrying out her mission:

. . .Pour moi, cela a été encore plus compliqué que pour toi de refaire ton royaume, de venir ici. Il a fallu que j'explique à mon père qui m'a battue, et qui a cru que je voulais devenir une ribaude à la traîne des soldats, et toutes proportions gardées, il cogne, encore plus dur que les Anglais, tu sais, mon père! Il a fallu que je fasse pleurer ma mère, et cela aussi paraissait insurmontable, que je convainque le gros Beaudricourt qui criait tant qu'il pouvait et qui était plein de mauvaises pensées . . .Tu crois que je n'ai pas eu peur? J'ai eu peur tout le temps.<sup>7</sup>

The recapitulation of these events makes it quite clear that Jeanne's sense of public duty obliges her to reject the normal life of a shepherdess and to adopt a pragmatic outlook in order to respond to her divine calling.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

She senses that she must play out her appointed role<sup>8</sup> in life to the bitter end.

Towards the middle of the play Anouilh shifts our attention from Jeanne's past to her present by means of a link passage. Warwick reminds us, as he does so often in the play,<sup>9</sup> that Jeanne is presently being tried for heresy: ". . . la petite alouette est prise".<sup>10</sup> From this point on, Jeanne no longer retells her past; she is questioned by Cauchon and the Promoteur on her obedience to the Church and on the nature of her voices. During this investigation, Jeanne's revolt attains its broadest dimensions.

While Cauchon tries to convince Jeanne of his reasons for disbelieving the divine origin of her mission, she fervently maintains that her voices were inspiration sent from God. Moreover, she contests her right to reject his opinions:

Cognez dur c'est votre droit. Moi, mon droit est de continuer à croire et de vous dire non.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Anouilh intends that Jeanne play out her "role". Let us recall Cauchon's remark on p. 55: ". . . Nous ne pouvons que jouer nos rôles, chacun le sien, bon ou mauvais, tel qu'il est écrit, et à son tour".

<sup>9</sup>Jean Anouilh, *L'Alouette*, p. 42: "Enfin, je l'ai ma pucelle" and p. 51: "Qu'elle la joue, sa petite histoire, puisqu'il paraît que c'est nécessaire, mais vite. Et qu'on en arrive à l'essentiel".

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

Throughout the interrogation Jeanne wisely refutes the numerous accusations and personal attacks made by Cauchon, the Inquisiteur and the Promoteur. However, when Cauchon informs her that her king, friends and military companions have deserted her cause (" . . .Tu es toute seule")<sup>12</sup> Jeanne undergoes a wavering of opinion.<sup>13</sup> As she hesitates, the stage directions diminish her stature.

(Jeanne ne répond pas, assise toute petite au milieu d'eux tous.)<sup>14</sup> This process is further enhanced by the phraseology which Jeanne uses to describe herself in her subsequent speech, which occurs between two periods of silence:

Jeanne (après un silence). Je ne suis pas intelligente, Messire. Je suis une pauvre fille de mon village, pareille aux autres. Mais quand quelque chose est noir, je ne peux pas dire que c'est blanc, voilà tout.  
Un silence encore.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually, Jeanne abjures and signs the proposed act of renunciation. She agrees to submit to the Church in matters of faith and to abandon all military pursuits as well as her military attire.

Nonetheless, Jeanne reaffirms her rebellion when

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>13</sup>This is similar to Antigone's wavering of opinion, which will be discussed in Chapter III of our dissertation.

