

CLA 2323A Greek Mythology

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

A Short Introduction to Ancient Greek Theatre

δρᾶμα 'action, doing, performance'

I. Greek Drama

- A. The writers of all surviving Greek tragedies were Athenian
- B. The dramatic festivals for which they composed, from 475-400 took place in the theater dedicated to Dionysos on the southern slope of the Acropolis.
- C. Greek drama included tragedies and satyr plays, comedies

D. Main players

Aeschylus (ca. 525-456)
wrote 80 plays, 7 survive

Sophocles (ca. 496-406)
wrote about 200 plays, 7 survive

Euripides (ca. 485-406)
about 90 play, 19 survive

Aristophanes (ca. 450-385)
about 40 comedies, 11 survive

Menander (ca. 342-290)

- E. Tragedy serious, subject matter from epic myth.
Comedy humorous, a contemporary fantasy intended to be directly funny and crude.
Satyr play a grotesque relief from tragedy with satyrs (not satire).
- F. Writer wrote either tragedy and satyr play or comedy, not both.

II. The Festivals

A. Two festivals of Dionysos

City Dionysia or Great Dionysia (March/April)

Lenaea (January)

B. Tragic writer wrote three tragedies and a satyr play for presentation at the Dionysia

C. Comic writers presented only one play at a time

D. Tragedians competed amongst themselves as did comedians – they did not compete with each other.

E. The audience may have watched four or five plays a day, for three or four days.

F. *Archon*: official responsible for organization of the city Dionysia, chosen annually by lot. The playwrights applied for a chorus to him for acceptance as one of the three tragedians, or 3-5 comic writers.

G. *Choregoi* or producers, wealthy private citizens, took up most of the expense of organization. The state paid the actors, the *choregos* paid for training and costume of chorus

III. The writer

A. *Didaskalos* 'teacher' or 'trainer' was official term for playwright, title originally refers to function of training the chorus, dancers and singers. Theatrical direction, script, musical production.

B. Plays composed in verse, in a variety of meters. In general, the chorus sang while other characters spoke in verse.

IV. The theater

A. *orchestra* – circular dancing space for chorus to sing and dance

- B. *theatron* – ‘watching space’ made by hollowing out the hill, stepped with boards and later stone. Accommodated 14,000 spectators
- C. *skene* – ‘tent’ or scene building, which included a centrally located door. Earliest plays lack a *skene*, which seems to have been first used with the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus.
- D. *ekkyklema* – a mobile platform that could be projected from the doors located in the center of the *skene*.
- E. *mechane* – ‘crane’ added later in the fifth century, which could lift actors and suspend them in the air above the *skene*. *Deus ex machina*.
- F. The chorus arrives from one or both side paths and only leaves at the end of the play

V. Costume

- A. masks and costumes were significant elements of the worship of Dionysos at Athens before advent of drama
- B. no masks have survived – too fragile
- C. comic masks were distortions or caricatures of individuals or types.
 1. Absence of facial expression with increased attention to voice and gesture.
 2. Emotions or elements like exaggeration or insincerity expected to be conveyed by the actor’s delivery and the text.
- D. costume was crucially important in determining characters or chorus by status, sex, provenance, or condition of life.
- E. comic chorus probably wore hugely exaggerated phallus.

VI. Chorus

- A. Those expected to sing and dance

- B. For tragedy 12 members, 15 in middle of 5th century
- C. Comedy had a chorus of 24
- D. Role of the chorus substantial, extensive section of the play dependent on choral song, esp. so in Aeschylus, less so in Euripides.

VII. Actors

- A. Originally only one actor, who was the composer; the early plays of Aeschylus require only two actors and he seems to have been the one to introduce the second actor. Otherwise, generally three (maybe four) actors used. Thus the same actor took on several roles.
- B. For the *Oresteia* in 458 BCE, three actors are required and sources ascribe the addition of the third to Aeschylus or Sophocles.
- C. *hypokrites* 'answerer' (to the chorus) > 'actor'
- D. All the actors and chorus members were men.

