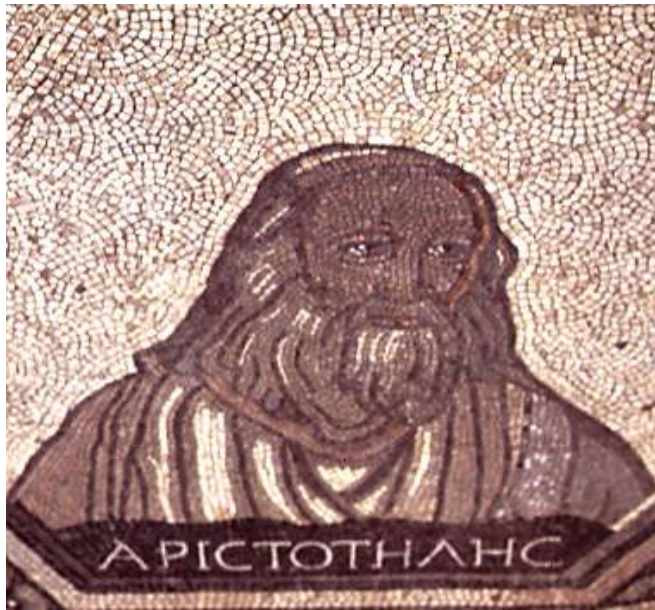


ARISTOTLE ON TRAGEDY



Outline of Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy in the *POETICS*

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) Greek philosopher; wrote *Poetics* (study of Greek dramatic art). His principles are still applied today.

SIX ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

1. **PLOT** – “life and soul of tragedy,” linking actions and events to produce a cumulative effect by giving a play tension and emotional momentum.
 - a. exposition
 - b. discovery and reversal
 - c. point of attack (introduction of conflict)
 - d. foreshadowing
 - e. complications

- f. climax
- g. denouement (falling action) and resolution
- h. time ----
- i. place ---- = unities
- j. action ----

2. **CHARACTER** – must be simple and his qualities made clear quickly. Character is revealed by:

- a. appearance
- b. speech
- c. action
- d. what others say and how others react

3. **THOUGHT** – reasoning; theme

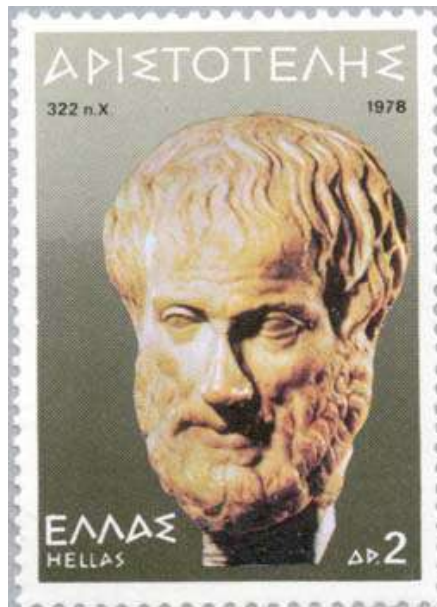
- a. profound problem
- b. man and gods
- c. justice
- d. good and evil

4. **DICTION** – dialogue which conveys playwright's meaning and character's thoughts.

- a. **Stichomythia** – short lines of alternating dialogue- builds tension.
- b. **Soliloquy** – introspective analysis
- c. Extended narration
- d. Choral speeches

5. **MUSIC** – all aspects of sound – pitch, rate, quality, duration, volume, rhythm.
6. **SPECTACLE** – all visual aspects – scenery, lighting, costumes, make-up, stage business, actor's movement.

Make a mnemonic device: PCTDMS



STRUCTURE OF CLASSICAL GREEK DRAMA

I. CHORUS 50 > 12 > 15

A. USES

1. ideal spectator – clarifies the experiences and feelings of characters.
2. actor in play
3. introduce new characters
4. point out significance of events
5. establish facts
6. cover passage of time between events
7. expresses author's views
8. sets mood and heightens dramatic effect
9. adds color, movement and spectacle

B. MOVEMENT

1. Strophe – Chorus moves Right to Left
2. Antistrophe – Chorus moves Left to Right

II. STRUCTURE

- A. **Prologue** – opening scene (exposition)
- B. **Parados** – entrance of chorus (chanting usually which applies to main theme)
- C. **Episode** – where plot is developed through action and dialogue.
- D. **Stasimon** – Choral ode

- E. **Exodus** – final action after the last stasimon, ended by exit of all players.
- F. Episodes and Stasimons are repeated until Exodus.

