

Συναγωνίζεσθαι
Studies in Honour of Guido Avezzù

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Fascism on Stage?

Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944)

DOUGLAS CAIRNS

Abstract

Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* has divided audiences since its first performance in 1944. For some, Anouilh's play presented an occasion for celebrating the Resistance, but the initial production's sole review in the underground press was deeply hostile, by contrast with many positive reviews in the collaborationist press. The latter support an interpretation in which Creon's necessary maintenance of order is balanced by the 'purity' and 'grandeur' of Antigone's defiance, keywords of a movement that has been labelled 'aesthetic fascism'. The play's nihilism, however, encompasses not only Antigone's apparently gratuitous and pointless death, but also the sordid cynicism of Creon's brutal regime. The central confrontation in which Creon attempts to save his niece is a contest of strength in which he is the loser, an outcome which demonstrates both the limits of power and the possibility of resistance. Though Antigone comes to doubt her decision at the very last moment, Creon's own last words pay tribute to her victory. An unequivocally collaborationist reading is as impossible as an unequivocally pro-Resistance one. And if Antigone's stance can be seen in the context of 'aesthetic fascism', there is in the play little comfort for actual fascism as a historical political movement.

Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* premiered on 4 February 1944 at the Théâtre de l'Atelier, Paris. The production ran until the liberation of Paris, and was in fact the first production to be mounted when the theatre reopened after the liberation on 27 September 1944. Now widely acclaimed, the production continued into 1945 and was revived for several further seasons (in 1947, 1949, 1950, and 1953). It was performed in translation in New York in 1946 and at the London Old Vic in 1949, in a celebrated production in which Vivien Leigh played Antigone and Lawrence Olivier the Prologue/Chorus (see Freeman in Anouilh 2000: xlvi-lii; Fleming 2008: 166; Flashar 2009: 173). Thus in Paris in 1944, prior to the city's liberation and as the allies planned the invasion of France

for June of that year, there were no fewer than three *Antigones* in the city's theatres: Arthur Honegger's operatic version (which developed from his music for Cocteau's 1922 adaptation),¹ Anouilh's, and the first attested stage production of Robert Garnier's 1580 *Antigone, ou la piété*.² Anouilh's play had been completed and approved for staging by the censors in 1942, but its production was delayed, and so Honegger's version beat Anouilh's to the stage (Flashar 2009: 172). Anouilh was well aware of the potential of Antigone as a symbol for the Resistance, whose initial attacks in the summer of 1941 had elicited a series of reprisals from the occupying Nazis; he himself later described the period as "the time of Antigone".³ By 1944, the risk of subversive, anti-authoritarian responses to the production was one that concerned the German authorities (Flashar 2009: 172). For some audiences and critics, both before and after the liberation, Anouilh's play did indeed present an occasion for celebrating the Resistance (Witt 2001: 220-1, 228; cf. Freeman in Anouilh 2000: xlvi-xlviii; Fulcher 2006: 287). This understanding gained ground after the war, and became for many years the standard interpretation.⁴ At the same time, however, the initial production's sole review in the underground press was deeply hostile, taking the play's nihilism as tantamount to connivance with fascism;⁵ and in fact the play was extremely popular in collaborationist, fascist, and pro-German circles, receiving many positive reviews in the collaborationist press.⁶

1 See Cairns 2016: 133-4, with further references to scholarly discussions.

2 On which see Steiner 1984: 139-41. Garnier's play was adapted by the right-wing nationalist, Thierry Maulnier, and presented at the Théâtre Charles de Rochefort in May 1944: see Steiner 1984: 143; Witt 2001: 219.

3 Anouilh, letter to M. Flügge, 15 May 1979, in Flügge 1982: 2.44: "nous vivions au temps d'Antigone."

4 For the roots of this interpretation and its debunking, see especially Flügge 1982; cf. Witt 2001: 228; Fleming, 2008: 167-9; Flashar 2009: 168, 171, 173.

5 Claude Roy, *Les Lettres françaises* 14, March 1944, in Flügge 1982: 2.70-2; cf. Witt 2001: 228; Fulcher 2006: 287; Fleming 2008: 168. Both Witt and Fleming also cite similar responses in post-liberation criticism.

6 There is an exhaustive collection of contemporary reviews, together with comprehensive analysis of the play's historical contexts and later receptions, in Flügge 1982; for the reviews in particular, see 2.47-72. In English, see Witt 2001: 227-8; Fleming 2008: 168, 180-1; cf. Freeman in Anouilh 2000:

Both pro- and anti-Resistance interpretations typically see Anouilh's *Antigone* as a symbol of the Resistance and Creon as representing the Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain (or his head of government, Pierre Laval).⁷ Such straightforwardly allegorizing approaches do find their place in contemporary reviews; yet, especially among collaborationist and pro-fascist responses, a more complex interpretation emerges, in which Creon's necessary maintenance of order is balanced by the 'purity' and 'grandeur' of Antigone's defiance.⁸ Witt and Fleming have traced these and similar terms as keywords of a movement that Witt calls 'aesthetic fascism'; according to them, whether or not Anouilh's *Antigone* offers an apology for Vichy collaboration (and they are both inclined, at least to some extent, to believe that it does),⁹ it manifests a more abstract, less directly 'political' form of fascism that celebrates purity, sacrifice, and the beauty of suffering by contrast with the mediocrity of bourgeois contentment, conformity, and the compromises of politics.¹⁰

One of the early champions of the 'purity' manifested by Anouilh's *Antigone* was Robert Brasillach, a fascist writer and intellectual executed on 6 February 1945.¹¹ Anouilh, for his part, was not politically active (before or after the war), but he did continue to write under the German occupation, and his work was published in the collaborationist press.¹² His one major foray into active politics was a failed campaign to secure clemency for

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7 See Freeman, in Anouilh 2000: xlvii-xlviii; Flashar 2009: 170; Guérin 2009, §§ 14-17; cf. and contrast Witt 2001: 218, 221n7, 226; Fleming 2008: 181-2. Witt and Fleming accept this characterization of Creon, but regard Antigone as, in one sense or another, 'fascist'. See also Deppman 2012: 523-4 (though this is, in general, a much more nuanced, open reading of the play).

8 See the responses cited in Witt 2001: 227-8; Fleming 2008: 181.

9 See especially Witt 2001: 226 (contrast 229); Fleming 2008: 182.

10 If Lacan's reference to Anouilh's 'little fascist Antigone' (1992: 250) is anything more than a glib sneer, this is perhaps its point. Lacan's own *Antigone*, whose beauty lies in her gratuitous pursuit of her desire for death, in fact has much in common with Anouilh's.

11 See Witt 2001: 227-8; Fleming 2008: 181. Cf. Witt 2001: 148-69, 185, 217-21 on similar themes in Brasillach's writings.

12 See Fulcher 2006: 286; Fleming 2008: 181.

Brasillach, whom he would later represent as an Antigone figure whose integrity was preserved in death; it is the Creon figure, who pronounces the death sentence, who “always plays a losing game”.¹³ This is a revealing comment; but its retrospective application to Anouilh’s *Antigone* is not straightforward.

