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Cher Antoine : Jean Anouilh's reflection on his own works

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CHER ANTOINE:

JEAN ANOUILH'S REFLECTION ON HIS OWN WORKS

By

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Thesis

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LE COMEDIEN PIEDELIEVRE demande,
important

Mais dites-moi, maître, sans indiscretion,
c'est un peu autobiographique, votre pièce?

ANTOINE, éclate de rire

Quelle idée! Vous voyez bien que je ne suis
mort!

LE COMEDIEN PIEDELIEVRE

Mais le titre "Cher Antoine ou l'Amour raté"?

ANTOINE

Un titre, voilà tout! Tout est purement
imaginaire, mon cher!

--Jean Anouilh, Cher Antoine
(Act III, pp. 130-131)¹

¹Jean Anouilh, Cher Antoine ou l'Amour raté (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1969). Quotations are keyed to act and page throughout this essay.

INTRODUCTION

This examination of plays by Jean Anouilh will uphold the thesis that Anouilh's most recent play offers an over-all judgment of his own work. Furthermore, while the play itself manages to be rather successful, the conclusion to be drawn from it is that the author has failed to attain the success he sought.

In Cher Antoine, which opened October 1, 1969, at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Anouilh takes as his subject matter one of his favorite subjects—playmaking. It is for that reason that Cher Antoine strikes us as "autobiographical." Being about a playwright and the people involved in production, the play contains unmistakable autobiographical elements and Anouilh's personal attitudes about the theatre and the work of playwrights and critics.

Anouilh's private life has always remained quite private. He once wrote to the critic Gignoux: "Je n'ai pas de biographie, et j'en suis très content."² Anouilh went on to give his birthdate—June 23, 1910, but except for that and a rather general account of his education and occupations, he made it quite clear that the rest would remain his personal affair. He speaks on this point through the aging actress Carlotta in Cher Antoine:

Cela m'agace, cette mode de maintenant, de s'intéresser uniquement

²Hubert Gignoux, Jean Anouilh (Paris: Editions du temps présent, 1946), p. 9.

aux petites choses des grands hommes, alors que ce qu'ils ont fait de grand, au fond, tout le monde s'en moque plus ou moins! Antoine a été un grand auteur, il a fait de très belles pièces. Bon. C'est tout. Qu'on les rejoue! Le reste, on s'en fout! (Act II, p. 93)

Carlotta continues brilliantly in this vein and, addressing a professor of literature, concludes:

Racine, c'est mon dieu—mais si on retrouvait ses fausses dents, vous croyez que je me dérangerai pour aller les voir? Tout ça, c'est des moeurs pour Madame Sarah Bernhardt qui se produit dans des cirques! C'est du Barnum! (Act II, p. 94)

It is certainly not the intention of this study to delve into Cher Antoine seeking to find juicy tidbits and details of the private life of the author. What we can expect to discover, however, are Anouilh's personal views like the one quoted above about the unimportance of the details of an artist's life in comparison to his creative efforts. Anouilh's only love affair that concerns us is his love affair with the theatre, and that, in my opinion, is dealt with rather broadly in Cher Antoine. What we will then be seeking will be Anouilh's personal sentiments expressed on the subject of his own theatre.

Whenever a literary work is expected to contain "mots d'auteur," there is a problem in determining just which characters are spokesmen for the author. It is annoying to hear someone say, "Shakespeare said: 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be: for loan oft loses both itself and friend.'" (Hamlet, I, iii) Those words may express an idea with which Shakespeare was in agreement; but the fact remains: they are words spoken by the conniving old Polonius, a rather foolish character in Hamlet. Consider the following quotation:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Macbeth, V, v)

Did Shakespeare say that? No, that was Shakespeare's Macbeth. It must be clear that we cannot attribute to the author the feelings or philosophies expressed by all the characters in a play. It is difficult to consider even a certain character as his "porte-parole." This problem, then, will be treated with a great deal of care in the following analysis of Cher Antoine. We must be sure to understand always just how far a certain character's words may parallel the ideas of the author. Carlotta's statements, quoted above, for example, about the relative unimportance of "des reliques" of authors, seem to bespeak an Anouilhian concept, yet we are not to take her every word as a belief shared by her creator and infer that Anouilh considers Racine his "dieu" (though there may be indications elsewhere that author does indeed hold Racine in high esteem).

As we examine Cher Antoine, we will attempt to determine in what way each of the major characters seems to represent a certain aspect of Anouilh. We will be asking: Why has Anouilh chosen to write about certain themes and certain subjects? What does he consider the mission of the playwright, the critic, the actors? What have been his aims and goals? What have been his shortcomings and failures?

Cher Antoine, serving as a springboard for a review of Anouilh's work, should help to bring to light some significant answers.

CHAPTER I

CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

I have come from Pirandello,
that's all. 'Six Characters
in Search of an Author.' I
haven't invented a thing since.

--Jean Anouilh¹

¹Jean Anouilh, *Opéra* (Feb. 14, 1951) quoted in John Harvey, *Anouilh, A Study in Theatrics* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 173.

Anouilh is not alone in recognizing his debt to Pirandello. One critic has observed: "Anouilh's great debt to Pirandello is in the themes that he has adapted and in the Pirandellian flavor of much of his dialogue and atmosphere."²

In his conclusion to Jean Anouilh, A Study in Theatrics, John Harvey takes issue with that statement, seeing Anouilh's themes as deriving from Molière, Marivaux, and Musset. Themes attributed to Pirandello, he says, like the relativity of truth, the multiplicity of personality, the notion of roles, the divergence between illusion and reality, are the traditional themes of dramatic literature. Furthermore, he notes a great difference between Pirandello's "metaphysical meshwork" and "Anouilh's intensely alive dialogues." Where he sees the importance of Six Characters to Anouilh was in "the asphyxiation of the well-made play" and "the ascendancy of theatre itself over the contents of theatre."³

As the first act of Cher Antoine unfolds, we might indeed think of the title, Six Characters in Search of an Author, not because of the dramatic technique that we know Pirandello uses when

²Thomas Bishop, Pirandello and the French Theatre (New York: New York University Press, 1960), p. 118.

³John Harvey, Anouilh, A Study in Theatrics (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1964), p. 172.

his six characters, having assumed a life of their own, invade the rehearsal of another play ostensibly to find an author who can work out their play, but because of the situation in Cher Antoine. In the first act, a number of significant personages in the life of an author, Antoine de Saint-Flour, are arriving at his Bavarian chateau. It is the beginning of the winter of 1913. The snow is getting unusually deep for that time of year, and the little group, called together for the opening of Antoine's will and concerned with the recent developments of Antoine's life and his accidental death, will find itself snowbound. This situation is certain to force confrontations and the sharing and comparing of observations and feelings about the dead playwright. In a sense, the characters are beginning a search to know the real Antoine.

First we meet Estelle, Antoine's present wife, the official widow. She had been deserted by Antoine several years earlier, and he had never asked for a divorce. Estelle comes on the scene—it is rather splendidly decorated in the baroque style "avec un excès de dorure un peu allemand" (Act.I, p. 22)—and with her is Marcellin, Antoine's doctor and friend of long-standing. The décor leads Estelle to remark on Antoine's obsession for acquiring houses—always attempting to solve problems, in family life or love affairs, by means of the walls of a new setting. This subject is taken up again with the arrival of Valérie, Antoine's rather youthful former mistress, and her daughter, Anémone.

VALERIE. C'est une maison extraordinaire! Et elle lui ressemble. Je me demande comment il pouvait, sous tant de climats différents, trouver toujours quelque chose qui lui ressemblât.

