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A Study of Character: The Antigone Motif in
Sophocles, Anouilh & Brecht

Submitted For Honors
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PREFACE

It is commonly claimed that Aristotle presents the definitive description of tragic character. In the Poetics, he offers a hierarchy of tragic forms (from good to bad) which posits the idea that action or plot has primacy and that other elements are derivatives thereof. Despite Aristotle's profound influence, many dramatists have disputed his claims and have written plays which violate his conventions. In Bertold Brecht's and Jean Anouilh's plays Aristotle's hierarchy has been reordered. Assuming that Sophocles represents strict adherence to theatrical convention, I shall try to show how Brecht and Anouilh diverge from him. In order to validate and, to facilitate the comparison, I shall treat each author's theatrical version of the same story, Antigone.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a twofold discussion of character. It is first a study in comparative drama, a comparison of the characters and plots of three versions of Antigone. This discussion deals primarily with empirical rather than conceptual aspects of the plays. I shall compare and contrast certain structural elements of the plays which indicate an overall theatrical development. Thus, such questions as, "How does Tiresias' absence from Anouilh's Antigone affect the play?" are to be treated. This discussion provides the basis and substantiation for the second, more abstract consideration of drama, namely, a general study of theatrical character with particular emphasis on its dramatic and philosophical essence. I propose to make certain claims about theater in general, its conventions, methods, and aesthetic effects, etc., in order to discuss and to analyze what may be termed the 'ontology of character.' I shall investigate certain authors' concepts of character in relation to Aristotle's as well as other authors' concepts of it. Underscoring the difficulty of studying character, Kirkwood says:

The concept of character tends to be elusive. The necessary beginning point for its study is a firm recognition of the fact that characters are not actual persons but elements of the playwright's work; they are altogether controlled by him and by the requirements of his artistic purposes. Therefore, all drama must have 'personae.' But character also means personality, especially that part or aspect of personality that corresponds to the Greek term 'ethos', what is sometimes called moral character.¹

Study of characters, then, requires a bifurcate comparison of the 'personae' of a play and of the author's concept of character which manifests itself in the whole play. In the first instance, one may make a comparison between Anouilh's and Brecht's Antigones in terms of 'ethos' and physical appearance (as described in the stage directions). Such a comparison will reveal not only certain fundamental differences in the authors' attitudes toward their characters but also their motives for writing. In order to substantiate this and other claims, one may make a third study which lies between the other two, an

examination of the playwright's lives, in particular, the social and intellectual influences which ultimately manifest themselves in the plays. It is thus possible to ascertain why, for example, Brecht rejects Aristotelian convention, or why Anouilh removes Tiresias. As Kirkwood says, character (and ultimately the play itself) are the creations of the playwright. As such their nature is directly determined by the playwright's nature.

Concomitant with the ostensible differences and similarities in various characters lies another more difficult comparison of the way in which the authors seek to attain dramatic goals such as catharsis, introspection, didacticism, etc. For instance, why does Anouilh create a malleable, reasonable Créon, whereas Brecht's Kreon is a tyrannical despot? This question will be answered by examining the authors' concepts of drama, specifically, the relation of action to character. First, however, it is necessary to determine, with regard to primary or equivalence, the precise relation of character to action in each of the plays. This will provide an

exact means for determining the authors' stance on Aristotelian convention.

A preliminary discussion of Aristotelian concepts of character should be useful. In the Poetics, Aristotle sets forth what he believes to be the rules of tragedy by which, in part, characterization of tragic heroes is governed. Generally he describes tragedies not as literary works but as theatrical performances. When he speaks of a dramatic character he is referring to the incarnation, as it were, of a character in the actor who is playing the role. He discusses characterization in terms of performance of which ingredients such as masks, gowns and props are an integral part. Unlike the theater of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Attic theater was not greatly occupied with character development and revelation. The Attic spectator did not need to wonder whether Antigone was happy or sad. Such conditions were made known quite clearly by the actress' mask, the music or the chorus. The classical playwright assigned obvious attributes to his characters, and the spectator's

attention was thus focused on the events. In this respect, Jenkes observes, "Aristotle in his discussion of 'ethos' and 'dianoia' obviously thought of character as something which the stage figures possessed, not something they were."² Usually and for the most part, Greek tragedy was meant to be performed rather than read. If the characters are to come to life, then they must be seen on the stage, in costume. One may conclude, then, that a character's personality (ethos) is determined either by the performance Per Se, or by the author's stage directions and descriptions. The latter provide the reader with ersatz action; the author describes the plot and gestic, while the reader imagines it. In philosophical terms, Antigone is an 'ontological parasite,' her existence depends on an actress (or secondarily a reader). In terms of Aristotelian theory, questions such as, "what is Antigone really like?" or, "what does Antigone do for fun?" are moot and meaningless. For Aristotle, catharsis is the goal of tragedy; characters are merely a means to that end. Thus, a psychoanalytic criticism (such as that

practiced on the psychodramas of H. Taine) is useless. Baldry compares twentieth-century theatrical interest with that of the fifth century B.C. thus;

"The twentieth century playwright is like the twentieth century public; for him, as for them, individual character is a subject of fascinating interest. [...] How many children Lady MacBeth had may have been irrelevant for Shakespeare, but the modern audience would dearly like to know. It is not surprising that the [modern] playwright's characters should be more important for him than his plot [...]. The Greeks had no such conception of character [...]." ³

In Greek drama, characters are inexorably linked to the plot, defined only in terms of their relationship to Praxis (action). Elsewhere in the Poetics, Aristotle writes:

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action, and an action implies personal agents who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities [] and thought []; for it is by these that we qualify actions [...]. Hence the plot is the imitation of an action-- for by plot I mean the arrangement of the incidents. By

character I mean that by virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities of the agents." 4

