

REVIEWS

2018—2019



CLOSE:UP

SAN FRANCISCO

SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

Film Review for

Before Night Comes

Dir: JOAQUIM PAVÃO

By pursuing an experimental interpretation of a Sophocles play, the filmmakers of *Before Night Comes* evolve the over 2000-year-old story from tired to wired. Everything from the cinematography to the acting is heavily dramatized to spectacular effect. The former is a beautiful thing for the viewer to behold. Light is utilized beyond just tonal execution; it literally becomes part of the fabric of the story, whether as symbolic or metaphorical. One of the liveliest aesthetical scenes of the film is when Antigone addresses Haemon's son after burying her brother. There are dozens of people rising up out of the background, red flags flapping in the wind, and a bright orange light centering the frame - presumably the sun setting on a tragic and courageous moment. The scene is so thick with powerful cinematography that it's awe-inspiring. The high-low contrast of lighting works to almost every other aspect of the film, too. It particularly accentuates the texture of the mise-en-scene - a rarely accomplished feat in film. You smell the sweat, you feel the grit of the earth, and you even fall into Antigone's despair and defiance.

Another key aspect of the film is the dramatic use of sound and body movement to convey tone and mood. The actress renders herself fiendish in her delivery of Antigone's lines, but not only that, the filmmakers emphasize the delivery with the crisp and raspy sound design. Whether a whisper or a snarl, you feel the texture of her voice come through. Yet another impressive feat. The actual use of music is utilized in an impressive manner as well. Apart from instrumentals, we only hear the singing operatic voice twice in the entire film - first, when Antigone buries her brother, and second, when Antigone hangs herself at the end. These perfectly synchronized aspects - song and weighty emotional scenes - make the scenes simply unforgettable. Furthermore, the inclusion of interpretive dance/body movement in the story was another dramatic, and not to mention risky, choice that ultimately pays off in the end. The bodies holding up and infusing other bodies to their fronts and walking in rhythmic tandem is probably the most awesome (and terrifying, once you see it) way to convey the emotional and psychological weight that Antigone carries.



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It's those same bodies that are in the cave with Antigone as she suffers her fate, and they are also there to help literally prop up her suicide. The rolling of dirty bodies in the dank deep, the noose assisted by a human pyramid, all of it supports this metaphor that the choices and decisions of others affected not only her sense of civil disobedience but her own sense of mortality and conscience. She carries it with her. The filmmakers take that basic premise of Sophocles and put a true cinematic spin on it.



Before Night Comes – Antigone Speech, is a visually presented famous Sophocles' tragedy – Antigone. Poetical and ominous short film that is dark in its nature. The director (**Joaquim Pavão**) did a wonderful job in presenting the suffering of Antigone. Absence of light, the hellish body language, buried alive in the dirt enhanced the emotional sensations of the watcher. Great narrator was for some too fast for some just as narration should be like.

Amazing acting (**Isabel Fernandes Pinto**) almost started transferring Antigone's pain and suffering to the public, and made them think again about the great Sophocles' masterpiece.

Antigone is religious, and she wants to decently bury her brother Polynices (Rui Pena), but the tyrant ruler Creon forbids it. The film artistically represents the psychological and ethical conflict both of the society and Antigone as an individual.

Antigone contradicts Creon's order and decides to bury her brother by the Greek commons. She is aware that she will be punished, but she does not care about endangering her life. Her decision was fatal. Creon gave the order to bury her alive in the tomb of kings. The brought decisions she defends by the common sense, having no children, no husband, she doesn't have anything to regret for. In the verses her strength will could be easily spotted. Like anyone who is different than the majority of the society, she is strong but lonely.

Antigone is idealized by her faith, love and unselfishness, and doesn't care about the possible consequences of her deeds. Her speech colorizes her suffering. She is full of sorrow because she is going to die young, unmarried and without any friends and family to mourn her death. Hemon (Claudinei Garcia) was Creon's son, he begged his father for mercy considering that the God's laws above his fathers, but in vain. He was engaged to Antigone.

Main problematic of the Sophocles' tragedy and this short film is the conflict between godlike and humanlike values. In the antic time it was believed that the soul of the deceased will be at calm if the body is covered in dust. It is not worthy to die because of morale and serving the society because the family is the most important and will always be there for you. One will be more likely abandoned by the society than one's family. The majority of us is willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their family.

It is easy to use Antigone's words, but many of us would endlessly think what and how should we do the thing that happened to her.

The art is a spiritual medicine that we consume in order to be healed from the bad things in our lives, everybody in their own way. This short film indeed represents one of the best medicines of that kind. The film has a great mind, spirit, talent, sense and sensibility and fantasy. It is wonderful how the most negative of human emotions can be the cause of such a beautiful art.