It is time to discuss the play itself. At its core, it is close to the Sophoclean original: from the Guard’s report to the departure of Haemon, Anouilh follows the Sophoclean sequence fairly closely; Antigone’s final scene becomes a dialogue with Jonas, one of Anouilh’s three Guards, in which she dictates a farewell letter to Haemon, but even this scene, with Antigone’s doubts, hesitations, and second thoughts, has its roots in Sophocles; as if to underline its relation of similarity and difference with the original, Anouilh has Antigone quote Sophocles’ lines 891-2, “O tombeau! O lit nuptial! O ma demeure souterraine!”¹⁴ Following Antigone’s departure, Anouilh’s play proceeds as in Sophocles: a Messenger reports Antigone’s suicide, the confrontation between Haemon and Creon, and Haemon’s own suicide, united with Antigone in death. The Chorus (in this version, a single character who has also delivered the play’s Prologue) then reports the suicide of Eurydice (1946: 119-21 = 2000: 58-9). Creon is then left alone; but where in Sophocles he is left to contemplate the fulfilment of Tiresias’ warning, that he has brought on himself a disaster that mirrors the punishments he sought to impose on Polynices and Antigone, in Anouilh he carries on with his duties as head of state, leaving with his Page for a meeting of the Privy Council (1946: 122 = 2000: 60). Because Tiresias has been omitted, Creon’s presence at Antigone’s

13 “L’homme à la sentence, croyant le supprimer, l’a préservé. Quels que soient les mots dont il se grise, Créon joue toujours perdant” (“The man with the sentence, thinking to suppress him, has preserved him. Whatever the words he gets drunk on, Creon always plays a losing game”), Anouilh in Brasillach 1963-6: 4.xii, quoted in English in Witt 2001: 230. On Anouilh’s campaign for Brasillach’s reprieve, cf. Freeman, in Anouilh 2000: ix, xlvii.

14 Anouilh 1946: 111. Translated (Anouilh 2000: 55) as “Hail, then, my grave, my marriage bed, my underground home!” Since Anouilh’s play has neither line numbers nor Act/Scene divisions, references to the 1946 original and to Barbara Bray’s 2000 translation are by page number. Henceforth references in the form ‘1946: 111’ and ‘2000: 55’ refer to Anouilh’s play.

tomb is not due to his desire to rescue her and avoid the disaster against which Tiresias had warned; rather, he is leaving after having Antigone walled up alive when he hears Haemon's voice from within the tomb (1946: 118 = 2000: 58). In Anouilh's play, Creon's attempt to save Antigone comes earlier, in the confrontation between the two that is the centre of Anouilh's play and Sophocles'.

But Antigone cannot be saved – this is a given of the plot as dramatized by Sophocles and an aspect of Anouilh's own plot that is highlighted throughout by the play's self-referential metatheatricity. The tone is set by the Prologue/Chorus at the outset; as the curtain rises, “all the characters are onstage” – the stage direction informs us – “chatting, knitting, playing cards, and so on” (2000: 3).¹⁵ The Prologue then introduces the characters, even before they take up their roles – the girl who will soon be Antigone, “thinking she is going to die . . . though she's still young, and like everyone else would have preferred to live”,¹⁶ Ismene, Haemon, Creon (“playing a difficult game” now that he is “a leader of men”, “forsaking his books and his collector's pieces”, 2000: 4),¹⁷ the Nurse, Eurydice, the Messenger, and the Guards. The roles of the characters are also their fates, as we see clearly in the case of Antigone (1946: 9-10= 2000: 3):

Mais il n'y a rien à faire. Elle s'appelle Antigone et il va falloir qu'elle joue son rôle jusqu'au bout.

[But there's nothing to be done. Her name is Antigone, and she's going to have to play her part right through to the end.]

This perspective recurs throughout. After the Guard's an-

15 “Au lever du rideau, tous les personnages sont en scène. Ils bavardent, tricotent, jouent aux cartes” (Anouilh 1946: 9).

16 “Elle pense qu'elle va mourir, qu'elle est jeune et qu'elle aussi, elle aurait bien aimé vivre” (1946: 9).

17 “Cet homme robuste, aux cheveux blancs, qui médite là, près de son page, c'est Créon. C'est le roi. Il a des rides, il est fatigué. Il joue au jeu difficile de conduire les hommes. Avant, du temps d'Œdipe, quand il n'était que le premier personnage de la cour, il aimait la musique, les belles reliures, les longues flâneries chez les petits antiquaires de Thèbes. Mais Œdipe et ses fils sont morts. Il a laissé ses livres, ses objets, il a retroussé ses manches et il a pris leur place” (1946: 11).

nouncement of the first attempt to bury the body, the Prologue reappears as the Chorus, with reflections on the differences between tragedy and ‘drama’ or melodrama (1946: 53-4 = 2000: 25-6). Where the latter has heroes and villains and a sense of contingency, that catastrophe might just be avoided, tragedy is a genre in which the tale unfolds “all of itself”; it “does itself. Like clockwork set going since the beginning of time.” In tragedy, all are innocent: “It doesn’t matter if one person kills and the other is killed – it’s just a matter of casting”.¹⁸

Dans le drame, on se débat parce qu’on espère en sortir. C’est ignoble, c’est utilitaire. Là, c’est gratuit. C’est pour les rois. Et il n’y a plus rien à tenter, enfin!

[In drama you struggle, because you hope you’re going to survive. It’s utilitarian – sordid. But tragedy is gratuitous. Pointless, irremediable. Fit for a king! (1946: 54-5 = 2000: 26)]

Immediately, Antigone is led in by the Guards. The Chorus observes (1946: 55 = 2000: 26):

Alors, voilà, cela commence. La petite Antigone est prise. La petite Antigone va pouvoir être elle-même pour la première fois.

[Now it’s beginning. Little Antigone has been caught – and handcuffed. She can be herself at last.]

Just so, when Antigone is finally led away, the Chorus comments (1946: 117 = 2000: 58):

Là! C’est fini pour Antigone. Maintenant, le tour de Créon approche. Il va falloir qu’ils y passent tous.

[So. It’s all over for Antigone. Soon it will be Creon’s turn. Everyone’s turn will come in the end.]

The characters are similarly aware of their roles, and thus of their fates. “My name’s only Creon, thank God”, says Creon, distinguishing his role in the myth from those of the characters

¹⁸ “Cela n’a plus qu’à se dérouler tout seul. . . . Cela roule tout seul. C’est minutieux, bien huilé depuis toujours. . . . Ce n’est pas parce qu’il y en a un qui tue et l’autre qui est tué. C’est une question de distribution” (1946: 51).

whose names are Oedipus or Antigone (2000: 33).¹⁹ Antigone's role is to "to say no to [Creon] and to die",²⁰ and Creon's to kill her, as both know (1946: 73-4, 78-9, 82-3 = 2000: 36, 38-9, 40-1).

