**Antigone**

**Themes, Motifs, and Symbols**

**Part I**

**Summary**

The cast sits about palace. The Chorus descends from the top of the staircase and introduces the players to the audience. It begins with Antigone, explaining that she is about to "burst forth as the tense, sallow, willful girl" who will rise up alone against the king and die young. With the rise of the curtain, she began to feel the inhuman forces drawing her from the world of those who watch her now. They watch with little concern, for they are not to die tonight.

The Chorus then introduces the chatting pair, Haemon, Antigone's dashing fiancé, and Ismene, her radiantly beautiful sister. They recount that though one would have expected Haemon to go for Ismene, he inexplicably proposed to Antigone on the night of a ball. He does not know his engagement only earns him the right to die sooner. The Chorus then turns to the powerfully built Creon, king of Thebes. When he was younger, and Oedipus ruled, he was an art patron. The death of Oedipus and his sons bound him to the weary duties of rule. Next to the sisters' Nurse sits the good Queen Eurydice. She knits and will go on knitting until the time comes for her to go to her room and die. The Messenger stands against the wall, brooding over his premonition of Haemon's death. Finally the Chorus presents the three red-faced, card-playing guards. They are common policemen, bothered by the worries of the day-to-day, eternally innocent, indifferent, and prepared to arrest anyone under any leader.

The Chorus then recounts the events leading up to Antigone's tragedy. During their recitation, the stage goes dark, a spotlight illuminates the faces of the Chorus, and the characters disappear through the left arch. Oedipus, Antigone and Ismene's father, also had two sons, Eteocles and Polynices. Upon his death, it was agreed that they would each take the throne from one year to the next. After the first year, however, Eteocles, the elder, refused to step down. Polynices and six foreign princes charged the seven gates of Thebes and all were defeated. The brothers killed each other in a duel, leaving Creon king. Creon ordered Eteocles buried in honor and left Polynices to rot. Furthermore, any who attempt to bury him will be put to death.

It is an ashen dawn and the house is still asleep. Antigone sneaks in from the outside. The Nurse appears and asks where she has been; she was not there when she went to check if she had flung her blanket off in the night. "Nowhere," Antigone replies, musing on how beautiful the world is when gray, how lovely the garden is when not thinking of men. The whole world was "breathless, waiting," though not for her. The Nurse asks angrily if she went to meet someone—perhaps a lover. Antigone assents. The Nurse is outraged and says that girls are all the same. Even Antigone, who never used to wear makeup, primp in front of the mirror, and ogle boys like Ismene. She was convinced Antigone would be alone for life. Now she knows she is a hypocrite.

**Analysis**

*Antigone* unfolds almost entirely in the course of one day, in one space (the palace), and in largely uninterrupted dialogue/action. Though dispensing with act divisions, *Antigone* thus relies on the dramatic unities as appropriated by the French classicists. The Chorus frames the tragedy with a prologue and epilogue. In the prologue, the Chorus directly addresses the audience and appears self-conscious with regards to the spectacle; we are here tonight to take part in the story of Antigone. Unlike conventional melodrama, for example, we are not asked to suspend our disbelief or watch a spectacle that would seamlessly pass itself off as reality. In some sense, like its ancient predecessor, Anouilh's Chorus prepares a ritual—the absence of such rituals in modern theater perhaps explains why this first scene might seem somewhat "artificial." In preparing its ritual, the Chorus would instruct the audience on proper spectatorship. Note, in particular, the ironic jab that the spectator need not upset himself as the tragedy does not affect him. This jab recalls the trio of crude and indifferent guardsmen, which the Chorus will cast in similar terms. Unlike the guardsmen, we have come to the tragedy to be upset.

The Chorus, who ultimately enters a spotlight, also recounts the events leading to Antigone's story and introduces all of its players under the sign of fatality. They have come to play their roles and, if such is their fate, die. The Chorus is omniscient, narrating the characters' thoughts: their roles, already predestined, should be self-evident, even if the reason they come to doom is ultimately not. Thus the Chorus traces each character's fate. Antigone is here to rebel and die; Creon is the unwilling king; Eurydice's role is but to die in her room; the guardsmen emblematicize the common rank-and-file. Importantly, it also establishes a key contrast between the two sisters: Ismene the full-figured beauty and Antigone the scrawny, sullen brat.