To tragedy's elements which he considered most important, Aristotle assigns a hierarchy. He says, "[...] most important of all is the structure of the incidents. [...] Dramatic [...] action is not with a view to the representation of character. Character comes in for the sake of action." 5 He claims additionally that tragedy can exist without character but not without plot. Therefore, for Aristotle, the structure of the incidents (praxis) is the essential dramatic mainspring. The characters are in the play merely to imitate the actions which the playwright imagines. Aristotle's insistence on primacy of action is, in many ways, a claim as opaque as it is famous. It is difficult to accept that tragedy can exist without character. Downplaying a character's importance is hard to accept. The viewer or reader of any drama retains an indelible impression of its characters. We often speak of Antigone, Hamlet, or Willy Loman as though they were real people. Although this may be unacceptable in literary criticism, one cannot deny

that we do so. Moreover, a quick survey of Greek tragic titles will show that most of them are simply a name, usually that of the main character. (For example, Antigone, Oedipus Rex, Electra, etc.). One wonders, then, what Aristotle means when he insists on primacy of action and what his concept of character really is. Referring to this problem, Kate Hamburger says:

"Aristotle maintained in the Poetics that the essential thing in tragedy was not the characters but the events. [...], and the action compounded from it. For him the preeminent example, which he repeatedly cites as model tragedy, was Sophocles' Oedipus in which the action, the 'destiny' takes precedence over character. This may not seem completely applicable to dramatic figures such as Sophocles' Electra and Antigone, [...]. Since they obviously present very pronounced character traits as well as actions and decisions deriving from individual will."⁶

Attempting to resolve this question, Hamburger cites Aristotle's distinctions between the poet and the historian. The historian relates the facts, he relates what has happened. He deals with fixed, isolated

events. The poet, on the other hand, concerns himself with universals, with what "... such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do."⁷ Thus, Antigone's character is merely a likelihood; she does represent the kinds of things such a girl would do in certain situations. As such, she is a generality of a particular set of attributes. Thus, it would be clearer if we spoke not of (unique) characters but of character types. Attic tragedy, as understood by Aristotle, is a man's being cast into a painful situation in which he behaves in one way or another.⁸ If Aristotle's situation theory is taken one step farther, a theory of interchangeable characters is likely to result. Clearly, if it is the situation which is of primary importance, then it seems possible to have a discussion on how Lysistrata, for example, would have behaved in Antigone's place. As the situations present themselves, the characters must make certain decisions which in turn reveal 'moral purpose.' In short, Aristotle insists on primacy of plot (sequence of events as situations) and characters' subordination

thereto. The Aristotelian hero is a man of action. His capacity to evoke pity and fear depends entirely on his action. "[...] if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character," says Aristotle, "[...] you will not produce the essential tragic effect nearly so well as with a play that [...] however deficient in these respects, yet has a plot and artistically constructed incidents."⁹ The placing of characters into certain fixed situations, leads additionally to the task of determining whether characters are, in philosophical terms, free. The Attic characters (like Anouilh's, but not Brecht's) are trapped in their destinies, in what Cocteau calls the "infernal machine of fate." Owing to the determinism which is prevalent in Greek tragedy, Aristotle's claims about a character's decisions seem paradoxical. He readily admits to the determined situations and in so doing contradicts himself when he says that characters make decisions. Such decisions cannot be what philosophers call 'live choice,' for they were determined by the primordial cause. When discussing the plays individually, I

shall further elucidate this point, and investigate the relationship between determinism and dramatic character.

CHAPTER I

Fundamentally, Antigone is an account of the conflict between two strong wills. Antigone and Creon are both equally dedicated to their causes; each adamantly believes the other to be wrong and guilty of grave transgression. The conflict between them is insoluble and ineluctably results in the deaths of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice. Creon, the surviving participant, is left emotionally bankrupt and must live a life of solitude and enormous guilt. Whenever Antigone and Creon appear together on stage, they are unsympathetic to one another and reject all pleas, no matter how logical or passionate they may be. Separated by differences in age and beliefs, Antigone and Creon are wholly incapable of communicating with, or understanding one another. Thus, like two trains headed for one another on the same track, Creon's and Antigone's destruction is ineluctable. Referring to the play, Kate Hamburger says, "Nothing, it seems, could be more monolithic and understandable than the plot, the heroine, and conflict, and the

problem."¹ Between Creon and Antigone (as between Haemon and Creon) there is confrontation but never reconciliation, argument but never resolution. It is as though each were arguing alone, in a vacuum. Since they are two opposite forces unwilling to change, their conflict is futile, for there can be no true victor. About the obstinacy of the Sophoclean hero, Bernard Knox writes, "[...] he is single-minded, obsessed with an objective, incapable of change, of assuming another Ndos, another disposition of character."² Greek tragedy has no notion of character development. Personnae dramatis are revealed in the play (by way of action), but once so revealed they remain the same. Greek tragic figures are altered by their recognition scenes (anagnorisis) and ironic turns (peripetia), but these changes come only too late, as part of the tragic fall. Thus, Oedipus' awakening is post facto and merely adds to his suffering. Clearly, in giving primacy to action and plot, Sophocles preordains Aristotelian convention. Sophoclean characters are usually fixed entities, types who exhibit certain intellectual and emotional traits.

This is not to say, however, that Sophocles posits only universal concepts in his characters, for as Kitto says, "[whereas Aeschylus' characters ...] tend to be types or embodiments of a principle, Sophocles devotes himself mostly to displaying the effect upon certain and well-marked, but abnormal characters of terrible crisis or strain."³ In this way Sophocles creates a model for Aristotelian rules of situation and plot, and at the same time he draws attention to the characters as well as the plot. Antigone, Creon, and Haemon are placed in certain situations which cause much consternation. Faced with philosophical and moral dilemmas which are not merely academic questions but matters of life and death, the characters have their strength and will tested. Unlike Garnier and the neo-clasicists, Sophocles does not present super-human characters. Preferring verisimilar characters, he eschews the Götterdämmerung of Corneille and Racine. His characters are slightly "bigger than life" humans who are pressed to the limits of their endurance. The Sophoclean audience easily identifies itself with such characters and in so doing experiences the

desired cathartic effects.