ESTELLE, sèche. Je suis persuadée qu'aimant une Lapone, il eût réussi à faire quelque chose à lui d'un igloo. Mais il y a une faille chez moi, je n'ai pas visité tous ses antres. Vous avez un avantage sur moi, Valérie: vous êtes venue chez moi. Antoine recevait dans les maisons de sa femme. Le petit rendez-vous de chasse de Sologne qu'il avait acheté de votre temps, lui ressemblait aussi?

VALERIE, nette. Ma chère Estelle, rappelez-vous que nous sommes convenues, lors de notre réconciliation, que nous ne reparlerions jamais plus de cela. (Act I, pp. 15-16)

This gently bitter sword-play between the now-friendly ladies continues as they await the appearance of the drama critic Cravatar, the Sorbonne professor Piedelièvre, and Antoine's first wife, the actress Carlotta. Antoine's lawyer informs this group that the will cannot be opened until the arrival of Mme Duchemin and her son, Alexandre, and Mme Staufenbach, the former Maria Werner. Mme Duchemin, Gabrielle, turns out to be Antoine's Latin Quarter lover during his youth, and Alexandre is their son. Maria Werner, whom Estelle dreads to encounter, is Antoine's last mistress, the one for whom he had apparently given up Estelle.

Our interest in this confrontation mounts, as well as our curiosity, like that of the characters, as to why they have been brought together and whether Antoine's death while cleaning a hunting rifle had really been an accident.

One thing readily noticeable is that Antoine has a taste for theatrical situations. Like Pirandello (whose name is certainly not used in the text, for he had not yet written his major work in 1913), Anouilh reveals an interest in the process of dramatic creation, just by the way that the characters recognize how the dead Antoine seems to have written their script. As an example: on hearing the dull muffled avalanche that blocks them in, there is an exchange of dialogue.

CRAVATAR. Hé bien, cette fois, ça y est, nous sommes coincés!
 Antoine l'aura réussi encore une fois, sa fin d'acte!
 C'est l'avalanche! (Il hurle au bord de l'hystérie.)
 C'est d'un mauvais goût! Ah, l'affreux théâtre!
 CARLOTTA, ravie, raide sur sa canne, glapit de sa voix de
fausset. C'est admirable! C'est du Sardou! (Act I, p. 51)

The well-made play of Victorien Sardou would, from all indications, be the last type of play to have appeal for Anouilh, so in this judgment, Cravatar is his spokesman rather than Carlotta. Yet up to this point, and indeed through most of the second act, the play that Anouilh has written moves rather straightforwardly in the most traditional way of the most conventional theatre. The exposition is handled skillfully; interest in the situation is maintained. It is a play typical of the "vaudevilles" and "mélос" of Antoine. We are to suppose that Antoine is a Sardou or perhaps a Rostand, and we are reminded constantly that Antoine has established the situation and the dramatis personae. Valérie remarks well in advance of the avalanche:

Je vous ferai remarquer que nous jouons de plus en plus une pièce d'Antoine. Des gens venus de tous les azimuts sous un prétexte fortuit, qui n'ont aucune envie de se fréquenter et qui sont bloqués ensemble, par une cause extérieure, quelque part. C'est un vieux truc de théâtre qu'il adorait et dont il s'est beaucoup servi. (Act I, p. 35)

Cravatar answers her dryly:

Au moins trois fois. "Le Château au Danemark", "Les Femmes de Barbe-Bleue", "Le Piège". Ce ne sont d'ailleurs pas ses meilleurs pièces! (Act I, p. 35)

Valérie had said even earlier in the play, at the moment when the first wife and the widow were beginning to indulge in a verbal duel: "On dirait que nous jouions une de ses pièces! Il adorait ces situations de théâtre." To that statement, Cravatar had likewise replied: "Ce n'est pas ce qu'il y avait de meilleur dans son oeuvre." (Act I, p. 29)

However much the situation may be reminiscent of one of Antoine's "vieux trucs de théâtre," for characters to remark that they seem to be participating in a play is a device often used by Anouilh himself. John Harvey has devoted a chapter of his work on Anouilh to the playwright's tendency toward this type of self-dramatizing. Harvey contends that protagonists in Anouilh's early plays "were so obsessed by the theatre that they could be accused of overplaying their very existence."⁴ That is indeed what Cravatar is criticizing in Antoine's weaker plays, and through Cravatar, what Anouilh is criticizing in his own. Perhaps by having Cravatar criticize the technique, Anouilh feels freer to use it, and he does use it well, especially as we near the end of Act I and the lawyer plays a recording of Antoine speaking to each individual in the assembled group. "C'est la dernière vilaine farce que je te fais," (Act I, p. 58) says the squeaky voice from beyond the grave. It comes from the big copper trumpet of what we now call an old-fashioned victrola, but which at the time of the action was quite an avant-garde instrument. It is this phonograph and, of course, the costumes that serve to set the play in time. Little else would assign the action and dialogue to any particular period.

Listening to the cylinder would be a rather lengthy session were it not enlivened a bit first of all by the lawyer's having put on the wrong one. When the right one is being played, it gets stuck at a crucial spot—just before it is Cravatar's turn to be spoken to.

⁴Harvey, p. 56.

To Cravatar, Antoine says, among other things:

J'ai toujours eu un certain mauvais goût--qui a d'ailleurs perdu mon théâtre, n'est-ce pas, Cravatar? Mais la vie aussi a mauvais goût, et la mort ... (Act I, p.61)

The already buried Antoine looks on life as a game, a bit of theatre. In this regard, he plays a role in somewhat the same way as does Becket, to name one of Anouilh's typical self-dramatizing characters (though one who self-dramatizes to a lesser degree than do characters of earlier plays). Antoine has come to expect himself to have "un certain mauvais goût," just as Becket comes to expect himself to have to uphold the honor of God. There are many others of Anouilh's heroes and heroines who can illustrate for us this type of role-playing, this sense of theatre or aestheticism, this attitude that life is, like theatre, a game. It is the stamp of Anouilh's theatre, and successful as it is in Cher Antoine, it may not always be "ce qu'il y avait de meilleur dans son oeuvre." (Act I, p. 29)

Besides their theatricalism, there are other parallels between Antoine and Anouilh. There is, for example, Antoine's tendency toward repeating himself, as in using the same theatrical tricks three times. Just as it could be said that Antoine revealed something of himself in all his houses in no matter what climate they were located, it could be said of Anouilh that he transforms all subject matter into something that is especially his own. Estelle says humorously that were Antoine to have taken as his mistress a Lapp, he would have succeeded in making something of his own of an igloo. Almost as comical is Anouilh's Procrustean tendency to fit a historical figure, or a contemporary heroine, or a character from classical antiquity, all into

the same mold. For instance, the critic Leonard Pronko says that Anouilh dramatizes the same problem in the plays L'Ermine, Jézabel, La Sauvage, and Eurydice. After analyzing the four plays, he concludes:

Once again we see the "sticky" quality of the past--man trapped in the net not only of his past actions, but also of his past experiences. This was the important element in separating Frantz from Monime, Marc from Jacqueline, and Thérèse from Florent. Now it separates Eurydice from Orphée. But it is important to note that in this instance the two lovers come from similar backgrounds; the chasm that separates poverty from wealth does not separate Orphée from Eurydice. The past is sufficient.⁵

Pronko observes a sameness in Orphée, Antigone, and Médée, and Jeanette of Romeo et Jeannette, saying that they "all say no, not only to reality, but to life itself."⁶ They reject life "for it will sully the pristine purity of their true 'selves.'"⁷

While Pronko takes great delight in seeing Anouilh use the same themes repeatedly, Paul Surer criticizes the playwright adversely for such repetition. Surer states:

Le reproche le plus grave que l'on puisse adresser à cette oeuvre touche à la relative monotonie de ses sujets: depuis ses débuts à la scène, Jean Anouilh a tendance à creuser, avec une étonnante persévérance, les mêmes problèmes; il redonne, inlassablement, les morceaux qui ont fait son succès: il nous a tout dit, semble-t-il, sur ses fantoches et sur ses héros; sur l'importance de la question d'argent; sur l'inévitable faillite de l'amour ... Aussi a-t-on l'impression qu'il évolue dans un univers un peu étriqué: comme à chaque pièce nouvelle, sa technique gagne en maîtrise, il arrive à donner le change en brochant de brillantes variations sur des thèmes connus ...⁸

⁵ Leonard Cabell Pronko, The World of Jean Anouilh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), p. 24.

⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Paul Surer, Le Théâtre français contemporain (Paris: Société d'Édition et d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1964), pp. 299-300.

That Anouilh is reflecting this type of criticism, in a light vein, in that chatter of Valérie's and Estelle's about the decoration of Antoine's houses, is doubtlessly open to question. Yet the following segment of dialogue relates clearly to this point.

PIEDELIEVRE (à Cravatar). ... Je sais bien que vous êtes le critique plus expéditif de Paris—et que c'est ce qui a fait votre autorité—mais les hommes sont des animaux singuliers, Cravatar, qui ne se laissent pas mettre en formule aussi facilement que les auteurs. Sous sa légèreté apparente, Antoine était un homme assez mystérieux.

CRAVATAR. Il n'y a rien de plus mystérieux que les gens qui n'ont pas grand-chose à dire. (Act I, p. 42)

Once again it is Cravatar, the drama critic, who seems to represent Anouilh's critical side, who touches the heart of the matter. Is Cravatar's statement possibly directed at Anouilh himself? At least, it is an echo of the criticism Surer leveled at Anouilh's thematic paucity.

The view that Cravatar represents Anouilh's critical side results from attempting to imagine how a playwright works. Later, in Act III of Cher Antoine, Anouilh will turn to one of his favorite devices—the play within the play, and we shall see a playwright attempting to direct characters in a rehearsal of his own play. The playwright comes to the realization that the characters, as he has created them, are to some extent reflections of himself: that is, that he projects something of himself onto them. In this Pirandellian situation, the play being rehearsed is a replay of Act I, the playwright happens to be Antoine, and his discovery is noted as follows: "On ne connaît les autres que par l'idée qu'on se fait d'eux." (Act I, p. 58) At another point, he says: "La vieille comédienne: c'est moi!" (Act III,

p. 130) in speaking of the role "CARLOTTA" as he has written it. My personal view is that Carlotta reflects Anouilh's theatrical side.

At various times in Cher Antoine, characters speak of Antoine's gentlemanly side or Jewish side or farce-loving nature, and that to me promotes the consideration that the characters of the play appeal to different facets of Antoine's personality and by extension represent different aspects of Anouilh's creative effort. As Carlotta stands for his theatrical tendencies, quite naturally, and Cravatar readily represents his inclination to be critical, Estelle embodies his clever side, bitter and sarcastic: she says that she has been working at "méchanceté." (Act I, p. 19) Valérie plays rather lightly. It is she, therefore, who stands for a kind of "désinvolture" on the part of the author. She says of Antoine, whose works she admits to having studied little, that he thought he had the right first of all to amuse himself. "C'était son côté gentilhomme," she says.

Il disait que la littérature, quoi qu'on pense, ne valait pas autre chose que le divertissement d'un moment. Il disait que c'était aussi l'avis de Racine. (Act I, p. 36)

Finally, Piedelièvre, Antoine's oldest friend, personifies the author's sentimental side. Piedelièvre defends Antoine against bad criticism, and he does point out that Antoine always considered Cravatar's uncomplimentary critiques of his plays as indispensable to "la santé du théâtre français." (Act I, p. 45) Piedelièvre, in a typically sentimental approach, insists on the importance of the author's past life to his works. Significantly, it is Piedelièvre's evaluation of Antoine, applicable to Anouilh, that is most complimentary. Piedelièvre, not understanding Antoine's penchant for theatrical tricks, is impressed

by his "excellent dialogue, net, sans bavures." He praises "la vérité de ses sentiments," mentioning that his play "Andromaque" is studied in universities in Germany and in America. "Nourri de culture classique," says Piedelièvre of Antoine, "il n'appréciait rien ... tant que la nudité, l'unité, le style." (Act I, p. 36)

This statement points to another parallel to be drawn between Anouilh and Antoine, for like Antoine, and like other modern French playwrights such as Gide, Cocteau, Giraudoux, and Sartre, Anouilh has been profoundly influenced by the subject matter and themes of classical drama. Three of his major works come to mind immediately: Eurydice (1941), Antigone (1942), and Médée (1946). In a recent study of classical subject matter in twentieth century plays, Myth on the Modern Stage by Hugh Dickinson, a chapter is devoted to Anouilh and the discussion of those three plays. Bearing out something of what was said earlier about Anouilh's tendency toward repetition of certain ideas, Dickinson reaches the following conclusion:

Anouilh, although he dramatizes three of the best-known stories of classical mythology, changes some element in each to make all three express his obsessive themes of Innocence and Experience, the assertion of one's "purity" in an absurd corrupting world.⁹

Leonard Pronko, writing almost a decade earlier, had remarked that the central figures of these classically oriented plays see life as a corrupting force. The ideal love of Orphée and Eurydice cannot endure, for the past hangs too heavily over Eurydice. Antigone must

⁹Hugh Dickinson, Myth on the Modern Stage (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), p. 338.

say no to life. She will not accept the compromise of Créon to whom she says:

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.¹⁰

Even Médée is seeking a "purity" of the self. She gives herself to evil, finding her real self, says Pronko, and she breaks all ties with Jason by murdering their children, who are the living symbols of "her compromise with Jason."¹¹ Jason, like Créon, is willing to forget the absurdity of the world, as Anouilh sees it, and accept "the world of petty happiness."¹² Through the recreation of these Greek stories, Anouilh has created what Pronko terms a "personal mythology," and what Dickinson describes as the "obsessive myth of Innocence and Experience" that Anouilh redramatized in all of his own plays even prior to those dealing with Greek myths.

In Cher Antoine, Cravatar is interrupted just as he is about to say something critical of Antoine's masterpiece "Andromaque." It is at that point that Piedelièvre makes his general statement about Antoine's appreciation of classical culture, a statement that has the same ring as one of Pronko's about Anouilh:

The classical spirit is evidenced in the simplicity of action, the unity of plot, a harmony in the ideas expressed and their means of expression, and the use of myth.¹³

¹⁰Jean Anouilh, Antigone (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1946), p. 97.

¹¹Pronko, p. 32.

¹²Idem.

¹³Ibid., p. 213.

If Piedelièvre's and Pronko's judgments be deemed valid, then both Anouilh and Antoine appreciate nothing quite so much as "la nudité, l'unité, le style." (Act I, p. 36) There is certainly a great deal to make one think that Piedelièvre's critique of Antoine could be applied to Anouilh. As a classic example, Anouilh's Antigone is expected to be staged as a unit without intermission, in tuxedos and evening dresses or perhaps in everyday dress. The Chorus is played by one actor who explains what we are to see performed; thus there is no suspense, except in seeing how the tragedy will be played out. Because of the absence of scenery, the simplicity of the costumes, and the elimination of suspense in regard to plot, what is there to be appreciated but the style? Of course, the style is the new interpretation of Sophocles' story. The young girl, who in Sophocles' play sacrificed herself to support a Higher Law against the Law of the State, is in Anouilh's play a girl who really has no cause. Créon reveals the meaninglessness of her actions by convincing her that the brother she has buried, according to religious custom but in opposition to his edicts, is not worthy of her efforts. Moreover, Créon is willing to allow her to escape punishment for her rebellion against the State. Nevertheless, Anouilh's Antigone is bound to die as the Chorus has told us she would and as the playwright has clearly indicated she would, for she is against compromise, unwilling to accept anything but an ideal existence. By limiting the action and the diction and the production to bare essentials, Anouilh gave a universality to his play that was classical.

