

**ANTIGONE**  
by Jean Anouilh  
translated by Alexander Szogyi  
Antigone (18) - Ismene (17)

**The Play:** Jean Anouilh's retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone* (the second tragedy in the Oedipus Cycle) was motivated by the Nazi occupation of Paris during World War II. The parallels between the tyranny of Hitler's rule and that of Creon's Thebes are at once evident. Eteocles and Polyneices, the sons of the late Theban King Oedipus, and the brothers of Antigone and Ismene, have recently killed one another in a civil war to gain control of Thebes. Their uncle Creon has become King. Creon has decreed that Polyneices, whom he believes provoked the war, be left unburied—his spirit left to roam eternally. Antigone considers this edict a sacrilege and defies her uncle by covering her brother's body with earth. When Creon learns of the deed, he is unyielding, and condemns his niece to be buried alive. This act brings about the suicide of Creon's son, Hemon (Antigone's fiance), and Creon's wife, Eurydice. Creon is left to face the tribulations of life alone. Ultimately *Antigone* explores questions concerning human responsibility to family, government and personal honor.

**The Scene:** Antigone has risen early and gone to bury her brother. She has now returned to her rooms, where she is confronted by her sister, Ismene.

**Special Note:** A comparison of Alex Szogyi's translation of Anouilh's *Antigone* with Lewis Galantiere's version and Sophocles' Oedipus Cycle may prove helpful to a full exploration of the text.

**ANTIGONE**

*(Enter Ismene.)*

ISMENE: You're up already? I was just in your room.

ANTIGONE: Yes, I'm up already.

ISMENE: Are you sick?

ANTIGONE: It's nothing. A little fatigue. *(She smiles.)* It's because I got up too early.

ISMENE: I couldn't sleep either.

ANTIGONE *(still smiling)*: You must sleep. You'll be less beautiful tomorrow.

ISMENE: Don't make fun of me.

ANTIGONE: I'm not. It reassures me this morning that you're beautiful. When I was little, I was so unhappy, you remember? I got you all full of dirt, I put worms on your neck. Once, I tied you to a tree and I cut your hair, your beautiful hair... *(She caresses ISMENE's hair.)* How easy it must be not to think up mischief when you have such beautiful smooth hair, so beautifully arranged around your head!

ISMENE *(suddenly)*: Why have you changed the subject?

ANTIGONE *(softly, without ceasing to caress her hair)*: I haven't changed the subject...

ISMENE: You know, I've been thinking, Antigone.

ANTIGONE: Yes.

ISMENE: I've been thinking all night. You're crazy.

ANTIGONE: Yes.

ISMENE: We can't do it.

ANTIGONE *(after a silence, with her small voice)*: Why?

ISMENE: They would have us put to death.

ANTIGONE: Of course they would. To each his own role. *He* must put us to death and *we* must go and bury our brother. That's how the roles have been distributed. What can we do about it?

ISMENE: I don't want to die.

ANTIGONE *(sweetly)*: I, too, don't want to die.

ISMENE: Listen, I was thinking all night. I'm the older one. I think more than you do. You always give yourself up to the first thought to cross your mind, and so what if it's foolish. I'm more level-headed. I reflect.

## ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE: There are times when one musn't reflect too much.

ISMENE: Yes, Antigone. It's horrible, of course, and I have pity for my brother, but I think I understand our Uncle a little.

ANTIGONE: I don't wish to understand a little.

ISMENE: He is the King. He must set the example.

ANTIGONE: But I am not the King. And I don't have to set an example... The things that go on in that head of hers, little Antigone, such a dirty thing, such a stubborn girl, such a bad girl, you have to put her in a corner or down a hole. And that's all she deserves: All that was expected of her was not to disobey!

ISMENE: Now, come on! You're frowning, you're staring right into space and you're launched without listening to anybody. Listen to me. I'm right more often than you are.

ANTIGONE: I don't want to be right.

ISMENE: At least try to understand.

ANTIGONE: Understand... That's the only word you have in your mouth, all of you, ever since I was a little girl. You had to understand that you can't touch the water, the beautiful cold and fleeting water because it gets the flagstones wet, can't touch the earth because that stains dresses. You had to understand that you musn't eat everything at once, nor give everything in your pockets to the beggar you encounter, nor run, with the wind until you fall to the ground, nor drink when you're warm nor bathe either too early or too late, but just exactly when you don't want to! Understand. Always understand. I don't want to understand. I will understand when I am old. *(She finishes softly.)* If I become old. Not now.

ISMENE: He's stronger than we are, Antigone. He's the king. And the whole city thinks as he does. There are thousands and thousands around us, swarming through the streets of Thebes.

ANTIGONE: I'm not listening to you.