<sup>14</sup>Jean Anouilh, L'Alouette, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

Warwick visits her in her cell. She begins to reflect on what the future will bring and revolts against the trite happiness of the everyday life<sup>16</sup> that awaits her:

Mais je ne veux pas que les choses s'arrangent . . .  
Je ne veux pas le vivre, votre temps . . .<sup>17</sup>

. . .  
Jeanne acceptant tout, Jeanne avec un ventre,  
Jeanne devenue gourmande. . . Vous voyez Jeanne  
fardée, en hennin, empêtrée dans ses robes,  
s'occupant de son petit chien ou avec un  
homme à ses trousses, qui sait, Jeanne mariée?<sup>18</sup>

She feels that her refusal of commonplace existence is in accord with her truest self. Having been called by God to perform a certain mission, she is set apart from the ordinary race of mortals, typified by Warwick:

. . . on n'est pas de la même race, tous les  
deux.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, Jeanne's revolt is directed, firstly, against the Church, whose demands conflict with her ideal of her public duty and, secondly, against the sale bonheur offered her by the compromises of life. Her revolt is typically Anouilh's, for as Marguerite Jamois points out, Anouilh's heroes and heroines refuse to accept a life of deception:

<sup>16</sup>This echoes the rejection of le sale bonheur by Thérèse and Antigone.

<sup>17</sup>Jean Anouilh, L'Alouette, p. 131.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-132.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

. . . Vos créatures aiment la vie dans la mesure où elles se révoltent et refusent le compromis, les déceptions, les concessions, l'horreur de la médiocrité. Vos héros sont exigeants. Pour eux, la vie n'est valable que s'ils gardent un coeur intransigeant, sauvage et même cruel.<sup>20</sup>

The futile efforts of Cauchon, the Inquisiteur and the other Church officials to repress Jeanne's rebellion suggest an implicit mockery of the Church. But Anouilh is not really concerned with undermining the religious or political ideologies of the period. We must discern that he wishes to demonstrate the pathetic revolt of an innocent idealist who struggles to give meaning to her life; Anouilh does not explain the reasons for Jeanne's revolt:

Il n'y a pas d'explications à Jeanne. Pas plus qu'il n'y a d'explication à la plus petite fleur qui pousse au bord du fossé. Il y a une petite fleur vivante qui savait de tout temps, imperceptible graine, combien elle aurait de pétales et jusqu'ou ils pousseraient, jusqu'à quel ton de bleu irait son bleu, de quel mélange exact serait son fin parfum. Il y a le phénomène Jeanne, comme il y a le phénomène pâquerette, le phénomène ciel, le phénomène oiseau. Faut-il que les hommes soient prétentieux pour que cela ne leur suffise pas?<sup>21</sup>

In L'Alouette we perceive that Anouilh exalts Jeanne's faith in her cause. He admires her sense of ethics so much that he ends the play on a cheerful note. As

<sup>20</sup>Marguerite Jamois, "Images de L'Alouette", Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud -- Jean-Louis Barrault, 26 (1959), 31.

<sup>21</sup>Jean Anouilh, "Mystère de Jeanne" in Pol Vandromme, Jean Anouilh, un auteur et ses personnages (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1965), p. 236.

Marguerite Jamois writes:

Anouilh l'aime tant qu'il refuse de la brûler.  
Tant pis pour l'histoire, il la sauve du  
bûcher.<sup>22</sup>

Like the heroes and heroines of the pièces noires, Jeanne refuses to accept the impurity of life. However, her revolt takes place in the public arena and is more closely related to Becket's revolt.

Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu, which Anouilh wrote six years after L'Alouette, shows us the revolt of an older, more mature historical figure. When this play opens, we are confronted with the spectacle of Henry II, Norman King of England, who is awaiting public punishment. As Henry meditates at Becket's tomb, the story of his relationship with Becket unfolds. Using a series of flash-backs, Anouilh demonstrates how the two men become opponents and highlights Becket's final rejection of Henry.

While companion in pleasure, servant, and counsellor to Henry, Becket fulfills his duties with utmost zeal and determination. Although a Saxon,<sup>23</sup> he willingly assists

<sup>22</sup>Marguerite Jamois, "Images de L'Alouette", Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud - Jean-Louis Barrault, 26 (1959), 32.