Spectators who saw Antigone in Paris during the German occupa-

tion were almost certain to identify the heroine with the forces of resistance, and though we can say that such was not the intention of the author, since Antigone bears a great deal of similarity to earlier heroes and heroines, still the interpretation is permissible, because the outlook in either case was a heroic stance in a pessimistic situation. In addition, we can see operating the "less-is-more principle." Because of its very simplicity and unity, a work that is timeless and universal offers many valid interpretations and can have a quite specific application. Even in ancient times, Greek plays were aimed at specific political problems.¹⁴ That is, of course, why the redramatization of Greek plays can have contemporary political significance and yet have lasting appeal. Anouilh has achieved just such a balance in Antigone and that is why it will continue to be studied--like Antoine's "Andromaque"--in universities in America and Europe.

In this chapter, we have seen that the playwright, Antoine, of Anouilh's play bears striking resemblance to Anouilh himself. Both have been influenced by classical culture and, for that reason, write a clear, succinct dialogue and well-wrought, unified plays. At the same time, both playwrights have a bent for theatricalism--for Anouilh, this theatricalism manifests itself in self-dramatizing characters, conscious that they are playing roles and are involved in theatrical situations; for Antoine, the love of the theatrical situation is so great that he has created one to take place at the opening of his own will. Both playwrights treat theatre as a kind of game, and there is a constant comparison of life and theatre. Most significantly, for

¹⁴Gilbert Highet, "The Reinterpretation of the Myths," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXV (1949), 104.

the purpose of this paper, both playwrights, the real one and his fictional counterpart, despite obvious dramatic talent, are targets of adverse criticism for having reduced their message to a rather simple formula that is repeated again and again in various settings.

CHAPTER II

LE RETOUR EN ARRIERE

ANTOINE

Ce que les professeurs, qui savent tout, ne sauront jamais, Piedelièvre, malgré toutes leurs nuits blanches, ce sont les secrets de la création. Moi qui suis du même métier que Molière—toutes proportions gardées—je puis vous le dire: on écrit toujours ce qui va se passer et on le vit ensuite. C'est dans la joie fragile de sa lune de miel que Molière a vécu la première trahison d'Armande.

PIEDELIEVRE, un peu vexé

Alors, c'est tout simple! Raconte-nous ta prochaine pièce que nous sachions ce qui va se passer!

ANTOINE

J'en ai trouvé le sujet ce matin, en me reveillant quinquagénaire ... Un homme vient de mourir—n'ayant pas très bien vécu, n'ayant pas donné beaucoup et n'ayant pas reçu beaucoup non plus—étant passé en somme, peut-être par sa faute, à côté de l'amitié et de l'amour. Le jour de l'enterrement, tous les personnages de sa vie se retrouvent, après le cimetière, pour le petit repas traditionnel dans sa maison—ce sont des moeurs de campagne, mais admettons qu'il soit mort à la campagne. Et ils font un bilan, de lui et d'eux. C'est tout. Mais ce sera assez comique.

(Act II, p. 114-115)

In Act II of Cher Antoine, Anouilh uses a technique employed several times in earlier plays--the flashback. Of course, for people accustomed to movies, the flashback is quite commonplace. Used much earlier by Sartre in Les Mains Sales (1948), "le retour en arrière" is a technique employed by Anouilh in two major works, L'Alouette (1952) and Becket (1958), both plays based on history. Of course, we can expect Anouilh to use repeatedly any successful device; yet there are two other reasons why his use of the flashback is to be expected. First of all, it is the most natural kind of technique to be employed by a self-announced disciple of Pirandello. Secondly, Anouilh's characters, as Harvey describes them, frequently turn inward, searching for drama in their dreams and memories, and "they find it in a number of little scenes, which they may never play out but which they narrate with enviable facility, terseness, and piquancy of detail."¹

Before seeing how Anouilh uses the flashback in Cher Antoine, let us consider his earlier uses of this technique. L'Alouette concerns the trial of Jeanne d'Arc. As the setting, like that of Antigone, is to be "un décor neutre," it is possible to replay all the important events in Jeanne's life during the course of the trial. Memories are

¹Harvey, p. 101.

evoked, time sequences are shifted, every event is felt to be in the present. By clever changing of lights, the play proceeds smoothly and the illusion is sustained; at the same time, we are constantly reminded that the individual scenes of Jeanne's life are being replayed just as in theatrical productions. The only difference between the use of the flashback in L'Alouette and its use in Anouilh's other historical play, Becket, is that in L'Alouette the scenes are not in chronological order.

Becket opens sometime after the Archbishop's murder. King Henry II, doing penance at Becket's tomb, is having himself flogged. This scene frames the action which explores the personal relationship between Henry and Becket. The story that is replayed is designed to be the unfolding of Henry's mind. One critic points out the inconsistencies of this approach, for some of the scenes are outside of Henry's consciousness²; still, the device works satisfactorily. Once again, Anouilh uses it to make spectators more willing to suspend disbelief. After all, if the play itself reminds those in attendance that they are in the theatre, it will not have to counter any resistance on the part of those who would normally be reminding themselves that they are watching make-believe.

In Cher Antoine, the flashback is so cleverly introduced that it may very well take us by surprise. It gives a sense of mysteriousness to the play, leaving one to wonder whether the reliving of the moment had not indeed actually taken place in the lives of all involved.

²Harvey, p. 97.

Whereas in L'Alouette and Becket the flashbacks remind us that we are in the theatre, this one brings us from theatre to life. Up until the flashback, the characters have been remarking all along that they seem to be participating in a play by Antoine. Only a moment before it, in the midst of a long speech, Carlotta says, "La pièce est jouée." (Act II, p. 102) Her statement refers to the fact that Antoine's affair with Maria is over and done with, but it is also highly suggestive of the new turn that the play is about to take. Ironically, it will bring back to life our dear Antoine, paralleling the scene in Act I where "le génie moderne ... a supprimé la mort" (Act I, p. 55) by means of the phonograph.

Throughout a large portion of Act II in Cher Antoine, Piedelièvre, Gabrielle, Marcellin, Carlotta, Cravatar, and Estelle consider the various loves of Antoine. Love, in Cher Antoine, as in other plays by Anouilh, is an important theme. Related to the question of love is the unanswered question raised in Act I (p. 40) as to why Antoine would have, three years earlier, separated himself from those who loved him, to come to settle finally in a mountain retreat in Bavaria. In attempting to answer that question, Piedelièvre, considering the author's past, had spoken in Act I of Antoine's childhood attachment to a Bavarian maid, Frida—a kind of mother-substitute. Now, in Act II, it is revealed that Frida is the old servant at the chateau. Estelle is quite surprised and upset to learn from the lawyer that Antoine originally arrived at the chateau alone. He had not brought his last mistress with him, as she had imagined. Suffering a great blow to her pride, she discovers that

Maria, whose departure had apparently led Antoine to a morbidly lonely state and suicide, was Frida's niece, hired to help out with the household chores.

