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Introduction

Join USC president C. L. Max Nikias for a performance on November 19th of Jean Anouilh's reimagining of *Antigone*. This adaptation of Sophocles' classic tragedy about morality in the face of immoral power dares us to choose between our personal values and those of the world in which we live. The performance will be followed by a conversation with President Nikias and director Robertson Dean. Jean Anouilh was one of France's most important writers in the decades following World War II, and *Antigone* is perhaps his best-known work. Produced under Nazi censorship and first performed in Paris in 1944, it has been widely interpreted as an allegory for the French resistance and the Nazi occupation. Anouilh's *Antigone* will be performed by *A Noise Within*, a Pasadena-based theatre company that promotes classical theatre as an essential means for our community to confront the universal human experience. One of drama's most compelling heroines, Antigone accepts her fate with fearless grace—and dares us all to rise to the greater good.



(1944 original production, Paris)

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Jean Anouilh

"Anouilh was born in Cérise, a small village on the outskirts of Bordeaux, and had Basque ancestry. His father, François Anouilh, was a tailor and Anouilh maintained that he inherited from him a pride in conscientious craftsmanship. He may owe his artistic bent to his mother, Marie-Magdeleine, a violinist who supplemented the family's meager income by playing summer seasons in the casino orchestra in the nearby seaside resort of Arcachon. Marie-Magdeleine worked the night shifts in the music-hall orchestras and sometimes accompanied stage presentations, affording Anouilh ample opportunity to absorb the dramatic performances from backstage. He often attended rehearsals and solicited the resident authors to let him read scripts until bedtime. He first tried his hand at playwriting here, at the age of 12, though his earliest works do not survive.

The family moved into Paris in 1918 where the young Anouilh received his secondary education at the Lycée Chaptal. Jean-Louis Barrault, later a major French director, was a pupil there at the same time and recalls Anouilh as an intense, rather dandified figure who hardly noticed a boy some two years younger than himself. He earned acceptance into the law school at the Sorbonne but, unable to support himself financially, he left after just 18 months to seek work as a copywriter at Publicité Damour. He liked the work and spoke more than once with wry approval of the lessons in the classical virtues of brevity and precision of language he learned while drafting advertising copy.

Anouilh's financial troubles continued after he was called up to military service in 1929. Supported by only his meager conscription salary Anouilh married the actress Monelle Valentin in 1931. Though she would go on to star in many of his plays, Anouilh's daughter Caroline (from his second marriage), claims that the marriage was not a happy one. Anouilh's youngest daughter Colombe even claims that there has never been an official marriage between Anouilh and Valentin. She allegedly had multiple extra-marital affairs, which caused Anouilh much pain and suffering. The infidelity weighed heavily on the dramatist as a result of the uncertainty about his own parentage. According to Caroline, Anouilh had learned his mother had had a lover at the theatre in Arcachon who was actually his biological father. In spite of this, Anouilh and Valentin had a daughter, Catherine, in 1934 who would follow the pair into theatre work at an early age. Anouilh's growing family placed further strain on his already limited finances. Determined to break into writing full-time, he began to write comic scenes for the cinema to supplement their income/

At the age of 25, Anouilh found work as a secretary to the French actor and director Louis Jouvet at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées. Though Anouilh's boss had happily lent him some of the set furniture left over from the production of Jean Giraudoux's play *Siegfried* to furnish his modest home, the director was not interested in encouraging his assistant's attempts at playwriting. Jouvet had risen to fame in the early 1930s through his collaborations with the playwright Giraudoux, and together the two worked to shift focus from the authorial voice of the director, (which had dominated the French stage since the early twentieth century) back to the playwright and his text.

Giraudoux was an inspiration to Anouilh and, with the encouragement of the acclaimed playwright, he began writing again in 1929. Before the end of the year he made his theatrical debut with *Humulus le muet*, a collaborative project with Jean Aurenche. It was followed by his first solo projects, *L'Hermine (The Ermine)* in 1932 and *Mandarine* in 1933, both produced by Aurélien Lugné-Poe, an innovative actor and stage manager who was then head of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre. Ruled by the philosophy, 'the word creates the decor,' Lugné-Poe let Anouilh's lyrical prose shine in front of a backdrop of simple compositions of line and color that created a unity of style and mood.