VII. The Audience

- A. Conflicting evidence: perhaps no rules controlling attendance, but certainly adult Athenian males allowed, perhaps metics (Greek immigrants to Athens who were not Athenian and did not have full citizen rights).
- B. Women and slaves, if allowed, smallest group.
- C. Allocation of prizes determined by the audience, who voiced their opinion to a panel of ten judges
- D. We know that Sophocles always placed first or second, never third; Euripides won very few victories; Aeschylus was so appreciated that after his death it was decreed that his work could be reproduced in the place of new works.

VIII. The Chorus

- A. Not enough known about choral music or dance to reconstruct it.

B. Choral song accompanied by an *auletes*, who played the double pipes.

IX. Organization of the play

From Kwintner:

The parts of a Greek tragedy are marked not by 'acts' but by alternations between dialogue spoken by actors and lyric odes sung by the chorus. The structural divisions, discussed by Aristotle in *Poetics* chapter 12, are as follows:

Prologue: the part of the tragedy that precedes the entry of the chorus. It usually offer some explanation of the situation.

Parodos: the first choral ode i.e., the chorus' entrance song (and dance).

Episode: dialogue spoken by actors between choral songs.

Stasimon: a song sung by the chorus after it has taken its station (as opposed to the parodos)

Epirrhematic: alternating parts of sung and spoken dialogue

Exodos: the part of the tragedy after which there is no choral song.

X. Outline of the Agamemnon

Prologue (1-39)

Choral prelude (40-103)

Parodos (104-257)

Episode I (258-354)

Choral prelude (355-366)

First Stasimon (367-488)

Episode II (489-680)

Second Stasimon (681-781)

Episode III (782-974)

Third Stasimon (975-1034)

Episode IV (1035-1071)

Epirrhematic I (1072-1330)

Choral interlude (1331-1342)

Episode V (1343-1406)
Epirrhematic II (1407-1576)
Episode VI (1577-1673)

Things to keep in mind as you read:

1. male vs. female

Clytemestra is repeatedly attributed with “male” characteristics and other characters are portrayed as ‘womanish.’ What examples can you find and why do you think it was done?

2. foreshadowing

Throughout the play, leading up to the murder of Agamemnon, there are ominous signs and hints from the characters that things are not well in the household. What are some examples?

3. images and themes

Aeschylus makes vivid use of the language and imagery of a) medicine, b) nature, c) nets, traps, and robes d) sacrifice, e) marriage, f) silence. What are some examples?

4. What is the role of the citizens referred to repeatedly in the play?

5. How is Helen an important figure in this play?

6. Is Clytaemestra entirely unjustified in what she does? Is Agamemnon completely innocent? How do you support your answer? What role does the ‘yoke of necessity’ play and how does the repeated sentiment ‘wisdom through suffering’ apply?

Background of the play

1. House of Atreus. Tantalus and Pelops, sons Thyestes (son Aegisthus) and Atreus (sons Menelaos and Agamemnon).
2. The *Cypria* told how Artemis was angry with Agamemnon because he boasted that his skill in archery surpassed hers. Calchas warned him that the winds would not allow the fleet to sail before he sacrificed Iphigeneia. In another version Artemis substitutes a deer for Iphigeneia at the last minute.

3. Homer's *Iliad* Agamemnon confesses he prefers Chryseis to his legitimate wife, Clytaemestra, who is Helen's sister.
4. In *Odyssey* strong contrast with Agamemnon, Clytaemestra, Orestes and Odysseus, Penelope, Telemachus.
Agamemnon left wife in care of minstrel, who is decoyed by Aegisthus to a desert island; Aegisthus woos Clytaemestra, posts watchman to look for Agamemnon; Agamemnon returns, storm drives him ashore where Aegisthus lives; Aegisthus entertains him and kills him; Cassandra, daughter of Priam, is killed by Clytaemestra; after seven years Orestes returns from exile in Athens and kills Aegisthus; Clytaemestra also dies, but we are not told how.
5. *Agamemnon* first of a trilogy including:
Choephoroe 'Libation Bearers': Orestes story of return and revenge, pursuit by the Erinyes.
Eumenides 'The Kindly Ones': Apollo defends Orestes; Erinyes and Apollo plead their cases on the Areopagus, Athena casts deciding vote for Orestes; Erinyes accept Athena's offer of a home in Athens, become *Eumenides* with a special cult in Athens. Transition from blood-feud to the rule of law.
Proteus: lost satyr play, Menelaus during return home

Produced in 458, two years before Aeschylus' death.

