

Antigone's Brothers. The Soviet Reburial

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Abstract: During the establishment of the Kádár era of state socialist Hungary and the emergence of a Hungarian ideological aesthetic that essentially internalized the Soviet cultural model—that is, in the years after the 1956 revolution—retaliation was the general tool of power. On 4 November 1956, Soviet troops marched into Hungary; by January 1957 fighting had ceased in the country, and the tabooing of revolutionary events began immediately. It would be a hopeless undertaking to detect, or even to look for, a moment of resistance in the acts of everyday communication, but an analysis of the cultural context of even a single theatrical performance reveals the human attention (and pain) present in civil situations. The tragedy of *Antigone* is a personal experience lived over decades because Sophocles' text carries the story of the communist martyr minister László Rajk, executed in 1949, and the story of the prime minister Imre Nagy, executed two years after the 1956 revolution, both buried secretly and hastily, only in the technical sense, without any ritual. The reburial of the dead of the previous eras played a decisive role in both of the two major political upheavals of the post-war decades in Hungary. But nothing can explain how Jean Anouilh's drama *Antigone* could have been performed at all in January 1957.

*"Only the thoughts we don't say are honest."*¹

It is a well-known phenomenon in Hungarian social practice that the burial of the dead becomes a source of new confrontations instead

of reconciliation.² The reburial of the dead of the previous eras played a decisive role in both of the two major political upheavals of the post-war decades. It is common experience that the liberation of remembrance, the utterance of forbidden names, breaks the language of power discourse, and consequently the granting of final honours to heroes breaks the order of power. In Hungary, Sophocles's *Antigone* is staged primarily in the context of this interpretative expectation.

For the Hungarian reader, the tragedy of *Antigone* is a personal experience lived over decades because Sophocles's text carries the story of the communist martyr minister László Rajk, executed in 1949, and the story of the prime minister Imre Nagy, executed two years after the 1956 revolution, both buried secretly and hastily, only in the technical sense, without any ritual. The denial of a proper funeral is an act of ultimate humiliation, where an earthly power intervenes in the post-mortem order. But this intervention, where the bodies are buried face down in unmarked graves in secret but markedly unholy places, as Sophocles records, does not obliterate remembrance but rather provokes it. The lack of a funeral itself becomes an object of remembrance.

Those to whom authorities deny burial might get buried later, sometimes more than once, and Sophocles gives Polyneices three burials. The rhythm of secret non-burials and ceremonial reburials mark crucial changes in the history of state socialism, and the Budapest performances of *Antigone* create a cultural

¹ This sentence, titled Anouilh, appears only in the Hungarian version; presumably it was the translator, György Galamb's own message.

² The research was supported by NKFIH-OTKA 142520.

community in the theatre that works as a memory machine.³

The best-known staging of *Antigone* took place at the National Theatre⁴ in Budapest, three days after the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic, the act that marked the end of the shift of power and the triumph of democracy, and the public reburial of Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister of 1956, and his fellow martyrs, on 16 June 1989, the 31st anniversary of their execution. Presented at a sublime moment of political regime change, in the adaptation of István Eörsi,⁵ while focusing on the will to bury the dead brother, pays tribute to the very recent act of reburial that broke a thirty-one-year-old nationwide taboo. The unexpected power of the performance, however, was emphasised by another performance of *Antigone*, thirty-two years earlier, which can be acknowledged from the perspective of this performance. In my study, I will point out this historical moment of cultural impact.

In January 1957, the largest theatre in Budapest presented *Antigone*. A surprising and incredible event, nothing can explain how Jean Anouilh's drama *Antigone* could have been performed at all and how it remained in the repertoire of the Vígsház's studio until the end of the season. This took place only a few weeks after the revolution was crushed, and it was perhaps the unpredictable and incomprehensible mixture of stability and confusion that had led to this message of freedom. Rich in naturalistic imagery, this drama, after depicting bloody battles that are chilling in their detail, also evokes the stages of the

decomposing decay of the corpse. For the people of Budapest in the weeks after the street fighting of 1956, all this was not aesthetic knowledge, but a physical experience. Of the performance, only a script and a few stage photos have survived, and a few reviews have been published. Yet it is possible to follow how the cultural order of the theatre was stabilised, and which theatrical-dramaturgical moments disrupted the standardised canon.

