

ANTIGONE

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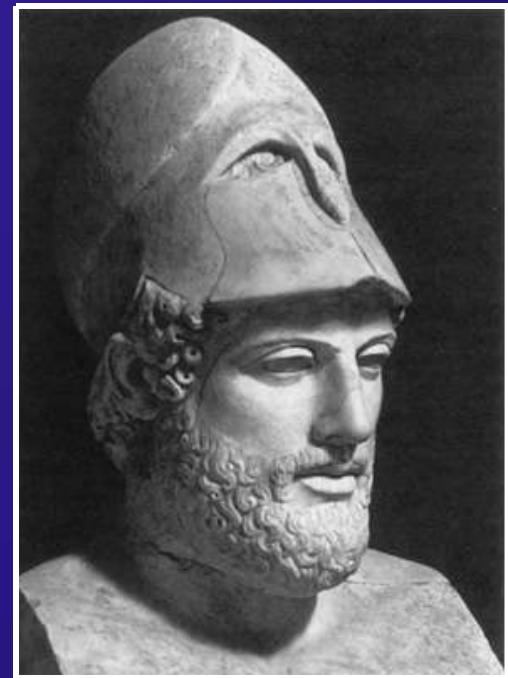
Ancient Greek Theater  
Background Information

# Basic Overview

- Antigone is about a woman who disobeys the laws of her ruler Creon in favor of the unwritten laws that she feels more properly govern society.

# Key facts and events to know

- Pericles, Creon, & Athenian democracy:
  - Pericles was the great Athenian general who dominated the social and political scene at the time the play was written.



# Key facts and events to know

- Pericles, Creon, & Athenian democracy:



- Some believe the character of Creon was modeled after Pericles.
- Pericles's career was at its highest point when Antigone was first performed in 442 B. C.
- Creon's character may have been a warning to Pericles and the Athenians about the dangers of dictatorship.

# Key facts and events to know

- Pericles, Creon, & Athenian democracy:
  - Democracy was a relatively new social development in Sophocles' Athens.
  - After a long period of dictatorship, it began in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century B. C.
  - A system was created in which the city was run by ten generals, each from one of the ten tribes.

# Key facts and events to know

- Pericles, Creon, & Athenian democracy:
  - Pericles was one of these generals, and he was very popular, even considered “the uncrowned king of Athens” (Wilcoxon qtd. in “Antigone” 18).
  - Therefore, he did not need to establish a formal dictatorship—he was liked and respected.

# Key facts and events to know

- Unwritten Laws:
  - Antigone claims that “unwritten and unfailing rules,” or her own beliefs and values, led her to bury Polyneices (her brother).
  - The subject of how much power such “unwritten” laws had when they came into conflict with civic laws was a matter of debate during the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C.

# Key facts and events to know

- Unwritten Laws:
  - In Antigone, Sophocles insists that unwritten laws are more important than any formal legal code created by men.
  - This may be a reaction to what was happening in Athens at this time, protesting that their priorities were wrong.



# Key facts and events to know

- Burial Rites:
  - Funerals in Greece were largely the responsibility of women during Sophocles' time.
  - They washed and dressed the body, adorned it with flowers, and then covered it up.
  - Only close relatives participated in this ritual.

# Key facts and events to know

- Burial Rites:
  - After a death, the “prepared” corpse was laid out for two days in the home and then taken away for burial before the dawn of the third day.
  - The funeral procession—led by men and followed by lamenting women—would slowly outside the city gates to a cemetery, where the body would be laid to rest.

# Key facts and events to know

- Burial Rites:
  - By some accounts, traitors and people who robbed temples were not entitled to be buried within Athenian territory, but the historical record is far from consistent on this.
  - These burial rites and rituals were very serious in Greek culture.

# The Athenian Theater

- Sophocles' plays were written to be performed in public at the great Theater of Dionysus.



# The Athenian Theater

- This theater was located in the heart of Athens with other important city buildings on the slope of the rocky hill of the Acropolis.



# The Athenian Theater

- The Theater of Dionysus looked like a semicircular football stadium.
- The seats were carved out of stone on a hillside; at the bottom was a performance area divided into two parts.
- In the front was a rounded orchestra, a fairly large space where the chorus sang and danced around the remnant of an altar.

# The Athenian Theater

- Behind the orchestra was a platform where the actors spoke their lines from behind huge masks.
- These masks had exaggerated mouthpieces that amplified the actors' voices.
- Many were stylized into familiar character types that were easily recognized by the audience.