III. **TRAGEDY – downfall of a hero, ending with his or her destruction or death**

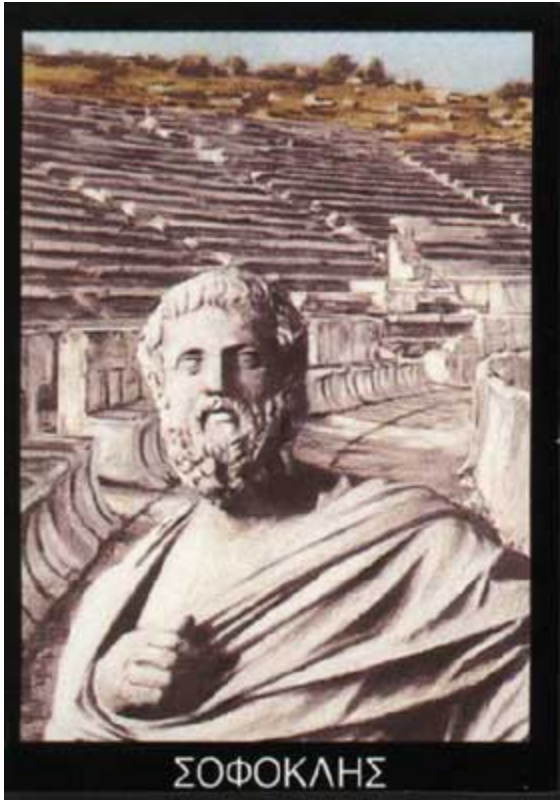
A. Characteristics of tragedy

1. Tragedy arouses the emotions of **pity and fear**
2. Tragic hero must be a man or woman capable of great suffering.
3. Tragedy explores the question of the ways of man to the ways of God (gods).

God's Law
Man's Law
4. Tragedy purifies the emotions at the climax through **Catharsis (release of tension)**
5. Tragedy shows how the hero is brought to disaster by a single flaw – **Harmartia (loss of perspective)**.

B. Origin – in early dances honoring gods (especially Dionysus).

1. tragos = goat
2. ode = song



Sophocles

IV. Sophocles

Sophocles (c. 497/6 BC - 406/5 BC) was the second of the three [ancient Greek tragedians](#) whose work has survived. His first plays were written later than those of [Aeschylus](#) and earlier than those of [Euripides](#). Sophocles wrote 123 plays during the course of his life, but only seven have survived in a complete form: *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *Trachinian Women*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

For almost 50 years, Sophocles was the most celebrated playwright in the dramatic competitions of the [city-state](#) of [Athens](#) that took place during the religious festivals of the [Lenaea](#) and the [Dionysia](#).

Sophocles competed in around 30 competitions; he won perhaps 24.

The most famous of Sophocles' tragedies are those concerning [Oedipus](#) and [Antigone](#): these are often known as the [Theban plays](#).

Sophocles influenced the development of the drama, most importantly by adding a third actor and thereby reducing the importance of the [chorus](#) in the presentation of the [plot](#). He also developed his [characters](#) to a greater extent than earlier playwrights such as Aeschylus.

Aristotle credits Sophocles with the introduction of *skenographia*, or scenery-painting.

[Aristotle](#) used Sophocles' [Oedipus the King](#) in his [Poetics](#) (c. 335 BCE) as an example of the highest achievement in [tragedy](#), which suggests the high esteem in which his work was held by later Greeks.



Portrait of the [Greek actor](#) Euiaon in Sophocles' *Andromeda*, c. 430 BCE.

V. Thespis

Thespis of Icaria (6th century BC) is claimed to be the first person ever to appear on stage as an actor in a play.

In 534 BC, Thespis took the stage at the Theatre Dionysus during a choral song and dance, and became the first man to take on the role of a character in a story.

Prior to this performance, **stories were told in third person narrative only**, and no one had ever assumed the resemblance of another person for the purpose of storytelling.

By becoming the first actor, Thespis not only created a new art form in acting, but had a substantial hand in changing the way stories were told and inventing theatre as we know it today

According to [Aristotle](#), writing two hundred years later, Thespis was a singer of **dithyrambs** (songs about stories

from mythology with choric refrains). Thespis supposedly innovated a new style in which one singer or actor performed the words of individual characters in the stories, distinguishing between the characters with the aid of different masks.

It is sometimes implied that Thespis invented acting in the Western world, and that prior to his performances, no one had ever assumed the resemblance of another person for the purpose of storytelling.

In reverence to Thespis, actors throughout western history have been referred to as *thespians*.

In theatrical myth (or superstition), Thespis is said to exist now as a mischievous spirit, and when things go wrong in performances it is often blamed on his ghostly intervention.

VI.DESIGN OF GREEK THEATRE