<sup>23</sup>Historically, Becket was not a Saxon. For the historical background of Becket, Anouilh relied on the story of Becket's life in Augustin Thierry's Conquest of England by the Normans. Subsequent historical research proved that Becket was not a Saxon but a Norman. However, Anouilh did not consider this detail to be important. In his play, Becket is considered to be a traitor by his Saxon countrymen.

his Norman monarch:

Je suis votre serviteur, mon prince, voilà tout.  
Que je vous aide à gouverner ou à vous réchauffer,  
pour moi, c'est pareil. J'aime vous aider.<sup>24</sup>

Early in the first series of flash-backs it becomes quite apparent that Becket is concerned primarily with doing his duty. When Henry appoints him Chancellor of England (Act I) he quickly adapts to his new position of authority and adamantly defends Henry in his tax dispute with the clergy. He upholds the justice of Henry's demand to obtain funds from the Church. He arrogantly rejects the pleas for tax exemption put forth by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other bishops and counsels Henry to affirm his tyranny:

. . .La loi et la coutume nous donnent des moyens  
de coercition. Nous en userons.<sup>25</sup>

Becket's initial revolt, then, which is directed against the Church authorities and which occurs despite the fact that he himself has been a deacon,<sup>26</sup> is in accord with what he considers to be fitting. Resolute in his role as Chancellor, he feels impelled to direct his first loyalties to England. Nevertheless, we notice that Becket searches for

<sup>24</sup>Jean Anouilh, Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1959), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

a value with which to identify himself wholeheartedly at this point in the play because he constantly feels obliged "to improvise his honor". This becomes clear at the end of the first act, when Becket muses over Henry's sleeping body:

. . .Dors tout de même, mon prince. Tant que Becket sera obligé d'improviser son honneur, il te servira. Et si un jour, il le rencontre . . .  
(Un petit temps. Il demande:) Mais où est l'honneur de Becket?<sup>27</sup>

At this stage of Becket's development it is the Archbishop who most fittingly describes him, when he says of Becket: "Il se cherche".<sup>28</sup>

It is in Act II of the play that Becket himself proclaims his love and respect for his concept of duty. When Henry asks him if he loves anything, he replies:

J'aime au moins une chose, mon prince, et cela j'en suis sûr. Bien faire ce que j'ai à faire.<sup>29</sup>

Towards the beginning of this act, Henry names Becket Archbishop of Canterbury and thereby anticipates the king's total domination over the Church. But it is easily discernible that Becket lucidly recognizes the difficulties to be encountered before he obtains the position. He cautiously accepts the challenge, all the while preserving

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

his notion of duty and tells Henry: "Je ne saurai servir Dieu et vous".<sup>30</sup>

From the time that Becket takes up his post as Archbishop he rapidly rejects his former life-style in order to better suit his function. Ridding himself of expensive adornments and possessions, he becomes an admirable shepherd of the flock, and conducts himself "comme un saint homme".<sup>31</sup> More important, however, is the fact that as Archbishop, Becket identifies his personal honor (sense of duty) with God's honor and consistently upholds the rights of the Church. Amidst his bishops, Becket declares his firm intention to fulfill his new duty and to defend the honor of God against Henry. For example, he explains to Folliot the necessity of defending the timeless honor of God:

Evêque, dois-je vous rappeler que nous sommes des hommes de Dieu et que nous avons à défendre un honneur qui, lui, n'a pas de date?<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, when the bishop of York suggests to him that the king embodies force and law, Becket reveals his will to uphold God's law above all else:

Il est la loi écrite, mais il est une autre loi, non écrite, qui finit toujours par courber la

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

tête des rois. (Il les regarde un instant en silence, souriant.) J'étais un débauché, messieurs, peut-être un libertin, un homme de ce monde en tout cas. J'adorais vivre et je me moquais de tout cela, mais alors, il ne fallait pas me remettre le fardeau. J'en suis chargé maintenant, j'ai retroussé mes manches et on ne me fera plus lâcher.<sup>33</sup>