# The Athenian Theater

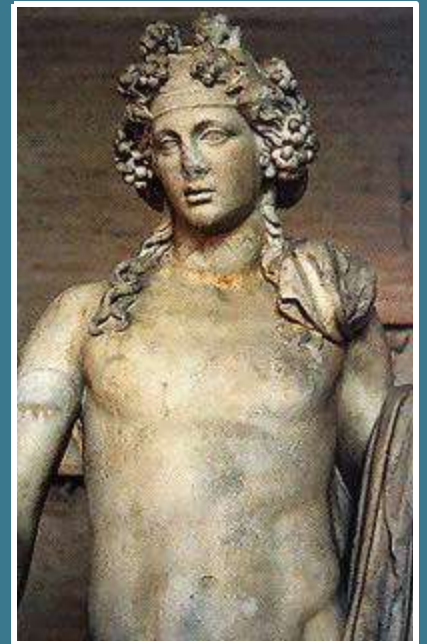
- All the actors were men, and the choruses were well-trained boys.
- By switching masks, each actor could play several roles.





# The Athenian Theater

- Plays were usually staged during the festival of Dionysus, the god of growth and wine, which took place at planting time in March.
- Crowds of 15,000 people regularly attended the performances, and even criminals were released from prison in order to see the plays.



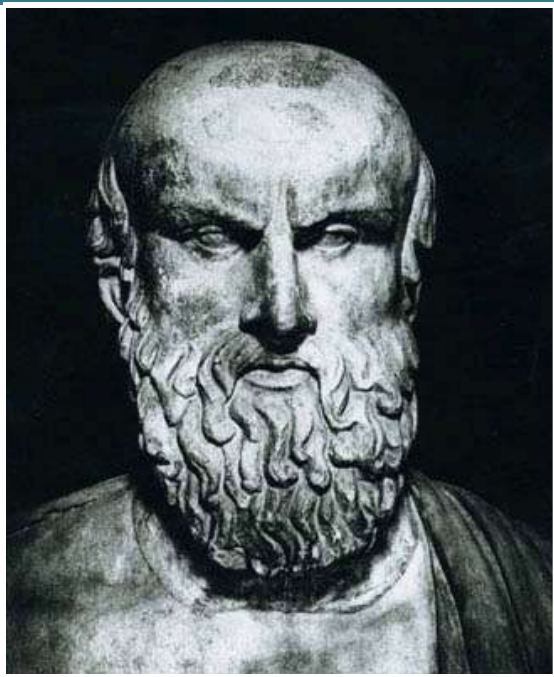
# The Athenian Theater

- Originally, dancing choruses of worshipers began competing for prizes.
- Tradition has it that a man named Thespis transformed the chorus's hymns into songs that still honored Dionysus but also told a story of a famous hero or even another god.

# The Athenian Theater

- Then Thespis added another innovation: one of the chorus members would step away from the others to play the part of that hero or god.
- This individual actor wore a mask and entered into a dialogue with the chorus.

# The Athenian Theater



- Drama was born when the playwright Aeschylus added a second individual actor to the performance, thereby creating the possibility of conflict.
- Sophocles added a third actor, introduced painted sets, and increased the size of the chorus to fifteen actors.

# The Athenian Theater

- Attendance at these dramas was perceived to be a civic duty, in part because the plays often addressed important social and political issues.
- The dramatic part of the festival's program was presented as a competition between playwrights, each of whom put on four plays in the space of one day.

# The Athenian Theater

- The first three plays were tragedies, which dealt with religious or mythical questions.
- The fourth play was a "satyr" play that poked fun at the serious subjects and characters of the three earlier plays.
- The audience made their preferences clear by booing or cheering, and the playwrights were judged by ten judges, each one selected from one of the ten tribes of Athens.

# The Athenian Theater

- The ten judges cast their votes into an urn, and five of the votes were drawn out at random.
- From these five votes, the result was announced.
- This complex system may have been designed to discourage cheating since this competition was so important.

# The Athenian Theater

- The Chorus
  - The Greek word *choros* means "dance."
  - The chorus, a group of singers and actors who either commented on what was occurring in the main part of the drama or actually functioned as a character in the play, was an important part of 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C. drama.



# The Athenian Theater

- The Chorus
  - The chorus served as a link between the audience and the actors, often portraying a group of citizens not unlike the audience themselves.