We know that the interpretive aura of *Antigone* is saturated with the idea of opposing forces. It is the relationship between Antigone and Creon, following Hegel's interpretation,⁶ that holds the attention of analysts, and theatre productions tend to focus on the question: what are the moments that determine the communal and power dynamics of the polis? The Hungarian tradition of acting and reading, however, noticeably backs down at the event that creates the conflict and considers the action that makes the Hegelian opposition visible, the burial of Polyneices, not simply as a cause but as an end. In the Hungarian play tradition, *Antigone* has become the drama of the call for burial.

During the establishment of the Kádár era of state socialist Hungary and the emergence of a Hungarian ideological aesthetic that essentially internalised the Soviet cultural model,⁷ that is, in the years after the 1956 revolution, retaliation was the general tool of power. On 4 November 1956, Soviet troops marched into Hungary, and by January 1957 fighting had ceased in the country,⁸ and the tabooing of revolutionary events began im-

³ Marvin CARLSON, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan: UMP, 2003).

⁴ Opening Night on 26. October 1989.

⁵ István Eörsi, a philosopher and poet, spent almost four years in prison after 1956 for revolutionary activity, and did not receive permission to publish in the Sovietized political system for years.

⁶ G. W. Friedrich HEGEL, *Ästhetik*, 2 Vols. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1965), 421.

⁷ Michal KOPEČEK and Piotr WCISLIK, *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015).

⁸ TABAJDI Gábor and UNGVÁRY Krisztián, *Elhallgatott múlt: A pártállam és a belügy: A politikai rendőrség működése Magyarországon 1956–1990* (Budapest: Corvina–1956-os Intézet, 2008).

mediately. It would be a hopeless undertaking to detect, or even to look for, a moment of resistance in the acts of everyday communication, but an analysis of the cultural context of even a single theatrical performance reveals the human attention (and pain) present in civil situations.

Plans for the 1956–57 theatre season had been drawn up by the Hungarian theatres in the summer of 1956 (that is, months before the revolution or even the Rajk-reburial), and the press started talking about the authorised performances in the summer. This is how it is known that the Vígszínház, then known as the Theatre of the People's Army, planned to present Anouilh's tragedy *Antigone*. The director was Andor Ajtay, a well-known actor and director of the interwar years, and the premiere was announced for 11 November 1956, even as late as 18 October 1956 (that is, five days prior to the breakout of the revolution). At the time, the production was still described as a "tragedy of *Antigone* with a rebel heart,"⁹ and the director envisaged "something new and different from the usual."¹⁰ In the interviews at the beginning of October, the concept, inspired by a dialectical reading of Hegel, focused on the struggle between Creon and Antigone, the struggle between "the infidel and the believer, the disillusioned and the one just awakening to life."¹¹

The choice of Sophocles's drama was certainly inspired by the official reburial of László Rajk, formerly Minister of Interior and more recently the Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian People's Republic. The politician, executed in 1949, was reburied on 6 October 1956, and the performance of *Antigone*, scheduled for six weeks later, was also supposed to be a tribute to the reburial, a production of a memorial that offered the audience a rehabilitation of the communist martyr through a reenactment of the act of confrontation and defiance. The will to burial represented in the

tragedy is a clear, pivotal reference to the communist victim innocently executed in 1949. This performance would have acknowledged the process of justice: Rajk had to be buried, it was done, and the Anouilh performance was a reminder of what the community had already gone through. But 18 October 1956 was the last news on *Antigone*; five days later, the revolution broke out. And in the following weeks, everything that Sophocles imagined within the walls of Thebes became reality in Hungary: armed battles in the streets, brother against brother, Hungarian soldiers against Hungarian revolutionaries, until the arrival of the new strongman, appointed by the Soviets, János Kádár. 1957 was to be the year of retribution, forced reconciliation, and the reorganisation of a somewhat reformed dictatorship.