Early in Act IV Anouilh highlights Becket's revolt against Henry. While an exile in France, Becket meets with Henry on a chilly plain and the two men argue over who has the right to pass judgement on the crime of a religious clerk. Becket, who is determined to strengthen the Church's position over the state, refuses to repeal the excommunications he has decreed upon three of Henry's barons and upholds his duty to defend and judge his clerics and priests. During their conversation, Becket emphasizes the necessity of doing one's duty; he makes it clear that he must constantly defend the Church's values:

Non. Cela n'est pas nécessaire, mon roi! Il faut seulement faire, absurdement, ce dont on a été chargé-jusqu'au bout.<sup>34</sup>

Becket explains to Henry how he discovered his honor, which is one with the honor of God and hence, the reasons for his revolt against Henry:

Je me suis senti chargé de quelque chose tout simplement, pour la première fois, dans cette cathédrale vide, quelque part en France, où vous m'avez ordonné de prendre ce fardeau.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

J'étais un homme sans honneur. Et, tout d'un coup, j'en ai eu un, celui que je n'aurais jamais imaginé devoir devenir mien, celui de Dieu. Un honneur incompréhensible et fragile, comme un enfant-roi poursuivi.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, in response to his vocation, he places his public duty and personal pride ahead of his relationship with Henry.

After his confrontation with Henry in France, Becket decides to return to England in order to carry on his mission (that of defending God's honor): ". . .pour y faire ce que je crois mon ouvrage".<sup>36</sup> He unceasingly cherishes his vocation and does not yield to Henry's demands; as King Louis says of him:

Mais il n'aime au monde que l'idée qu'il s'est forgée de son honneur.<sup>37</sup>

Henry, who is perplexed by Becket's firmness in his stand, regrets having appointed him Archbishop. But, at the end of the play, when Becket is assassinated by a group of English barons for being a "rebel in the public world", Henry procures his canonization and thereby publicly proclaims the honor of God which Becket had upheld. Moreover, he acknowledges Becket as a friend and describes Becket as

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 165

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

exemplifying the means whereby England will achieve victory over chaos:

L'honneur de Dieu, messieurs, est une bonne chose et on gagne, tout compte fait, à l'avoir de son côté. Thomas Becket -- qui fut notre ami -- le disait. L'Angleterre lui devra sa victoire finale sur le chaos et nous entendons qu'il soit désormais, dans ce royaume, prié et honoré comme un saint....<sup>38</sup>

Our brief review of Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu traces the revolt of Becket as a public figure against King Henry II. An Anouilhesque hero in the public world, Becket is ceaselessly preoccupied with fulfilling his public duty and therefore, he champions the honor of God and rejects Henry's request for submission. Furthermore, acting in accordance with what he believes to be the will of God, Becket fails to be used by greedy Church officials and carries on his sacred mission to his death. His dedication and altruism contrast sharply with the "honor" of the Pope, Cardinal Zambelli, Folliot, and other Church figures. His revolt is in defense of an ideal (the honor of God) which he serves loyally until the time when he becomes a national hero.

We observe that the theme of revolt in this play is linked to Anouilh's common theme of the impossibility of an enduring love relationship between two individuals. The close relationship that exists between Becket and Henry must

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

of necessity cease to thrive not only because of their very humanity (and hence, impurity) but also on account of the impure world in which they live. In this sense, Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu is very similar to the pièces noires which we examined earlier.

L'Alouette and Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu reveal an evolution in the theme of revolt as it is used by Anouilh. In our study of the pièces noires it was remarked that Anouilh's heroes and heroines revolted against their angoisse in their immediate environments. In L'Alouette and Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu the heroine and hero revolt in the midst of a much larger, more influential environment. Furthermore, having adopted a public role, they revolt for a particular public cause -- Jeanne rebels for the liberation of France and Becket for the honor of God.