Antigone is young, sensitive, and emotional. She exhibits the normal faults of youth: intolerance, zeal, and impatience. With reference to Antigone's character, Kitto says she "[...] is neither a philosopher nor a devotee, but a passionate girl, and we need not expect consistency from [her] ..." Antigone's strength and dedication to her cause are undeniable, yet she is impulsive and reckless. In her battle with Creon she sacrifices reason for passion, understanding for faith. Dedication to her brother, the curse of her father, and respect for the Gods do not allow Antigone a reprieve. Her argumentation, which is emotionally charged and almost void of reason, does not change Creon's mind. Of Antigone's predicament, the chorus says:

"Such loyalty is holiness;
yet none that holds authority
can break disobedience, O my
child: Your self willed
pride has been your ruin.⁴

Thus Antigone receives praise for her intentions, but it is reason which the Greeks most admire, and she

must face her punishment all the same. Abandoning her defense, she says

"Unwept, unwedded, and unbefriended, alone, pitilessly used. Now they drag me to death, never again, O thou sun in the heavens, May I look on thy hold radiance! Such my doom, and no one laments it. No friend is hers to mourn me."⁵

Antigone's lament has great emotional impact, and although solitary death is indeed depressing, "Creon standing somewhere in the back," says Kitto, "is utterly unmoved. For him it counts for nothing."⁶ Creon responds to Antigone thus,

"Do you not know that there is none that would cease from dirges and laments, if they would serve to ward off death? Away with her, away ..."⁷

Thinking that the Gods have deserted her and that Creon has emerged unscathed, Antigone goes off to her tomb. Death is her reward for doing what she believes right. "Nothing is left to her," says Kitto, "but her deep instinct that she had to do it."⁸ Unlike Julien Sorel who was able to face death with the calmness given by

certainty of purpose, Antigone is left wondering whether she was unjustly condemned or simply wrong. Her faith is like a sieve, and as she goes to the tomb, she cannot understand what she did wrong. Her last lines are:

"How savagely impious men use
me for keeping a law that is
holy."⁹

Since she never recognizes her flaw, perhaps she feels some consolation.

Antigone's impulsive nature underscores the dramatic importance of her actions. Aristotle says that tragedy is an imitation of action, not of a thought--which is certainly the case in Antigone. Antigone's acts are the play's focal points. In the dramatic structure, the act of burying Polyneices is more important (has greater repercussions) than are the religious or familial philosophies which motivate the act. Thus, Creon and Antigone's confrontations are one-sided, each's intellectual realm is impenetrable. Ultimately the reader (or spectator) is to reflect on and understand the intellectual

dilemmas posited in Antigone, but such reflection does not occur during the play's performance. A tragedy (in the Aristotelian sense) is meant to be experienced (cf. Kitto). If the spectator is to be purged of certain emotions, he must identify himself with the characters; he must be empathic, not distant and objective. Action, therefore, brings the spectator into the play; contemplation of character distances him therefrom. Hence, Antigone's acts lead to her death and to the purgation of the spectators' emotions. Greek tragic heroes, moreover, rarely suffer from their intentions or musings. They are responsible only for what they actually do. In this respect, Sophocles' Antigone exhibits what Aristotle would have preferred, primacy of action. Referring to it, Jones says:

"[...] the conflict of the heart of the Antigone is projected into the single faceted action of Polyneices' burial, and is not referred back to the two opposed consciousness of the principal stage figures. [...] The critical discussion of action [Aristotle's] has its principal counterpart in Sophocles'

unwearying preoccupation
with what men do."¹⁰

There is no sitting and doing nothing; there is only action and action's anti-self, suffering. If Jones' view is correct, then it is possible to resolve several problems posed by the play. Critics have frequently found it puzzling that Antigone is absent from much of the play. Kitto among others is unable to reconcile Sophocles' superior ability with such an obvious flaw. In light of Sophocles' adherence to what became Aristotelian principles of dramaturgy, the problem is solved simply. Antigone's role in the play is that of a causal agent; she imitates an action, not a concept. Thus, once she has buried Polyneices, her dramatic purpose, as it were, is accomplished. After she defies Creon, the tragedy is in motion; as Anouilh might say, the spring is left to unwind. Thereafter, Antigone's presence is, in terms of praxis, unnecessary. Indeed, even after she has killed herself, her body is left in the tomb, whereas Haemon's and Eurydice's corpses are brought back to the palace. Clearly, it is Creon who is the

central figure of the play. Antigone's dramatic importance must not be exaggerated. She is mainly a catalyst for Creon's downfall. Creon's actions and their consequences are of primary importance. The personal conflicts between the characters is of secondary importance for, as Kitto says,

"Creon" Creon is in conflict with the Gods both the upper and the Mother Gods [...] his lack of humanity brings him into conflict with another great power, Enosaphrodite, [...] here is another of the great forces [...] which he thinks his sole decree can override."¹¹

Creon receives little sympathy, for his actions are in defiance of the forces of the cosmos. The possible merits of his dedication as a leader of state are overshadowed by his hubris (excessive pride). Antigone may have been wrong, but compared with Creon she is only foolhardy. It is Creon who commits the greater crime and suffers the greater punishment. To the end Creon remains impious and unrepentant. He has lost his wife, son, and political fortune. Yet even in perdition he remains immodest, and indignantly he asks, "How can you think the Gods care for this vile

corpse? [...] Do you think that Gods honor the Vile?" Kitto tersely replies, "Yes, for at least he was a man."¹² Creon is void of certain fundamental aspects of humanity. He is insensitive, harsh, and blatantly blasphemous. His character is clearly revealed by his actions and by the consequences he suffers. In the last lines of the play the chorus offers the Sophoclean equation for justice. "The ~~nears~~ measure of a proud man's boasting shall be the measurement of his punishment."¹³ Having buried Antigone alive, he loses everything that is important to him, and he is faced with his own living death.

Hegel claims that both Creon and Antigone are right and that the tragedy lies therein. It is more logical, however, to say that they were both wrong. It follows that it is a matter of degree of shades of guilt instead of a clear-cut case of right or wrong. In a universal sense of legality, Antigone is wrong to break the law even though it is unjust. Creon is guilty of a greater wrong, though, for having imposed the law in the first place. Again, it is clear that tragedy focuses on the greater force and the greater evil.