And yet Anouilh toys throughout with these generic expectations. Though the plot does ultimately opt for tragedy, with all its (supposed) inevitability, over the sordidness of melodrama, there is a pronounced element of bourgeois melodrama throughout: Sophocles' opening scene between Antigone and Ismene is transformed into a complex opening sequence in which the House of Labdacus is presented as a typical well-to-do household, in which Ismene's attempt to dissuade Antigone from an act that she has, in fact, already committed is embedded in scenes in which Antigone and her Nurse exhibit a tender mutual concern and Antigone and Haemon their mutual romantic love. (In complete contrast to her Sophoclean counterpart, Anouilh's Antigone, having decided to take on the task of burying her "sweetheart", Polynices,²¹ has even made a ham-fisted attempt to consummate her relationship with her actual sweetheart, Haemon – 1946: 36-44 = 2000: 17-20.) This conventional, domestic milieu – in which Creon had, on taking power, reluctantly to give up his passion for books and antiques (1946: 11 = 2000: 4), Antigone takes the trouble to make sure that there will be someone to look after her dog after she is gone (1946: 33-6 = 2000: 16-17), and Creon expresses what seems to be genuine avuncular concern by reminiscing about presents he had given Antigone in the past (1946: 70 = 2000: 34) – is what Antigone rejects in playing her tragic role to its conclusion.

Yet, even as that conclusion approaches, Anouilh flirts with the generic conventions that the Chorus has attributed to melodrama. Accepting, but also subverting the melodramatic plot of good versus evil ("J'ai le mauvais rôle, c'est entendu, et tu as le bon," 1946: 75 = "I've got the villain's part and you're cast as

19 "Moi, je m'appelle seulement Créon, Dieu merci" (1946: 68).

20 "Je suis là pour vous dire non et pour mourir" (1946: 82).

21 When Antigone returns home from burying Polynices' body, the Nurse assumes that she has a sweetheart (other than Haemon); Antigone at first agrees that, in a way, she does (1946: 16-18 = 2000: 7-9), thus picking up the incest theme that also surfaces in Sophocles' presentation of Antigone's devotion to her brother (Cairns 2016: 104-6).

the heroine,” 2000: 36), Creon makes one last attempt to save Antigone from her fate (1946: 84 = 2000: 41):

Écoute-moi tout de même pour la dernière fois. Mon rôle n’est pas bon, mais c’est mon rôle et je vais te faire tuer. Seulement, avant, je veux que toi aussi tu sois bien sûre du tien. Tu sais pourquoi tu vas mourir, Antigone? Tu sais au bas de quelle histoire sordide tu vas signer pour toujours ton petit nom sanglant?

[Listen to me for the last time. I’m cast as the villain, and I’m going to have you put to death. But before I do I want you to be sure of your role. Do you know why you’re going to die, Antigone? Do you realize what a squalid story it is you’re going to put your poor little bloodstained name to – for ever?]

As in Sophocles, there is a window of opportunity in which Antigone’s death just might have been averted. But whereas in Sophocles that window is quickly closed (when Antigone not only confesses to committing the deed in full knowledge that it was prohibited, but also justifies her decision in a way that forcefully demonstrates her acceptance of death and her contempt for Creon, *Antigone* 441-70), in Anouilh Creon’s attempt to prevent his niece’s death is the main focus of the long central confrontation (which Anouilh develops beyond the length of the Sophoclean original, until it occupies fully one third of the entire play, 1946: 62-99 = 2000: 30-49). That attempt appears to be on the verge of success, when, having spoken the lines quoted immediately above, Creon demonstrates that neither Polynices nor Eteocles was the hero of Antigone’s imagination (1946: 84-90 = 2000: 41-4); both were petty thugs, “common crooks” (2000: 44 = “deux larrons en foire”, 1946: 89), addicted to power and violence, who had tried to murder their father and who were each equally ready “to sell Thebes to the highest bidder” (*ibid.*). Creon had made a hero of one and a villain of the other purely for propaganda purposes – he “couldn’t afford to have a scoundrel in both camps” (2000: 43).²² Even the choice of which body to bury and which to expose had been arbitrary: they were so badly mutilated that it was impossible to tell them apart.

²² “Tu penses que je ne pouvais tout de même pas m’offrir le luxe d’une crapule dans les deux camps” (1946: 88).

Antigone's belief in her cause is shattered, and she makes, as Creon had wanted, to go to her room (1946: 90-1 = 2000: 44-5). This is where Creon makes his fatal error. This is not, as emphasized by Tiresias in Sophocles, the mistake of keeping a corpse in the world of the living and consigning a living person to a tomb, but that of referring to the conventional happiness of marriage and domesticity. Thinking back fondly to his own youthful idealism, and urging Antigone to "get married quickly . . . and be happy" ("Marie-toi vite, Antigone, sois heureuse"), he concludes (1946: 92 = 2000: 45):

la vie c'est un livre qu'on aime, c'est un enfant qui joue à vos pieds, un outil qu'on tient bien dans sa main, un banc pour se reposer le soir devant sa maison. 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.

[Life's a book you enjoy, a child playing round your feet, a tool that fits into your hand, a bench outside your house to rest on in the evening. (*Pause.*) You'll despise me more than ever for saying this, but finding it out, as you'll see, is some sort of consolation for growing old: life is probably nothing other than happiness.]

But Antigone does think of the future – of compromises and accommodations such as Creon himself has made, of a Haemon who may grow up to be just like his father, of the conformity of saying yes "like the rest" (2000: 46 = "lui aussi", 1946: 93). And she does not want this (1946: 94-5 = 2000: 47):

ANTIGONE Vous me dégoûtez tous avec votre bonheur! Avec votre vie qu'il faut aimer coûte que coûte. On dirait des chiens qui lèchent tout ce qu'ils trouvent. Et cette petite chance pour tous les jours, si on n'est pas trop exigeant. Moi, je veux tout, tout de suite, – et que ce soit entier – ou alors je refuse! Je ne veux pas être modeste, moi, et me contenter d'un petit morceau si j'ai été bien sage. Je veux être sûre de tout aujourd'hui et que cela soit aussi beau que quand j'étais petite – ou mourir.

CRÉON Allez, commence, commence, comme ton père!

ANTIGONE Comme mon père, oui! Nous sommes de ceux qui posent les questions jusqu'au bout. Jusqu'à ce qu'il ne reste vrai-

ment plus la petite chance d'espoir vivante, la plus petite chance d'espoir à étrangler. Nous sommes de ceux qui lui sautent dessus quand ils le rencontrent, votre espoir, votre cher espoir, votre sale espoir!

[ANTIGONE You disgust me, all of you, you and your happiness! And your life, that has to be loved at any price. You're like dogs fawning on everyone they come across. With just a little hope left everyday – if you don't expect too much. But I want everything, now! And to the full! Or else I decline the offer, lock, stock and barrel! I don't want to be sensible, and satisfied with a scrap – if I behave myself! I want to be sure of having everything, now, this very day, and it has to be as wonderful as it was when I was little. Otherwise I prefer to die.