And then, after a three-month hiatus, *Antigone* somehow appeared among the theatre news on 11 January 1957, with a rehearsal photo. Those three months incorporated the largest upheaval of state-socialist systems, and the nation was experiencing the most violent identity crisis in its post-war history. Between October 1956 and January 1957, the structure and language of the news changed, and even the periodicals reporting on the performance were still searching for the weight, or even the meaning, of the sentences written in the destabilised intellectual space. Publicists had to, first of all, justify what this drama and this theme were doing on stage. This reveals the techniques of obfuscation: for example, they wrote that *Antigone* was being staged "in a studio performance by the theatre's young people,"¹² which would mean that *Antigone* was being performed in a studio, as a young person's opportunity,¹³ but the actors in the photograph were no longer young people. Miklós Szakáts, 37, Andor Ajtay, 54, and Nóra Tábori, 29, are shown on the front page in civilian clothes. (László

⁹ n. n., "Egyperces interjú az *Antigone* rendezőjével," *Esti Budapest* 5, no. 246 (1956): 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Népszava* 2, no. 8 (1957): 2.

¹³ *Népszava* 2, no. 15 (1957): 4.

Bánhid, playing the guard, was 51; György Pálos, playing the chorus, was 37; István Szatmári, playing Haimon, was 32; and Mihály Erdélyi, in the role of the 2nd guard, was 62).

The news report therefore diminished the importance and significance of the show by referring to young people instead of established star actors. If we also look at the programme schedules beside the news, the most striking thing we see is the confusion of the programme schedules. We see that *The Taming of the Shrew* and one of the Hungarian classics, *The Mute Knight*, were on at the Vígszínház, but in January the theatres already tried to entice their old season ticket holders back. In their advertisements they were promising to make up for the cancelled performances, but they were asking patience from theatregoers,¹⁴ because in a situation of upheaval and ongoing recovery they could only play a few days per week.

The year 1957 was a year of patience and reparations, a year of return to stability, when theatre could be attended again, when services, e. g. laundry, were gradually restored. Between the lines announcing the theatre shows, one can't even guess what kind of revolution and freedom fight had been taking place on the streets, but smuggled in between the news of the services, one can read that something had happened.¹⁵ Since neither the repertoire structure nor the rhythm of the performances evokes the image of a shattered city or the unburied dead, the still constant sense of loss and pain, it is quite surprising that *Népszabadság*, the party newspaper, carried the news of *Antigone* on the morning of its premiere, 19 January 1957, with a photo on its front page. The picture, taken from the top right, shows a modern stage design and constitutes a small piece of

colourful information under the headline "British military attaché expelled."¹⁶ The contrast is disturbing and striking, but it is there anyway.

The first review took an unusually long time, five days, to appear, and by Thursday, 24 January, it was finally decided what kind of critical tone would accompany *Antigone*. The columnist of *Népszabadság* found that the purpose of the performance was nothing less than to "give news of contemporary French society."¹⁷ The reviewer, before presenting the play in a way that was not free of generalities, made it clear that "even in a world under capitalism, the best of the best still have a sense of non-compromise, a sense of vocation, as the writer calls it, a 'strange fever'."¹⁸ The play evoked the Frenchness of "the twilight of capitalist society in a maelstrom of filth, disbelief, inhumanity, anarchism, and cynicism." The performance was visually French, the elegance of the costumes, the gestures of the actors, the hairdo, the plate-caps, all concretised and linked the story to Anouilh, and the story was not complicated, since "Creon and Antigone clashed over the question of happiness."¹⁹

In January 1957, *Antigone* was searching not for happiness but for truth after the greatest revolution of modern Hungary—but the words funeral or burial simply could not be written down; temporarily they lacked a written form. In the reviews, the word death was also associated only with Antigone, and her brother, whom she had to bury, was not to be known about. For the first time, on 26 January 1957, in one of the reflections, Antigone was described as the one who "assumes death."²⁰ But the act of burial and the word itself were taboo by then. In March 1957, for the first time, in an impromptu discussion in a

¹⁴ *Népszava* 2, no. 2 (1957): 6.