CHAPTER II - ANOUILH

A striking aspect of *Antigone* is his *thés* exposé of tragedy expressed directly and indirectly in the play itself. In this work written in 1942, Anouilh deals with the question of tragedy's role in the twentieth century, particularly during the traumatic years of World War II which marked the ascendancy of existentialist thought. In assuming the problematic task of composing a modern tragedy, Anouilh adds to and alters Sophocles' Antigone. Fundamentally, Anouilh has suggested that the decline (perhaps the term 'change' would be preferable) of the tragic theater is attributable to the "replacement of action by character as the dramatic mainspring."¹ Anouilh considers many so-called modern tragedies to be exercises in the development of characters who exhibit nineteenth century romantic impulses; escapism, brooding and introspection. In contrast, he considers classic tragic characters to be monolithic heroes; that is, characters who are unswerving in their quest for self-fulfillment and who exhibit little of the reflective

nature of the romantic heroes. Anouilh posits a type of character which is a synthesis of the romantic and tragic heroes. His characters show the strong determination of the classic hero, yet they engage in the introspection of the romantic figure. Moreover, Anouilh's characters are conscious not only of their character roles but of themselves as performers about to play out these roles. For example, in opening the play the chorus says:

Voilà, ces personnages vont vous jouer
l'histoire d'Antigone. Antigone,
c'est la petite maigre assise là-bàs,
et qui ne dit rien. [...] Elle pense
qu'elle va être Antigone tout à
l'heure."²

Spingler writes: "[...] if we ask who, [...] is thinking these thoughts, it becomes apparent that Antigone is an actress thinking about the characteristics and demands of her part just before going on."³ It is evident that the chorus is describing not only the character Antigone but also the actress who is about to play the part, and in so doing reveals initially and throughout the rest of the play the dual nature of all the characters. Unlike the Sophoclean chorus,

Anouilh's consists of only one person, a man who is dressed in evening clothes and who speaks to the audience rather than to the stage characters. He causes the audience's detachment from the play as though he were the narrator of a court trial. Spingler observes, "Because of his comments we do not experience tragedy in the play as rhythm and structure but consider it at a distance as an abstract concept and problem."⁴

The chorus thus provides a medium for Anouilh to introduce his own concept of tragedy, as though he himself were speaking in the play. Moreover, the chorus introduces Antigone to the audience while it also reveals the ineluctable outcome of the play. Referring to Antigone, the chorus says: "[...] elle pense qu'elle est jeune et qu'elle aussi aurait bien aimé."⁵ This introduction to the play establishes an important similarity to the Greek version. When Sophocles' Theban Trilogy was first performed, the audience knew the story and, unlike Anouilh's audience, knew what Antigone's fate would be. In revealing the outcome of his play, Anouilh makes it possible for a modern audience to have, according to Peman, an aesthetic

attitude comparable to that of the Greek audience. (In his introduction to his Antigone, Peman discusses this aspect of modernizing the classics).

Anouilh's Creon contrasts sharply with Sophocles' Creon. A man of unchanging position, unwilling to alter his conception of the law or to forsake his heart-felt duty to law, Sophocles' Creon will make no excuses for Antigone in order to save her life. Anouilh, however, depicts a man who is relatively malleable, or even likable. Unlike Sophocles' Creon who is obstinate and enamoured with his own position and importance, Anouilh's Creon is moderate and sympathetic. Indeed Antigone is the stubborn one. She likes power whereas, as Vandromme observes:

"Créon n'a pas le goût du pouvoir ... la prudence, la nécessité, ce sont les règles d'une sagesse qu'il pratique pour autant qu'il peut, les hommes de leur folie. Le fond de sa nature, c'est la pitié, la compassion, le pressentiment au néant de toute chose."⁶

The French Creon acts not in defiance of the Gods but in the realm of the practical, out of an attachment to the fundamentals of life. In referring to the old

morality and conception of God's power, Nietzsche says, "God is dead." This belief is evident in Anouilh's representation of Créon to which Vandromme alludes in noting: "Finalement il n'a qu'une seule croyance; Celle de la vie élémentaire [...] Les dieux sont morts, et avec eux les belles histoires antiques[...]."⁷

This belief is emphasized by the chorus when he refers to the play as "L'histoire d'Antigone" instead of the "tragédie d'Antigone." The play is now a story and has lost the grandeur of Sophoclean tragedy. Anouilh feels that there is no longer a place for a tragic hero like Oedipus and his family. This point is emphasized in a speech given by Créon. Referring to Oedipus, he declares:

"Thebes a droit maintenant à un prince sans histoire. J'ai résolu avec moins d'ambition que ton père de m'employer tout simplement à rendre l'ordre de ce monde moins absurde, si c'est possible."⁸

Créon refers to Oedipus as an annoyance, infatuated with himself as a tragic hero. Créon seeks simplicity in calmness rather than in calamity. He claims that Oedipus and his family sought their destiny, and indeed

revelled in their gloomy fate. Thus, Anouilh makes it clear that a tragic hero like Oedipus is anachronistic in the twentieth century. "Whereas the chorus' attitude toward tragedy is ambiguous," writes Spingler of Anouilh's play, "Créon's bias against it is clear."⁹

By instilling in Créon a bias against tragedy, Anouilh removes from the classical tragedy a major element, the antagonist. Moreover, Creon disputes every justification Antigone offers for burying Polyneices. If Creon has renounced his role as the antagonist, then it becomes, in Spingler's words, his "... problem to convince Antigone to refute tragedy also."¹⁰ This first step is to refute every reason (except for purposes of sanitation) for the burial. He begins by discrediting the authenticity and sanctity of the priest and of their religious duties. In attempting to convince Antigone that the religious burial is meaningless, Créon says to Antigone:

"Tu y crois donc vraiment, toi à cet enterrement dans les règles? [...] et tu risques la mort maintenant parce que j'ai refusé à ton frere ce passeport derisoire, ce bredouillage en serie sur sa dépouille, cette pantomime dont

tu aurais été la première
à avoir honte [...] C'est
absurde."¹¹

This speech represents a major departure from the Sophoclean version. Whereas in the classic version Sophocles' Creon is in conflict with Antigone, the conflict is never considered to be absurd. Each character recognizes the value and purpose of the other's quest. Anouilh's Creon, however, sees Antigone's action as absurd, and considers the priest's duties equally so. Anouilh further digresses from the traditional characterization of Antigone when Antigone herself admits that burial under the auspices of priests is little more than religious "mumbo-jumbo."