The discussion centers on this new information: Carlotta is attempting to give Estelle a philosophical perspective on the situation, when Marcellin begins to recall an evening just prior to Antoine's leaving for Bavaria. Marcellin's recollections lead into the flashback that is to explain why Antoine went to Bavaria. Marcellin describes Antoine's fiftieth birthday celebration, which also feted the fiftieth performance of his play, "Dame Blanche." Telling about the occasion, Marcellin remarks that everyone presently in Bavaria was there that night except Anémone, and at that moment, she is not in the room but outside hiking in the snow with Alexandre. Then, Marcellin changes his mind. He remembers that Anémone was out in the garden with a young man. He specifically recalls how Valérie had made a little scene when Anémone had come in. Marcellin even repeats Anémone's exact words on entering: "Il fait un froid divin!" (Act II, p. 106) As the description of this past moment continues, Anémone does enter, and she does say, "Il fait un froid divin!" The transition to the past is easily modulated, for the ensuing conversation at first seems to be exactly what it would have been in the present, and Antoine, who has materialized, is brought effortlessly into the situation.

Despite the fact that he is in the scene, he still does not contribute much to the conversation. He is rather melancholy: the only present that he wants for his birthday is one year less, he says.

He is not happy about embarking on a new decade of existence. When it is suggested to him that he might yet produce masterpieces, he points out that the great playwrights, Shakespeare, Molière, and Racine, had ceased their literary efforts by the time they had reached his age. With a slight nod to humor, he acknowledges, however, that he is not comparable to those masters.

Yet the little that Antoine says and the way that this act ends demand a certain amount of consideration. First of all, when Piedelièvre explains that he makes his students see how an author's life is reflected in his later works, Antoine counters that the work is written and that life will then imitate the work. His statement to this effect has been presented as the epigraph to this chapter. By it, Antoine reveals something about the process of artistic creation--especially that the secrets of creation are hard to know. Thinking that the work influences the life lived later, Antoine is a typical Anouilhian character. We saw in some of Anouilh's earlier works that a character like Thérèse of La Sauvage or Eurydice with Orphée was burdened, even imprisoned, by the inescapable past. The past, however, is not all that can dominate a character's life and determine his course of action. Any powerful vision can. Harvey has expressed this idea in the following manner:

Throughout the plays—and Anouilh has shown remarkable consistency here—it is not violent actions which in turn precipitate violence and prod the characters on to peaks of emotion; it is instead a mental image which motivates them: the dream of a perfect love, a rankling memory, the anticipation of a joy that will never be, the hallucination of an unbearable horror. A climax may be assiduously and logically prepared, but it is invariably triggered by a precise vision in someone's mind.³

³Ibid., p. 125.

What was the vision of the future that was haunting Antoine on his fiftieth birthday? It was the vision of his own death and the final balance sheet to be worked out by his friends at his funeral.

According to Marcellin, Antoine was asking a question of everyone by his moody detachment from them on that last evening that they all saw him. That question was, "M'aimez-vous?" And that line is given emphasis. It is the closing line of Act II. As a curtain line, it is hardly what can be called suspenseful. If action be desired, that ending does not promise it. In fact, at that point in the play, there is no reason to have any idea what will occur in the next two acts. What then is to hold our interest? There are all the still unanswered questions that have been raised about life and love and playwrighting. The play promises to be "une sorte de pièce russe," (Act II, p. 115) without action, just as Antoine had promised his new play would be. Furthermore, Anouilh's play Cher Antoine is apt to offer what Antoine has said his "Cher Antoine ou l'Amour raté" would offer:

Il pourrait y avoir un certain nombre de choses drôles
et quelques inventions de théâtre, un peu gratuites comme
j'ai la faiblesse de les aimer ... (Act II, p. 116)

There are sure to be other theatrical devices on the order of the previously used flashback.

We know for certain now that both Anouilh and Antoine have written a Cher Antoine. We know, too, that Antoine desires to find out how he is to be judged. His "M'aimez-vous?" is said to be the question asked of everyone by Mozart, "qui n'avait pas grandi lui non plus." (Act II, p. 119) That is Marcellin's interpretation, and

it indicates that the interrogation means: "Do you like my work?" Because of the other parallels between the actual author and his imaginary counterpart, it is reasonable to assume that Anouilh is asking the same question, and one further question that they both definitely deal with is the failure of love--a theme that Anouilh was criticized for overdoing long before he wrote Cher Antoine ou l'Amour raté. This theme is touched upon throughout the play by all of the characters, and it is to be considered in some detail in studying Act III. In concluding this chapter, therefore, it is appropriate to quote a statement that Antoine makes to Anémone near the end of Act II. This statement shows that Antoine and Anouilh, the creator of so many youthful heroines, have similar attitudes toward love and its elusiveness:

Tu es ce qu'on rêve toujours de connaître. Tu es l'illusion de l'amour. Mais tu as seize ans: c'est comme si je me mettais à aimer la forme d'un nuage, au bord de la mer, un jour de grand vent ... (Act II, p. 118)

CHAPTER III

LA REPETITION

ANTOINE

... Vous connaissez vos personnages ...
vous connaissez la situation ... Ce n'est
pas autre chose, que diable, le théâtre!
Une situation et des caractères et après
on parle: voilà tout! Et au bout d'une
heure ou d'une heure et quart, on fait
un entracte et on vend des bonbons dans
la salle ... (Act III, p. 161)

A review of Cher Antoine calls the play snail-shaped:

"... la pièce ne se déroule pas, elle s'enroule ..." ¹ So far as theme is concerned, this description is accurate, to a certain point, and especially in light of what happens in the third act. Yet the action of the third act is not clearly a continuation of the actions of Acts I and II. In some ways, it strikes us as a new beginning, a new play.

When the third act opens, it is summer at Antoine's chateau. Frida is welcoming characters who are familiar to us. They are actors and actresses bearing great similarity to the individuals whom we have met in the first part of the play. They have come to rehearse Antoine's new play. Having already studied the script, they offer criticism of it and ask each other questions about it prior to Antoine's entrance. For example, the very experienced Comédie-Française actor Grossac, who is to play Piedelièvre and is called Le Comédien Piedelièvre, has this to say about the new work:

C'est dément! Je ne sais ce qui lui a pris d'écrire une fadaïse pareille! Où est l'auteur de "la Dame Blanche"? Je comprends maintenant son silence. C'est un homme vidé, voilà tout! (Act III, p. 122)

¹Robert Kanters, "L'Amour raté réussit à Anouilh," L'Express, No. 962 (6-12 Octobre 1969), 52.

The actors and actresses recognize the work as a flop, but they still see that it may be expressive of "la nouvelle vague" (Act III, p. 124) that may be leading the theatre to lose its public.

Antoine's arrival breaks up the discussion. The playwright greets the group, and then makes the following remarks:

Ah! qu'on est bien dans les coulisses, entouré de comédiens! Croyez-moi, il n'y a que là qu'il se passe quelque chose ... Quand on met le pied dehors, c'est le désert--et le désordre. La vie est décidément irréelle. D'abord elle n'a pas de forme: personne n'est sûr de son texte et tout le monde rate toujours son entrée. Il ne faudrait jamais sortir des théâtres! Ce sont les seuls lieux au monde où l'aventure humaine est au point. (Act III, pp. 127-128)

In this act, during the discussion preparatory to the rehearsal, during the rehearsal itself, and during an improvization à la Commedia dell' arte, Antoine makes a number of statements along that line. He shows an intense love of theatre. "Rien n'est impossible au théâtre," (Act III, p. 155) he says, and also: "Hors des planches, point de salut." (Act III, p. 143) When the actors are surprised to learn that their performance will be for Antoine's "satisfaction solitaire," Antoine tells them: "Ce n'est jamais pour autre chose que pour sa satisfaction solitaire qu'on écrit."