The action begins at dawn. Unlike in the Sophocle's *Antigone,* Antigone has already committed the crime, though the play, perhaps relying on the spectator's memory of the Sophocles's version, keeps this revelation in suspense in the first scenes. Anouilh himself commented on the paradoxical nature of this suspense: "What was beautiful and is still beautiful about the time of the Greeks is knowing the end in advance. That is real suspense. As the Chorus notes, in tragedy everything has "already happened." Anouilh's spectator has surrendered, masochistically, to a succession of events it can hardly bear to watch. Suspense here is the time before the realization of those events.

Thus Antigone's death is prefigured in her first words. The first scene involves Antigone and her fussy, aging Nurse. Their touching relationship is one of the more sentimental in the play: note especially Antigone's entrusting her dog, Puff, to the Nurse's care. Like many of Anouilh's heroines, Antigone wanders nowhere in a gray world, a world beyond the postcard universe of the waking. This world is breathless with anticipation: it doubles the stage, set apart from the human world, upon which Antigone's tragedy will ensue. At the same time, this world does not lie in wait for Antigone—she is meant to pass onto another, one beyond the living. Firmly located in her care-taking duties, the Nurse understands none of Antigone's ramblings. Instead, she bluntly asks if Antigone has taken a lover. Though Antigone is the opposite of the coquettish and hyper-feminine Ismene, to the Nurse she is just the same—another young, foolhardy girl like the rest of them. The Nurse does not appreciate what makes Antigone different from other girls.

Notably, Antigone tells the Nurse what she wants to hear—in some sense confirming that she is like the rest—and feigns that she has a paramour. We should weigh this subterfuge carefully. First, as we will discuss later, Antigone has gone out to attempt to become someone's lover, Haemon, having donned her sister's accoutrements to attempt to participate in pleasures that are not meant for her. Second, it is not for nothing that Antigone feigns to have taken a lover after having an illicit visit to her brother's corpse. This feint evokes a familiar trope in the Antigone tradition, that of Antigone's unnatural love for her brother. This love numbers among the desires Antigone refuses to surrender, desires she will follow to the point of death. Though somewhat suppressed in Anouilh's adaptation, this desire haunts the stage nevertheless.

**Part II**

**Summary**

The Nurse shudders to think of what Creon and Haemon will think, and certainly Antigone's mother will reproach her in the underworld. Antigone bids the Nurse not to cry: she was only teasing. She embraces her "sweet red apple" and swears to her purity. The Nurse must not cry as it turns Antigone into a little girl, and she cannot be a girl today.

Suddenly a sleepless Ismene enters, also asking where Antigone has been. The Nurse chastises them both for rising so early. Antigone sends her away for coffee. She tells Ismene she should not forgo her beauty sleep. She recalls how she was such a beastly sister, flinging mud and worms at her, tying her to a tree and cutting off her hair. How easy it must be to never be unreasonable with all that "smooth silken hair" set around her head.

Ismene abruptly interrupts Antigone, saying they cannot bury Polynices, as Creon will put them to death. But Antigone is unmoved, and replies that it is his purpose, just as theirs is to bury their brother. Ismene insists that she behaves too impulsively. She sort of sees what Creon intends with his edict, and that he must set an example. Antigone rejoins that she, the nasty, willful brat, does not understand. The family has always told her to understand, to not play with water or earth, to not eat from every dish at once, to not run in the wind, or give empty one's pockets for beggars. Ismene warns that Creon has the mob with him, a mob of thousands arms and eyes that will drag them to the scaffold.

Antigone pushes Ismene off. Ismene enjoins her to be sensible, since only men die for ideas. Ismene tells Antigone that Antigone is a young and beautiful girl engaged to be married. Antigone retorts that she is not beautiful. Ismene disagrees, saying that she always gives the little boys and girls pause in the streets. Antigone bids her to go back to bed; the sun is up, and she can do nothing today. Ismene retires.