Film review for

Before Night Comes - Antigone Speech

Joaquim Pavão

Before Night Comes is an interpretation of Antigone's speech in Sophocles' play. The Portuguese short film shows us an intriguing stylized version of it, though. But will you be able to appreciate it if you're not familiar with this Greek tragedy? The answer is both a yes and a no.

The film focuses solely on Antigone's partial story, in particular her ending speech. This is the part where she defies her uncle king's rule. And that rule is to not bury her dead brother who died fighting another brother. The film starts from this premise and ends until Antigone's punishment and suicide.

Overall, one can appreciate the attempt to depict this fierce female's moment of combined grief, lament, and anger. But there are parts that feel dragging. *Before Night Comes'* strength is in turning Antigone's moment into an arthouse cinema fare. From the very first shots, it immediately unravels intriguing images. Its cinematographic style chooses to focus on the subjects by showing close-ups. In this case, the subjects are the actors that serve as "background elements" as the main character takes center stage. This close-up process reveals great textures that take over the whole screen. An example is the close-up of the dirtied face of a man while getting "mauled" by soiled hands. The stark lighting juxtaposed with the gritty feel of dirt on the face and hands gives us a chilling irony. It also presents to us an ambiguous image. Later, as Antigone's speech unravels, we try to associate this stark image with what she is saying. We then make associations that this man is the symbolization of Antigone's brother's death. The film doesn't spell it out for us. We have to figure things out ourselves. And that is a good skill, directing-wise.

The film, short as it is, loops and repeats these types of stark images as motif. Another interesting image is the repeated focusing of soiled women. Sometimes they are half-buried on the land while sometimes they're just lying there. They act and perform a kind of interpretative dance movement with their arms and hands. But the intense stares from their dirtied faces elevate them from being mere "props" in the film. They are integral to the gritty production design that helps tell the story.

Those are the parts that work well in this film. For the parts that don't work as well, the cause may be the theatrical nature of the material itself. In a way, this stylized cinematic motif is like the midway compromise of the filmmakers. It honors the material both as a stage play and as a cinematic work, too. But when Antigone's lines start sounding like a meandering monologue, the visuals don't help as much. During these parts, you would end up wishing you can see more images. You will almost wish for a one-to-one correspondence of the theatrical and film material. But we all know that this is not the filmmaker's intention.

It is indeed a challenge to bring this theatrical piece to life as a film fragment. Viewers who are used to the fast-paced cutting style of today's commercial cinema might find this film a bit slow in some parts. But the true heart of this material is Antigone's unraveling of her doomed plan from beginning to end. The tragedy of the situation is very evident in the film. Perhaps it will be more arresting if crucial parts of the tragedy were inserted to serve as back story. But that is something for the filmmakers to consider for next time, perhaps. For this moment, *Before Night Comes* is enjoyable as it lasts.



02 Dic “Before Night Comes – Antigone Speech” by Joaquim Pavão

In times where pop culture seems to have obliterated all traces of past literature from the public debate, it is very important to bring back eternal pieces of greek tragedy to life in a new form. In this very interesting portuguese short film “Before Night Comes – Antigone Speech” by Joaquim Pavão, we see Sofocles’ Antigone staged for the screen in a way that has more than one strength.

This version of Antigone is staged in a film with a mixture of different arts. It is a choreography of dance, theater and film, that finds its center and propulsion in the performance of the leading actress Isabel Fernandes Pinto, which gives us a very touching character. The greek chorus is represented by a multitude of dancers and characters which act on the background, moved by a theatrical direction.

Costumes, make up and set design give the short a very peculiar form, creating a meta-cinematographic stage where the act can be performed as the grecians would have done it: without creating a complete fictional world.

While editing is kind of invisibile – and therefore serves his purpose well – cinematography is high contrast and de-saturated, creating a very hard light look that is part of a greater atmosphere.

We watched and enjoyed this representation of Sofocles with much curiosity and, in the end, we were very happy to see that it was done with good taste and with exquisite culture



FILMSTRIP INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Despite being written by Greek playwright Sophocles almost 2500 years ago, Antigone has endured as one of the world's most famous and revered tragedies, whilst its main character remains one of the most powerful female portrayals in the history of universal theatre. After a war which has left many dead and injured, the newly crowned king of Thebes, Creon, orders that all dead bodies should be left unburied, as a form of punishment. However, his niece, Antigone, defies the law and strives to give all the bodies a proper burial. The plot is a simple one, and yet its metaphoric ramifications and avenues of interpretation are available in abundance.



Even from the first couple of frames, it becomes readily apparent that this representation of Antigone's speech from the classic Sophocles play is not an ordinary one. The initially observed choice is that for a monochromatic palette, which takes the light and life out of the portrayed world both in a real and in a symbolic way – death, mud, blood, and decay are what the film's narrative is built on. We say 'film', but this project is more than just a film – it could perhaps be more accurately described as a juxtaposition of film, theatre, and music. While it progresses in a movie-like manner, the décor is faithful to the original's setting, and the background occasionally springs into action in a dance performance that beautifully complement the chosen score.