Having refuted the value of the priests, Creon discredits the beliefs to which a tragic hero must adhere if she is to remain tragic. Thus, in perhaps the most important modification of the classical version, Anouilh's Creon tells Antigone how the real Polynices differed from Antigone's idealized conception of him. He explains that Antigone's brothers were merely political mercenaries who were willing to

fight for the party that paid the most, and also, that when their bodies were found they were so disfigured it was impossible to distinguish one from the other.

When the corpses were subsequently returned to Thebes, Creon decided ~~those~~ arbitrarily which brother would be remembered as a hero and which as a traitor.

CHAPTER III - BRECHT

In synthesizing the Aristotelian (determined, motivated, trapped in their destinies) and the romantic (reflective, uncertain, brooding) concepts of character, Anouilh has rejected some of Aristotle's dramatic principles and has thus created a character especially suitable for the twentieth century theater. In another version of Antigone influenced by Holderin's translation, Brecht manifests anti-Aristotelian tendencies even stronger than Anouilh's. In short, Brecht and Sophocles seem to lie antipodal, with Anouilh somewhere between the two. This chapter will deal with contrasts between the Brechtian and the Sophoclean versions of Antigone as well as comparisons between Brecht's and Anouilh's so-called modern tragedies.

In his plays, Sophocles manifests his belief that men are trapped in their destinies, that their lives are governed and their futures determined by forces beyond their control. Sophoclean character's behavior is part of a great, preordained world order. Antigone is meant to die, whereas Creon must act as he does. An integral part of Greek tragedy,

this air of inescapable fatality also pervades Anouilh's play. The characters are pre-determined, for there is no place for free will. The audience need never question or even ponder the outcome of the play. Referring to this aspect of Greek tragedy, Brecht writes, Oedipus who has sinned against several principles which prop the society of the time, is executed. The gods take care of that; and they are beyond criticism."¹ Thus, from a Brechtian perspective, the spectator of a Greek tragedy cannot draw his own conclusions. Vigorously delineated, right and wrong are presented in the action of the play, and as Walter Sokel concludes, "[...] Brecht [is] unable to accept the concept of dramatic character as the ultimate, absolute, and fate determining quality which it had been."² In Brecht's plays character, rather than plot, turns the dramatic main mainspring.

Between 1926 and 1929 Brecht's belief that men are in conflict and that, as described by Hegel, the class conflict is necessary and beneficial, led him to embrace Marxism. The basic tenet of Hegelianism to which Brecht subscribed is the concept of thesis-

antithesis-synthesis. The dialectical notion of history, which claims that men are free and obliged to alter society, is in direct opposition to Aristotelian notions of tragedy. Hegelianism has greatly influenced Brecht to oppose classical conventions and to create what he calls "epic or dialectical theater."⁴ Here the term "epic" does not mean "heroic" or "on a grand scale." Brecht simply means that the theater tells a story through dramatic means. The following points out the differences between the Brechtian and the classical theater.

The comparative list of 'shifts of emphasis' tabulated by Brecht in his notes on the opera Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny:

<u>Dramatic Form of the Theatre</u>	<u>Epic Form of the Theatre</u>
direct action	narrative
involves the audience in the action on stage	makes the audience into observers, but
uses up their activity	awakens their activity
facilitates emotions	enforces decisions
experience	image of the world
the audience is projected into an action	the audience is confronted with it

hypnotic suggestion	argument
the feelings are conserved	are impelled to the point of recognition
man is taken for granted	man is the object of inquiry
unchangeable man	man as both the subject and object of change
suspense as to the outcome	suspense as to the process
one scene leads to another	each scene a separate unit
linear development	in a series of curves
evolutionary necessity	leaps
the world as it is	the world in the process of development
man as a fixed entity	man as a process
thought determines existence	social existence determined thought
feeling	reason

Brecht refutes Aristotle's two most important claims about tragedy: that character is secondary to plot and that its goal is to effect catharsis. Aristotle claims that "by evoking pity and fear, such emotions may be purged."³ This purgation is accomplished if the viewer is able to identify himself with the characters or, more importantly, with the actions they are

imitating. If catharsis is to take place, the viewer must develop an empathic relationship with theatrical characters to the extent that, for example, each pain felt by Antigone must also be felt by the audience. Brecht, however, seeks to awaken rather than drain the audience's energy. Since his plays are didactic, they must not purge the emotions and thoughts which they are seeking to arouse. According to Karl Schoeps,

Brecht objects vigorously to the Aristotelian concept of catharsis because it prevents the spectators from thinking about the events presented on stage. A completely free and critical attitude of the viewer, bent on solutions of problems here on earth, is no basis for catharsis.⁵

In this respect Anouilh and Brecht have similar concepts of character. While viewing Anouilh's Antigone, for instance, the spectator is prevented from becoming emotionally involved. He becomes the judge; the actors, participants in a trial. Brecht maintains, "[the theater] must engage itself with reality so that it can and may present effective images of reality."⁶ Brecht's plays are meant to be viewed by a critical audience. In presenting characters who exhibit free

will, Brecht enables his audience to make certain judgments. Instead of appealing to a viewer's emotions, he wishes to stimulate thought and ideas. Like Anouilh, Brecht hopes that his audience will simply observe his plays instead of becoming emotionally involved in them. According to Grossvogel, "Brecht wants the spectator to remain detached. Every natural obstacle in the way of his identification is a dramatic good."⁷ The obstacles are part of the dramatic distancing known as the Verfremdunseffekt. The "V-effect" prevents an empathic relationship between viewer and character and in so doing allows Brecht to present characters who take part in an intellectual and physical confrontation. Brecht creates a character who is the antithesis of

Aristotelian universality and timelessness [which] allowed indefinite identification [...] character is not a necessary incarnation within the possible forms so that its very presence becomes a part of the dialectic development of the total performance.⁸