CREON There you go – just like your father!

ANTIGONE Exactly! Neither of us ever stops asking questions! Right up to the moment when there's not a spark of hope left to stifle. We're the sort who jump right on your precious, lousy hope.]

This, she believes, will make her beautiful, like her father, who was beautiful when all hope was gone, but when he could shun the ugliness of conventional happiness (1946: 96 = 2000: 47-8).

As in Sophocles, Antigone resembles her father.²³ Also as in Sophocles, she and Creon have vastly different notions of happiness, of what counts as prosperity or profit.²⁴ And as in Sophocles, Antigone's conception of happiness leads her to choose death over life (1946: 99-100 = 2000: 49-50):

LE CHŒUR Tu es fou, Créon. Qu'as-tu fait?

CRÉON (*qui regarde au loin avant lui*) Il fallait qu'elle meure.

LE CHŒUR Ne laisse pas mourir Antigone, Créon! Nous allons tous porter cette plaie au côté, pendant des siècles.

CRÉON C'est elle qui voulait mourir. Aucun de nous n'était assez fort pour la décider à vivre. Je le comprends maintenant, Antigone

²³ Soph. *Ant.* 379-80, 471-2, 856. Cf. Creon at Anouilh 1946: 68, "L'orgueil d'Œdipe. Tu es l'orgueil d'Œdipe" = 2000: 32-3, "The pride of Oedipus. You're its living image . . ."; 1946: 74, "Orgueilleuse! Petite Œdipe!" = 2000: 33, "Proud Antigone! Pocket Oedipus!"

²⁴ See Cairns 2016: 82-8.

était faite pour être morte. Elle-même ne le savait peut-être pas, mais Polynice n'était qu'un prétexte. Quand elle a dû y renoncer, elle a trouvé autre chose tout de suite. Ce qui importait pour elle, c'était de refuser et de mourir.

LE CHEUR C'est une enfant, Créon.

CRÉON Que veux-tu que je fasse pour elle? La condamner à vivre?

[CHORUS You're mad, Creon. What have you done?

CREON (*staring ahead of him.*) She had to die.

CHORUS Don't let her die, Creon! We'll all bear the scar for thousands of years!

CREON It was her choice. She wanted to die! None of us was strong enough to persuade her to live. I understand now. She was born to die. She may not have known it herself, but Polynices was only an excuse. And when that excuse wouldn't work any more she chose another. All that mattered to her was to refuse everything and to die.

CHORUS She's only a child, Creon.

CREON What do you want me to do? Condemn her to live?]

Antigone's fixation with death is a major theme in Sophocles too, but in Anouilh it has – along with her refusal to grow up and her petulant, child-like insistence on having it all, now – become the ultimate reason for her self-sacrifice.²⁵ Creon, for his part, loses the happiness that all his compromises have sought to preserve, because he did not understand Antigone's motives. Indeed, not even Antigone herself seems fully to understand these, since her final scene in the play shows her, along with the doltish Guard, Jonas, doubting her choice. Dictating (like a Resistance heroine) a letter to be conveyed to Haemon, she reflects (1946: 115 = 2000: 56-7):

Et Créon avait raison, c'est terrible, maintenant, à côté de cet homme, je ne sais plus pourquoi je meurs. J'ai peur . . . Oh! Hémon, notre petit garçon. Je le comprends seulement maintenant combien c'était simple de vivre . . .

[And Creon was right: it's awful, but here, with this man beside

25 On the infantile nihilism of Antigone's rebellion, cf. Genette 1992: 469; Ciani 2000: 14.

me, I don't know any more what I'm dying for . . . I'm afraid . . .
Oh Haemon! It's only now I realize how easy it was to live . . .]

Paradoxically, however, this tribute to Creon's world view is balanced, in the final scene, by Creon's tribute to hers. Unlike Sophocles' Creon, Anouilh's does not engage in extensive lamentation over the loss of his wife and son. Instead, he reflects on the rest that they now enjoy and he does not, as he prepares to carry on with his duties, telling his Page boy (1946: 121 = 2000: 60):

on est là, devant l'ouvrage, on ne peut pourtant pas se croiser les bras. Ils disent que c'est une sale besogne, mais si on ne la fait pas, qui la fera?

[There you are, face to face with what's to be done. You can't just fold your arms and do nothing. They say it's dirty work. But if you don't do it, who will?]

He goes on (1946: 122 = 2000: 60):

CRÉON Il te tarde d'être grand, toi?

PAGE Oh oui, monsieur!

CRÉON Tu es fou, petit. Il faudrait ne jamais devenir grand.

[CREON Are you looking forward to growing up?

PAGE Oh yes!

CREON You're mad, boy. It'd be best never to grow up, either.]

The ancient pessimism, on which Sophocles draws in his play, held that it is best not to be born, or failing that, to die as soon as possible.²⁶ Anouilh's Creon here pays tribute to Antigone's variation on that theme, in which early death avoids the ugliness of growing old. Antigone, at the end, sees the force of Creon's argument, and Creon Antigone's. Perhaps both are right; perhaps neither is.

Antigone believed in her duty to her brother, but was talked out of that belief. In end she dies because, at some level, she has

26 See esp. Soph. *Ant.* 460-70, with (*in primis*) Thgn. 425-8, Bacchyl. 5.160-2, *Cert. Hom. Hes.* 73-4 Rzach, Soph. *OC* 1224-7, Eur. fr. 285.1-2 Kannicht (*Bellerophon*), fr. 908.1 Kannicht, Alexis fr. 145.14-6 K.-A., Arist. fr. 44 Rose (65 Gigon), *AP* 9.359.9-10 (= Posidippus 22 Gow-Page).

to, and because, at least at the crucial point at which her decision matters, she wants to. But by that stage her choice appears to have no positive motivation; it appears arbitrary or, as the Chorus had described it, gratuitous. In the end, she doubts it even as a refusal of the compromises of adulthood; and yet she conceals her doubts and goes through the motions, playing (as the Prologue/Chorus said she would), her part through to the end.²⁷ And thus her death seems pointless. As some in the Resistance pointed out at the time, *Antigone* is no Resistance heroine.²⁸ It seems, on the face of it, that Anouilh has composed a play in which there are no heroes or villains; the play itself, in fact, seems to suggest that to see the world in those terms is a device of bad drama or corrupt politics. There is purchase, too, for the view of Witt and Fleming that *Antigone's* gratuitous and allegedly 'beautiful' self-sacrifice, along with her rejection of conformity (saying yes, as Anouilh repeatedly terms it), compromise, and politics and her preference for the purity of childhood over the adult world of bourgeois happiness, chimes with themes that recur in the writings that represent what Witt calls 'aesthetic fascism'. But if this is the case, we should notice the extent to which this undercuts any interpretation which sees

²⁷ See Freeman, in Anouilh 2000: xlii.