(Act III, p. 158) We gather well enough the idea that for Antoine, like Anouilh, "the meaning of theatre lies in its nature as 'play,' that simple game of pretending that we all loved as children."² The "jeu" involves establishing characters, putting them in a situation, and then letting them talk. Having outlined the game in such a way, Antoine, toward the end of Act III, calls on the characters to

²Harvey, p. 5.

liberate themselves from his manuscript: he will play dead and they will come to play their final respects. There is a great deal of humor in this scene. Similarly, there is a light comic element in what we might call the "instant replay" of the opening sequences of Act I, with Antoine as director constantly interrupting to change names and hide specific autobiographical allusions. Still, for all the fun it offers in the play-acting of rehearsal and the improvisation when Antoine plays dead, this act reveals a very deep sadness. Clearly, we have an example of what Surer calls Anouilh's remarkable ability to effect a "mélange du comique et du tragique."³ Because Anouilh has categorized a number of his plays "rose" and "noir" according to whether they are comic or tragic, we can also call this Anouilhian trait an intermingling of "rose" and "noir."⁴

The "noir" in this act fully emerges as the ingénue begins to question Antoine about interpreting her role:

LA JEUNE COMEDIEENNE. Je ne le comprends pas très bien. Elle revient au moment de l'enterrement, mais elle avait pourtant quitté Antoine quelque temps auparavant pour se marier?

ANTOINE. Oui.

LA JEUNE COMEDIEENNE. Elle ne l'aimait plus? Ce n'est pas très nettement dit dans la pièce.

ANTOINE. Si. Elle l'aimait.

LA JEUNE COMEDIEENNE. Et lui?

ANTOINE. Il l'aimait aussi.

LA JEUNE COMEDIEENNE. Alors pourquoi se sont-ils quittés?

ANTOINE. C'est une des parts d'ombre de ma pièce. J'aimerais

³Surer, p. 296.

⁴Harvey, p. 174; Pronko, p. 137; Surer, p. 295.

qu'on se le demande. Je me le demande bien, moi!

LA JEUNE COMÉDIENNE. Je crois que pour bien jouer ce rôle, il faudrait pourtant que je sache pourquoi elle a décidé ou accepté de partir?

ANTOINE. Ces comédiens qui veulent toujours tout savoir! Et encore, en France, ce n'est rien. Vous savez qu'en Allemagne on ne peut pas leur faire lever le petit doigt sans leur faire une conférence? (Il redevient grave et dit soudain sourdement.) Peut-être s'est-elle aperçue qu'Antoine n'avait jamais été capable de vivre-- qu'il avait inventé sa vie et les personnages de sa vie comme ses pièces et en même temps,--et qu'elle n'était qu'un signe, comme les autres dans le rêve de cet homme endormi. Ce jour-là, elle a fui, comme un petit animal sauvage qui sent l'odeur de la mort. (Act III, pp. 135-137)

This is the girl to whom Antoine has said earlier, concerning her role: "Vous êtes l'amour, le vrai." (Act III, p. 135) We cannot help but be reminded of Antoine's speech to Anémone and realize that this love is elusive.

Antoine and La Jeune Comédienne play a very touching scene in which we gradually realize that they have shifted subtly from a conversation about characterization to a scene using lines from the script itself. Anouilh has used this kind of interplay between play and play-within-the-play in L'Hurluberlu (1958) and, to a very highly refined degree, in La Répétition (1950), which revolves about a rehearsal of Marivaux's La Double Inconstance. In Cher Antoine, the serious nature of this particular scene and the unsteady balance between illusion and reality seem to derive more from Pirandello than from any others who have used this theatrical trick, including Marivaux in Les Acteurs de bonne foi, Molière in L'Impromptu de Versailles, and Shakespeare in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Hamlet.

The essence of the scene played between Antoine and La Jeune

Comédienne is that she is going to leave him to marry someone she does not love because she has to be involved in real life. Speaking of her husband-to-be, she says to Antoine:

Il me donnera un vrai enfant et je tiendrai en ordre une vraie maison—comme le voulait mon destin de petite paysanne allemande—que tu as un instant dérangé. Coupant de vraies tartines, dans du vrai pain à quatre heures pour mon garçon que j'entendrai rentrer de l'école, courant avec ses galaches, sur la neige dure du chemin.
(Act III, p. 140)

This sort of love of life, its simple things, is rarely shown by an Anouilhian hero or heroine. This is a "oui" to life, despite its imperfections--this is what Antigone could not say. The young woman has told Antoine:

J'ai à construire ma maison moi aussi ... La seule maison que j'aurai jamais, moi. Sans toi ... Parce qu'il y a des choses drôles ... Tu t'en apercevras un jour, quand tu seras enfin devenu grand et que tu n'auras plus envie de jouer ... (Act III, p. 138)

Their scene demonstrates "qu'Antoine n'avait jamais été capable de vivre" (Act III, p. 137)--what Antoine has suggested about himself. But Antoine is not alone in making this observation. Gabrielle, his first jilted lover, has remarked, "Quand on joue éternellement sur l'amour, comme Antoine, vous voyez bien qu'on aboutit dans le même désert." (Act II, p. 78) Also, near the end of Act III, when we find that the whole rehearsal business has been a flashback played before the original assembly of characters, the lawyer interpreting Antoine's despair at losing Maria, says:

Au cours d'une vie faite de beaucoup d'illusions et d'inconséquences, elle seule lui avait apporté sur le tard, une sorte de réalité ... Mais habitué comme il l'était à inventer tout, de toutes pièces--sans doute ne s'en est-il rendu compte qu'après coup ... Lui qui avait raconté tant d'histoires, la réalité était une chose qui ne lui était pas familière ... (Act III, p. 168)

Valérie sums up this thought later: "Au fond," she says, "le malheur d'Antoine, c'est qu'il n'arrivait à croire que ce qu'il imaginait ... " (Act III, p. 173)

It is this act then that clarifies the subtitle of the play, L'Amour raté. Now we know why the love failed for Antoine, and also we have been told something of a love that has failed for Anouilh. In Eurydice, Anouilh attempted to dramatize that life will corrupt, that love will not last. Implicit from the beginning is that the lovers are doomed. Only by a theatrical ending is their love allowed to survive--in death which is the only place for love: "La mort est belle. Elle seule donne à l'amour son vrai climat."⁵ That is the advice that Orphée takes. To the typical Anouilhian hero, only the ideal is acceptable, non-being is preferable to imperfect life. In Cher Antoine, the playwright who so loves the theatre that he prefers illusion to reality, art to life, figuratively drowns in his solipsism. And what else can we think but that Anouilh's love for the theatre, like Antoine's, has turned too far inward? Antoine's love failed because he was wrapped up in the theatre. Is it not reasonable to assume that Anouilh sees a failure of his own love of the theatre in his immersion in the theatre itself? There are plays about plays, plays within plays, role-playing, theatricalism, all of which Cher Antoine takes to a greater extreme than ever. One of the characters rehearsing Antoine's play asks him: "Si vous voulez

⁵Jean Anouilh, Pièces noires (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1945), p. 500.

faire n'importe quoi, n'importe comment, pourquoi vous êtes-vous adressé à des gens de métier? Et d'abord devant qui prétendiez-vous nous faire jouer cette chienlit?" (Act III, p. 156) Antoine's reply is that it is for himself alone. However wonderful such an objective may be, it is a blind alley so far as the theatre is concerned. It is the route toward suicide, as surely as is Narcissus' absorption in his own image.