The Nurse reappears, calling Antigone to breakfast. Antigone asks the Nurse to keep her warm and safe as she always has, explaining that she is too young for what she must endure. The Nurse is stronger than fever, nightmare, shadow, and night. Her powerful hand, which Antigone presses to her check, wards off all evil. The Nurse implores her to explain. Antigone makes a request that the Nurse must never scold her dog Puff again and talk to her as she does, especially if, for whatever reason, she can no longer. If she gets too unhappy, she should put her to sleep. Indignant and perplexed, the Nurse agrees.

Suddenly Haemon enters and the Nurse departs. The betrothed embrace, and Antigone begs his forgiveness. Smiling, Haemon replies that he already had when she stormed out. He wonders from whom she stole the perfume, rouge, powder, and frock. Antigone admits that she filched them from Ismene. She was a fool to waste an evening, especially when they may not have many more. She asks Haemon to hold her with all his strength.

**Analysis**

As with Sophocles's sistes, Ismene and Antigone appear as foils and rivals. Ismene is reasonable, timid, and obedient, full-figured and beautiful in being a good girl. In contrast, Antigone is recalcitrant, impulsive, and moody, sallow, thin, and decidedly resistant to being a girl like the rest. Though the Chorus will later emphasize the play's distance from conventional melodrama, it is interesting to note how, in revising the opposition in Sophocles's version, it imports the good girl/bad girl structure typical of this genre, not to mention a number of rather sentimentally melodramatic scenes. Here, Ismene advises moderation, understanding, and capitulation to difficult sister. They must both take Creon's obligations into account. In any case, women do not die for ideas, only men do. Ismene also conjures the specter of the howling mob, the mob that would stare them down with its thousands of eyes become one, and the guards that would defile them with their beastly hands. A number of critics have underlined this mob as central to the anti-fascist polemic mounted in the play. Strangely, in this nightmare, the spectator perhaps hears the cowardly Ismene's attraction to this fantasy of martyrdom. The sisters' humiliation appears in erotic terms, involving fantasies of looking and touching that culminate in their ecstatic scream of pain. This fantasy indicates that Ismene knows all too well that women do die for ideas. Ismene's attraction to martyrdom perhaps explains her ultimate conversion to Antigone's cause.

As we will see later, Antigone has little interest in playing the public martyr. Her agenda belongs to her alone. Interestingly, in contrast to conventional readings of the Antigone legend, here Anouilh's Antigone does not defend her act of rebellion in the name of filial or religious loyalty. Instead, she casts her act in terms of her desire. Just as she always played with water, ate from all the plates at once, or went swimming at dawn, she will bury Polynices. Throughout the play, we will follow the tension that occurs between Antigone's insistence on her desire and her political heroism. Refusing to understand those around her, she will follow her desire to the point of death. In this sense, Antigone departs from the human and becomes a tragic heroine. Thus, as Ismene notes, her beauty as such a heroine is somehow not of this world, the kind of beauty that turns the heads of small children—in fear, awe, and otherwise.

With Antigone's beauty in mind, Anouilh develops another form of rivalry between the sisters with regards to femininity. Antigone curses her girlhood. She manifests her hatred for the ideal of femininity Ismene incarnates in their childhood, brutally binding her sister to a tree to stage her mutilation. This reminiscence of torture is perhaps related Ismene's own vision of being defiled by the mob and guards. In any case, Anouilh attributes Antigone's hate and envy in Ismene's capacity to figure as an object of desire, as the woman men want. Thus, in attempting to seduce Haemon and become "his woman," Antigone steals Ismene's goods—lipstick, rouge, perfume, powder, and frock—in another act of sisterly dismemberment. Through Ismene, Antigone could be a woman. But as we will see, such human pleasures are not meant for her.

Antigone's exchange with Ismene is followed by another exchange with the Nurse, in which she desperately seeks solace from the fate that has been set in motion. For Antigone, the Nurse assumes an apotrophaic, that which wards off evil, capacity. Note how Antigone's speech on the Nurse's strength ("Stronger than all fever…") reads like an incantation. For Antigone, the Nurse is stronger even than death; her callused hand wards off evil like an amulet. Antigone's pleas for protection echo the promises she will later make to Haemon—that she would have been a "real mother" to their son and kept him safe from all. Antigone poses the world as something to be afraid of, conjuring the fevers, nightmares, silences, beasts, and other unknown forces that menace her from the darkness.

