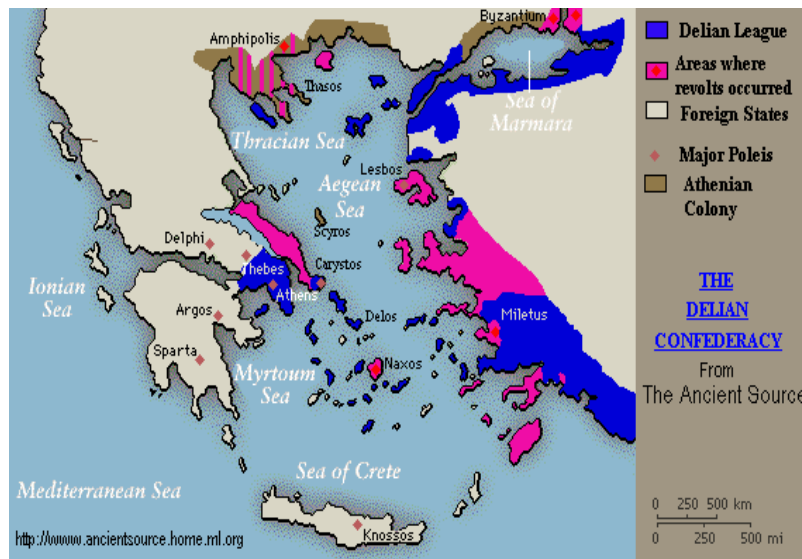


Greek Theater History Notes

All drama originates from Ancient Greece where groups of people worshiped the god Dionysus by singing and dancing together. Soon, this religious ritual became formalized into what we know as drama. The Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first to categorize the parts of drama and tragedy, so we turn to his classification on what makes tragedy and drama.



I. GREEK HISTORY

A. THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

1. IN THE YEAR 490 B.C., THE ATHENIANS DEFEATED AN OVERWHELMING FORCE OF PERSIANS AT THE BATTLE OF MARATHON
2. THE ATHENIANS LOST 192 MEN TO THE PERSIANS 6,400.
3. THE RESULT OF THIS INCREDIBLE UPSET WAS ONE OF THE LARGEST FLOWERING OF CREATIVE ENERGIES THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN.
4. A GREEK RUNNER RAN ABOUT 25 MILES TO CARRY THE NEWS TO

ATHENS.

B. THE GOLDEN AGE OF GREECE

1. AFTER THIS EVENT, GREECE ENTERS A GOLDEN AGE DURING THE 5TH CENTURY B.C.
 - a. GREEK LEADER PERICLES USES PUBLIC FUNDS TO REBUILD THE PARTS OF ATHENS DAMAGED IN THE PERSIAN WARS.
2. GREECE FORMS A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, WHERE EVERY MALE CITIZEN HAS THE RIGHT TO VOTE.
3. WOMEN AND SLAVES, HOWEVER, ARE NOT CONSIDERED CITIZENS AND HAVE NO PROPERTY RIGHTS. A WOMAN IS CONSIDERED THE PROPERTY OF HER HUSBAND.

II. GREEK DRAMA

A. RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

1. DRAMA BEGINS AS A FORM OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP TO THE GREEK GOD DIONYSUS.
2. EARLIEST FORMS OF DRAMA INCLUDED RELIGIOUS CHANTS AND SONGS BE PERFORMED BY A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS CALLED THE **CHORUS**.
 - a. THE CHORUS WOULD WALK BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE STAGE

CHANTING RELIGIOUS HYMNS.

3. TRADITION STATES THAT **THESPIS**, A CHORAL LEADER, STEPPED OUT OF A CHORUS AND SPOKE TO THE CHORUS; THUS HE IS KNOWN AS THE FIRST ACTOR.

B. DIONYSUS

1. DIONYSUS IS THE GOD OF WINE AND VEGETATION, WHO SHOWED MORTALS HOW TO CULTIVATE GRAPEVINES AND MAKE WINE.
2. DIONYSUS WAS WORSHIPED BY THE **MAENADS** OR **BACCHANTES**, WHO WERE A GROUP OF FEMALE DEVOTEES WHO LEFT THEIR HOMES TO ROAM THE WILDERNESS IN ECSTATIC DEVOTION TO DIONYSUS.
3. DIONYSUS WAS GOOD AND GENTLE TO THOSE WHO WORSHIPED HIM, BUT HE BROUGHT ABOUT MADNESS AND DESTRUCTION UPON THOSE WHO SPURNED HIM OR THE ORGIASTIC RITUALS OF HIS CULT.
4. DIONYSUS WAS BELIEVED TO DIE EACH WINTER AND WAS REBORN IN THE SPRING.
 - a. THIS CYCLICAL REVIVAL, ACCOMPANIED BY THE SEASONAL RENEWAL OF THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH, EMBODIED THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION.

C. DIONYSIAN FESTIVAL

1. YEARLY RIGHTS TO DIONYSUS EVOLVED INTO THE STRUCTURED FORM OF GREEK DRAMA.
2. THE **GREATER DIONYSIA** WAS HELD FOR FIVE DAYS DURING THE SPRING.
3. EACH WRITER WOULD PRESENT **THREE TRAGEDIES** AND A **SATYR** PLAY.
 - a. A SATYR PLAY IS A FARCICAL, OFTEN BAWDY PARODY OF THE GODS AND THEIR MYTHS.
4. 15,000 PEOPLE WOULD SIT THROUGH THE PLAYS IN THE DIONYSIAN THEATER AND WOULD VOTE FOR THEIR FAVORITE PLAYS BY CASTING STONE BALLOTS.
 - a. WINNERS WOULD RECEIVE THE LAUREL WREATH

III. GREEK THEATER

A. THEATERS WERE BUILT INTO NATURAL HILLSIDES

B. THE GREEK ACTORS WERE ALL MEN

1. THE ACTORS WORE LARGER THAN LIFE MASKS, WHICH INDICATED THE NATURE OF THE CHARACTER TO THE AUDIENCE.
 - a. IF A CHARACTER WAS HAPPY, THE MASK WOULD HAVE A SMILE, ETC.