Outline of the Agamemnon

Prologue (1-39)

Palace Watchman; foreboding and some major themes: male strength (11), med. (16), house (17f.), house and silence (33-39). At *Odyssey* 4.524ff. hired spy posted by Aegisthus, here loyal servant.

Choral prelude (40-103) anapestic dimeters

The army embarks (40-71), chorus too old to join (72-82), present inquiry after sacrifices (80-103)

eagles (48), Helen (62), med. (69, 94, 99), sacrifice (87)

Parodos (104-257) 104-159 dactylic meters, 160-191 trochees, 192-257 iambs

The portent at Aulis, Calchas' interpretation, Iphigeneia (146ff.), Hymn to Zeus (160ff.), wisdom through suffering (178, 250-1), med. (200),

Agamemnon's dilemma (205ff.), necessity's yoke (218)

Episode I (258-354)

Clytaemestra informs Chorus that Troy has fallen, the Beacons (281ff.), fire as avenging power of Zeus from Troy to House of A.; Clytaemestra's description of Troy—her fears are her secret hopes (320ff.)

Choral prelude (355-366)

Zeus' net cast over Troy

First Stasimon (367-488) mainly lyric iambic

Paris (367-402), Helen (403-426), those who died at Troy (427-474), uncertainty if Troy has fallen (475-488)

Episode II (489-680)

Prob. Clyt. speaking (489-500), Chorus (501-2), Herald's speech (503-537), Chorus, Herald, Clytaemestra (538-680); three main speeches of Herald

Second Stasimon (681-781)

Helen = destroyer (681-715, 737-749), the lion cub (716-736), wealth (750-781)

Episode III (782-974)

Chorus (sincere/false praise), Agamemnon, Cassandra (silent), Clytaemestra.

Tapestry scene

Third Stasimon (975-1034)

Uncertainty of the Chorus

Episode IV (1035-1071)

Clytaemestra and Chorus; Cassandra remains silent

Epirrhematic I (1072-1330) Cassandra in lyric verses, Chorus in iambics

Cassandra's visions (1072-1177): ancient crime and present murder revealed.

Three speeches of Cassandra (trimeters) and dialogue (1178-1330)

Choral interlude (1331-1342)

Chorus on wealth

Episode V (1343-1406)

Cries of Agamemnon, deliberation of Chorus, appearance of Clyt. and dead

Epirrhematic II (1407-1576) Chorus lyrics, Clytaemestra trimeters

Chorus identify blood-guilt as problem of the trilogy (1560-1566)

Episode VI (1577-1673)

Aigisthos, Chorus, Clytaemestra

Themes

Clytaemestra, male/female

Medicine

The House

Silence

City/citizens/rumor

Helen

Sacrifice

Wisdom/suffering
The yoke of necessity
Robes, nets, tapestries
Marriage
Lion

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Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

I. **Lecture Outline** (slightly adapted from Lawrence Kim, Univ. Texas)

A. Laius and Jocasta

1. Laius flees from Thebes to the court of Pelops
2. Laius rapes Chrysippus, son of Pelops; Pelops curses Laius
3. Laius returns to Thebes, marries Jocasta
4. Laius learns from oracle that his own son would kill him
5. Shepherd pities child, gives it to friend from Corinth
6. Friend gives it to Polybus and Merope, rulers of Corinth
7. Child called Oedipus ('swollen foot')

B. The Oracle and the Murder of Laius

1. Oedipus, grown, is accused by friend of being a bastard
2. Goes to Delphi to ask Oracle who his parents are
3. Oracle: "You will kill your father and marry your mother"
4. Decides to avoid Corinth and heads toward Thebes
5. Is abused by man and entourage at crossroads
6. Oedipus kills them all except one