²⁸ Cf. above, n. 5, and esp. Claude Roy's words, in *Les Lettres françaises* 14 (March 1944) 5-6 (quoted in Flügge 1982: 2.71-2 and in translation by Witt 2001: 228 and Fleming 2008: 178): "Et l'Antigone qu'on nous propose n'est pas *notre* Antigone, la seule, la vraie . . . A force de se complaire dans le 'désespoir' et le sentiment de la vanité de tout, de l'inanité et de l'absurdité du monde, on en vient à accepter, souhaiter, acclamer la première poigne venue . . . Quand Créon lui demande pourquoi en fin de compte, elle meurt, elle répond 'Pour moi.' Cette parole sonne lugubrement, dans le même temps où, sur tout le continent, dans le monde entier, des hommes et des femmes meurent, qui mourraient, à la question de Créon, répondre: 'Pour nous . . . pour les hommes.'" [The *Antigone* which [the play] offers us is not *our* Antigone, the only Antigone, the true Antigone . . . By accepting despair and the feeling of the vanity of everything, the inanity and absurdity of the world one ends up by acclaiming . . . the first strong arm that comes along . . . When Creon asks why she insists upon dying she replies, "For myself." This answer resounds morbidly at a time when, as all over Europe, indeed over the entire world, men and women are dying who could, to Creon's question, reply, "For ourselves . . . For mankind."]

in Anouilh's presentation of Creon a justification of or apology for Vichy collaboration. For the world that the supposedly 'fascist' Antigone rejects is a world that her very 'fascism' constructs as a shoddy and sordid one; and Creon is its representative.

Perhaps, however, the meaning of Anouilh's play is less determinate than this approach would suggest. If Antigone abandons her positive ideals, and in the end dies because the alternative, life, involves too many sordid compromises, Creon is the incarnation of those sordid compromises. Unlike Sophocles' Creon, he is given no grand opening speech in which he enunciates the positive civic ideals by which he proposes to govern. Instead, he is from his first entrance characterized by cynicism and driven by expediency, constrained throughout by the need to appease the mob. Thus his first impulse, on hearing of the burial of Polynices' body, is to cover it up (1946: 51-2 = 2000: 24-5), not, at this stage, out of any desire to spare his niece (for he does not yet know that she is the perpetrator), but as a matter of news management, to avoid any impression that resistance to his regime exists. If the news does get out, he threatens, the Guards will be put to death. Accordingly, his command, once the Guards have returned with Antigone in handcuffs, to have them held incommunicado until he has questioned Antigone (1946: 64 = 2000: 31), and his suggestion to Antigone (1946: 64-5 = 2000: 31), that as long as no one knows what she has done, they can simply forget about it, can be attributed to the same motive. His assurance that he will "get rid of those three men" ("Je ferai disparaître ces trois hommes", 1946: 65) if Antigone returns to her room and conceals what she has done is chilling.

The much-touted reasonableness of Creon's position, in the central scene with Antigone, also bears examination. His statement of his principles, such as it is, comes not, as in Sophocles' play, prior to the discovery of the burial, but here, in the *agôn*. Contrasting (in words which echo the second stasimon in Sophocles' original) his own situation with the Labdacids' "private confrontation with destiny and death" ("un tête-à-tête avec le destin et la mort"), he describes himself as "un prince sans histoire" (1946: 68 = "an ordinary king with no fuss", 2000: 33), and continues (1946: 68-9 = 2000: 33):

Moi, je m'appelle seulement Créon, Dieu merci. J'ai mes deux pieds par terre, mes deux mains enfoncées dans mes poches et, puisque je suis roi, j'ai résolu, avec moins d'ambition que ton père, de m'employer tout simplement à rendre l'ordre de ce monde un peu moins absurde, si c'est possible. Ce n'est même pas une aventure, c'est un métier pour tous les jours et pas toujours drôle, comme tous les métiers. Mais puisque je suis là pour le faire, je vais le faire . . .

[My name's only Creon, thank God. I've got both feet on the ground and both hands in my pockets. I'm not so ambitious as your father was, and all I am at now I'm king is to try to see the world's a bit more sensibly run. There's nothing very heroic about it – just an everyday job, and, like the rest of them, not always very amusing. But since that's what I'm here for, that's what I'm going to do.]

He then turns to Antigone, takes her gently by the arm, and, with affectionate, avuncular concern, repeats his suggestion that they forget all about what she has done (1946: 69 = 2000: 34):

Tu vas rentrer chez toi tout de suite, faire ce que je t'ai dit et te taire. Je me charge du silence des autres.

[No you go straight back to your room, do as I told you and say nothing. I'll see that everyone else keeps quiet.]

But Antigone sets off in the opposite direction, straight back to the body. Creon stops her (1946: 70-1 = 2000: 34):

Tu ne comprends donc pas que si quelqu'un d'autre que ces trois bêtes sait tout à l'heure ce que tu as tenté de faire, je serai obligé de te faire mourir? Si tu te tais maintenant, si tu renonces à cette folie, j'ai une chance de te sauver, mais je ne l'aurai plus dans cinq minutes. Le comprends-tu ?

[Don't you realise that if anyone other than those three louts gets to know what you've tried to do, I shall have to have you killed? If you'll only keep quiet now and give up this foolishness there's a chance I may be able to save you. But in five minutes time it will be too late. Do you understand?]

Creon may genuinely wish to save his niece; but he also wants to make sure that her action does not furnish a rallying-point for opponents of his regime. He asks (1946: 73 = 2000: 35):

Pourquoi fais-tu ce geste, alors? Pour les autres, pour ceux qui y croient? Pour les dresser contre moi?

[Why are you acting like this, then? To impress other people . . . ? To set them against me?]

Though putting Antigone to death would, as in Sophocles, be designed to demonstrate his power and authority, the fact that Creon would feel it necessary to do so only if Antigone's deed became public reveals the extent to which his power is circumscribed by popular opinion, represented throughout the play as the voice of the unruly mob – the mob that would jeer as Antigone and Ismene, like aristocrats during the French Revolution, ride in the tumbril to their execution (1946: 26-7 = 2000: 12), that surrounds the palace baying for Antigone's blood (1946: 102 = 2000: 50), finally breaking in just as Antigone is about to be led off to her death (1946: 106 = 2000: 52).

It was, we learn, propaganda, the need to keep the mob in line, that dictated the exposure of the corpse. Creon himself is as revolted by that act as anyone else; it is, he confides, “not only horrible, but also . . . abysmally stupid” (2000: 37-8 = “ignoble, et . . . monstrueusement bête”, 1946: 77):

mais il faut que tout Thèbes sente cela pendant quelque temps. Tu penses bien que je l'aurais fait enterrer, ton frère, ne fût-ce que pour l'hygiène! Mais pour que les bêtes que je gouverne comprennent, il faut que cela pue le cadavre de Polynice dans toute la ville, pendant un mois.

[But it's necessary that Thebes should smell the body for a while. I myself would have preferred to have your brother buried, just for reasons of hygiene. But to make those clods I govern understand what's what, the city has to stink of Polynices' corpse for a month.]