**Part III**

**Summary**

Breathless, Antigone tells Haemon that she would have protected their son against everything in the world, and that he would have feared nothing. Though his mother would have not been imposing, she would have been stronger than those "real mothers." Instead, she would have been Haemon's "real wife." Antigone asks him if he is sure he loved her the night he proposed, that he did not want Ismene instead. His arms and hands do no lie—he loves her as a woman. Haemon assures her that he loves her exactly as she loves him, with all of himself. Ashamed, Antigone implores him to tell her the truth. When he thinks of her, she asks whether he senses that a "great empty space is being hollowed out" inside him and that something inside him is dying. Haemon assents; Antigone feels the same.

Antigone draws away, announcing that she has two more things to say. Haemon must, however, swear to leave instantly after she does. He reluctantly swears. Antigone explains that she came to Haemon in Ismene's accoutrements because she wanted to become his wife before their wedding because she will never be able to marry him. Stupefied, Haemon departs. Ismene enters, terrified that Antigone will attempt to bury Polynices despite the daylight. Antigone says that Polynices is dead and never loved her, instead he was like an enemy in the house. Antigone tells her she is too late and she has just come from burying him.

Later in the day, Creon stands on the top step with his Page. The nervous First Guard enters, and Creon asks what has happened with the body. The Guard explains that he has been in the service for seventeen years, is known for his obedience, and is due for a promotion. Creon interrupts his chattering. The Guard continues, saying that the men had the two o'clock watch, the toughest part of the night. When they were not looking, someone covered the body with a little dirt last night. The guards heard nothing, only discovering a kid's shovel on the scene. Creon mutters in disbelief: he broke the back of the rebellion in the banks, the public square, and the temples, and a kid rebels. He will undoubtedly become a martyr. He orders the guards to uncover the body and keep the matter secret, on the pain of death. The Guard excitedly promises to obey and Creon orders him out. Creon turns to the Page and muses that he will have to "clean up the mess." He asks if the Pace would die for him, and he replies that of course he would defy the Guard with his shovel. Both exit.

The Chorus appears and announces that the tragedy is on. Its spring is wound, and it will uncoil by itself. Anything will set it going—a glance, one question too many—and the rest is automatic. The machine has been oiled since time began. Death, treason, and sorrow are "on the march," moving in the wake of storm, tears, and stillness.

**Analysis**

The lovers' dialogue is another of the play's more sentimental scenes, in which Antigone, after a flurry of sighs and embraces, resolutely bids Haemon farewell. It proceeds according to what "would have been": Antigone imagines their son and herself as a "real wife." She assures herself of Haemon's love, which he articulates in typically narcissistic terms: "I love you exactly as you love me. With all of myself." What is more pressing to Antigone, however, is Haemon's desire, a desire that, in her fantasies, must truly belong with her rival, Ismene. Thus, after his declarations of love, she continues to ask him if his caresses do not lie, if she wants her as a woman, if he does not really want Ismene after all. This desire is predicated on a sense of lack, of insufficiency, the "hollow space" that, despite the fullness their love promises, opens within the lovers whenever they think of each other. The melodramatic nature of this subplot is most clear. Part of the pathos of the scene lies in Antigone's desire remaining unfulfilled. She went to Haemon, having somewhat chilling donned Ismene's guise, to become a woman, and will not die with their love unconsummated. At the same time, the play is also clearly invested in Antigone's virgin death. Her sexual purity, a chastity she takes to the grave, is currency for achieving a tragic effect.

Haemon's departure and the revelation of Antigone's already-committed crime give way to the scene of its report to Creon. Creon learns of her crime through the first of the three costumed guards. The card-playing trio, made all the more mindless and indistinguishable in being grouped in three, emerges from a long tradition of the dull-witted rank-and-file officer. As the Chorus notes, they smell of garlic and beer. Jonas gives voice to their thoughts: they follow orders and they cover for themselves when things go wrong. They are eternally indifferent, innocent, and ready to serve whatever powers that be. Thus the guards serve as thinly veiled doubles for the fascist collaborators or *collabos* of Anouilh's day.