¹⁵ "Patyolat informs everyone that compensation for garments destroyed as a result of events after 23. October will begin on 15. January, 1957," *Népszava* 2, no. 2 (1957).

¹⁶ *Népszabadság* 2, no. 16 (1957): front page.

¹⁷ KEMÉNY György, "Anouilh: Antigone," *Népszabadság* 2, no. 20 (1957): 4.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ F.P., "Antigoné: Tábori Nóra," *Magyar Ifjúság* 1, no. 4 (1957): 4.

journal wrote about the well-known dramatic situation of Antigone burying her brother. The critic, who was almost the only one to discuss the situation, was a young classical philologist who was enthusiastic primarily about Sophocles, but was immediately corrected by a skilled and respected translator.²¹ It was then that a new kind of cautious discourse could be discerned, and that only experience could help to find one's way in the mixture of formulations and suggestions for reading techniques. It was then and there that straight talk, which could have been the lifeblood of communities and society as a whole, lost its *raison d'être*, once again after the second war.

Sophocles's drama was performed a few more times during the season, but at the beginning of the new season, in August 1957, an ideologist who was supposed to create the new aesthetics of the party, spoke out strongly: "Anouilh's *Antigone* which is a total failure [...] was put on the Hungarian stage as a completely original experiment [...] This drama, which the author wrote using all artistic means to defend the fascist Laval, is essentially reactionary."²² So the flawed play, the French gloom, and the pessimism of capitalist society²³ became the linguistic and intellectual reference points, and from then on, whenever the name of Anouilh came up in the media (even in *Új Kelet*, published in Israel), these slogans dominated the discourse: the originals, the classics, must be presented to bring the ancient down to earth, in its originality,²⁴ and Anouilh's presentation was a mistake, since he had only written an adaptation of a classic.

It's worth returning to the question of how Anouilh came to be in the repertoire of the Vígszínház (at the time, People's Army Theatre) in the first place. Anouilh was a commu-

nist author; his adaptations and reinterpretations were well known. But after the premiere of his *Elektra* in 1945, his plays were not performed in Hungary for 11 years, until early 1956, and the premiere of *Antigone*, scheduled for the autumn of 1956, was postponed until January 1957.

On 18 October 1956, five days before the outbreak of the revolution, the director said of *Antigone*, "The play is not an everyday one. And studio performances are usually not only to test the skills of individual actors, but also to appeal to the public's taste with plays that are usually not on the programme."²⁵ By 11 January 1957, twelve weeks after its scheduled premiere, the drama had been "tamed into one of the outstanding works of modern dramatic literature."²⁶ The reviewers still invoked the French author's professionalism and linked his treatment of the subject to modernity, but the topicality of the situation, and thus the process of meaning-making, was hidden in silence, in collective knowledge.

We cannot determine in full certainty what was uttered on the stage on 19 January 1957 of Anouilh's sentences translated into Hungarian. Censorship may have interfered at some points during the performance, but I have found no documentation or record of this. However, there are several passages from the original text that can only be made sense of by the specific formulation, the specific image, and the interpretative power of the community. Below are a few examples of how cultural translation worked after Stalin's death in 1953 and what insights the linguistic automatism of translation can stimulate.

Anouilh himself introduces the characters in a prologue, and this enumeration and contextualisation does not require any translation softening; the Hungarian 1956 version also emphasises that the boy is pale and

²¹ *Nagyvilág* 2, no. 3 (1957): 458–463.

²² HERMANN István, "Színvonal és műsorpolitika," *Népszabadság* 2, no. 194. (1957): 4.