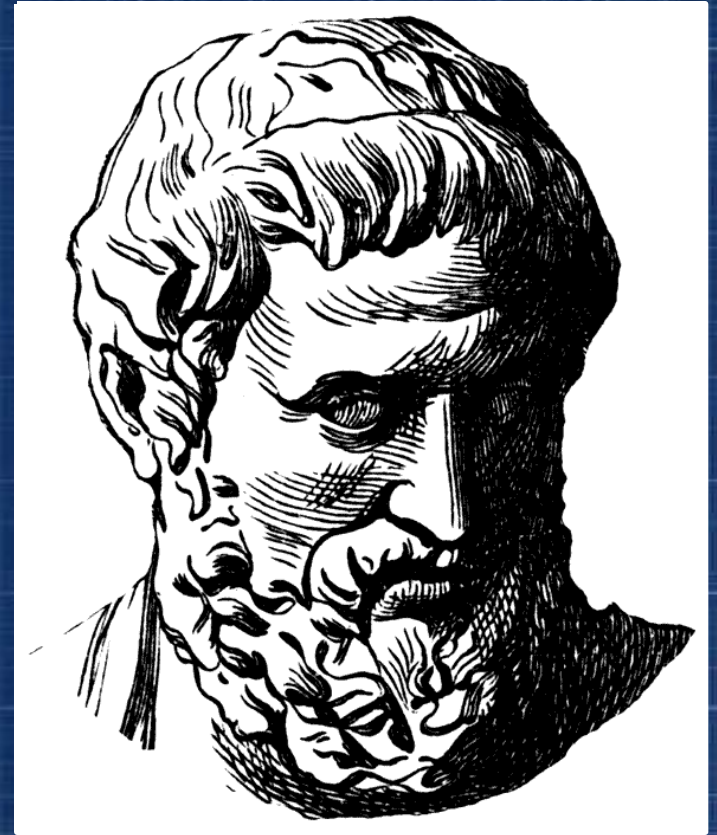


# The Athenian Theater

- The Chorus:
  - In Antigone, the chorus is a group of Theban elders who keep shifting their loyalty back and forth from Creon to Antigone; their indecision further confirms the complex nature of the issues under discussion.

# Sophocles, playwright of *Antigone*

- 496 - 406 B. C.
- He came from a wealthy family in Athens.
- He was well educated and mixed with some of the most powerful figures of his day.



# Sophocles, playwright of *Antigone*



- He took an active role in Athens' political life.
- He was elected a general in the Athenian military because of the popularity of his work.
- In 468 B. C. Sophocles entered the most important Athenian drama competition of the year for the first time.

# Sophocles, playwright of *Antigone*

- He beat Aeschylus, a well-established and respected figure, as an unknown playwright at the age of 28.
- Over the next 62 years, Sophocles won first place a total of 24 times and second place seven times in 31 competitions (the best record of any Greek playwright).
- He's generally considered the greatest of the ancient Greek playwrights.

# Sophocles, playwright of *Antigone*

- He wrote 123 plays but only 7 of them have survived to the present.
- He had huge success with Antigone at the dramatic festivals held in Athens.
- He developed the art of tragic drama from the work of the first tragic playwright Aeschylus.

# Sophocles, playwright of *Antigone*

- He was a religious conservative, deeply concerned with the individual's need to find a place in the existing moral and cosmic order.
- His plays always contain a moral lesson—usually a caution against pride and religious indifference.

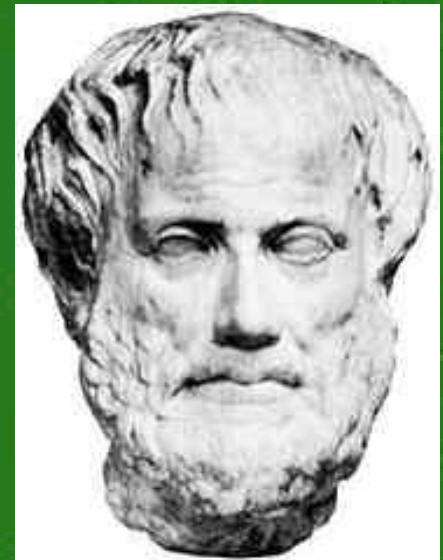
# Sophocles, playwright of *Antigone*

- Sources:
  - Sophocles took the characters for Antigone from a well-developed body of Greek stories about the tragic family of Oedipus.
  - Sophocles used the familiar characters of the royal family of Thebes but changed their actions to suit his own dramatic purposes.



# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, was the first to define *tragedy*, and critics have argued about it ever since.
- Aristotle's definition of tragedy:
  - to arouse pity and fear in the audience so that we may be purged, or cleansed, of these unsettling emotions



# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- Catharsis:
  - emotional purging
  - a strangely pleasurable sense of emotional release we experience after watching a great tragedy
  - for some reason, we usually feel exhilarated, not depressed, after a tragedy

# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- According to Aristotle, we can only feel pity and fear after a tragedy if there is a tragic hero or heroine.

# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- "For pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves . . . There remains, then, the character between these two extremes—that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error of frailty . . ." (from The Poetics)

# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- Tragic hero/heroine:
  1. A character who is neither completely good nor completely bad but rather somewhere in the middle. He/she does have good intentions.
  2. Someone "who is highly renowned and prosperous," which in Aristotle's day meant a member of a royal family or someone who holds a high or elevated place in society.

# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- Tragic hero/heroine continued:
  3. The character must possess a flaw (tragic flaw) in his/her personality that is taken to an extreme and impairs his/her judgment.
  4. This tragic flaw leads to the hero's/ heroine's own downfall (a major catastrophe).
  5. By the end of the play, the tragic hero recognizes his/her own error, accepts its tragic consequences, and is humbled.

# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- Critics question what that "error or frailty" of a tragic hero is.
  - Is the hero's undoing the result of a single error of judgment?
  - OR
  - Does the hero have a tragic flaw?
- Tragic flaw: a fundamental character weakness, such as excessive pride, ambition, or jealousy

# Aristotle's View of Tragedy

- As the audience, we feel:
  - PITY: the hero's punishment is too harsh for his crime, and he is a suffering human being who is flawed like us
  - FEAR: the hero is better than we think and still he failed, so what hope do we have?



# Structure of a Drama

- Exposition
- Exciting or Inciting Force
- Rising Action
- Turning Point
- Falling Action
- Moment of Final Suspense
- Catastrophe

# Structure of a Drama

- Exposition

- Basic information
- What's going on
- Characters, setting, conflict

# Structure of a Drama

- Inciting or Exciting Force
  - An event or character that moves action forward (usually a key decision)

# Structure of a Drama

- Rising Action

- A series of events that lead to the turning point

# Structure of a Drama

- Turning Point
  - Things start to work against the protagonist because of a shift in fortune

# Structure of a Drama

- Falling Action

- Events after the turning point that lead to a catastrophe
- The results of the turning point

# Structure of a Drama

- Moment of Final Suspense
  - The moment when it looks like tragedy may be avoided

# Structure of a Drama

- Catastrophe

- The effects of the tragedy are full
- The death or complete downfall of the tragic hero



# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Tragedy- Scene
- Catharsis- Strophe
- Chorus- Antistrophe
- Choragus- Ode
- Tragic Hero- Tragic Flaw
- Hubris- Paeon
- Prologue- Exodos
- Parodos

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Tragedy

- According to Aristotle: to arouse pity and fear in the audience so that we may be purged, or cleansed, of these unsettling emotions

- Catharsis

- Purging of emotions of pity and fear that leaves the viewer both relieved and elated

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Chorus

- Groups of dancers and singers who comment on the action of the play; in ancient Greece, their songs used to make up the bulk of the play

- Choragus

- The leader of the Chorus

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Tragic Hero

- A character who:

1. Is neither completely good nor completely bad but has good intentions
2. Is of royal birth or holds an elevated place in society
3. Possesses a tragic flaw
4. Has a downfall because of the tragic flaw
5. Recognizes his/her own error, accepts its tragic consequences, and is humbled

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Tragic Flaw

- A fundamental character weakness, such as excessive pride, ambition, or jealousy

- Hubris

- Arrogance or overweening pride that causes the hero's transgression against the gods; usually, the tragic flaw

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Prologue

- Introductory speech delivered to the audience by one of the actors or actresses before a play begins

- Parodos

- The first ode, or choral song, in a Greek tragedy, chanted by the Chorus as it enters the Orchestra

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Scene
  - One of the series of structural units into which a play or acts of a play are divided

# Literary Terms for *Antigone*

- Strophe

- The part of the ode that the Chorus chants as it moves from right to left across the stage

- Antistrophe

- The part of the ode that the Chorus chants as it moves from left to right across the stage



# Literary Terms

- Ode

- Each scene is followed by an ode. These odes serve both to separate one scene from the next, since there were no curtains, and to provide the Chorus's response to the preceding scene.