C. Thebes and the Sphinx

1. The Sphinx (half lion, half woman, wings)
2. No one can solve her riddle
3. Creon, brother of Jocasta, ruler in Laius' absence
4. Creon: whoever solves riddle, rules Thebes/marries Jocasta
5. Oedipus solves riddle

D. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*

1. A plague in Thebes; Oedipus consults Delphic Oracle
2. Oracle: Find and punish Laius' murderer
3. Asks prophet Teiresias, who tells him that he is the murderer
4. Oedipus suspects conspiracy
5. Slowly discovers truth, via his own investigation
6. Jocasta hangs herself
7. Oedipus puts out his eyes with hairpins
8. Oedipus wants to leave Thebes, Creon now rules

Homeric version: Jocasta is called Epicaste, Oedipus remained ruler of Thebes and apparently did not blind himself but Epicaste did hang herself. No mention of Sphinx or the children of Oedipus (Eteocles, Polyneices, Antigone, Ismene).

Oedipodeia: the four children of Oedipus were not borne by Jocasta but by a second wife, Euryganeia.

Thebaid: Oedipus curses his sons after they set a table with the wine-cups of Laius.

Stesichorus (ca. 575): wrote a *Thebaid* (vel sim.), in which the death of Oedipus' sons occurs at the insistence of the Fates because of the family curse. It is prophesied by Teiresias; Jocasta appears as the wife.

Pindar: represents the destruction of Oedipus' sons as direct retribution by the Furies for the parricide.

Aeschylus: Treated like the story of Agamemnon, that is, Oedipus portrayed as the victim of an inherited curse (tetralogy: *Laius*, *Oedipus*, *Seven against Thebes*, *Sphinx*). Includes blinding and curse on sons; the triple road where Laius killed sacred to the Erinyes/Eumenides.

Euripides: wrote an *Oedipus* in which Oedipus is blinded by the servants of Laius; but in his *Phoenissae* he blinds himself.

Slides:

1. The shepherd Euphorbus with the child Oedipus. Attic Red-figure amphora by the Achilles Painter, c. 450 BCE. From Vulci.
2. The Sphinx.
3. Oedipus and Sphinx. Attic Red-figure kylix by Douris. Oedipus, dressed as a traveller (hat, staff), seated before the Sphinx, who is perched atop a short Ionic column. Vatican Museums.

Outline of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

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Parados (151-215)

Episode I (216-462)

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Exodus (1223-1530)

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The plague that ravishes Thebes; the arrival of Creon from Delphi; Oedipus pledges to relieve the people by finding the murderer of Laius

Parados (151-215)

The Chorus bewail the pestilence and invoke the aid of the gods

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Oedipus invokes a curse on the murderer of Laius, sends for Teiresias but then blames Teiresias and Creon for conspiring against him

Stasimon I (463-512)

The Chorus senses the murderer is doomed; refuse to believe Teiresias

Episode II (513-862)

Creon and Oedipus quarrel, through Jocasta Oedipus begins to realize his guilt; the attendant/herdsman of Laius is summoned

Stasimon II (863-910)

The Chorus pray against arrogance and impiety

Episode III (911-1085)

The messenger from Corinth reveals that Polybus is dead, that Polybus and Merope were not the parents of Oedipus; tells the story of Oedipus' abandonment as an infant; Jocasta flees in terror

Stasimon III (1086-1109)

The Chorus, gravely mistaken, foretells that Oedipus will prove to be a native of the land, perhaps even of divine parentage

Episode IV (1110-1185)

The Theban herdsman is brought in. The entire truth is revealed. Oedipus flees.

Stasimon IV (1186-1222)

The Chorus bewails Oedipus' fate.

Exodus (1223-1530)

The Messenger announces that Jocasta has hanged herself and Oedipus has blinded himself. Oedipus is led forth and begs Creon to banish him, leaving him only his daughters as guides.