²³ dr. MARTON Gizella, "Színház," *Új Kelet* 38, no. 2820 (1957): 9.

²⁴ ARDÓ Mária, "Elévült klasszikusok?," *Magyar Nemzet* 14, no. 60 (1958): 7.

²⁵ n.n. „Egyperces...”

²⁶ *Népakarat* (later *Népszava*) 2, no. 8 (1957): front page.

dreamy.²⁷ However, in the days of the revolution, it was the very young, pale boy who became the iconic figure of the Budapest struggles, so much so that decades later, media memory also chose this pale, young boy, the local Gavroche, as the iconic figure of the revolutionary hero.

It should be stressed that at the time of the premiere, and for many months to come, Budapest was a wounded city. Even the devastation of the second war had not yet been completely cleared away; the bridges linking the two halves of the city had not yet been fully rebuilt, and once again tanks marched through the streets. Only eleven years after the siege of 1945, new shot wounds marked the walls of the houses, and even the sight of unburied dead on the streets was a very recent memory. At the time of the staging of this production at Vígszínház, the Hungarian words of Creon could not be understood from any other angle than that of the revolution: "...the rebel, the despicable Polyneices, let no one mourn him, and let him be thrown unburied to the prey of ravens and jackals, and if anyone dares to bury him, let him die a death of death."²⁸ In the English version: "The vultures and the dogs are to bloat themselves on his carcass. Nobody is to go into mourning for him. No gravestone is to be set up in his memory. And above all any person who attempts to give him religious burial will himself be put to death." In the original, the brother is "le vaurien, le révolté, le voyou",²⁹ and during the utterance of these abusive phrases, Anouilh leads all the actors off the stage, so that these threatening words are delivered in an empty space. Assuming from subsequent reviews, the Hungarian production followed this instruction; the threat was clearly addressed to the audience, bringing the opening scene emotionally close to the audience's experiential reality.

²⁷ "garçon pale [...] qui rêve."

²⁸ Hungarian version, György GALAMB'S translation, manuscript, OSZMI, 43.

The January 1957 performance played a lot with the dialogues of the two sisters, then the lovers, then Creon and Antigone. In their shared scenes, Ismene and Antigone created a tension between utterance and implication. While the sisters built a family context around the duty of burial, the physical circumstances of death are meticulously depicted by Creon. It is he who reveals that the brothers were both burdened with dark, youthful sins, both hired assassins to kill their father, but fell to each other's weapons in battle at the city wall. When they were run over by the cavalry, "They were-mashed-to a pulp, Antigone",³⁰ and crushed beyond recognition. Creon buried the pieces that were the easiest to pick up, calling them Eteocles. In fact, he did not know which of the two was the unburied one.

Creon almost tortured the young girls, and, during the performance, the audience as well, of course, as he reminded them of their rather recent corporal and visceral experiences. In the Anouilh version, it was Creon who summed up the dramatic moment of reality-building (which, in the Sophocles version belongs to the chorus, Teiresias and the guard). Creon sees, hears, and smells, so that his monologue on the stench of the unburied dead became a prominent interpretative gesture in the post-revolutionary performance:

"Don't think that I am not just as offended as you are by the thought of that – meat – rotting in the sun. In the evening, when the breeze comes in off the sea, you can smell it in the palace, and it nauseates me. My God! If it was up to me, I should have had your brother buried long ago as a mere matter of public hygiene. But if the feather-headed rabble I govern are to understand what's

²⁹ Jean ANOUILH, *Antigone* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2008), 13.

³⁰ English ed., 29., "Ils étaient en bouillie." (French ed., 89.)

what, that stench has got to fill the town for a month!"³¹

Anouilh's adaptation emphasises the relativity of events, but in the post-revolutionary presentation, everything became concrete. Anouilh's Creon addresses the guard when he brings news of the funeral: "I broke the back of the rebellion; but like a snake, it is coming together again...." In French: "L'opposition brisée qui sourd et mine déjà partout"³² the verb "undermine", ("miner"), is ambiguous; Anouilh speaks of the muddy ground in general, which is different of the Sophoclean desert in nature, but both Paris in the autumn of 1944 and Budapest in the autumn of 1956 understood mud as an allegory of filth. The city was covered (in Hungarian) with "muddy earth" and the unbearable stench of corpses spread above it.

