

Greek Drama and Theatre Study Guide

I. Origin of Tragedy

- A. Religious festivals in honor of Dionysus.
 - 1. City of Dionysia - City that held the religious festival held in spring.
 - 2. Chorus - Originally a group of 50 people who sang and danced.
- B. Thespis (circa 600 B.C.)
 - 1. "Father of Drama"
 - 2. Creator of dramatic theatre with the use of one actor.
- C. Aeschylus (525-426 B.C.)
 - 1. Added a second actor.
 - 2. Introduced the use of trilogies.
- D. Sophocles (496-406 B.C.)
 - 1. Changed chorus from 50 to 15.
 - 2. Introduced painted scenery and props to plays.
 - 3. Wrote the Oedipus Rex Trilogy
- E. Euripedes
 - 1. Reduced the use of the chorus.
 - 2. Wrote *Medea*.
 - 3. Relied on endings with *deus ex machina*, meaning a god was lowered into the orchestra and offered an unexpected or improbable finish to save the protagonist.
 - EX: In H.G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, the alien invaders die out from airborne diseases to which mankind is immune.

II. Structure of the Theatre

- A. Theatron - Audience seating.
- B. Orchestra - Stage where actors and chorus performed.
- C. Skene - Building for dressing rooms and background effects.
- D. Parados - Entrance used by chorus.

III. Elements of Greek Drama

- A. Protagonist
- B. Antagonist
- C. Tragic Hero
- D. Tragic Flaw
- E. Dramatic Irony

IV. Actors and Costumes

- A. Chorus
 - 1. Played music and danced.
 - 2. Led by a chorus leader called a *choragos*.
 - 3. Gave background information and narrated the play.
 - 4. Would question and advise the characters in the play.
- B. Costumes and Dress
 - 1. Absolutely no female actors - men dressed up for female roles.
 - 2. Actors wore long, flowing robes.
 - 3. Wore boots with high soles.
 - 4. Wore larger than life masks.
 - a. Masks showed character's age and emotional status.
 - b. Facial features were over-exaggerated - large eyes and mouth.

V. Conventions

- A. Setting
 - 1. Action had a simple plot
 - 2. Timeframe was one single day
 - 3. One place throughout the play.
 - 4. Acts of violence were NEVER shown on stage.