CHAPTER IV

FINALE

ANTOINE

" ... Hors des planches, point de salut ..."
(Act III, p. 143)

Gabriel Marcel once said that the last act of a play is its own judgment of itself. At the time, he was considering the artificial denouement of Le Voyageur sans bagage. The hero of that play, Gaston, a veteran of World War I, has been suffering from amnesia for eighteen years. A kind of twentieth-century Oedipus, Gaston is seeking his real identity, the truth about his past. A number of families are attempting to prove that he is one of them; among them is a family named Renaud, at whose house the action takes place. Little by little, we are convinced that Gaston is really Jacques Renaud; Gaston, likewise, is apparently convinced, but because he is repelled by the image of himself that the Renauds give him to see, he chooses, in the end, to pretend that he belongs to another family where he can begin again. John Harvey says that the ending of this play "comes as a shock to most spectators who, until this moment, have not realized that Anouilh has been playing with them all along."¹ Leonard Pronko says that "the situation created in the play is so artificial that one is forced to think how impossible it is in reality to escape both one's own self, with one's own weaknesses and innate vicious impulses, and the super-imposed past of one's life."² The play, he considers, has been placed

¹Harvey, p. 18.

²Pronko, p. 13.

among Anouilh's Pièces noires, because "its implications are pessimistic"³ despite the happy ending. In basic agreement, Harvey contends that Anouilh has purposely emphasized the artificiality of the ending in order to imply that "only on the stage can man so easily escape his guilt."⁴ What Anouilh has demonstrated in Le Voyageur sans bagage, as in the theatrical ending of Eurydice, is Antoine's theorem: "Hors des planches, point de salut." (Act III, p. 143) When Anouilh does not offer a happy ending, he generally dramatizes, not that there is salvation offered in theatre, but that there is none in life. Of Anouilh's pessimistic view, Gabriel Marcel has remarked: "Il est regrettable de mettre un tel talent au service d'une pensée aussi négative."⁵

In the fourth and final act of Cher Antoine, we see a perfect application of Marcel's principle that the last act of a play is its own judgment of itself. As for his concern that Anouilh is too pessimistic, however, the conclusion of Cher Antoine reveals that our man of genius is a playful artist, sentimental, reconciled, somewhat sad, but still comfortably able to wear the mask of comedy. Clearly, the ending is not totally pessimistic. The final act is like the fourth movement of a great Mozart symphony that "gets off to a cheerful start" yet "contains more than a hint of the melancholy mood of many of Mozart's last works."⁶

³Idem.

⁴Harvey, p. 18.

⁵Surer, p. 299.

⁶Martin Bernstein, "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart," An Introduction to Music (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 165.

The fourth act is not a continuation of the third act. We do indeed begin a new movement. There is a very cheerful beginning like that of Bal des Voleurs: "Devant le rideau fermé éclate soudain une 'Marseillaise' jouée sur un rythme beaucoup trop rapide qui la rend vaguement cocasse." (Act IV, p. 177) And what is to be dramatized? Alexandre and Anémone, observing and commenting on a humorously elaborate memorial service for Antoine, are beginning to fall in love. It is a scene that grows quite reasonably out of the rest of the play, for the young couple was allowed a touching exchange of glances at the end of Act I, and in Act II, they went hiking in the snow together. Admirer of Marivaux that he is, Anouilh has shown himself as capable as the eighteenth-century master in dramatizing the awakening of young love. But the juxtaposition of this scene with a kind of funeral service is the special work of the "rose et noir" talent of Anouilh.

From this scene, we move rapidly to the departure of the group of old friends, concerned with all the petty problems of getting away. It is interesting to know that in an interview Anouilh once talked about how much play-acting he was conscious of at funerals.⁷ We, too, are made aware of such play-acting because, the ceremony having come to an end, the dialogue here is filled with banalities. Still, there is a kind of beauty of life, particularly in the continuing interest that is growing between Anémone and Alexandre.

Finally, the lawyer, following Antoine's instructions, is closing up the house. He tells of Antoine's special love for the ending of a play by Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard (written in 1904), where the

⁷Harvey, p. 52.

old family house that has had to be sold is closed up and the old servant, "l'âme de la maison," is left inside. (Act IV, p. 190) The lawyer, then having closed all the shutters, leaves with the last of the group. The stage is empty, but we hear echoes of the dialogue: a dozen or so short speeches, not intrinsically significant, but the repeated banalities somehow gain significance. There is a rare beauty in this lightly melancholy, rather musical touch, and there is a particular significance, humorous and even optimistic, in the repetition of this exchange:

LA VOIX D'ALEXANDRE. Ah! que c'est amusant de vivre!

Vous ne trouvez pas qu'on a de la chance?

LA VOIX D'ANEMONE. De la chance, pourquoi?

LA VOIX D'ALEXANDRE.. D'être venus au même enterrement ...

(Act IV, p. 193)

The echoing dialogue in the empty house works as a kind of imitation of what Chekhov did in The Cherry Orchard, but it is still original, dramatizing the importance of memory and providing the necessary coda to a musically organized work.

We know that Anouilh has had an abiding interest in music. Often a musician, like Orphée or Frantz in La Sauvage, is an important figure in a play. There is music by Milhaud for Bal des voleurs, by Poulenc for Léocadia, as well as scores by Damase for La Petite Molière and by Parys for L'Orchestre; and music by Milhaud is used to underscore the artificial ending of Le Voyageur sans bagage.⁸ Also, Harvey tells that Anouilh was quite enthusiastic

⁸ Ibid., p. 152.

about writing for the opera after hearing the operatic version of his Colombe by Damase.⁹

It seems not so unusual then to expect a certain musicality in Cher Antoine. That the entire play is like a Mozart symphony is suggested by several facts. In a very important statement at the end of Act II, Antoine is compared to Mozart. It should be remembered, too, that Antoine's chateau is located in Mozart country, probably somewhere between Munich and Salzburg. The first and second acts, it has been pointed out in earlier chapters, have a kind of parallel time-sequence structure. One could almost see in them a parallel sonata-form structure reminiscent of the sonata-form of the first two movements of Mozart's G Minor Symphony. The third act, particularly in the rehearsal of Act I, is quite comparable to the most playful, bright movement of the symphony, and the last act, as we have noted, is the one that seems to give us the clue to the musical form of the whole play. Both Anouilh's play and a Mozart symphony can be characterized by their interesting dialogue, their intermingling of the happy and the melancholy, and a rich counterpoint, which is "like a variety of symbols or illustrations of the same idea; but they are peculiarly reinforcing, as they are simultaneous, and harmonious in the beauty of their union."¹⁰ In the final analysis, it is the themes that tie the play together into a unit rather than the continuity of the action, much as a musical composition is unified.

⁹Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁰Philip H. Goepp, "Mozart," Great Works of Music (Symphonies and their Meaning), (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1925), I, 79.

Nevertheless, it is one thing for a musical style such as Mozart's to be "dramatic"¹¹; it is another, for drama to be musical. We may be able to agree that good drama needs to be influenced to a degree by the form of music and language of poetry. But drama is not to be pure music or pure poetry. No matter how successful such an effort may be in one or two plays, that direction, like that of the Theatre of the Absurd and Samuel Beckett's latest thirty-second Breath, seems to lead down what John Gassner has called "the blind alley of 'theatre as an end in itself.'"¹² After all, drama as music can never be better than music as music, and anti-theatre, which takes theatre as its subject, can only be realized in a limited number of ways. Theatre as the subject of theatre has been seen in Cher Antoine as an unfortunate road to follow: Antoine is dead, by suicide.