The Hungarian translation mostly hardens Creon's character. In Anouilh's "That distinguished, powerfully built man sitting lost in thought is Creon, the King. His face is lined. He is tired."³³ Creon himself is described as:

"Let me assure you that Thebes needs that boy a good deal more than it needs your death. ... Your father was like that. For him, as for you, human happiness was meaningless; and mere human misery was not enough to satisfy his passion for torment. You come of people for whom the human vestment is a kind of straitjacket: it cracks at the seams."³⁴

In French the "passion" is *pathétique personnel*, and in Hungarian it turns into *tragic hero*, and we can follow how the Hungarian version becomes a highly interpretive adaptation. The translation is at least twofold, since the Hungarian version of Anouilh's text was completed sometime in the summer of 1956, and then in January 1957 it was adapted for the stage in Vígszínház, so the context in which these sentences were revealed from January 1957 on was quite remote from the translator's decisions. Let us emphasise here that the translation's choices reveal a translator-creator well acquainted with the state-socialist operational framework, who, after Stalin's death, could openly identify the will to power with dictatorship.

This translation-for-stage by Galamb is honest and accurate, with neither passion nor fantasy overflowing. At a few points, however, it is precisely its unexpected deviations that reveal the low level of its freedom. Creon explains to Antigone:

"Believe me when I tell you—the only poor consolation that we have in our old age is to discover that what I have just said to you is true. Life is, perhaps, after all, nothing more than the happiness that you get out of it."³⁵

The Hungarian version translates consolation as justice, and prefixes *bonheur* with the adjective conciliatory. A similar syntactical quibble is encountered in the definition of Creon's position because the Hungarian translator seems unable to solve the problem of the insult *cuisiner* (cook). He translates it as "kitchen

ton père, de m'employer tout simplement à rendre l'ordre de ce monde un peu moins absurde. [...] les rois ont autre choses à faire que du pathétique personnel, ma petite fille."

³⁵ English ed., 30., French ed., 92. "tu vas me mépriser encore, mais de découvrir cela, tu verras, c'est la consolation dérisoire de vieillir, la vie, ce n'est peut-être tout de même que le bonheur."

³¹ English ed., 25.

³² English ed., 16., French ed., 50.

³³ English ed., 2., French ed., 11. "robust, aux cheveux blancs. [...] il a des rides, il est fatigué."

³⁴ English ed., 21–22., French ed., 68–69. "Ces temps sont révolus pour Thèbes. Thèbes a droit maintenant à un prince sans histoire. [...] j'ai résolu, avec moins d'ambitions que

servant”, and fails to find the condescending, contemptuous tone that works well in Anouilh (with the connotation ‘schemer, conspirator’). A few years after the premiere, this glitch provided a pretext for the cultural-political-ideological pundits to retrospectively reject the image that identifies Creon with the party leader.³⁶

According to the script, the following sentences were also uttered at the 1957 performances, but the immediacy of these sentences could function as a kind of reminder, or rather as an archival document, against the constructed reality of the theatre. According to one of the guards, the “crowd has already surrounded the palace and is shouting in revolt”³⁷ and then, addressing Creon, urges, “Chief, the people are crowding into the palace.”³⁸

Moreover, from 2025, it is impossible to imagine the depth and force of these sentences delivered by the actor playing Creon on 19 January 1957: “Au lendemain d’une révolution ratée, il y a du pain sur la planche, je te l’assure. [...] Je ne veux pas te laisser mourir dans une histoire de politique.”³⁹ No record of any audience reaction has survived, as the critics presumably tried to defend both the company and their own community. We do notice that the Hungarian translation chooses the verb *elpusztul* (‘perish’) instead of *meghal* (‘die’) for the original *mourir*, but any assumption concerning the possible phonetic effect of the phrases would only be mere speculation.