In the next chapter of our study we shall concern ourselves with another dimension of revolt in Anouilh's theatre.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE UNIVERSE OF REVOLT

In the pièces noires which we examined in Chapter I it was remarked that Anouilh's heroes revolted against the human condition.<sup>1</sup> Their revolt sprang primarily from their discontent with their situation (ie. their angoisse) and from their inability to attain their ideal of purity in life. Similarly, in our analysis of revolt in Anouilh's historical plays, in Chapter II, it was pointed out that his heroes rebelled in an impure world for a public cause and in order to give meaning to their lives.<sup>2</sup> Now, in Antigone, we encounter a young "mythological" heroine whose timeless revolt against the human condition forms part of an absurd universe.

As in Eurydice,<sup>3</sup> Anouilh employs Greek myth in Antigone for the purpose of analysing the human condition. The critic Thomas Bishop points out that the use of myth to this end appealed to Anouilh and to other French dramatists, especially in the period between the two world wars:

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<sup>1</sup>See p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>See p. 16.

After all, what great myth has to offer to posterity is a restatement structured along poetically pregnant lines of the essence of man's experience. The greatest insights concerning man's relationship to his universe, to his fellow men, and to his own truth are equally valid in every era and in all societies. At the same time, by resorting to very well known characters and events, the playwrights in question were able to make more palatable to the wide theater-going public various fairly new dramatic techniques.<sup>4</sup>

Anouilh inserts anachronisms and other dramatic modernizations into this seemingly classical play<sup>5</sup> in order to modify the ancient myth and to emphasize the continuing relevance of its message. Hugh Dickinson summarizes Anouilh's principal modifications as follows:

To stress the timeless nature of its protest, the play takes place in a neutral setting; the characters wear inconspicuous modern dress; the prose dialogue, with its colloquialisms, anachronisms, and barracks talk, can be traced back to Cocteau's earlier efforts at modernizing the classics; . . .<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Anouilh omits certain parts of the thematic content of Sophocles' play.

The opening action of Antigone points towards

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Bishop, "Anouilh's Antigone In 1970", American Society of Legion of Honor Magazine, No. 41 (1970), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup>Anouilh's Antigone is based, to a certain extent, on Sophocles' Antigone. The play can also be said to be political; it was written during the German occupation of France and contains several political allusions.

<sup>6</sup>Hugh Dickinson, Myth on the Modern Stage (Chicago, 1969), p. 261.

Antigone's inevitable revolt against existence. We appreciate from the very outset of the play that Antigone will isolate herself from the rest of humanity and that she will die:

Le Prologue. - . . .Et, depuis que ce rideau s'est levé, elle sent qu'elle s'éloigne à une vitesse vertigineuse de sa soeur Ismène, qui bavarde et rit avec un jeune homme, de nous tous, qui sommes là bien tranquilles à la regarder, de nous qui n'avons pas à mourir ce soir.<sup>7</sup>

In the first sequence of events in the play, however, it appears somewhat astonishing, if not shocking, that Antigone is destined to renounce life. Anouilh evokes the tender private world of Antigone's childhood and shows her to be child-like in bearing and manner<sup>8</sup> while in the presence of her nanny. We note, for example, that Antigone asks her nurse to protect her little dog during her absence.<sup>9</sup> Further, in the course of her dialogue with Ismène, Antigone makes it perfectly clear that, as a young girl, she had been completely satisfied with life. When Ismène asks her if she wishes to die, Antigone insists upon her customary love of life:

Antigone, murmure. Pas envie de vivre . . .  
Et plus doucement encore si c'est possible.

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<sup>7</sup>Jean Anouilh, Antigone, ed. W. M. Landers (London: Harrap, 1954), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Antigone is "la maigre jeune fille noire et renfermée", Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

Qui se levait la première, le matin, rien que pour sentir l'air froid sur sa peau nue? Qui se couchait la dernière seulement quand elle n'en pouvait plus de fatigue, pour vivre encore un peu de la nuit? Qui pleurait déjà toute petite, en pensant qu'il y avait tant de petites bêtes, tant de brins d'herbes dans le pré et qu'on ne pouvait pas tous les prendre?<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, Antigone believes in the necessity of burying her brother Polynice and she rejects her sister's pleas. She remains determined to disregard her uncle's edict and to accomplish her mission, knowing full well that it will result in her death:

Bien sûr. A chacun son rôle. Lui, il doit nous faire mourir, et nous, nous devons aller enterrer notre frère. C'est comme cela que ç'a été distribué. Qu'est-ce que tu veux que nous y fassions?<sup>11</sup>

When Antigone meets her beloved fiancé Hémon she declares that she must of necessity renounce the possibility of marrying him:

. . .D'ailleurs, je vais te dire. Je voulais être ta femme quand même parce que je t'aime comme cela, moi, très fort, et que -- je vais te faire de la peine, ô mon chéri, pardon! -- que jamais, jamais, je ne pourrai t'épouser.<sup>12</sup>

In response to what she considers to be fitting, then, Antigone forsakes happiness; she rejects the pleas of

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

her sister as well as marriage with Hémon. In this way, Anouilh prepares us gradually for her confrontation with Créon.

During Antigone's confrontation with Créon, Anouilh focuses our attention on the opposition of the judgement of Créon, who represents the world of adulthood, with that of Antigone, who personifies the world of childhood. To begin with, we perceive that when Antigone is brought before Créon, for having attempted to bury her brother with a tiny shovel, she insists on her right to refuse:

Eh bien, tant pis pour vous! Moi, je n'ai pas dit "oui". Qu'est-ce que vous voulez que cela me fasse, à moi, votre politique, votre nécessité, vos pauvres histoires? Moi, je peux dire "non" encore à tout ce que je n'aime pas et je suis seul juge. Et vous, avec votre couronne, avec vos gardes, avec votre attirail, vous pouvez seulement me faire mourir, parce que vous avez dit "oui".<sup>13</sup>

Throughout their dispute Créon refutes Antigone's reasons for wanting to bury the corpse of Polynice. He destroys the rationale behind her motives and explains to her the necessity of maintaining law and order in Thebes. He is eager to save his niece and very nearly prevents her final manifestation of revolt.

When Créon explains his view of social life to Antigone and urges her to accept the happiness it offers, Antigone revolts, and rejects the people like Créon who are

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

prepared to make a pact with an existence devoid of purity.

Death is preferable to her:

Vous me dégoûtez tous avec votre bonheur! Avec votre vie qu'il faut aimer coûte que coûte. On dirait des chiens qui lèchent tout ce qu'ils trouvent. Et cette petite chance pour tous les jours, si on n'est pas trop exigeant. Moi, je veux tout, tout de suite -- et que ce soit entier -- ou alors je refuse! Je ne veux pas être modeste, moi, et me contenter d'un petit morceau si j'ai été bien sage. Je veux être sûre de tout aujourd'hui et que cela soit aussi beau que quand j'étais petite -- ou mourir.<sup>14</sup>

We notice, in the preceding quotation, that Antigone extolls the life of childhood. Clearly, she would accept adult life if it were as pure ("aussi beau") as childhood life. She foresees the compromise and impurity that taint an individual as he grows up:

Quel sera-t-il mon bonheur? Quelle femme heureuse deviendra-t-elle, la petite Antigone? Quelles pauvretés faudra-t-il qu'elle fasse elle aussi, jour par jour, pour arracher avec ses dents son petit lambeau de bonheur? Dites, à qui devra-t-elle mentir, à qui sourire, à qui se vendre? Qui devra-t-elle laisser mourir en détournant le regard?<sup>15</sup>

We discover at this stage of the play that it is precisely the impure life of the adult world that Antigone refuses to accept and that the burial of Polynice is merely a pretext for her revolt. Antigone upbraids Créon for his compromises with the ideal of purity and,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 84. This echoes Thérèse's rejection of le sale bonheur. See p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

wholeheartedly, pits the life of the child against the world of the adult:

Si, je sais ce que je dis, mais c'est vous qui ne m'entendez plus. Je vous parle de trop loin maintenant, d'un royaume où vous ne pouvez plus entrer avec vos rides, votre sagesse, votre ventre.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note, moreover, that a certain doubt is raised, from time to time, over the value of Antigone's revolt. Indeed, Anouilh confronts his heroine with a rational opponent whose insights are not faulty. Créon is a brilliant man whose sharpness and intellect match those of the heroine; we ask ourselves if his reasoning is not superior to that of Antigone. He is sympathetic to Antigone's revolt and points out that the difference in their views is one of age and not one of conviction. Créon believes that individuals must forsake the quest for an absolute of purity in life and must, for the public welfare, make the best of life as it is. For these reasons, he encourages Antigone to marry Hémon and to accept the simple pleasures that imperfect life offers:

. . .Je te comprends, j'aurais fait comme toi à vingt ans. C'est pour cela que je buvais tes paroles. J'écoutais du fond du temps un petit Créon maigre et pâle comme toi et qui ne pensait qu'à tout donner lui aussi....Marie-toi vite, Antigone, sois heureuse. La vie n'est pas ce que tu crois....Tu vas me mépriser encore, mais de découvrir cela, tu verras, c'est la consolation

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

dérisoire de vieillir: la vie, ce n'est peut-être tout de même que le bonheur!<sup>17</sup>

In direct contrast to Créon, Antigone seeks an absolute of purity which is realizable only in childhood. The critic Pierre-Henri Simon explains the nature of the conflict between Antigone and Créon as follows:

Voilà bien le sens du conflit de Créon et d'Antigone: non plus du tout, comme chez Sophocle, l'opposition entre deux idées de la justice, mais entre deux conceptions de la vie. Créon est quelqu'un qui a cru d'abord à une vie de plénitude, mais, l'ayant jugée impossible, s'est résigné à un sage bonheur de tous les jours soutenu par un devoir positif. Antigone croit encore à cette vie intense et pure où un être, toutes chaînes rejetées, s'accomplit absolument. Si cette perfection n'est pas possible, elle préfère le désespoir et la mort à une transaction sans grandeur et à une dégradation inévitable. Elle est celle qui dit non au bonheur commun, comme elle a dit non à la loi sociale....<sup>18</sup>

The triteness and impurity of the adult life against which Antigone revolts is personified by the guard who watches over Antigone in her cell. The petty preoccupations of this "mediocre" man provide for a sharp contrast with the "heroic" demands of Antigone.

Towards the end of the play Anouilh suggests that Antigone is not alone in her rejection of life and that her revolt is wholly justified. We observe that Ismène, Hémon and Créon's wife commit suicide when they learn of Antigone's

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>18</sup>Pierre-Henri Simon, Théâtre et Destin (Paris, 1959), p. 161.

fate. The ending, for this reason, seems to represent a universe of revolt against existence.

In short, Antigone is a young rebel who chooses death out of fidelity to a purity not to be realized in the adult world. She asserts what she feels to be her true self in opposition to the compromises necessitated by life. Her revolt is a blatant protest against all of creation in an absurd world; Hugh Dickinson writes:

It is a world of the absurd; Antigone's protest will be against no specific, concrete action or situation which might be suffered, or prevented, or changed, or even simply understood; it will be against the nature of life, indeed the fact of living. Créon's edict will be for her, as well as for Anouilh, merely a pretext for incurring her death, because she refuses to continue living on life's terms.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that Antigone represents a desperate rejection of the human condition. Antigone's revolt against existence is without direction and offers no hope short of death for the "pure" individual. Moreover, her revolt takes place in a neutral setting and thereby represents an expansion in Anouilh's theme of revolt from the local to the universal level.

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<sup>19</sup>Hugh Dickinson, Myth on the Modern Stage (Chicago, 1969), p. 262.