2. EACH MASK ALSO CONTAINED A MEGAPHONE, SO THOSE FARTHEST AWAY IN THE AMPHITHEATER COULD HEAR THE ACTORS AND CHORUS SPEAK.

C. SOPHOCLES 496 B.C. - 406 B.C..

1. ONE OF THE THREE GREAT DRAMATIC DRAMATISTS OF ATHENS.
2. HE INTRODUCED A THIRD ACTOR TO THE STAGE.
3. SOPHOCLES HAD AN ARISTOCRATIC EDUCATION.
4. HE WAS CHOSEN TO LEAD THE CHORUS OF YOUTHS CELEBRATING THE NAVAL VICTORY AT SALAMIS IN 480 B.C.
5. HE WAS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PLAYWRIGHT AT THE **GREATER DIONYSIA**, WINNING FIRST PRIZE AT LEAST 20 TIMES.
6. OF THE 100 PLAYS SOPHOCLES COMPOSED ONLY SEVEN SURVIVE AS COMPLETE PLAYS
7. SOPHOCLES WAS VERY CONSERVATIVE, AND HIS PLAYS OFTEN DEAL WITH THE PAIN AND SUFFERING CAUSED WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL OBSTINATELY DEFIES DIVINE WILL OR AUTHORITY AND OBEYS HIS OWN INNER WILL -- EVEN IF HE RISKS LOSING HIS OWN LIFE.

Aristotle and Greek Drama

Aristotle's Definition of a tragic hero:

1. Comes from nobility
2. Tragic Flaw (caused by a simple mistake or a character flaw) maybe pride or *hubris*
3. Undergoes a Reversal of Fortune (Falls from high to low)
4. Has a Downfall
5. Recognizes his mistakes (in a catharsis or purgation of pity and fear)

Play Structure:

1. Exposition
2. Rising Action
3. Climax
4. Falling Action
5. Denouement/Resolution

Aristotle's Six Elements of Drama

1. Plot (the incidents or story line)
2. Character (physical, social, psychological, moral--people represented in the play)
3. Thought/Theme (insights into humanity and life)
4. Music (all sound)
5. Spectacle (scenery and other visual elements)
6. Diction/language (the dialogue and poetry)

Greek Theater History

Dionysus: Greek god of wine and fertility. Plays were first performed at year festivals in his honor.

dithyramb: Chorus of 50 men who chanted stories and danced in unison in this festival event

Deus ex machina: "god on machine," which lowered gods down from the top of the theater to wrap up a storyline

Chorus: The voice of the citizens in a tragedy. They became less important as playwrights began to use actors.

Protagonists/Antagonists: the protagonist is the hero (who the story is about) and the antagonist is the person or thing that is working against the protagonist (like an enemy or weakness of character.)

Thespis: credited with being the first actor; he stepped out of the chorus and spoke alone

Masks: used by actors/chorus so that many different characters could be played by one person and so that the actors expression could be seen from far away.

Oedipus: play by Sophocles which demonstrates the perfect tragic hero. Story of a man who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother because of a simple mistake.

The Unities: a way of providing a central focus to a play: Aristotle believed that perfect tragedies had

Unity of Time: The play takes place in a 24 hour time period

Unity of Place: The play has only one setting

Unity of Action: The play has one plot and no mixture of tragedy and comedy

Aristotle's Perfect Tragic Hero follows these guidelines:

1. a member of the nobility
2. Tragic flaw (*Hamartia*) consisting of a simple mistake or a weakness of character which causes them to suffer

Tragedy

1. Tragedy is meant to reaffirm the fact that life is worth living, regardless of the suffering or pain that is part of human existence.
2. Tragedies are about people in conflict with the universe.
 - a. tragedies are always about spiritual conflicts, never about every day events.
3. Tragic actions arise from a character's inner conflict.
 - a. a tragic protagonist must have **magnitude**; his struggles are great because he is important to society.
4. The tragic protagonist must fall from high to low; they will have a noble soul.
 - a. The audience must care about the tragic protagonist.
5. The tragic protagonist is a good man, but not perfect.
 - a. He usually suffers from *hubris* (**Pride**) as shown through *hamartia* (character flaw or error in judgment).
 - b. once the transgression is realized, the character enters the stage of *anagnorisis* (**recognition**) and will undergo a *peripeteia* (**reversal of fortune or fall from high to low**).
6. The protagonist's actions should arouse feelings of both **pity and fear** in the audience.
 - a. Pity because the protagonist is better than we are, so we place ourselves into his position (empathy)
 - b. Fear because we too do not know our future or fate.
7. By the end of the play, the audience should be purged of pity and fear, so they go through a **catharsis**.
 - a. Catharsis = purgation of pity and fear
8. The tragic protagonist must ask the first and last of all questions: What does it mean to be?
 - a. He must face the world alone, unaccommodated, and kick against his fate.
 - b. He can never escape his fate, but he will insist upon accepting fate on his own terms.