Sophoclean characters represent universal concepts. They are clearly delineated symbols, virtually

allegorical representations, of various qualities-- 'good,' 'bad,' 'foolish.' On the other hand, Brechtian characters exhibit many personality traits which govern the action's direction. In contrast, classical characters are monolithic; they stand like columns, according to Aristotle, intended only to support the plot, to which they are subordinate. Their purpose is to represent immutable, conflicting forces. "In traditional dramaturgy," Sokel says, "motivation is the carrier of the plot, and motivation is deduced from character, and its qualities figure as absolutes."⁹ Brecht is adamantly opposed to this 'absolute' concept of tragedy. He believes that a play's dramatic and philosophic success depends on its ability to blend the actors' gestures and speeches and thereby to reveal character and plot. Brecht makes it clear that character "[...] is not a unity but an ensemble."¹⁰ This ensemble, which Sokel calls "the totality of gestic," enables a gradual revelation of character." Gestic, however, must not be confused with Aristotle's notion of action. For Aristotle, tragedy is an imitation of men performing an action, which "is serious, complete and of a certain

magnitude"--a definition unacceptable to Brecht. Brecht attempts to present characters not simply as imitators of actions but as problems to be studied. About this aspect of his characters, Brecht says,

The epic theater is to put the spectator into a position where he is able to arrive at considered opinions on the life technique of a given individual in society. In place of feeling ourselves within a character, we, are to be able to examine and criticize him.¹¹

This aspect of Brechtian theater is most anti-Aristotelian; Brecht's goal is not catharsis but the preservation of the audience's intellectual sobriety. The viewer is meant to study and analyze a character and thus to come to certain conclusions. The cathartic tears caused by Greek tragedy impair one's vision and prevent the careful study of a play. According to Schoeps, "primacy of character means, for Brecht, the channeling of the audience's attention away from the outcome of the action to the processes leading to that outcome."¹²

Believing that actors should be more than mere

imitators of an action, Brecht finds certain contradiction in Aristotle's concept of mimesis (imitation). The actors should strive to create an illusion of reality so that the spectator can know and analyze the characters. For Brecht, the viewers must see human beings rather than dramatic figures who are merely doers of their deeds, as it were, props which enable an action to take place. Although Brecht seeks to preclude or at least impede an empathic relationship between character and audience, his characters' realism will evoke sympathy. His characters are the principal object of attention, and the audience will watch, hear and study each individually and in relation to the others. Alluding to this aspect of Brechtian characters, Sokel writes, ". . . the dramatic character can be conceived only from its interhuman relationships. For the actor, the figure comes into being by entering into relations with other figures."¹³ Brechtian theater is a reversal of Aristotelian convention. Brecht insists on the primacy of character. Hence, as the primary structural element of Brechtian theater, character transcends plot which in turn serves to

convey character.

Brecht is influenced by the "Denkspiel"-- particularly those of George Bernard Shaw. In order to satisfy his demands for dialectical theater he alters the conventions of these so-called thought-plays.¹⁴ By presenting individuals in intellectual conflict, he is able without excessive moralization to inject his thoughts into his plays.

In 1932, Brecht wrote The Mother, a play which he considers the best example of his epic theater. Speaking in 1939 about The Mother, he says, "[...] written in the style of the didactic plays [...]. It is a piece of Anti-Metaphysical, materialistic, non-Aristotelian dramaturgy."¹⁵ The Mother is not only non-Aristotelian but also blatantly communist. As a result of the play's performance, the Nazi government forced Brecht into exile. He traveled through Europe and the United States until his return to Germany in 1947 after the House Un-American Activities Committee drove him out of his country!¹⁶

During a fifteen-year exile, Brecht's rebelliously anti-classical attitudes waned. Referring

to Brecht's *Antigone*, Fuegi says, "The work [...] represents on the practical plane the rapprochement between Brecht and Aristotle that is worked out (albeit very deviously) in Brecht's post-1947 theatrical pronouncements."¹⁷ Brecht, however, does make numerous changes in the play; he alters the plot, characterization, setting and staging, etc., but as Fuegi says, ". . . Brecht's changes in text are overwhelmingly ones of content rather than structure. [...] he retains the old (presumably Aristotelian) framework [...]."¹⁸ Nevertheless, he makes considerable changes in the play, most notably in his characterization of Kreon and in the staging.

Most critics agree that it is impossible to determine accurately whom (if anyone) Sophocles' Creon and *Antigone* represent. Some (e.g., Kitto) suggest that Creon is meant to be Pericles, but there is no evidence to support this claim. It has previously been said that Sophocles' characters are generalities and that they are not likely to stand for historical, rather than mythical, figures. This is not the case with Brecht. It is possible and probably correct to

say that Brecht's Kreon represents Hitler; Antigone, the resistance movement. This fact--which will be elucidated presently--also explains why Brecht chose to revise Antigone. Although Brecht's attitude toward the classics was softening, his choice of Antigone, which is considered the cornerstone of Aristotelian tragedy, is difficult to understand. If Brecht wanted to return to the classics, which he often called useless,¹⁹ one would expect him to start with Euripides, whose theory of characterization is similar to Brecht's. It is the plot of Sophocles' Antigone which perfectly suits Brecht's purpose of portraying Hitler and Germany. Moreover, Hegel is Brecht's favorite philosopher, and Sophocles' Antigone is Hegel's favorite play. Dickson alludes to this fact in noting, "Hegel saw in conflict [Antigone and Creon] the dialectical process of history. For him the absolute Weltgeist, incarnate in Creon as ruler and in Antigone as individual conscience, is divided against itself."²⁰ Brecht is therefore able to use Antigone to present the Marxist-Hegelian concept of history. In Brecht's Antigone, as in Anouilh's,

perhaps the most important textual change is effected through a revision of Eteocles' and Polyneices' roles. In Sophocles, the brothers are enemies, but Brecht places them on the same side, as Fuegi says, "[...] reluctantly fighting a war of aggression at the behest of the tyrant and usurper, Kreon."²¹ Because they are both fighting on the same side, the dramatic emphasis is further shifted to Kreon. Kreon starts and prosecutes the war, and he is therefore responsible for the destruction of Thebes (Berlin). Whereas Sophocles' Creon is guilty of a moral wrong, and Anouilh's Creon is guilty of incompetence, Brecht's Kreon is, as Fuegi says, "[...] a dyed-in-the-wood villain, [...] the bad man of the twentieth century-- Adolf Hitler."²² This claim is further supported by the guards' reference to Brecht's Creon as "Mein Fuhrer," an expression which is seldom used in post-1945 Germany. Sophocles' Creon evokes some sympathy, whereas Anouilh's Creon is truly pitiable, but Brecht wholeheartedly wants to prevent the audience from feeling any sympathy for his Kreon. Furthermore, in deleting Enrydice's death from the play, Brecht

removes any reason to feel sorry for Kreon. Fuegi suggests that Eurydice's death "[...] would be out of place in a play that consistently seeks to blacken Kreon's character." Additionally, Kreon himself kills Eteocles, for as Antigone says,