Discussion Points

1. Sophocles has been called the master of the enacted metaphor. What does that mean?
2. *Anagnorisis*: "In play after play, one or more characters is brought to a realization that he or she has misperceived the nature of reality and the realization is almost always associated with pain, suffering, and death." How does this apply to the *OT*?
3. Aristotle recognized three elements of the tragic plot, two of which were *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia*. *Peripeteia* means reversal, a complete and startling twist in the direction of the dramatic action. Aristotle said that the best kind of recognition is one which happens at the same time as *peripeteia* as in the *Oedipus*. What did he mean by this?
4. There are a number of riddles associated with the story of *Oedipus*, and the play itself works, in one sense as one big riddle. How is this so?

Riddle of Sphinx; *Oedipus* man of the swollen foot who also knows (*oida*) the riddle of the foot (*pous*); riddle of who *Oedipus* is; riddle for the audience of how the play will end (irony directed at the audience, who up till now is a better riddle-solver than *Oedipus*)

Riddle of Sphinx is really the riddle of *Oedipus* (who is the babe, the man, the older man with walking stick (457)).

5. How do we explain *Oedipus'* fate? Why did he suffer in the way he did?

Dodds' question: "In what sense, if in any, does the *Oedipus Rex* attempt to justify the way of God to man?"

- a) *Oedipus* was a bad man; his treatment of Creon. *Oedipus* suffered from a fateful *harmartia*.
 - i. No clear example of *harmartia* in the play (*Oedipus* proud, over-confident, treatment of Teiresias and Creon, doubt over truth of oracles); no mention of it on stage.

- ii. Aristotle did not say Oedipus suffered from a moral fault but from *hamartema*, an offence committed in ignorance of some material fact and thus free from *poneria* or *kakia*. If they had acted knowingly we could not feel pity for them. Oedipus' *hamartia* lie in his parricide and incest.
 - iii. Oedipus did what he could to avoid his fate, but the oracle did not make its fulfillment conditional.
 - iv. In Aeschylus the sin of Laius was conditional, but no mention of such in Sophocles. Aeschylus' story is one of a hereditary curse, like the *Oresteia*.
- b) Oedipus had no free will, he was a puppet in the hands of the gods.
- i. Anachronistic, the debate about determinism is a creation of Hellenistic thought.
 - ii. Divine foreknowledge of events did not imply for the ancient Greeks that all human actions were predetermined.
 - iii. The point is rather "a man freely choosing, from the highest motives, a series of actions which lead to his own ruin." "What causes his ruin is his own strength and courage, his loyalty to Thebes, and his loyalty to the truth."
 - iv. "The notion that nothing matters except the agent's intention is a peculiarity of Christian and especially of post-Kantian thought" Athenian law courts took account of intention and Oedipus would have been acquitted but "no human court could acquit him of pollution; for pollution inhered in the act itself, irrespective of motive."
- Vernant "Innocent and pure from the point of view of human law, he is guilty and contaminated from the religious point of view."
- pollution: 97-8, 137, 313, 821, 833, 1427
- v. **Plato Laws 872c ff.:** "Should cases occur of a kind for which it is a formidable and most unwelcome task to legislate, and yet impossible not to legislate,--such as murders of kinsfolk, either by a man's own

hand or by plotting, which are wholly willful and wicked,--crimes that occur for the most part in States with bad organization and nurture, but may occur at times even in a country where one would not expect them,--we must again recite the story we uttered a moment ago, if haply anyone, on hearing us, may become more strongly disposed in consequence voluntarily to abstain from murders of the most impious kind. The myth or story (or whatever one should call it) has been clearly stated, as derived from ancient priests, to the effect that Justice, the avenger of kindred blood, acting as overseer, employs the law just mentioned, and has ordained that the doer of such a deed must of necessity suffer the same as he has done: if ever a man has slain his father, he must endure to suffer the same violent fate at his own children's hands in days to come; or if he has slain his mother, he must of necessity come to birth sharing in the female nature, and when thus born be removed from life by the hands of his offspring in afterdays; for of the pollution of common blood there is no other purification, nor does the stain of pollution admit of being washed off before the soul which committed the act pays back murder for murder, like for like, and thus by propitiation lays to rest the wrath of all the kindred. Wherefore, in dread of such vengeance from Heaven a man should refrain himself; if, however, any should be overtaken by a disaster so lamentable that they have the audacity deliberately and of free will to reave soul from body for father, mother, brethren or children, in such cases the ordinance of the law of the mortal lawgiver stands thus:-- The warnings of exclusion from customary places, and the sureties, are the same as those prescribed for former cases; and if any man be convicted of such a murder, and of having slain any of the persons named, the officers of the judges and magistrates shall kill him and cast him out naked at an appointed cross-roads outside the city; and all the magistrates, acting on behalf of the whole State, shall take each a stone and cast it on the head of the corpse, and thus make atonement for the whole State; and after this they shall carry the corpse to the borders of the land and cast it out unburied, according to law."

