Modern ‘Antigone’ successful

By CLINT GOODSON

“Antigone,” Sophocles’ classic tragedy of civil disobedience, presents an unusual number of problems for the director who wishes to avoid the stigma of either the heavily stylized or amorphous stylistic pattern that the play can so easily assume.

Unless he plans to produce it along traditional lines, with masks and a large chorus, he must improvise and attempt to reach an interpretation that is consistent with the ideals of Greek tragedy, but that also escapes the anarchic pattern that can emerge when the heavily prescriptive Greek style is removed.

Roger Glade, director of the Wiess College Theater, answered the challenge by creating a modern play, emphasizing the universal nature of the problem, and thereby escaping the stigma of stylistic prescription.

The result was a creditable, though dramatically inconsistent performance; the sense of purgation so ultimately fundamental to Greek theater, in any interpretation, was missing, and this cast an unfortunate pall on an otherwise interesting approach to the problem.

Creon’s Tragedy

Glade obviously chose to play “Antigone” as the tragedy of Creon rather than of the play’s namesake, and as a result the role of the King of Thebes, played by Gil Dawson, assumed the crucial responsibility for the precarious transformation from a vile to a pitiable figure.

Dawson made a fiery and convincing antagonist, but the sound and fury carried over, tainting his portrayal of a tragic and broken character; there was still a hint of defiance in his voice in the last, bitter scene, and purgation just did not occur. Dawson did an otherwise acceptable job, maintaining a reasonable tension in his scenes and conveying the tyrannic self-assurance of a despotic king.

Small Chorus Effective

Also elemental to any performance of Greek tragedy is an effective chorus; Glade trimmed the number of members from fifteen to four, yet produced a chorus that seemed large in its vigorous and communicative delivery. The blocking for the group was especially good, and its seeming omnipresence was the most constant reminder that this was Greek tragedy.

Antigone herself was naturally subordinated to Creon in this interpretation, but Mary Strozier did a fine job of emphasizing Antigone’s significance in the light of Creon’s tragedy. She conveyed all the courage and bitterness necessary to the role, but managed, correctly, to divert the spotlight to Creon.

Karfigin Laud

Lanz Karfigin, as Haemon, put in the evening’s finest performance, communicating expressively the dilemma of a son whose father is cruelly and unnecessarily vesting him of his love, the heroic Antigone.

Penny Johnson added a reasonably good portrayal of Ismene, sister to Antigone. Bob Stout’s role as Teiresias, the hoary, blind soothsayer, was unfortunately out of character, for not only was his prophecy delivered in the voice of a healthy young man, but he hardly seemed blind.

Sentry Reinterpreted

The sentry scene was construed by Glade to be a sort of comic relief, and Jim Cochran, as the sentry, conveyed the mood quite adequately.

The style of his delivery was totally removed from that of the rest of the drama; though well-played, the emotional break seemed unnecessary, for the tension had not nearly reached an unbearable level. The resulting drop in emotional pitch did not leave with the sentry, but rather remained and impeded the emotional development of the tragedy.

The bit actors performed adequately in small, but dramatically important roles.

Credit Due

If the performance fell short by Greek standards, it was at least interesting from the standpoint of modern interpretation and experimentation with the form. Glade is to be congratulated on the consistency with which he pursued this interpretation and carried it through to a conclusion; the set, for example, which well complemented the director’s plan, was a nicely designed free form.

Judged from the angle of modern direction, the performance was generally successful and a credit not only to the actors and the director, but also to Wiess College, which sponsored its production.