Antigone's response is apposite: “You're loathsome,” she observes (2000: 38 = “Vous êtes odieux!”, 1946: 77). Creon replies:

Oui, mon petit. C'est le métier qui le veut. Ce qu'on peut discuter, c'est s'il faut le faire ou ne pas le faire. Mais si on le fait, il faut le faire comme cela.

[Yes, child. It's my job. Whether that job should or shouldn't be done is a matter for discussion. But if it is done, it has to be done like this.]

This is a Creon who is wholly devoid of the principle that animates his Sophoclean predecessor. His only concern is to maintain a position on whose justification he himself is agnostic and whose demands include policies and procedures that he himself regards as cynical and abhorrent. This is what saying yes to political office, to just doing one's job, entails (1946: 78 = 2000: 38):

ANTIGONE Pourquoi le faites-vous?

CRÉON Un matin, je me suis réveillé roi de Thèbes. Et Dieu sait si j'aimais autre chose dans la vie que d'être puissant . . .

ANTIGONE Il fallait dire non, alors!

CRÉON Je le pouvais. Seulement, je me suis senti tout d'un coup comme un ouvrier qui refusait un ouvrage. Cela ne m'a pas paru honnête. J'ai dit oui.

[ANTIGONE Why do you have to do it?

CREON One morning I woke up King of Thebes. Though heaven knows there were things in life I loved better than power.

ANTIGONE Then you should have said no!

CREON I might have. But suddenly I felt like a workman refusing a job. It didn't seem right. I said yes.]

As in Sophocles' play, Creon's strength or weakness as a leader is a central issue. Though Antigone began by making religion as well as kinship a reason for action (1946: 65-6 = 2000: 31-2) she soon agrees with Creon that "mass-produced mumbo-jumbo" about the ghost's need for funeral rites is "ridiculous" (2000: 35).²⁹ She is defying Creon not for other people, not even for her

29 1946: 72: "CRÉON Et tu risques la mort maintenant parce que j'ai refusé à ton frère ce passeport dérisoire, ce bredouillage en série sur sa dépouille, cette pantomime . . . C'est absurde! / ANTIGONE Oui, c'est absurde".

brother, but for “No one. Myself” (2000: 35).³⁰ Though she doubts her ability to “be brave for ever”,³¹ she is determined to resist his attempts to save her. It is this that will demonstrate the limits of royal power (2000: 36): “You’re the king – you can do anything . . . But not that.”³² It is at this point that Creon, who had previously taken Antigone’s arm in a gesture of avuncular concern (1946: 75 = 2000: 33), begins to twist her arm aggressively, playing “the villain’s part” to her “heroine”, presenting himself as “the strong one” whose turn it is “to take advantage” (1946: 74 = 2000: 36), yet still stressing his clemency and patience (1946: 75 = 2000: 37). But to no avail: “You’re twisting too hard now,” says Antigone. “It doesn’t even hurt”. Creon relaxes his grip.³³ The iron fist and the velvet glove are both visible, their purpose to preserve Creon’s position and demonstrate his strength, to obtain victory in a contest between a king and a girl.

Creon persists in his project, trying to save Antigone while explaining his own position in terms of the exigencies of office, the consequences of saying yes (1946: 76-9 = 2000: 37-8). But Antigone has no concern for his politics (1946: 78 = 2000: 38):

Eh bien, tant pis pour vous. Moi, je n’ai pas dit “oui”! Qu’est-ce que vous voulez que cela me fasse, à moi, votre politique, votre nécessité, vos pauvres histoires? Moi, je peux dire “non” encore à tout ce que je n’aime pas et je suis seul juge. Et vous, avec votre couronne, avec vos gardes, avec votre attirail, vous pouvez seulement me faire mourir parce que vous avez dit “oui”.

30 “Pour personne. Pour moi” (1946: 73), the statement that so infuriated Claude Roy: cf. nn. 5, 28 above.

31 “Je n’aurai pas du courage éternellement, c’est vrai” (1946: 73).

32 “Vous êtes le roi, vous pouvez tout, mais cela, vous ne le pouvez pas” (1946: 74).

33 “CRÉON J’ai le mauvais rôle, c’est entendu, et tu as le bon. . . . Moi, je suis le plus fort comme cela, j’en profite aussi. . . . Cela ne te semble pas drôle, tout de même, ce roi bafoué qui t’écoute, ce vieux homme qui peut tout et qui en a vu tuer d’autres, je t’assure, et d’aussi attendrissants que toi, et qui est là, à se donner toute cette peine pour essayer de t’empêcher de mourir? . . . / ANTIGONE (*après un temps*). Vous serrez trop, maintenant. Cela ne me fait même plus mal. Je n’ai plus de bras. / CRÉON *la regarde et la lâche avec un petit sourire . . .*”

[That's your look-out! I didn't say yes! What do I care about your politics and what you "have" to do and all your paltry affairs. I can still say no to anything I don't like, and I alone am the judge. You, with your crown and your guards and your paraphernalia – all you can do, because you said yes, is have me put to death.]

The death sentence will demonstrate not Creon's strength, but his weakness, not his power, but its limits. Antigone, though fated to die, is free; Creon is not.

Creon is, as Antigone continues, afraid (1946: 79 = 2000: 38–9):

ANTIGONE Non. Je vous fais peur. C'est pour cela que vous essayez de me sauver. Ce serait tout de même plus commode de garder une petite Antigone vivante et muette dans ce palais. Vous êtes trop sensible pour faire un bon tyran, voilà tout. Mais vous allez tout de même me faire mourir tout à l'heure, vous le savez, et c'est pour cela que vous avez peur. C'est laid un homme qui a peur.

CRÉON (*sourdement*) Eh bien, oui, j'ai peur d'être obligé de te faire tuer si tu t'obstines. Et je ne le voudrais pas.

[ANTIGONE You're not amused – you're afraid. That's why you're trying to save me. It would suit you best to keep me here in the palace, alive but silent. You're too sensitive to be a tyrant.³⁴ But just the same, as you know very well, you're going to have to have me put to death presently. And that's why you're afraid. Not a pretty sight, a man who's afraid.

CREON (*dully*) All right – I am afraid. Afraid you won't change your mind and I'll have to have you killed. And I don't want to.]

But though Antigone does not have to do what she does not want to do, Creon does. This is "what it means to be a king" (2000: 39).³⁵ Creon now accepts his subordinate role, and appeals not only to Antigone's pity, but to her "understanding" (*comprendre*): he is in a difficult position trying to steer the ship of state (the Sophoclean metaphor is developed satirically in unSophoclean detail, 1946: 81–2 = 2000: 39–40). He goes on (*ibid.*):

34 The line recalls the Euripidean Creon's self-assessment at *Medea* 348–9. Anouilh composed a *Medée* in 1946, first produced onstage in 1953.

35 "Et c'est cela, être roi!" (1946: 80).