c) Sophocles was a pure artist and had no interest in justifying the gods.

There is no meaning in *Oedipus Tyrannus*; there is merely the terror of coincidence and then, at the end of it all, our impression of a man's power to suffer and of his greatness because of this power.

Reinhardt: The question of responsibility is irrelevant to Sophocles—there is no discussion here about justice and atonement or freedom and necessity. “What we have had to consider is illusion and truth as the opposing forces between which man is bound, in which he is entangled, and in whose shackles, as he strives towards the high-test he can hope for, he is worn down and destroyed.”

- i. No, but true that the ways of the gods cannot be justified to man in terms of human justice.
- ii. Sophocles did not believe that the gods are in any human sense ‘just’ but he did believe that the gods exist and that man should revere them. The two were not felt to be contradictory.
- iii. Note the words of Heraclitus “Men find some things unjust, other things just; but in the eyes of God all things are beautiful and good and just.”
- iv. “There is an objective world-order which man must respect, but which he cannot hope fully to understand.”

d) Summation

- i. Dodds, “Certainly the *Oedipus Rex* is a play about the blindness of man and the desperate insecurity of the human condition; in a sense every man must grope in the dark as Oedipus gropes, not knowing who he is or what he has to suffer; we all live in a world of appearance which hides from us who-knows-what dreadful reality.”
- ii. Dodds, “But surely the *Oedipus Rex* is also a play about human greatness. Oedipus is great, not in virtue of a great worldly position—for his worldly position is an illusion which will vanish like a dream—but in virtue of his inner strength: strength to pursue the truth at whatever personal cost, and strength to accept and endure it when found.”
- iii. Oedipus as a symbol of the human intelligence “which cannot rest until it has solved all the riddles—even the last riddle, to which the answer is that human happiness is built on an illusion.” “Is there not in the poet’s view a much wider sense in which every man is Oedipus?”

Final words of the play, "Count no mortal happy til he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain."

6. Oedipus as *pharmakos*: suppliant with branches, lack of fertility (27, 171-2, 269ff., 353), banishment of murderer

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Prologue (1-150)

The plague that ravishes Thebes; the arrival of Creon from Delphi; Oedipus pledges to relieve the people by finding the murderer of Laius

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Sophocles' *Antigone*

Outline of Sophocles' *Antigone*

Prologue (1-99) Antigone and Ismene

- Creon to order that Polyneices not to be buried on pain of death by stoning. Antigone decides to defy the order but Ismene is unwilling to do the same
- lines 1ff. mention of curse on house of Laius
- Ismene's rationale, lines 49ff.
 - The curse on the family: you will prove your own undoing like the others have
 - Such an action goes against law and royalty
 - We are mere women
 - We are subject to Creon's authority
 - Wild and futile action is senseless

Parados (100-154)

- Polyneices failed in his attack; Zeus hates the proud; Let us turn now from battle to sacrifice

1st Episode (155-331) Creon, Chorus, Guard

- Creon's rationale for his order – the primacy of loyalty to the state
- Creon 175ff.

*You cannot learn of any man the soul,
the mind, and the intent until he shows
his practise of the government and law.*

...

*And he who counts another greater friend
than his own fatherland, I put him nowhere.*

...

*Nor could I count the enemy of the land
friend to myself, not I who know so well
that she it is who saves us, sailing straight,
and only so can we have friends at all.*

- Creon's position is approved by the chorus (213-4)
*For you can make such rulings as you will
about the living and about the dead.*
- Guard appears with news that someone has mysteriously covered the corpse of Polyneices.
- Creon rejects the notion that the gods are behind the burial but accuses the guards.