The plays were not great successes, closing after 37 and 13 performances respectively, but Anouilh persevered, following it up with a string of productions, most notably *Y'avait un prisonnier* (1935). These works, most in collaboration with the experimental Russian director Georges Pitoëff, were considered promising despite their lack of commercial profits, and the duo continued to work together until they had their first major success in 1937 with *Le voyageur sans bagage (Traveller Without Luggage)*. In subsequent years, there was rarely a season in Paris that did not prominently feature a new Anouilh play and many of these were also being exported to England and America. After 1938, however, much of Anouilh's later work was directed by the prominent Paris

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scenic designer André Barsacq, who had taken over as director of the Théâtre de l'Atelier after Charles Dullin's retirement in 1940. Barsacq was a champion for Anouilh and their affiliation was a major factor in the playwright's continued success after the war.

In the 1940s, Anouilh turned from contemporary tales to more mythical, classic, and historic subjects. With protagonists who asserted their independence from the fated past, themes during this period are more closely related to the existential concerns of such writers as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The most famous play of this group is *Antigone*, which established Anouilh as a leading dramatist, not only because of the power with which he drew the classic confrontation between the uncompromising Antigone and the politically expedient Creon, but also because French theatre-goers under the occupation read the play as a contemporary political parable. His post-war plays dealt with similar concerns and included *Roméo et Jeannette*, *Médée (Medea)*, and Anouilh's Joan of Arc story *L'Alouette (The Lark)*, which, in its distinct optimism, rivalled the commercial success of *Antigone*.

Anouilh himself grouped his plays of this period on the basis of their dominant tone, publishing his later works in collected volumes to reflect what he felt represented the phases of his evolution and loosely resembled the distinction between comedy and tragedy. *Pièces noires* or 'Black plays' were tragedies or realistic dramas and included *Antigone*, *Jézabel*, and *La Sauvage (The Restless Heart)*. This category typically featured 'young, idealistic, and uncompromising protagonists [who] are able to maintain their integrity only by choosing death.' By contrast, in Anouilh's *pièces roses* or 'pink plays' were comedies where fantasy dominated with an atmosphere similar to that of fairy tales. In these plays such as *Le Bal des voleurs (Carnival of Thieves)*, *Le Rendez-vous de Senlis (Dinner with the Family)* and *Léocadia (Time Remembered)*, the focus is on 'the burden of the environment and especially of the past on a protagonist seeking a happier, freer existence.'

Most of Anouilh's plays of the late 1940s and into the 1950s become darker and distinctly cruel and, in contrast with his earlier works, begin to feature middle-aged characters who must view life more practically than Anouilh's former idealistic youths. The playwright divided the works of this period into *pièces brillantes* ('brilliant plays') and *pièces grinçantes* ('grating plays'). The first group includes works such as *L'Invitation au château (Ring Round the Moon)* and *Colombe*, and are typified by aristocratic settings and witty banter. The grating plays like *La Valse des toréadors (Waltz of the Toreadors)* and *Le Réactionnaire amoureux (The Fighting Cock)* are more bitterly funny, trading clever word play for a darker tone of disillusionment.

Another category Anouilh specifies are his *pièces costumées* ('costume plays') which include *The Lark*, *La Foire d'Empoigne (Catch as Catch Can)*, and *Becket*, an international success, depicting the historical martyr Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury who sought to defend the church against the monarch (and his friend), Henry II of England, who had appointed him to his see. So classified because they share historical 'costumed' settings, Anouilh also specifies that these plays must also prominently feature an enlightened protagonist seeking 'a moral path in a world of corruption and manipulation.'

Anouilh's final period begins with *La Grotte (The Cavern)*, in which he comments on his own progress as a writer and a theatre artist. The central character is a playwright suffering from writers' block who in his frustration recalls the foibles of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Anouilh's work had always contained hints of metatheatricality, or commentary on the business of theatre within the world of the play, but in his late works these structures became more fully developed as he begins to write primarily about character who are dramatists or theatre directors. There is also a pronounced link, during this time, of Anouilh's emphasis of theatre and the family, displaying intimate relationships that are 'more profound and more important than the traditional heightened action of 'theatre'. Antoine, the playwright-protagonist of *Cher Antoine; ou, L'Amour raté (Dear Antoine; or, The Love That Failed)*, asserts that the world must take notice of these *pièces secrètes* (secret dramas) and Anouilh scholars have proposed this name, '*pièces secrètes*,' to classify the collected works of his latest period."



(Jean Anouilh)

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Visions and Voices: Antigone: The Plot

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The Plot

"The Chorus introduces the players. Antigone is the girl who will rise up alone and die young. Haemon, Antigone's dashing fiancé, chats with Ismene, her beautiful sister. Though one would have expected Haemon to go for Ismene, he inexplicably proposed to Antigone on the night of a ball. Creon is king of Thebes, bound to the duties of rule. Next to the sisters' sits the Nurse and Queen Eurydice. Eurydice will knit until the time comes for her to go to her room and die. Finally three Guards play cards, indifferent to the tragedy before them.