Though enraged by the news, the ever-practical Creon orders an immediate cover- up. The kid's shovel also seems to evoke an allegory of the Resistance. Though Creon has broken the back of the organized resistance, the lone child, perhaps a double for the boy who ostensibly inspired Anouilh's adaptation, rebels, readily presenting himself for martyrdom. The play is clearly drawn to this image of youthful resistance. Chillingly Creon then turns to the Page. It would seem that he both muses about the Page's potential betrayals and wonders if he could use him in a cover-up. That is, pin the crime on the child and offer him up to the mob. Here the overtones of totalitarianism in Creon's rule are probably the most explicit.

The scene then breaks and the Chorus returns, announcing that the tragedy has occurred. His speech offers a meta-theatrical commentary on the nature of tragedy. Here, in apparently a reference to Jean Cocteau, tragedy appears as a machine in perfect order, a machine that proceeds automatically and has been ready since the beginning of time. Tension of the tragic plot is the tension of a spring. The most haphazard event sets it on its inexorable march; tension has been lying in wait for its catalyst. Tragedy belongs to an order outside human time and action. It will realize itself in spite of its players and all their attempts at intervention

**Part IV**

**Summary**

The Chorus continues, evoking tragedy's stillness in the hush when the executioner raises his ax, the silence when two lovers stand naked before each other for the first time, the silence within when the roaring crowd acclaims a winner, leaving you, "the victor, already vanquished," alone in the desert. Tragedy is clean, restful, and flawless. It has nothing to do with melodrama. In tragedy, everything is inevitable, hopeless, and known, making for tranquility and "fellow-feeling" among the characters. All are innocent, simply bound to their parts. All one can do is shout.

The Guards are heard and the Chorus announces that Antigone has been caught and will be able to be herself for the first time in her life. The Guards enter with the struggling Antigone, the First telling her to give it a rest. Antigone complains of their dirty hands; the Guard gestures to her own. Imagine taking a tobacco break only to find a girl clawing away by the corpse like a hyena. The Second Guard compares her to a nut who exposed herself in the main square the other day.

The First proposes that they throw a party. The trio discusses plans, the First insisting that they keep it from their wives. Creon and the Page enter, and the guards stand at attention. The First explains Antigone's arrest. The guards had moved the corpse upwind to mitigate the stench. When he took a break for some tobacco, he found her madly clawing in the broad daylight. Antigone affirms his account and also confesses to having come the night before; the child's shovel on the scene was once Polynices's. The First Guard remarks how one sentry thought she was a dog. Creon sends the guards out.

Once he is certain no one saw Antigone arrested, he orders her to bed. She is to say that she has been ill and not left the palace. He will get rid of the guardsmen. Antigone replies that he knows she will only do the same tonight. She says that Polynices is home from the hunt and it is her duty to unlock the house of the dead for him. Creon asks if she thought her being the proud Oedipus's daughter put her above the law. No one has a more sacred obligation to the law than its makers. Antigone retorts that had she been a scullery maid she would have done the same. Creon disagrees and a maid would have taken the edict seriously. Antigone replies that she has never doubted Creon would put her to death.

Creon curses the pride of Oedipus. Like him, her death seem the "natural climax" to her life. For them, human happiness is meaningless and human misery unable to satisfy their passion. Only a "cozy tea party" with death and destiny can quench them. Oedipus was happiest when he listened greedily to the revelation of his tragic fate. But those days are over for Thebes. Being more humbly named, Creon will devote himself only to the order of the kingdom.

**Analysis**

The Chorus continues its comments on tragedy by underlining its stillness. Stillness appears as a key metaphor in the Chorus's comments on the nature of tragedy. First the Chorus evokes this stillness in its theatrical mode. This stillness is apiece with the spring-like tension and sense of suspense in tragedy that it evokes earlier. Tragedy's stillness appears in the moment before the execution, the moment at the beginning of a play before the consummation of a love affair. This tension only finds release in the terrible, ecstatic shout. Note this conjunction of sex and death. The stillness of sex and death is precisely where the play's two lovers will ultimately end, lain together in the tomb that figures also as their "bridal bed."