Antoine is dead, but the theatre is not dead. Antoine is dead, but the son he never knew as his own encounters love at the "enterrement." Thus, the fourth act represents a kind of affirmation. Not only is there the strong promise of love, there is also talk of a newly emerging theatre: Cravator says, "Il y a un mouvement extraordinaire qui se dessine." (Act IV, pp. 186, 192). Moreover, Antoine's longing to have written something like Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard is noteworthy in this regard. First of all, the old servant in the Chekhov play, locked in the house at the end of the play, is left to

¹¹Douglas Moore, "The Classic Era," From Madrigal to Modern Music (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1942), p. 131.

¹²John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (New York: Dryden Press, 1956), p. 149, quoted in Harvey, p. 3.

say: "Life has gone by as if I'd never lived."¹³ Certainly that is the realization of the playwright Antoine whose soul lingers in the locked-up Bavarian chateau. Secondly, Anouilh attempts to model the ending on the Chekhov ending, as if to say that Antoine's unachieved goal is one that he shared. Of course, the affirmation of the fourth act represents a negation of much of the material of Anouilh's plays--it is a "yes" to life and it is a realization that life is the place for love. Despite the poetry of the Chekhovian scene at the end of Cher Antoine, Chekhov's theatre is a theatre based on life rather than on art or on theatre itself, described by Cravator in Act II as plays made "avec des banalités." (Act II, p. 115)

We behold then the paradox of Cher Antoine. If there is no salvation outside the theatre, there is no enduring theatre outside life. The salvation of the theatre is in life.

Not long ago, Anouilh came to the support of a young author, Jean-Louis Roncoroni, whose play, Le Temps des Cerises, had been badly received by critics:

C'est avec des sentiments très clairs et un langage très simple traité avec des harmoniques mystérieuses à la Tchekhov, l'histoire d'un couple qui court après le souvenir de son amour mort dans une petite ville de Provence où tout le monde, d'une façon plus ou moins cocasse, attend comme lui quelque chose--le temps des cerises--qui ne reviendra probablement jamais.¹⁴

Critical of the "conformisme" of the avant-garde theatre which he sees

¹³Anton Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard (trans. George Calderon) in Twenty-Five Modern Plays (ed. S. Marion Tucker and Alan S. Downer), (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 292.

¹⁴Jean Anouilh, "D'un Jeune Conformisme," in Pol Vandromme, Un Auteur et ses personnages (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1965), p. 216.

in a way as having blocked the success of Roncoroni's play, he prophecies, in line with what we may call the self-criticism and the prophecy of Cher Antoine:

Dans dix ans on redécouvrira l'amour--ce vieux ressort humain qui a résisté déjà à quelques civilisations, comme un thème valable et susceptible d'infiniment plus de variations que la constatation uniforme de l'absurdité de la condition humaine (dont les bons esprits de l'antiquité se doutaient déjà), qui sait, peut-être même les parfums forts de l'honneur, et quelqu'un nous refera un Cid--et pour la forme le discours de théâtre, ce vieux truc qui a tenu trois mille ans, que n'ont méprisé ni Sophocle, ni Shakespeare, ni Molière, comme le moyen le plus propre à faire communiquer les nuances du sentiment de l'auteur à cet être sensible, mystérieux et toujours un peu monstrueux qu'est une salle pleine.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., p. 218.

CONCLUSION

CREON

· "... Aucun de nous n'était assez fort
pour la décider à vivre ..." ¹

¹Jean Anouilh, Antigone (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1945),
pp. 101-102.

Cher Antoine ou l'Amour raté, Jean Anouilh's most recent play, has lent itself well to close examination. Not only does it have a light surface of witty, sharp dialogue and intriguing situations, but it explores a rare depth of psychological and literary interest. We have seen that it is a beautifully structured work, playfully contrived in the unusual manner befitting the author of "rose et noir" plays. In subject matter--the theatre itself, and in theme--the failure of love, it is likewise a work that bears the stamp of its author. What has been of particular interest to us is the discovery that the dead playwright Antoine, on whom interest is focused, has a theatrical stance similar to Anouilh's. Both Antoine and Anouilh give themselves totally to the theatre, even indicating at times that in theatre alone is salvation to be found. They both have a tendency to be repetitious in their works, they are both nourished in classical culture, and they share an intense love of all that is theatrical.

Despite Anouilh's amazing talent to sustain interest in this play by means of clever dialogue and amusing or intriguing situations, he appears to be critical of the play itself by being critical of Antoine, who is seen in many ways as its author. There is no doubt that Anouilh is being self-critical, though not without a certain

amount of fun and a generous use of light touches. The conclusion reached about Antoine in the play is that he was so in love with the theatre that he lost life and love: he could believe in only what he imagined--life for him was replaced by theatre. Not surprisingly, this judgment of Antoine applies to Anouilh's theatre which is indeed too self-conscious, and we have seen this self-consciousness in its extreme form in Cher Antoine.

Since 1931, Anouilh has written a play or two every year or so until the early sixties. Now, after a lapse of a number of years, he has chosen to reflect upon his career and make an evaluation. Were we not aware of the self-critical side of Anouilh's characters, it would seem extraordinary indeed that the author should be able to perform such a task, especially when such self-criticism turns self-condemnatory. What is really quite astonishing is that a playwright of Anouilh's stature, whose reputation is well-established, whose talent is widely acknowledged, should at this point seem to be setting a new course for himself, away from theatricalism and away from the kind of hero who prefers death to a life that is less than ideal. The ending of Cher Antoine is the promise of that new direction.

The final act, in spite of its reminiscences, actually because of its reminiscences, is forward-looking. The reminiscences of banalities dramatize a beauty of life--beautiful even because of its pettinesses and imperfections. There is humor, there is sadness, but it is the humor and sadness of life. And this conclusion is not a tacked-on theatrical conclusion that gives the false appearance of rosiness like that of Le Voyageur sans bagage or Eurydice.

It is not an ending that is only possible in the theatre like the out-of-time sequence coronation scene at the end of L'Alouette.

The final scene of Cher Antoine grows out of the play as a whole. We have been prepared for the awakening to life and love of Alexandre and Anémone, brought together by Antoine's death. It is a new love that has been brought into being through Antoine's "amour raté."

Of Anouilh's Antigone, Créon lamented that no one was strong enough to convince her to live. Antoine, too, could not be convinced, and that is where the difference now lies between Antoine and Anouilh. While Cher Antoine shows a certain regret about what Anouilh sees as the shortcomings of his plays, its conclusion does not represent a pessimistic view of life. Indeed, the view of life is almost Giralducian, like that of the Madwoman of Chaillot who speaks so heroically about life to the young man she thinks is attempting suicide. It is appropriate to consider this Giralducian twist, for Giraudoux has long been one of Anouilh's models, inspiring him particularly in poetical language.² Now that Anouilh is sixty years old, perhaps it is time that he should reveal a love of life similar to Giraudoux's. Perhaps we can see Giraudoux as an inspiration in another way, too. Antoine, we remember, was aware that Shakespeare and Molière had ceased to write by the time they were fifty. Yet Shaw, Giraudoux, and Claudel, idolized by Anouilh as a young man,³ are all authors who continued to write

²"Poetry and fancifulness...were Giraudoux's gifts to Anouilh." Harvey, p. 172.

³"Vers 1928 je portais bien Claudel dans mon coeur, Pirandello et Shaw écornés dans mes poches." Jean Anouilh, "A Giraudoux," in Vandromme, p. 167.

and retained their masterful touches in old age. Cher Antoine promises that Anouilh will follow their example. His love for the theatre will not be an "Amour raté."

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