The latter wonderfully punctuates key dialogues or actions and crafts its own niche for the audience's attention, rather than merely intermixing with the on-screen events. However, the big stars of the show are the sublime cinematography, which cannot be praised enough for its artistic flair and cultured approach, and the performance of Isabel Fernandes Pinto, who interprets Antigone with amazing fervour and passion.

At face value, the story of Antigone reminds us that the core struggles of mankind remain the same, even across millennia. It shows that sometimes, what is decreed by law is not necessarily the best choice and that alternative courses of action always exist, as long as one is willing and ready to embark on them. While by no means pushing toward revolutionary ideas, the symbolism of Antigone is tame in its push for taking matters into one's own hands and doing what seems to be the right thing. Through its deeply moving composition, shocking imagery and first-class representation of the main character, Joaquim Pavão's short project combines the best out of several art mediums and arrives at a monumental achievement, which we regard as a great project.

THE MONKEY BREAD TREE FILM AWARDS

Before Night Comes by Joaquim Pavão

With visuals reminiscent of Tarsem's work (in particular *The Cell* and *The Fall*), *Before Night Comes* bursts onto the screen with a variety of beings crawling out of the ground in the dead of night. I mean, wow! What a fantastic opening, what a delicious way to hook your audience and get them all ready and anticipating the wild world to follow.



Sadly the overall effect drifts away from the initial genre impressions, and leans more towards the likes of Tarkovsky – which isn't to say anything negative, as the project delivers its poetic and very somber material with style, consistency and various technical elements which are delicious to consume.

Of course one can't help but feel that with its near 30 minute runtime, that the locale of mud, straw and sand sort of wears thin after a while. And though the performances are very impressive... the whole thing eventually starts to feel a bit like Anthony Minghella's staging of *Play* by Samuel Beckett. Again, this isn't to say a bad thing really, but rather one can't help but feel of immediate academic strings which the film is similar to.

Ultimately, with so many objects in mind, the project is quite fantastic. As a viewer I kept trying to pin down what it reminded me of, mainly because it is such an unusual and poetry laden project. It is an unusual object, and when it comes to consuming film, it is the sort of material one can't help but cherish and enjoy as it is such a rarified thing.

THE MONKEY BREAD TREE FILM AWARDS

Independent Film Awards

THE MONKEY BREAD TREE FILM AWARDS

Before the Night Comes

First of all, the respect for the Theater. The breath, the word, the appreciation for the text of Eduarda Dionísio from the *Antigone* of Sophocles, transformed into monologues of precise moments and, using the game of words and meanings, also precious and necessary moments. Joaquim Pavão's first short film fiction, not the first cinematographic work, is a stage of a delicate and delicious penumbra in its immense strength, of course, with that load of text that fortunately draws the Beautiful of the Greek tragedy associated to justice and injustice.

Joaquim Pavão, as director, was interested in the strength of the Woman and her condition two thousand years later. And this already unyielding force of a classic gains contours of a good exaggeration with the interpretation of Isabel Fernandes Pinto. If the play with Eduarda Dionísio's text became a Portuguese scenic milestone when it premiered at the Cornucopia in 1992, with Adriano Luz' staging, this short film has in Isabel Fernandes Pinto a milestone in the way of feeling the sister who wants to bury a body with dignity, the condemned woman who does not resign herself to Power, using the natural Law ignored by the States. Where the actress and Antigone begin will always be a mystery, because in this border, art is made and cinema which takes advantage of the latter to follow it.

The cinema is about the respect referred to when beginning this text, and the commitment to have a cinema of its own without conventional models is well for those who like the association to escape the fear - producer of the film - fight and do against inertia, without fear of consequences. Before the night ... The film is called, like the book, *Before the Night Comes*, and gives us a literal look so close to Antigone that one can guess the breath, the rot ... that the real death is felt and the breath of many lives around a Femina that is giant without effort. It is giant because it suffers and surrenders in this suffering of going to the end for the Other and for the dignity of the Other.

Here it is the currentness of the classics and the pertinence of this *Before the Night Comes*, presented in a time of live murders, walls that stand on the borders, bodies to be buried and, much, the requirement of being a Woman. In light of what is constant, for example, in the struggle for more support for the arts in Portugal, this is a film that makes the slow movement a ballet of secondary actors that are not mere supportive extras and extras that are not just landscape. They are almost contemporary dance bodies in a song that is a persistent lament and a melody that goes into the ear much more than a soundtrack. Music is like another word that has no definition. Here the arts are gathered for 29 minutes under the power of the word and the minimum light to focus on what matters before the night... before the world falls into the void, working like a stubborn plow.

Nuno Santos Cash

Journalist and critic