The Galamb-translation is a stage translation that has never been published, not even in the representative Hungarian Anouilh volume of 1977,⁴⁰ even though *Antigone* is one of the best known and “most beautiful”⁴¹ of Anouilh’s works. If these sentences were uttered in the performance, they presumably found their context not in 1944, in Nazi-occupied France, but in 1956.

Director Andor Ajtay created a completely contemporary and distinctly French setting around *Antigone*. Anouilh abandoned Teiresias, the seer, and with him the supportive transcendental context, so that we see only games between people.⁴² The staging was in the style of the post-war French art theatre, Vieux Colombier, a familiar form of theatre in Budapest, thanks to the repertoire and acting technique of the Hungarian Art Theatre between 1945 and 1948. A few contemporary furnishings and elements of space, such as a giant amphora,⁴³ indicated the presence of antique cultural ideals with gentle stylisation. The image of collaboration was created by the gendarme guard dressed in a Pétain uniform,⁴⁴ who was degraded by party critics into a hotel boy.⁴⁵ This shows quite clearly that the language of the press during the 1956 revolution and the Soviet military occupation afterward specialised in the act of sending a message rather than the message itself. The daily routine of textual comprehension tried to detect unexpected elements beyond the information conveyed, hidden in the context, and this makes our late attempts at understanding particularly difficult.

ered unintelligible the concept of revolution, so it is missing from the play.

⁴⁰ VINKÓ József, “Anouilh-drámák magyarul,” *Magyar Hírlap* 11, no. 1 (1978): 10.

⁴¹ GYERGYAI, “Védelem Jean Anouilh ügyében,” *Nagyvilág* 14, no. 7 (1969): 1084.

⁴² See Andor TORMAI’s photos [here](#) and [here](#).

⁴³ See Éva KELETI’s photos [here](#).

⁴⁴ See Éva KELETI’s photos [here](#).

⁴⁵ VÁNDOR Tamás, “Tessék elképzelni,” *Magyarország* 1, no. 6 (1957): 11.

³⁶ HONT Ferenc, “Harc az emlékekkel,” *Kortárs* 5, no. 2 (1961): 254.

³⁷ Sentence of the Hungarian translator (48.) to reinforce the importance of the crowd outside.

³⁸ English ed. 36. French ed. 104. “Chef, ils envahissent le palais.”

³⁹ English ed. 30. French ed. 76. “Would it have been better to let you die a victim to that obscene story?” The English translation consid-

For example, it can be seen from the announced programme that *Antigone* was in repertoire for about three months, and then in November 1957 the director, Andor Ajtay, in connection with a completely different production, said that "...after Anouilh's *Antigone*, the studio of the Hungarian People's Army Theatre was on hiatus for a while."⁴⁶ In other words, Ajtay's message about the temporary closure of the Studio is a half-sentence hidden in an interview, and this message in the *Esti Hírlap* in the autumn of 1957 is almost the only medial form of free speech.⁴⁷ The Studio was closed because the space of free play itself is always a reminder of freedom. This routine of power, of breaking the memory of the space, was used in 2022 by the Board of Trustees taking over the University of Theatre and Film Arts when it closed the Ódry Stage, whose very existence reminded all passers-by of the 71 days of resistance by students protesting the takeover.