"[...] du greift den vom Blut
Bruders Besprengten Kreon, der
hinten Einpeitscht alle sie in
die Schlacht, und zerstükt ihn." (III)

Kreon is a greedy, selfish, merciless tyrant who feels no shame or guilt for his actions. His final words are,

"So fullt jetzt Thebe.
und fallen soll es, soll's mit
mir, und es soll aus sein und
für die Geir du. So will ich's
dann." (III)

Aristotle says that tragic figures should be neither totally good nor totally bad. Clearly, Brecht's characterization of Kreon is a violation of that rule, and perhaps a flaw in the play. Brecht blames all of Europe's ills on Kreon, and as Fuegi says, "These crimes are perhaps a little too much for one man to bear."²³ It seems as though Brecht inadvertently makes the mistake for which he criticizes Sophocles. Brecht's Kreon is utterly

monolithic, he is wholly evil, governed not by reason but by passionate hate and anger. Unlike Brecht's earlier characters (Pre-1933) which were realistic, thoughtful humans, Kreon is monstrous beyond all (dramatic) proportions. In characterizing Kreon, Brecht seems to anticipate the absurdity of an Ionesco play, for example Rhinoceros.

As Brecht magnifies Kreon's evil he intensifies Antigone's goodness. She has great strength and dedication. Sophocles presents a conflict between two strong wills; Brecht presents a battle of behemoths. In Kreon one sees evil of the world; in Antigone, the good. Brecht views them not as individuals but as forces in history. The confrontation is more a dramatization of Marxism than a revision of Sophocles' Antigone. This conflict is summed up in the dialogue:

Kreon: "Immer nur die Nase neben dir
siehst du, aber des Staats Ordnung,
die Göttliche, siehst du wohl
nicht.

Antigone: "Göttlich mag sie wohl seon,
aber ich wollte doch Lieber sie
menschlich, kreon ...]" (II)

and in Kreon's question, "Gibt es keinen krieg.", to which Antigone responds, "Ja, deiner." It is Kreon's war of

aggression against Argos, which inspires Antigone to wage her own war against Kreon. Brecht's Antigone is far stronger and far more calculating than Anouilh's or Sophocles'.

Although Brecht adopts some classical conventions, he retains one of epic theater's major aspects, the Verfremdungseffekte. This alienation of the audience from the play effectively prevents catharsis from taking place. In staging Antigone, Brecht adds gongs, phonographs, paintings, and a bench, visible to the audience, on which the actors sit when not on stage. This prop is similar to those used by Anouilh. The inverisimilitude of these props causes the audience to remain at a distance from the play. The spectator is constantly reminded that he is watching a play, and he is, therefore not drawn into the play as the Greek spectator was.

CONCLUSION

Having investigated Sophocles', Brecht's and Anouilh's characters and dramatic theories, I can now categorize the three versions of the character Antigone that I have studied. Additionally, I will make various claims about developments in dramaturgy from Sophocles to Anouilh. Finally, I will offer my own theories on characterization and the goals of drama. Specifically, I will posit my concept of the ideal relation of character to plot and whether tragedy's end should be cathartic, didactic or otherwise.

In order to describe accurately and tersely the various Creons and Antigones, the following attributes may be associated schematically with the characters:

Antigone:

Sophocles: Altruism
 Anouilh: Egoism
 Brecht: Patriotism

Creon:

Zeal, immorality
 Avuncular, incompetent
 Despotism, wholly evil

Although it is accurate and thorough to describe the Antigones with only one word, it is not possible to do the same with the Creons. This is further evidence that in all the plays the major character is Creon and not as the title would suggest, Antigone. Even if one disputes this fact, it is undeniable that, in terms of drama or personality, Creon is more complex and interesting than Antigone.

Sophocles' Antigone is honestly dedicated to her family and is willing to sacrifice her life for what she believes to be the moral laws of God and man. Antigone is set within a religious framework. The dramatic importance of the sooth-sayer, Tiresias, the religious and philosophical dilemmas presented, and the fatality which looms in the play are all indications that Sophocles is influenced by the religious and philosophical Zeitgeist, the spirit of the time. It is important, however, to preserve the distinction between a religious framework and a religious play. Antigone is the former; it has certain religious overtones, but it would be inaccurate to call it a religious play. Thus, one could claim correctly that Antigone's motives for burying

Polyneices are not only religious but also inspired by love for Polyneices and family. Whatever Antigone's true motives may be, she is clearly unselfish in the prosecution of her objective. She can receive no reward for her act. Even her hope that she will be remembered as a heroine is faint. Her willingness to sacrifice herself, to act without desire of self-aggrandizement, reflects her altruism which is revealed essentially through action. Through acts Sophocles presents her. Burying Polyneices and committing suicide are both physical acts which reveal as clearly as any soliloquy, Antigone's nature. When Antigone speaks, she is honest and warmly simple. Creon, however, is coldly eloquent and shrewd. His speeches are haughty and sophistic; in him we see the craftiness of language that, in Dante's mind, sends Odysseus to hell. Creon's famous "ship of state" speech reveals his character early in the play. One expects him to act as he does. It seems as though Sophocles does not wholly believe that character is revealed by and subordinate to action. Whereas Antigone's character is revealed through action, Creon's is revealed through speech.