Crois-tu, alors, qu'on a le temps de faire le raffiné, de savoir s'il faut dire "oui" ou "non", de se demander s'il ne faudra pas payer trop cher un jour et si on pourra encore être un homme après? On prend le bout de bois, on redresse devant la montagne d'eau, on gueule un ordre et on tire dans le tas, sur le premier qui s'avance. Dans le tas! Cela n'a pas de nom. C'est comme la vague qui vient de s'abattre sur le pont devant vous; le vent qui vous gifle, et la chose qui tombe dans le groupe n'a pas de nom. C'était peut-être celui qui t'avait donné du feu en souriant la veille. Il n'a plus de nom. Et toi non plus, tu n'as plus de nom, cramponné à la barre. Il n'y a plus que le bateau qui ait un nom et la tempête. Est-ce que tu le comprends, cela?

ANTIGONE (*secoue la tête*) Je ne veux pas comprendre. C'est bon pour vous. Moi je suis là pour autre chose que pour comprendre. Je suis là pour vous dire non et pour mourir.

CRÉON C'est facile de dire non!

ANTIGONE Pas toujours.

[And do you really think this is the moment for fine distinctions? Do you think there's time to debate whether you say yes or no, to wonder whether some day the price isn't going to be too high, whether afterwards you're going to be able to call yourself a man again? No! You grab the tiller, you stand up in the mountains of water, you shout an order – and if you're attacked you shoot the first comer. The first comer! He hasn't got a name. He's like the wave that's just broken over the deck, like the wind tearing at your limbs. He may be the man who smiled at you and gave you a light yesterday. He hasn't got a name any more. And neither have you, as you hang on desperately to the tiller. The only things that have got a name now are the ship and the storm. Do you understand?

ANTIGONE (*shaking her head*) I don't want to. It's all very well for you, but I'm not here to understand. I'm here to say no to you, and to die.

CREON It's easy to say no!

ANTIGONE Not always.]

'Understanding' is all very well – very reasonable, very adult. At one level, Antigone's refusal to understand exhibits the childish petulance that is an undeniable element of her characterization.

Yet 'understanding' also entails condoning Creon's subjection of all values to the survival of the state, even if the cost is too high, even if it means being prepared to "shoot the first comer", to deny that person a name, to give up one's own name, all in the name of the state. Thus when Antigone ultimately decides on death because she (again, petulantly and childishly) rejects Creon's brand of bourgeois contentment, this also entails rejection of the cynical compromises that are contentment's cost (1946: 92 = 2000: 46):

Quel sera-t-il, mon bonheur? Quelle femme heureuse deviendra-t-elle, la petite Antigone? Quelles pauvretés faudra-t-il qu'elle fasse elle aussi, jour par jour, pour arracher avec ses dents son petit lambeau de bonheur? Dites, à qui devra-t-elle mentir, à qui sourire, à qui se vendre? Qui devra-t-elle laisser mourir en détournant le regard?

[What kind of happy woman will Antigone grow into? What base things will she have to do, day after day, in order to snatch her own little scrap of happiness? Tell me – who will she have to lie to? Smile at? Sell herself to? Who will she have to avert her eyes from, and leave to die?]

Creon, in Antigone's eyes, is now as helpless as he was when he was fifteen (1946: 94 = 2000: 46); he and his ilk are ugly, like cooks or scullions (1946: 96-7 = 2000: 47-8). It is she who now gives the orders, commanding him to open the doors and let everyone hear her defiance (1946: 97 = 2000: 48).

There are those who argue that it is Creon who wins the contest with Antigone, Creon who comes off best in the play over all.³⁶ True, he does undermine Antigone's reasons for resistance, so that her death may appear arbitrary, gratuitous. True, Antigone doubts her decision at the very last moment. But Creon himself recognizes that his attempt to save Antigone was a trial of strength, and he lost (1946: 100 = 2000: 49):

C'est elle qui voulait mourir. Aucun de nous n'était assez fort pour la décider à vivre. Je le comprends maintenant, Antigone était faite pour être morte. Elle-même ne le savait peut-être pas, mais

36 See Steiner 1984: 193-4; cf. and contrast Witt 2001: 218, 226-7.

Polynice n'était qu'un prétexte. Quand elle a dû y renoncer, elle a trouvé autre chose tout de suite. Ce qui importait pour elle, c'était de refuser et de mourir.

[It was her choice. She wanted to die! None of us was strong enough to persuade her to live. I understand now. She was born to die. She may not have known it herself, but Polynices was only an excuse. And when that excuse wouldn't work any more she chose another. All that mattered to her was to refuse everything and to die.]

And Creon understands what this means. Though the Chorus, in the speech that closes the play, believes that “those who are still alive are quietly beginning to forget [the dead] and get their names mixed up” (2000: 60-1),³⁷ this is contradicted by much that has gone before. Creon knows that Antigone's defiance, if he cannot prevent it, will live on. Hence he wants her to know “what a squalid story it is [she's] going to put [her] poor little bloodstained name to – for ever” (2000: 41).³⁸ Thus the Chorus begs Creon not to let her die – “We'll all bear the scar for thousands of years!”³⁹ Though Creon ends the *agôn* as he began it, trying to stifle all word of Antigone's rebellion, the cat is out of the bag – Ismene bursts in and, as in Sophocles, declares her determination to share her sister's fate (1946: 97 = 2000: 48). Unlike in Sophocles, however, she meets Antigone's reproaches with a promise to complete what Antigone has done – “All right, Antigone – all right! I'll go tomorrow!”⁴⁰

Antigone is triumphant (1946: 98 = 2000: 49):

Tu l'entends, Créon? Elle aussi. Qui sait si cela ne va pas prendre à d'autres encore, en m'écoulant? Qu'est-ce que tu attends pour me faire taire, qu'est-ce que tu attends pour appeler tes gardes? Allons, Créon, un peu de courage, ce n'est qu'un mauvais moment à passer. Allons, cuisinier, puisqu'il le faut!

37 “Et ceux qui vivent encore vont commencer tout doucement à les oublier et à confondre leurs noms” (1946: 123).

38 “Tu sais au bas de quelle histoire sordide tu vas signer pour toujours ton petit nom sanglant?” (1946: 84).

39 “Nous allons tous porter cette plaie au côté, pendant des siècles” (1946: 100 = 2000: 49).

40 “Eh bien, j'irai demain!” (1946: 98 = 2000: 49).

[Hear that, Creon? Her too! And how do you know it won't spread to others when they hear me? What are you waiting for? Why don't you call your guards to silence me? Come on now, Creon, be brave – it won't take long! Come on, scullion! You have no choice – get it over with!]

However motiveless and arbitrary Antigone's opposition may be, the mere possibility of opposition that cannot be silenced or coerced into conformity demonstrates to all the weakness of power. Antigone forces Creon to acknowledge this, publicly, and thus to confess the limits of his power even as he uses it to make an example of her. This is her victory, and Creon's defeat, for a ruler whose entire conduct in office is determined by the need to control how things appear to the public, is substantial. Though in Creon's world – and perhaps in the world of the play in general – there are no heroes, this is, in effect, what Antigone will become, just by saying no in a world where everyone else says yes.