The Chorus recounts the events leading to Antigone's tragedy. Oedipus, Antigone and Ismene's father, had two sons, Eteocles and Polynices. Upon Oedipus' death, it was agreed that each would 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 marched on Thebes. All were defeated. The brothers killed each other in a duel, making Creon king. Creon ordered Eteocles buried in honor and left Polynices to rot on the pain of death.

It is dawn, and the house is still asleep. Antigone sneaks in and the Nurse appears and asks where she has been. Suddenly Ismene enters, also asking where Antigone has been. Antigone sends the Nurse away for coffee. Ismene declares that they cannot bury Polynices and that she must understand Creon's intentions. Antigone refuses and bids Ismene to go back to bed. Suddenly Haemon enters and Antigone asks Haemon to hold her with all his strength. She tells him that she will never be able to marry him. Stupefied, Haemon departs. Ismene returns, terrified that Antigone will attempt to bury Polynices despite the daylight. Antigone reveals that she has already done so.

Later that day, the nervous First Guard enters and informs Creon that someone covered Polynices's body with a little dirt last night. He orders the guards to uncover the body and keep the matter secret. The Chorus appears and announces that the tragedy is on. Its spring is wound, and it will uncoil by itself. Unlike melodrama, tragedy is clean, restful, and flawless. In tragedy, everything is inevitable, hopeless, and known. All are bound to their parts.

The Guards enter with the struggling Antigone. The First proposes that they throw a party. Creon appears, and the First explains that Antigone was found digging Polynices' grave by hand in broad daylight. Creon sends the guards out. Once he is certain no one saw Antigone arrested, he orders her to bed, telling her to say that she has been ill. Antigone replies that she will only go out again tonight. Creon asks if she thinks her being Oedipus's daughter puts her above the law. Like Oedipus, her death must seem the "natural climax" to her life. Creon, on the other hand, devotes himself only to the order of the kingdom. Antigone's marriage is worth more to Thebes than her death.

Antigone insists that he cannot save her. Enraged, Creon seizes her arm and twists her to his side. Antigone remarks that Creon is squeezing her arm too tightly, but his grasp no longer hurts. Creon releases her. He knows 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. While ruined, she is a queen. Because Creon said yes, he can only sentence her to death. Creon asks her to pity him then and live. Antigone replies that she is not here to understand, only to say no and die.

Creon makes a final appeal, saying that Antigone needs to understand what goes on in the wings of her drama. As a child, she must have known her brothers made her parents unhappy. Polynices was a cruel, vicious voluptuary. Being too cowardly to imprison him, Oedipus let him join the Argive army. As soon as Polynices reached Argos, the attempts on Oedipus' life began. But Eteocles, Thebes' martyr, too plotted to overthrow his father. Both were gangsters. When Creon sent for their bodies, they were found mashed together in a bloody pulp. He had the prettier one brought in.

Dazed, Antigone moves to go her room. Creon urges her to find Haemon and marry quickly. She must not waste her life and its happiness. Antigone challenges his servile happiness. She is of the tribe that asks questions and hates man's hope. A distraught Ismene rushes in, begging Antigone's forgiveness and promising to help her. Antigone rejects her, but she does not deserve to die with her. Ismene swears she will bury Polynices herself then. Antigone calls on Creon to have her arrested, warning him that her disease is catching. Creon relents. The

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Chorus protests. Haemon enters and begs his father to stop the guards. Creon replies that the mob already knows the truth, and he can do nothing.

Antigone sits before the First Guard in her cell; this is the last face she will see. The Guard rambles about his pay, rations, and professional quibbles. Antigone interrupts him, pointing out that she is soon to die. She asks how she is to be executed. The Guard informs her that she is to be immured. The Guard asks if he can do anything for her. She asks if he could give someone a letter, offering him her ring. Reluctant to endanger his job, the Guard suggests that she dictate her letter and he write it in his notebook in case they search his pockets. Antigone winces but accepts. She recites her letter, "Forgive me, my darling. You would all have been so happy except for Antigone." Suddenly a drum roll is heard, and the Guards lead Antigone out.

The Chorus enters, announcing that it is Creon's turn. The Messenger delivers the news: Antigone had just been immured, when the crowd heard Haemon's moan from within. Creon howled for the slaves to remove the stones. Antigone had hung herself. Haemon then stabbed himself and lay beside Antigone in a pool of blood. Upon being told of Haemon's death, Eurydice finished her row of knitting, climbed to her room, and cut her throat. Creon is alone. The Chorus notes that truly if it had not been for Antigone, all would have been at peace. All who had to die have now died. Only the Guards are left, and the tragedy does not matter to them."

