

Jean Anouilh



A Charade with Music

Adapted by Christopher Fry

A Playgoer's Guide

Anouilh's plays are recorded improvisations -- he is a poet of words acted, and of scenes set, of players performing – Peter Brook, director of the first productions

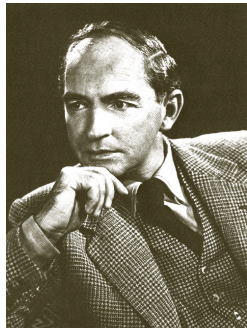


Jean Anouilh

Jean Anouilh was born on June 23rd, 1910, in the small village of C risole, France to parents of Basque heritage. His father was a tailor and his mother, a violinist. Anouilh became interested in drama at a young age and began his playwriting career at the age of 12. Anouilh received his secondary education at the Coll ge Chaptal and later enrolled as a law student in the University of Paris, only to abandon the course after just eighteen months when he found employment in the advertising industry. It was in advertising, through drafting copy, that Anouilh discovered the importance of the brevity and precision of language; he put the discovery to use when, at 25, he chose to devote himself entirely to writing. In addition to many successful plays, he also wrote ballets and translated and adapted works from such authors as Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. Many of his works deal with moral choices and the limitations imposed upon his characters. Anouilh's work reflects the classical theatre of Moli re in its comic portrayal of human folly and misery and the experimental theatre of Pirandello in its overt use of theatrical devices to explore the nature of reality and illusion.

A note on “adaptation” and “translation”

Ring Round the Moon is often considered an *adaptation* rather than a *translation*. When Christopher Fry adapted it for Peter Brooks' 1950 London production, he made several changes to the script. Fry softened some of the edges of the original, for example cutting out all Anouilh's allusions to anti-Semitism, and also pushed the comedy up a notch, both in language and action. It is possible that he did so to make it more palatable to weary post-war London audiences. The explanation Fry gives for the adaptation of the title from *L'Invitation au Chateau* to *Ring Round the Moon* is: “to see a ring round the moon was both magical and a little threatening”. This is the version, and title, known to most English-speaking audiences.



Christopher Fry

Christopher Fry was one of the most celebrated playwrights of the 20th century. His dazzling verbal invention led many to regard him as the Shakespeare of his time for his poetry and wit. Plays such as *The Lady's Not For Burning*, *Venus Observed* and *The Dark Is Light Enough* have deservedly become modern classics. Laurence Olivier observed that Fry was a "dialogue sorcerer" and the critic Harold Hobson described him as "a master jeweller of words." The list of actors and directors associated with Fry's work

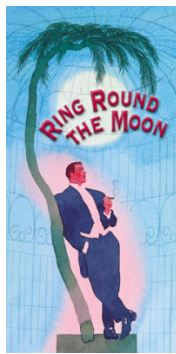
reads like a Who's Who of show business: Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Michael Redgrave, Edith Evans, Vivien Leigh, Alec Guinness and Peter Brook. Fry continued to write plays into his nineties.

The Beginnings

Ring Round the Moon was first produced in Paris, in 1947, as *L'Invitation Au Château*. The play was the first of a series of plays which Anouilh called his "pieces brillantes." He saw these plays as having the quality of jewels – scintillating and unyielding. Peter Brook was the director of the original French production.

Deciding that there should be an English version, in the spring of 1949, Brook approached Christopher Fry to translate the play for his London production.

Brook's production starred Claire Bloom and Paul Scofield and, like the Paris original, featured incidental music by the famous French composer Francis Poulenc. There was a Broadway production that same year and it has become a frequently-staged classic. It was revived at Lincoln Center in 1999. [Some material adapted from the Brock University Department of Dramatic Arts *Study Guide*, 2006]



What the play is about

Ring Round the Moon is the delightful tale of twin brothers, a supremely rich heiress who is engaged to one of the brothers but desperately in love with his heartless sibling, and a ballet dancer who has been brought to the ball at the chateau to further a plan of the coldly calculating brother. The dancer, however, won't behave. She has some ardent emotions of her own and resists the role she has been hired to play. A millionaire who thinks he can buy anything with his money, a timeworn aunt who is watchful and witty from her wheel chair, and a couple having a torrid love affair outside of marriage all join together at the ball. They all have their delicate hearts turned upside down in *Ring Round the Moon*. [Ithaca College Theatre note]

His plays, popular in America in the 50s and early 60s, while true to his entertaining plots, were always about "greater issues," more often than not personal happiness as defined by the differing realities of the different classes and what, if anything, people owed each other.

– New York Magazine

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The Page and the Stage

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