## CONCLUSION

It may be remarked from the preceding study that the dynamic principle of the action in each of the plays analysed proceeds from the protagonist's revolt. In the pièces noires, the pièces costumées, as well as in Antigone, Anouilh is chiefly concerned with showing us the revolt of a pure individual against an impure world. His heroes and heroines struggle to maintain their ideal of purity in a world where purity cannot exist and they reject everything that contradicts their ideal -- compromise, conformity, petit bonheur, adulthood and even life itself, which is intrinsically impure. For this reason, Anouilh's plays represent a theatre of existential<sup>1</sup> revolt, that is to say, they leave no hope short of death for the pure individual.

Linked with other dramatic themes, revolt in these plays becomes a vital part of the human condition. In the pièces noires, Anouilh shows us man's angoisse, the impurity of bourgeois happiness and ideals, the fallacy of a quest for a pure love relationship, and the impossibility of escaping from one's past. Under such conditions a "hero" has but one choice: he must either corrupt himself or accept death. Similarly, in the two pièces costumées which

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<sup>1</sup>I use the word "existential" in the seventeenth-century meaning of the term: "of or pertaining to existence".

we examined, Anouilh's heroes are obliged to seek out, in vain, a solid value in a vile society and they therefore espouse their causes to the very end. Antigone, too, must either accept compromise with a debased world or abandon life.

In all of his plays, Anouilh insists on demonstrating the intransigence of a pure protagonist in the midst of a corrupting world. He has a tendency to emphasize this theme time and time again and, although he has been censured for repetition, he refuses to omit this recurrent conflict from his plays. He constantly places his heroes in opposition to those who compromise or to members of the mediocre race. Concerning these aspects of Anouilh's theatre, Dorothy Knowles writes:

If one looks back over the whole of Anouilh's dramatic production one finds such a similarity between his themes that one is tempted to say that he has written only one play, but that his one play has been re-written time and time again, and that each successive handling of the play has brought out more clearly the amazing ingenuity of the author....<sup>2</sup>

In certain respects it is to be regretted that the revolt of Anouilh's heroes offers no practical solution to the angoisse of the human condition. At best, it leads to mere escapism. Moreover, it is paradoxical for it is a revolt which implies suicide.

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<sup>2</sup>Dorothy Knowles, French Drama of the Inter-War Years 1918-39 (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 180.

In all fairness, however, we must conclude that the theme of revolt gives a powerful dramatic force to Anouilh's plays. It allows him to range his characters into opposing groups (both comic and tragic) and provides for a great deal of dramatic suspense. Clearly, Anouilh contrasts the tragic revolts of his protagonists with the petty preoccupations of the mediocre individuals who surround them. In La Sauvage, for example, we observe that Thérèse fights against a way of life which is being defended by the compromisers, Hartman and Florent, as well as by the ridiculous characters in the play. Likewise, in Antigone, we note that Anouilh's heroine revolts against an established order of things and that her rejection transcends the comprehension of the comical guard who watches over her. Furthermore, throughout the action in his plays, the dramatic suspense depends on whether or not the protagonist will yield to the proposals of the outside world. We notice that Thérèse, Antigone and Jeanne all undergo a period of wavering before their tragic revolts. The use of revolt thus aids Anouilh to create tragic roles for his heroes, allows for variety of tone in his plays, and provides them with a structure based on a series of confrontations which are inherently dramatic.

## APPENDIX

Chronology of the plays dealt with in this dissertation:  
dates of composition and first performances.

L'Hermine (1931), April 26, 1932, Théâtre de l'Oeuvre.

La Sauvage (1934), Jan. 10, 1938, Théâtre des Mathurins.

Le Voyageur sans bagage (1936), Feb. 16, 1937, Théâtre des  
Mathurins.

Eurydice (1941), Dec. 18, 1942, Théâtre de l'Atelier.

Antigone (1942), Feb. 4, 1944, Théâtre de l'Atelier.

L'Alouette (1952), Oct. 14, 1953, Théâtre Montparnasse.

Becket ou L'Honneur de Dieu (1958), Oct. 1, 1959, Théâtre  
Montparnasse.

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