Strangely, the Chorus then invokes a filmic metaphor. Tragic stillness is the silence within the spectator when the crowd acclaims the victor. This stillness within perhaps recalls the "hollow space" imagined by Antigone earlier. This inner silence turns the outer world into "no more than a picture," a film without a sound track. This separation of sound from the image of the world is a dissociation of the spectator from that world as well. Again, two disjunctions are at work here: that of the sound from the image and the spectator from the world-become image. The Chorus shifts from a theatrical to filmic metaphor here because these experiences of disjunction are inherent to the cinematic apparatus. The spectator is then identified with the already vanquished victor, who is similarly alone in a desert of silence, similarly disjoined from the world. This disjunction from the world is the plight of the tragic hero and spectator who identifies himself with him.

Having compared tragedy to other media, the Chorus then sets it off generically, dissociating it specifically from the genre of melodrama. Tragedy is restful and flawless, free of melodramatic stock characters, dialogues, and plot complications. All is inevitable, which lends, in spite of tragedy's tension, the genre tranquility. Moreover, it gives its players innocence, as they are only there to play their parts. Though Creon will later accuse Antigone of casting him as the villain in her little melodrama, the players are embroiled in different mechanism. Again, note here the differences between Anouilh's theory of the tragic and political allegory. The latter is necessarily engaged in the generally pedagogical passing of political and ethical judgment, the arbitration of innocence, guilt, and complicity. Though tragic players face judgment, they do so on different terms. The Chorus retires, and the Guards bring forth the arrested Antigone. Though not quite a passion, this scene is Antigone's disgrace. The Guards are alternatively brutal, insulting, and indifferent to her plight. Anouilh comically imagines their indifference in their banal party squabbles. Again, the Guards will remain impervious to the tragedy before them. At the same time, under their insults Antigone, filthy, bruised, and with nails torn, begins her descent into abjection. Her insistence on her desire makes her inhuman. Conjuring her wild behavior at the scene of the crime, the First Guard compares her to a hyena. His colleagues thought she was a dog, not a girl. Antigone reminds the Second Guard of an exhibitionist. There is something decidedly perverse in her desires, something amiss in her carrying on in broad daylight.

The encounter between Creon and Antigone, the most pivotal dialogue of the play, then ensues. Though displeased by Antigone's disobedience, Creon's impulse is to cover it up, and he sends Antigone to her room. Creon will rather wryly bring a decidedly worldly set of prerogatives to bear on Antigone's tragedy, perhaps giving voice to the criticisms of many of Antigone's modern readers might make today. As Creon makes clear, his only interest is state order. Antigone's role as the mother to the next heir is far more valuable to Thebes than her death. Creon curses Antigone's tragic aspirations, aspirations that mark her as Oedipus' child. Like Oedipus, Antigone finds human happiness meaningless, and human misery cannot satisfy her thirst for torment. She too seeks a "cozy tea party with death and destiny." She believes tragic death to be the "natural climax" to her existence. Like Oedipus, she will be never happier than at the moment of her absolute ruin and abjection. We will return to his moment, what Antigone will call the moment of Oedipus's beauty, when Antigone invokes her lineage herself at the end of their dialogue. Against this tragic lineage, Creon imagines himself of humbler birth. If he was in Oedipus's place, he hardly would have given into such private concerns.

**Part V**

**Summary**

Creon assures Antigone that he does not romanticize his work: ruling is his trade, and a trade he takes seriously. If some wild messenger was to tell him tomorrow his wife was his mother, he would hardly surrender himself to his private feelings. Nor will he execute Antigone today, as she is mother of the next heir, and her marriage is worth more to Thebes than her death. Moreover, though she may think him prosaic, he is fond of her. Antigone moves wordlessly to the arch.

Creon warns her that if anyone else knows of her crime, he will have to execute her. Her act will do no good. Antigone insists that she must do what she can. After a pause, Creon asks if she really believes in the desecrating "mass- production jibber-jabber" of the priests she has seen so many times. Antigone agrees to its absurdity. Creon asks for whose sake then does Antigone go. Antigone replies that she acts only for herself.