Andor Ajtay had no other means but this message to remind his audience of *Antigone*, a play about the forbidden and tabooed obligation to bury the dead, and thanks to the 1956 revolution that was wedged between his rehearsal and his performance, it did not preserve the gesture of László Rajk's reburial, but the memory of the unburied dead lying in the streets during the 1956 revolution. And Andor Ajtay had no other way to recall Miklós Szakáts, the actor who had played Creon, who had been one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Committee of the Federation of Theatre and Film Arts during the revolution,

and who had been arrested and interned at the end of the season, on 23 May 1957.⁴⁸

Miklós Szakáts was recruited as an informant in the internment camp. He submitted his reports under the name Cyrano, and may have been employed by the CIA. These reports do not concern the performance of *Antigone*, but some of them can be used in the future as valuable sources for Hungarian theatre history. As an actor, Szakáts was a master of the old masquerading, likeness-assuming acting. In the rehearsal photographs of January 1957, he stands before the camera in civilian clothes, an overcoat, and a tie, like a gentleman in his thirties, and this posed image appears in the party newspaper barely eight weeks after the revolution was crushed. However, this image makes Creon difficult to identify, because we see Miklós Szakáts as a grey, bald, short-sighted, slightly obese man in an everyday jacket, almost imperceptible in his insignificance, while on the stage he presents a strong, cool, straightforward, determined ruler, because he plays Creon in heavy makeup, a wig and a beard, and no glasses.⁴⁹

In the absence of contemporary sources, it is unexpected that decades later the Ajtay performance will be remembered as a huge popular success,⁵⁰ which "truly fascinated and shocked the Hungarian audience."⁵¹ In the aftermath of the performance, we can follow how the stories of life were interwoven with the image of Anouilh and how the playing technique called double speech⁵² took shape in Hungarian theatre. Double speech maintains the discipline of the text before

⁴⁶ n.n. "Interview with AJTAY Andor," *Esti Hírlap* 2, no. 264 (1957).

⁴⁷ Another example for the 'messaging': In January 1957 it was reported in the *Esti Hírlap*, that 'dr. Antal Németh will direct a classic play at the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár, and in February Sophocles 'Antigone' was chosen. *Esti Hírlap* 2, no. 5 (1957): 2.

⁴⁸ SZAKÁTS Miklós, "Miért nem mentem haza," *Irodalmi Ujság* 20, no. 16 (1969): 3.

⁴⁹ See Éva KELETI's photos [here](#).

⁵⁰ VINKÓ, "Anouilh..."

⁵¹ GYERGYAI, "Védelem..."

⁵² On Double Speech: Magdolna JÁKFALVI, "Identity-machines: The Nationalism of Hungarian Operetta between the Two World Wars," in *Operetta between the Two World Wars*, ed. Jernej WEISS, 165–178 (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 2021).

censorship, but during the performance, a common complicity develops in the confidential relationship between actor and viewer, a parallel world connected by metaphorising links, in which the viewer moves about freely and understands freely. The essence of the Hungarian state socialist theatrical context is that the participants all know what the messaging mode means, and it is not the aesthetics, pedagogy, etc. of the performance, nor the message itself, but the event and channel of the message that is to be sought for. In the press a party-ideological assessment returned to the Ajtay performance even on the fifth anniversary, saying that "In a society that implements socialism, by erroneously actualizing freedom and dictatorship, Creon can be mistakenly identified by the misguided public with popular state power, as happened in 1957 when Anouilh's *Antigone* was performed in Budapest."⁵³ The profane version (i.e. the one without Teiresias) of Sophocles's tragedy would never be played in Hungarian again, probably because there are so many unburied dead to be remembered in connection with it.

No more revolutions shook the community of state socialist Hungary. However, in 2020, three decades after the fall of communism, another rebellion had to start when the University of Theatre and Film Arts was forcibly transformed. The students occupied the building and defended their spaces and ideological values for seventy-one days, until the pandemic ended the collective fight. This opposition was commemorated with *Antigone* in 2022 by Dorka Porogi's production at the Radnóti Theatre: "We are in Budapest, in 2022, the king already lives in the palace, and Antigone, losing, fatherless, deprived of everything, buries her brother who fell in the battle."⁵⁴

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⁵³ HONT, "Harc..."

⁵⁴ JÁKFALVI Magdolna, "Messzi-e a sivatag?", *Ókor* 23, 3–4. (2004) 86–93.

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