# Literary Terms

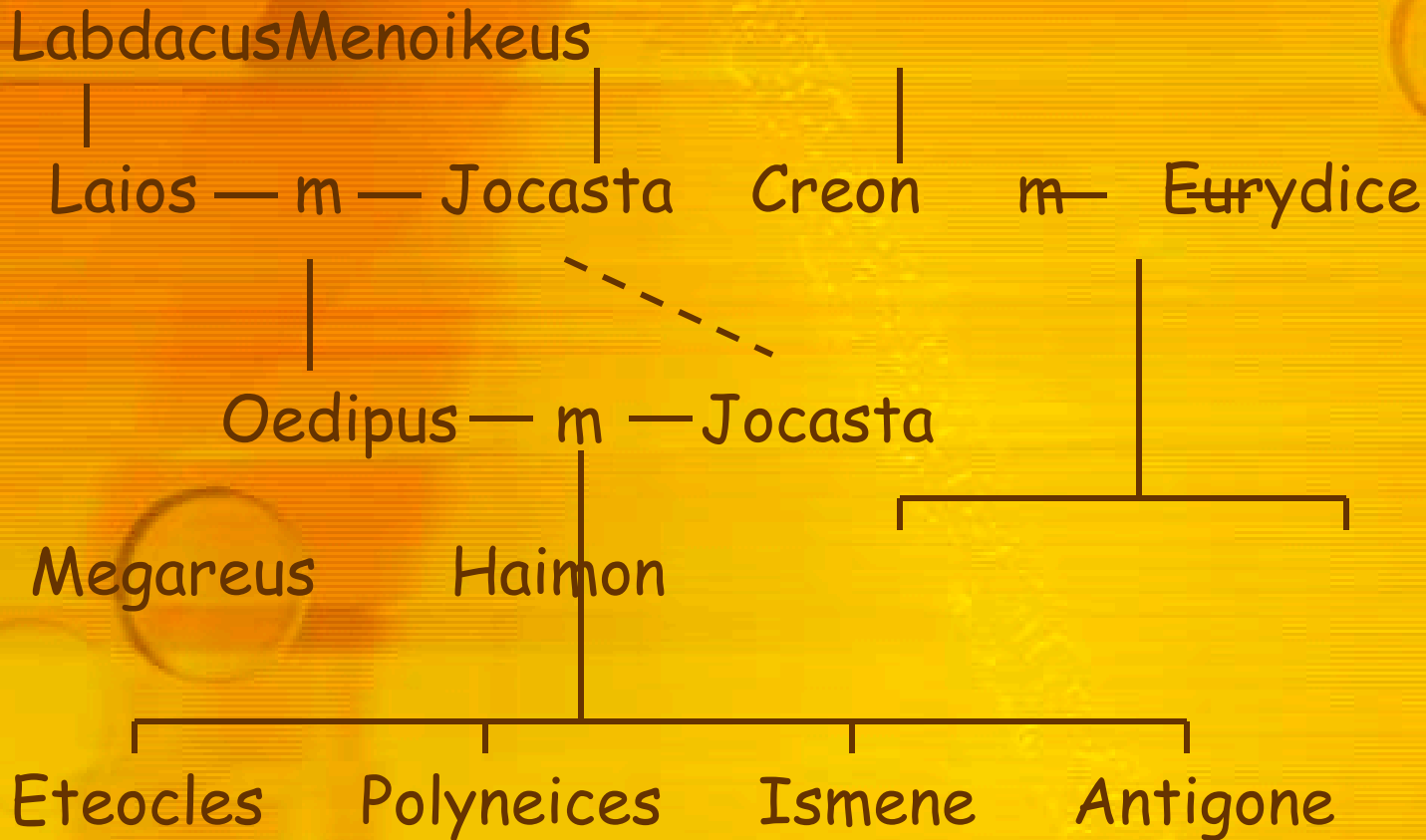
- Paeon

- A choral hymn in praise of a god—in Antigone, the Chorus is praising Dionysus

- Exodos

- The final, or exit, scene

# Antigone's Family Tree



Name:	Relationship to Others:	Personality:	Situations:
Antigone	Daughter of Oedipus, sister of Ismene, niece of Creon	Strong, firm in her beliefs	Main character, in conflict over the laws of the gods vs laws of man
Ismene	Daughter of Oedipus, Antigone's sister	Timid	Also in conflict over the laws of the gods vs laws of man
Eurydice	Creon's wife, mother of Haimon	Obeys her duties as the King's wife	Wife of the King

Name:	Relationship to Others:	Personality:	Situations:
Creon	Husband of Eurydice, father of Haimon	Firm in his belief, unbending, an absolute ruler	Recently became King of Thebes
Haimon	Son of Creon and Eurydice,	Level headed	Engaged to Antigone
Teiresias	prophet	Wise	He is a very respected blind prophet