

Historical and social contexts have an influence on they way in which antigone is...



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"Antigone", by Jean Anouilh, is a political allegory written during the Nazi occupation of France in the early 1940's. The play served as a way for Anouilh to subtly persuade the people of France to rebel against the Nazi regime and state power. At the time, when "Antigone" was first performed, the French Resistance worked somewhat ineffectively in cells, and Anouilh's purpose was to critique this method and advise the French Resistance to unite and persist as one unit. However, to do so, the play needed to be performed without being seen as a breach against the Nazi party, so Anouilh embedded his intention within the play and relied on the intellects of France to interpret his discrete message. The historical and social contexts at the time of which "Antigone" was written impacted directly upon how Anouilh chose to write his play in terms of characterization and setting.

In Anouilh's "Antigone", the historical and social contexts influence the way that the protagonist and antagonist are characterized. Antigone, the titular character, is characterized to be petulant, stubborn, and immature. In contrast, the king and leader of Thebes, Creon is characterized as logical and pragmatic, and is portrayed with many characteristics that are heroic rather than villainous. He repeatedly attempts to save Antigone from killing herself, and he selflessly steps up to rule Thebes against his will. Creon's characterization is able to garner sympathy from the audience, causing them to side more often with Creon rather than Antigone. However, by naming the play "Antigone" and not "Creon" Anouilh is able to prompt the audience to pay attention to Antigone's actions and subtly express his support for the overarching concept of rebellion that she represents.

The negative characterization of Antigone, rebelling against state power alone, ensures that the Nazi occupation in France does not view the play as propaganda for a revolution. Doing so, Anouilh is also able to convey his critique by portraying his disapproval of the cell method through characterizing Antigone as immature and illogical. In the play, Antigone attempts to go against state laws and bury her brother with a toy shovel. The anachronism of the toy shovel symbolizes the childish nature of Antigone and lack of thought in the process. She claims, " I owed it to him" as a justification for her doing, however, she does not justify the usage of a toy shovel. The toy shovel was the method that Antigone chose to rebel with, and it is parallel to the cell method that the French Resistance chose to implement. Anouilh is thus able to convey Antigone's lack of forethought by adding in a toy shovel and therefore criticizes the cell method and highlights its unsuitability.

Not only does the historical and social contexts affect the way in which characters in the plays are portrayed but they also affect the place in which " Antigone" is set. In order to remain discrete and non-specific to France, Anouilh chose to set " Antigone" in the city of Thebes, an ancient city that no longer exists. This adds ambiguity and universality to the play. With a play that is set in a place that does not exist, the setting is equally relatable to all audience members. It does not take away from the play and allows the audience to focus on Anouilh's message. Such a universal and timeless setting also ensures that the audience do not suspect " Antigone" to be based on the occupation situation in France at that time, especially as the play involves politics, and would therefore provoke less suspicion from the

Nazis. Additionally, having the same setting as the original Sophocles' version adds a more justifiable reason for the inclusion of uprising and disobedience against power. This is all to prevent the Nazi regime from banning the play from performance.

Without the historical and social contexts of “ Antigone”, the audience would not have known to look into the subtleties of each character, event, and setting. The characters within the play were directly parallel to the contexts of France at the time and their interactions helped to convey Anouilh's critique and purpose. The setting of “ Antigone” was universal and general, due to the circumstances of when the play was written. Understanding the context gives the audience an understanding of the intricacies of the play and allows them to comprehend Anouilh's purpose. Without the context of the time, Anouilh would have no necessity to write such a play, a play that was fundamentally created to critique the society of France, and their politics at the time.