ISMENE: They will jeer at us. They'll seize us with their thousand arms, jeer at us with their thousand faces congealed into a single gaze. They will spit into our face. And in our open cart we'll have to move ahead surrounded by their hate, their zeal and their cruel laughter stalking us to our death. And there will be the guards with their

## ANTIGONE

imbecilic faces, looking congested over their stiff collars, their huge scrubbed hands, their cattle-like gaze—so that you think you can keep shouting forever, trying to make them understand, but they're like slaves and they will always do as they are told, scrupulously, without knowing whether it's for good or evil... Suffer? We'll have to suffer, feeling the pain mount, until it gets to the point when one can't bear it anymore; it will eventually have to stop, and yet it will continue and even increase, like a piercing scream... Oh I cannot, I cannot bear it...

ANTIGONE: How well you've thought everything out.

ISMENE: All night. Didn't you?

ANTIGONE: Yes, of course.

ISMENE: I'm not very brave, you know.

ANTIGONE *(softly)*: Nor I. But what does it matter?

*(A silence. ISMENE asks suddenly.)*

ISMENE: Don't you have any desire to live?

ANTIGONE *(a murmur)*: No desire to live... *(and softer yet, if that were possible)* Who got up first, in the morning, if only to feel the cold air on her skin? Who went to bed last, and only when she was so exhausted with fatigue, just to live a little more at night? Who cried when she was very young, thinking there were so many little animals, so many blades of grass in the meadow knowing you can't touch them all?

ISMENE *(with a sudden movement toward her)*: My little sister...

ANTIGONE *(pulls back and cries out)*: Oh no! Leave me alone! Let's not whine together now. You've thought it all out, you say? You think that the entire city howling at you, the pain and the fear of death are enough?

ISMENE *(lowers her head)*: Yes.

ANTIGONE: Take advantage of these pretexts.

ISMENE *(throwing herself at her)*: Antigone! I beg of you! It's for men to believe in ideas and to die for them. You are a girl.

ANTIGONE *(her teeth clenched)*: A girl, yes. Haven't I wept enough for being a girl!

ISMENE: Your happiness is right there ahead of you and you have only to take it. You are engaged, you're young, you're beautiful.

## ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE (*hollow sound*): No, I am not beautiful.

ISMENE: Not beautiful as we are, but in another way. You know perfectly well that it's you that all the little boys stare at in the street; that it's you the girls look at when you pass by, suddenly mute without being able to take their eyes off you until you've turned the corner.

ANTIGONE (*with a barely perceptible smile*): Little boys, little girls...

ISMENE (*after a moment*): And Hemon, Antigone?

ANTIGONE (*inaccessible*): I shall speak to Hemon in a little while; Hemon will be a settled matter in a little while.

ISMENE: You're mad.

ANTIGONE (*smiles*): You always told me I was mad, in everything, ever since I can remember. Go back to bed, Ismene... It's daylight now, you see, and, anyway, I can't do anything about it. My dead brother is now surrounded by guards exactly as if he had succeeded in becoming king. Go back to bed. You're still pale with fatigue.

ISMENE: And you?

ANTIGONE: I have no desire for sleep... But I promise you I won't move from here until you return. Nurse will bring me something to eat. Go and sleep some more. The sun is just rising. Your eyes are heavy with sleep. Go...

ISMENE: You will let me convince you, won't you? You'll let me talk to you again?

ANTIGONE (*a little tired*): I will let you speak to me, yes. I will let you all speak to me. Now go and sleep, please, or you'll be less beautiful tomorrow. (*She watches her leave with a sad little smile, then suddenly weary, she falls into a chair.*) Poor Ismene!...

## ASCENSION DAY by Timothy Mason Faith (18) - Charity (16)

**The Play:** Life often takes a turn when we are young that affects us forever. This theme is explored with an edge in Timothy Mason's short play set in a Lutheran Bible camp in Wisconsin, late in May, 1947. The story centers around nine teenagers spending a week at camp, strengthening their faith through testimonials, enriching the quality of their lives by study (everything from "nature tips" to lifesaving), and having time to spend with each other, sharing life experiences. If all of this seems expected church camp business, what is underneath this engrossing drama certainly isn't. In this seemingly tranquil environment, on the shores of a beautiful lake, loon song abounding, a series of moments compose a score that will not only change many lives, but will allow us the opportunity to reflect on the path our lives have taken. Written with economy, the issues are significant, the characters crystalline. The week is seen through the eyes of the young people. In fact, the adults at camp never appear—but are always a threatening presence. Specifically we follow the story of two sisters, Faith and Charity. Faith, the older of the two, is returning to camp—this year as a junior counselor. Last year at camp, her life began to change. Having been brought up in a strict home, overseen by a demanding, single-minded father, Faith found her experiences at camp exciting but disturbing. She met a boy, a boy who has returned this year. Faith struggles to handle the feelings in her heart, while at the same time, striving for perfection in the eyes of her parents, her sister, and herself. Her rigid instincts for right and wrong (influenced by her father) have driven away the boys and, during the course of the play, will sever the close bond that for years has held her and Charity together. Charity wants the freedom to explore a new-found excitement away from the watchful eye of her parents and resists Faith's firm governance. Perhaps seeing her own choices in Charity's actions, Faith drifts further away until the desperation demands action. A rekindled spark with Wesley, last year's boyfriend, ends in disaster. Those around her seem shallow, mindlessly content for the same kind of life that their parents live. Faith somehow demands more from life.