Anouilh removes from Antigone all the magnanimity

and selflessness Sophocles creates in her. Anouilh's Antigone is childish and self-centered. For her, burying Polyneices is little more than a mischievous prank, an act intended only to attract attention and to preserve the frivolity of youth. Referring to this aspect of Antigone's character, Hamburger says that the key to understanding the play is Créon's statement, "Polyneices n'était qu'un prétexte." Antigone wants attention, and the religious and moral justifications are merely excuses for gaining it. Moreover, in regard to dramaturgy Anouilh believes that the act is a pretext for writing the play. By burying Polyneices, Antigone sets the play, and the events which lead to an ineluctable tragic climax, in motion. Antigone's goal seems to be the retention of youth's qualities: playfulness, independence, and frivolity. In Créon she sees the burdens of age: responsibility, mediocrity, and mortality. Her greatest concern seems to be her dog's fate. Anouilh's alteration of Antigone reflects his sentiments toward the twentieth century. For him, Sophoclean drama would be anachronistic. Additionally, Tiresias' complete absence from the play points out Anouilh's atheistic view of the world. In

a play which reflects an unjust and cruel world, a priest would be out of place. If salvation is to come, it must come not from God but from man. Compared with Sophocles' Creon, Anouilh's is far kinder and receives pity. Antigone deserves the blame for his ruin. He is guilty only of mediocrity and the inability to keep order. Clearly these flaws are not as detestable as the wanton crimes committed by Sophocles' and Brecht's Creons. In short, by minimizing the conflict between Antigone and Créon, Anouilh dilutes the myth's dramatic impact. The conflict is merely a temporary interruption; the guards who are playing cards and the beginning of the play quietly resume the game after the turmoil subsides. Anouilh seems to believe that acts such as Antigone's are futile and are quickly forgotten. It is this expression of life's triviality which makes Anouilh's play the most depressing of the three. Unlike Sophocles who sustains the hope of Justice, and Brecht, who gives the hope that tyrants will be opposed, Anouilh offers no hope. In this way, Anouilh effects a 'quiet catharsis.' Sophoclean spectators cry when Antigone dies, but they feel better for having done so; Brecht's spectators are angry or

enthusiastic. Anouilh, however, like the modern Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg, causes the spectator to feel languid and depressed. His play is neither tumultuous nor inspiring. It is merely bleak and grey.

Whereas Anouilh reverses the Sophoclean character's attributes, Brecht enhances them. As we have seen, Brecht magnifies Antigone's goodness and Kreon's evil. Ironically, the one-sidedness of his characters lead him closer to Aristotelianism than to his own 'epic' theater. I believe that owing to their intense goodness and evil, Brecht's characters are more monolithic than those of Sophocles. It is also ironic that Sophocles' characterization of Creon is less than Aristotelian. With regard to concept of character, I still feel that Brecht and Sophocles lie antipodal with Anouilh, but perhaps they lie nearer to each other than expected.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹G. M. Kirkwood, A Study of Sophoclean Drama. Iathaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958.

²Norma Jenkes, The Aristotelian Idea of Character From Aeschylus to Brecht, paper prepared for Prof. T. G. Rosenmeyer, Berkeley, Calif. 1978.

³H. C. Baldry, The Greek Tragic Theater. New York: Norton and Co., 1971, p. 99.

⁴Robert Wolff, Ten Great Works of Philosophy. New York: Mentor Books, 1969, p. 71.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Käte Hamburger, From Sophocles to Sartre. New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., p. 101.

⁷Aristotle, op. cit., p. 79.

⁸Ibid., p. 71.

⁹Ibid., p. 82.

Chapter I

¹Hamburger, op. cit., p. 119.

²Bernard Knox, The Heroic Temper; Studies in Sophoclean Drama. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1964.

³"Sophocles," Oxford Classical Dictionary, 1971, p. 1085.

⁴H.D.F. Kitto, Form and Meaning in Drama: London: Methuen and Co., 1960, p. 157.

⁵Oxford Classical Dictionary, p. 1088.

⁶Kitto, op. cit., p. 178.

⁷John Jones, On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy:
New York: Oxford University Press, p. 198.

⁸Kitto, op. cit., p. 176.

⁹Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁰Sophocles, Antigone. Baltimore: Penguin Books
(R.D. H.D.F. Kitto) II, III (all citations are from this
edition).

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Kitto, op. cit., p. 170.

¹³Sophocles, op. cit., Act. III, Scene 4.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Jones, op. cit., p. 200.

¹⁶Kitto, op. cit., p. 176.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁸Sophocles, op. cit., Act. III.

Chapter II

¹Michael Spingler, "Anouilh's Little Antigone:
Tragedy, Theatricalism, and the Romantic Self." Comparative
Drama 8, (1973), p. 280.

²Anouilh, Jean, "Antigone," in Anthology of 20th
Century French Theatre, ed. by Jacques Guicharnard,
New York: Paris Book Center, Inc., 1967, Prologue.

³Spingler, op. cit., p. 233.

⁴Ibid., p. 231.

⁵Anouilh, p. 467.

⁶Pol Vandromme, Un Auteur et ses Personnages.
Paris: La Table Ronde, 1965, p. 37.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Anouilh, p. 485.

⁹Spingler, p. 236.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Anouilh, p. 486.

Chapter III

¹Cf. Jones.

²Walter Sokel, "Brecht's Concept of Character,"
Comparative Drama, vol. 5 (1971), p. 177.

³Ibid., 174.

⁴John Fuegi, The Essential Brecht, L.A.: Hennessy
and Ingalls, Inc., 1972, esp. Chap. I.

⁵Aristotle, op. cit., sec. 4-7.

⁶Karl Schoeps, Bertolt Brecht, New York: F. Ungar
& Co., 1977, p. 112.

⁷Bertolt Brecht, Kleines organon für das Theater.

⁸C. N. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript.
Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1962, p. 167.

⁹Sokel, op. cit., 186.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 188.

¹¹Sokel, op. cit., p. 186.

¹²Schoeps, op. cit.

¹³Sokel, op. cit., p. 178.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Bertolt Brecht, cited by Fuegi in The Essential Brecht, p. 49.

¹⁶Fuegi, op. cit., pp. 63-65.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 87.

²⁰Keith Dickson, Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 197.

²¹Fuegi, op. cit., p. 71.

²²Ibid., p. 69.

²³[...] there Kreon seizes him, covered with his [Polyneices] Blood, Kreon who is busy in the rear, whipping everyone into the Battle, siezes him and chops him to pieces.

So falls Thebes, and fall it should, it's nothing to me if it [Thebes] lies exposed to the vultures. I w'oent it be thus.

²⁴Fuegi, op. cit., p. 69.

²⁵K: Always, you see only the nose in front of you, but you see nothing of the divine, ordered state.

A: It may be divine, but I'd rather see it humanly ordered, Kreon.

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