--- SparkNotes



(Original production of *Antigone*--Paris, 1944)

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(Antigone--later French production)

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And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-occupied Paris

"On June 14, 1940, German tanks rolled into a silent and deserted Paris. Eight days later, a humbled France accepted defeat along with foreign occupation. The only consolation was that, while the swastika now flew over Paris, the City of Light was undamaged. Soon, a peculiar kind of normality returned as theaters, opera houses, movie theaters and nightclubs reopened for business. This suited both conquerors and vanquished: the Germans wanted Parisians to be distracted, while the French could show that, culturally at least, they had not been defeated. Over the next four years, the artistic life of Paris flourished with as much verve as in peacetime. Only a handful of writers and intellectuals asked if this was an appropriate response to the horrors of a world war. Alan Riding introduces us to a panoply of writers, painters, composers, actors and dancers who kept working throughout the occupation. Maurice Chevalier and Édith Piaf sang before French and German audiences. Pablo Picasso, whose art was officially banned, continued to paint in his Left Bank apartment. More than two hundred new French films were made, including Marcel Carné's classic, *Les Enfants du paradis*. Thousands of books were published by authors as different as the virulent anti-Semite Céline and the anti-Nazis Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Meanwhile, as Jewish performers and creators were being forced to flee or, as was Irène Némirovsky, deported to death camps, a small number of artists and intellectuals joined the resistance..."

Antigone

"Jean Anouilh, one of the foremost French playwrights of the twentieth century, replaced the mundane realist works of the previous era with his innovative dramas, which exploit fantasy, tragic passion, scenic poetry and cosmic leaps in time and space. *Antigone*, his best-known play, was performed in 1944 in Nazi-controlled Paris and provoked fierce controversy. In his allegorical tale, Antigone defies the tyrant Creon and is sent to her death. *Antigone* conveyed to Anouilh's compatriots a covert message of heroic resistance to Nazi occupation; but the author's characterisation of Creon also seemed to exonerate Marshal Petain and his fellow collaborators. More ambivalent than his ancient model, Sophocles, Anouilh uses Greek myth to explore the disturbing moral dilemmas of our times."

Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage

"...is the first book to analyse what happens to Sophocles' play as it is adapted and (re)produced around the world, and the first to focus specifically on *Antigone* in performance. The essays, by an international gathering of noted scholars from a wide range of disciplines, highlight the numerous ways in which social, political, historical, and cultural contexts transform the material, how artists and audiences in diverse societies including Argentina, The Congo, Finland, Haiti, India, Japan, and the United States interact with it, and the variety of issues it has been used to address."

Jean Anouilh, Life, Work, and Criticism

"A biography of the great French playwright and an analysis of his major works."

Paris in the Third Reich: A History of the German Occupation, 1940-1944

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The World of Jean Anouilh

"The high comedy of Jean Anouilh has found a large and enthusiastic public over the past few years both in England and the United States. Oddly, despite critical and popular acclaim, there has been no full-length treatment of Anouilh in English since 1953, when his audiences outside France were small. This present work is the only comprehensive examination of this brilliant dramatist and his art which has been addressed to his new audiences in this country. Mr. Pronko's aim has been to write a self-contained introduction to Anouilh for the non-specialist. Avoiding critical pronouncements, he presents all of the plays of Anouilh in the form of interpretation and summary. His discussion of the playwright's chief dramatic ideas and of his purposes and development is not only admirably thorough and direct, but also makes lively reading..."



(2009 French production)

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Antigone

"A filmed play adaptation from the Jean Anouilh reinterpretation of the Sophocles tragedy. First written and produced during the Nazi Occupation, this play about a young woman facing a morally corrupt world raises powerful questions of human interaction in regard to collaboration, responsibility and personal integrity."

Becket

"Henry II surprises England by naming his fellow rogue and trusted confidant Thomas Becket as Chancellor. But when Henry next appoints him Archbishop of Canterbury, Becket shocks the world by openly defying the King with his newfound faith and compassion. Will a desperate ruler now destroy a beloved friend to save his splintering kingdom? "

You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet

"Based on two works by the playwright Jean Anouilh, this film opens with a who's-who of French acting royalty being summoned to the reading of a late playwright's last will and testament. This is an alternately wry and wistful valentine to actors and the art of performance from a director long fascinated by the intersection of life, theater and cinema."



(Genevieve Bujold as Antigone)

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