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Mythologising: Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*

Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* has long provoked discussion and controversy. In many ways it can be seen as a paradigmatic encounter between classicism and the politics of the twentieth century. First performed in the final year of the Occupation, Anouilh's *Antigone* goes to the very heart of the debate about the appropriation of classics in the ideological battles of the Second World War. My paper will explore the consequences of reading the *Antigone* for a greater understanding of the role of classics in WWII.

As Steiner has shown in *Antigones* (1984), the *Antigone* story has stood as a figurehead for the meaning of Greek culture in the development of European thought and society. Anouilh's *Antigone* follows in the footsteps of this tradition. Written and produced at such an important historical moment it provides an excellent model of how antiquity and modernity meet and of the complicated and diverse nature of the dynamics of appropriation, which, I will show, are never straightforward or easily determined.

The play's production produced a storm of controversy and responses in both the resistance and collaborationist press. My paper will discuss these reviews and reveal how the interpretation of this piece mattered, as it became entangled in the wider ideological battles over resistance and collaboration. *Antigone* was understood (by all sides) both as a play sympathetic to the Vichy regime and the Occupation powers, and as one condemning them and actively portraying resistance.

However, as I will indicate, after the war, particularly in English-speaking countries Anouilh's *Antigone* was understood as a play allegorising the heroic resistance of the French to the German Occupation. It became an important French cultural and political export.

My paper acts as a reply to Manfred Flüge whose work responded to this post-war reading (*Verweigerung oder Neue Ordnung: Jean Anouilhs 'Antigone' im politischen und ideologischen Kontext der Besatzungszeit 1940-1944* (1982)). In this thesis Flüge explodes the ubiquitous post-war understanding of the play as signifying resistance.

Whilst Flüge's exhaustive historical research is beyond doubt and his conclusions are compelling, I will suggest that his approach illustrates precisely what is at stake in any narrative of reception and appropriation. Flüge's narrative is just as much a claiming of meaning and determination (even dictation) of understanding as Anouilh's original appropriation. It is precisely this kind of difficulty that any study of the reception of antiquity must seek to tackle head on.