Neither Sophoclean tragedy nor Anouilh's version have much time for "lousy hope" (1946: 54, 95 = 2000: 26, 47).⁴¹ It is the absence of "le sale espoir" that makes tragedy, "pointless" and "gratuitous" as it is, "restful" (1946: 54-5; 2000: 26); "it would have been nice and peaceful for us all without" Antigone (2000: 60). "But now it's over. It's nice and peaceful anyway." All those who had to die are dead: "quite stiff, quite useless, quite rotten". The living forget; "Only the guards are left. All that has happened is a matter of indifference to them. None of their business. They go on with their game of cards" (2000: 61).⁴² But though Antigone's 'no' is stripped of its idealism, offers no positive programme, and risks falling into oblivion against a background of indifference, nevertheless it serves as a reminder of the limits of the ruler's power to

41 On the theme of hope in Soph. *Ant.*, see Cairns 2016: 63-4, 66-7, 84, 170-1nn18, 27, 33, 174n73.

42 "Sans la petite Antigone, c'est vrai, ils auraient tous été bien tranquilles. Mais maintenant, c'est fini. Ils sont tout de même tranquilles. Tous ceux qui avaient à mourir sont morts. . . . Morts pareils, tous; bien raides, bien inutiles, bien pourris. . . . Il ne reste plus que les gardes. Eux, tout ça, cela leur est égal; c'est pas leurs oignons. Ils continuent à jouer aux cartes. . . ." (1946: 122-3).

coerce. However it may be motivated, the very ability to say no is what the powerful fear; and surely the world of Creon – of compromises and conformity, but also of lies, violence, and casual brutality – is one to which one should say no. Antigone shows that there is always a way to resist and the extent to which even (apparently) futile resistance undermines the powerful.⁴³ Creon is not, therefore, given the positive portrayal identified by some commentators, both at the time and more recently.⁴⁴ An unequivocally collaborationist reading is as impossible as an unequivocally pro-Resistance one. And if Antigone's stance can be seen in the context of 'aesthetic fascism', there is in the play precious little comfort for actual fascism as a historical political movement. Creon's doctrine that the state comes first is shown to be cynical and amoral, since there is no price too high for the maintenance of order, and futile, since it serves no positive end. Both Creon's on-stage violence and the reported, offstage violence of Eteocles are presented as repugnant.

Those who serve such leaders, in the person of the boorish and callous Guards, offer the standard excuse (just obeying orders, 1946: 48, 55 = 2000: 22, 27), in all its standard inadequacy. The

43 Similar interpretations suggested themselves to pro-Resistance commentators in occupied France: see the recollections of Béatrix Dussane (*Notes de théâtre 1940–1950*, Paris: Lardanchet, 1951, 1.251), cited (in a translation by H. Hobson, *The French Theatre of Today: An English View*, London: Harrap, 1953, 45) in Witt 2001: 221n71: "Antigone's refusal became the symbol and the sublimation of the personal refusals of all and every one . . . This is by no means imagination. I felt like that myself when I saw the play, and others have confessed to the same experience." Cf. the post-liberation response (*L'Homme libre* 29 September 1944) cited by Witt 2001: 228.

44 See e.g. the review by Charles Méré in *Aujourd'hui*, 26-7 February 1944 (Flügge 1982: 2.57, quoted in English by Freeman in Anouilh 2000: xlvi), which paints Antigone as a "degenerate, unintelligent madwoman whose revolt produces only anarchy, disaster and death" ("l'inintelligente Antigone fait figure de demi-folle, de dégénérée . . . C'est la révoltée, l'anarchiste, génératrice de désordre, de désastre, de mort . . .") and Creon as the "real hero . . . the just ruler, a slave to his duty who sacrifices everything that is dear to him for the sake of his country" ("le héros, c'est au contraire Créon, le roi juste, esclave de son devoir et qui doit aux intérêts de sa patrie sacrifier, ses affections les plus chères"). For modern views, cf. n. 9 above.

Chorus/Prologue figure, who highlights their indifference to suffering at the play's close, characterizes them ironically at the beginning as "les auxiliaires toujours innocents et toujours satisfaits d'eux-mêmes, de la justice" (1946: 12; "agents – eternally innocent, eternally complacent – of justice", 2000: 5):

Pour le moment, jusqu'à ce qu'un nouveau chef de Thèbes dûment mandaté leur ordonne de l'arrêter à son tour, ce sont les auxiliaires de la justice de Créon.

[For the time being the justice they serve is the justice of Creon . . . until the day comes when Thebes designates Creon's successor, and they are ordered to arrest Creon himself.]

Just possibly, Anouilh here envisages the overthrow of the Vichy government. Perhaps, too, the mob that swarms the palace demanding the traitor's death is already conceived of as the mob that will clamour for the execution of traitors once the regime that Creon represents is overthrown. If, in that situation, Robert Brasillach is the Antigone-figure, the Antigones of the previous regime were different.

Consideration of these issues does not exhaust the richness of Anouilh's drama. Concentration on the political implications of Antigone's stance, in particular, risks obscuring the extent to which there is a genuine and recurrent tragedy of the everyday, one that has implications for all of us, in the play's emphasis on the brutality of the family, the mundanity of adult life, the sell-outs and compromises that come with it, the son's inevitable disillusionment with his father (1946: 103-4 = 2000: 51-2). Antigone's disgust at the thought of growing old, at the thought of Haemon turning out like his father, belongs with her depiction as a recognizable type – twenty years old, undernourished, undeveloped, dressed in black. Her refusal of adulthood takes on a particular societal and psychological character. In persisting with her rebellion, even though she has, in the end, no cause, she is the archetype of all the terrible Antigone-as-teenager productions that many of us have had to sit through.⁴⁵ The play's historical context

⁴⁵ "Do we", asks the writer of the programme notes to a production by TAG Theatre Company at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in 2000, "think of

gives these themes a hard political edge; but their bleak, nihilistic view of the world implicates even those who live in happier times. Most of us trade our youthful ideals for bourgeois contentment; we achieve ‘understanding’ and say ‘yes’ to compromise. This a “mortal wound” that we all share.⁴⁶ Though it is perhaps the historical circumstances of its genesis and the controversial nature of its reception that gives Anouilh’s play its prominence in the reception-history of *Antigone*, the play itself is of enormous interest for the audacity and skill with which it transforms and reconfigures the plot, as well as a very large number of motifs and themes, both major and minor, of Sophocles’ original. Along with *The Island*, by Athole Fugard, John Kanu, and Winston Ntshona, it must rank as one of the most thought-provoking and interesting of twentieth-century adaptations.

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Harry Enfield’s character, Kevin the teenager, and discover the timelessness of the teenage strop?”

46 1946: 105-6 = 2000: 52: “LE CHŒUR Il est parti, touché à mort. / CRÉON Oui, nous sommes tous touchés à mort. / CHORUS Haemon’s wounded, mortally. / CREON We all are.”

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