Creon declares that he wants to save her. Antigone retorts that while he is an all-powerful king, he cannot do so. Aware that Antigone has cast him as the villain of her play, Creon warns her against going to far. He was been far more generous than the average tyrant, and she taunts him when she can see the hesitation in his face. Angrily he seizes her arm. Antigone moans in pain and he twists her to his side. After a pause, Antigone remarks that Creon is squeezing her arm too tightly and his grasp no longer hurts. Creon releases her.

Creon insists that he will not let politics cause her death. The entire story comes down to politics. He finds rotting corpses as nauseating as Antigone, and he would have buried Polynices as a matter of public hygiene. But to educate the masses, his stench must fill the town for a month. He agrees that his reign makes him loathsome but he has no choice. Antigone rejoins that he should have said no; she can say no to anything she thinks vile. Because Creon said yes, he can only, for all his trappings, sentence her to death.

Antigone knows that she frightens her uncle and his fate frightens him. Creon concurs. Antigone cries that while her nails are broken, her fingers bleeding, and her arms covered in welts, she is a queen. Creon asks her to pity him then and live. There had to be a man who said yes because the ship of state was sinking. On such a sinking ship, nothing can have a name except the ship itself and the storm. Antigone replies that she is not here to understand, only to say no and die. Creon rejoins that it is easy to say no, no is a man-made word. The beasts cannot say no to hunger and propagation. They persevere in their simple, good, and obstinate will. Antigone jeers that Creon would be quite the king if men were animals.

**Analysis**

Creon's attempt to save Antigone continues. First, changing his rhetoric, he caricaturizes the funeral rite. As Antigone knows, the priests practice but "mass-production jibber-jabber." Moreover, the Polynices's affair comes down entirely to politics. Creon himself would rather have Polynices buried; he only needs his corpse as an object lesson to the unruly masses. In asking why and in whose name Antigone has rebelled, Creon will progressively strip Antigone's act of its external motivations, be they moral, filial, religious, political, or otherwise. This stripping will appear most explicitly in his unmasking of her brothers. As we will see, Antigone's act will come to "not matter" in terms of filial loyalty, religious devotion, insurrection, and onward. Antigone will have no "just cause," no human reason for bringing herself to the point of death: her act is senseless, gratuitous. Antigone clings to her desire despite its madness. Antigone's appeal to her sisterly duty to her brother is a front. As she tells in Creon, she acts in her own name. As the Chorus says, Antigone's act and arrest finally enable her to be herself.

This insistence on her desire puts her beyond the Creon's reach. Anouilh starkly demonstrates Antigone's transcendence with Creon's assault on her person. Enraged by her proud defiance and his inability to sway her, Creon seizes Antigone and twists her to his side. The immediate pain passes. Creon squeezes too tightly and Antigone feels nothing. Her act locates her beyond state power. As she cries throughout, her role is to refuse to understand, to say no simply to whatever she finds vile when others would endure in beast-like fashion. Again this no is not against state oppression or injustice. It is not in the name of liberation, but in the assertion of Antigone's desire. As we will see, Antigone's no makes her a tabooed body that passes outside the human community. Here she revels in her abjection. While her nails are broken, her fingers bleeding, and her arms covered in welts, she is an exalted queen.

Antigone's inflexible insistence on her desire reduces Creon to asking for her pity. Despite all his trappings of power, Creon finds himself helpless, unable to act on his own. He wants not to execute Antigone but cannot help ordering her death. Having said yes to state power, he is circumscribed by his own kingship, by very the throne that makes him the master of the land. He has surrendered himself entirely to the ship of state and knows his circumscription all too well. As he tells Antigone, conjuring the storm-tossed ship as an extended metaphor for the beleaguered Thebes, the ship of state demands that all on board lose their names. Only the ship and the storm remain. To save the ship, Creon has had to terrorize the mob into obedience. He has lost his ties with his family, his life, and other men. Unlike Antigone, he has completely ceded his desires to take upon the mantle of governance. A double for the collaborationist head of state, Creon is rendered loathsome, terrified of what his office requires of him and yet unable to act otherwise.