1st Stasimon (332-375)

- Man's 'inventive craft' has tamed the sea, the earth, birds, beasts, language, thought, emotion, even sickness; all but death.
*When he honors the laws of the land and the gods' sworn right
high indeed is his city; but stateless the man
who dares to dwell with dishonor.*

2nd Episode (376-581) Guard, Chorus, Creon, Antigone

- The guard brings in Antigone, who was caught in the act. She admits to covering Polyneices
- Her justification (449f.):
 - Such a law was not from Zeus or Justice
 - The law was from Creon, who cannot overturn the gods' unwritten and ancient laws
 - It is better to face the anger of man than of the gods
 - For one with so many sorrows death is preferable to life, but leaving Polyneices while living would only increase grief.
- The chorus and Creon disapprove, the chorus comparing her to Oedipus, Creon ironically rebuking her rigidity.
- Creon charges Ismene as silent participant
- Creon and Antigone debate her actions
- Ismene appears, accepts blame but Antigone will not allow it
- Creon is resolute in his decision to kill Antigone even though she is betrothed to Haemon, his son

2nd Stasimon (581-625)

- The curse on the house of Labdacus, Folly and Fury, the power of Zeus, wandering Hope

3rd Episode (626-780) Chorus, Creon, Haemon

- Haemon at first appears loyal to his father

- Creon justifies his decision
 - She was caught in the act
 - He cannot allow disorder in his house, since that would license it elsewhere
 - The man in charge must be obeyed wrong or right; there is no greater wrong than disobedience
- Haemon responds that the people are grieving for Antigone, Creon should bend and not be so rigid
- Creon refuses to be schooled by his boy, and they argue whether Creon should bend to the will of the people
- Haemon runs off; Creon relents in his plan to kill Ismene, announces plan to hide Antigone in a cave

3rd Stasimon (781-800; Choral interlude 801-805)

- Powerful Love is responsible for the present quarrel

Kommos (806-882; *kommos*: formal song between actor(s) and chorus)

- Antigone escorted to her death; the curse on the house
- The chorus, though sympathetic, faults her actions (872ff.)
*You showed respect for the dead.
 So we for you: but power
 is not to be thwarted so.
 Your self-sufficiency has brought you down.*
- Antigone leaves with words reminiscent of Oedipus, (880): *No longer shall I see this holy light of the sun*

4th Episode (883-943)

- Creon orders Antigone to be taken away
- Antigone unrepentant; controversial lines (906ff.)
*Had I had children or their father dead,
 I'd let them moulder. I should not have chosen
 in such a case to cross the state's decree,
 What is the law that lies behind these words?
 One husband gone, I might have found another,
 or a child from a new man in first child's place,
 but with my parents hid away in death,
 no brother, ever, could spring up for me
 Such was the law by which I honored you.*

4th Stasimon (944-987)

- Fitting mythological subjects: the imprisonment of Danaë and Lycurgus (the angry king), the blinding of Phineas' sons, and Cleopatra of the cave.

5th Episode (988-1114)

- Teiresias appears with news of strange omens and the gods' rejection of sacrifices: these are because of Creon's decision not to bury Polyneices.
- Creon accuses Teiresias of trying to make a profit from his prophecy
- Teiresias is pushed to reveal that if Creon doesn't relent he will pay with the lives of those close to him (1066ff.):

*Know well, the sun will not have rolled its course
many more days, before you come to give
corpse for these corpses, child of your own loins.
For you've confused the upper and lower worlds.
You sent a life to settle in a tomb;
you keep up here that which belongs below
the corpse unburied, robbed of its release.*

.....

You rob the nether gods of what is theirs.

- Teiresias gives a further reason for Creon's fate (1080ff.)
*And all the cities that you fought in war
whose sons had burial from wild beasts, or dogs,
or birds that brought the stench of your great wrong
back to each hearth, they move against you now.*
- The chorus convinces Creon to change his mind, bury Polyneices and free Antigone. He leaves with these words (1116-7)
*I've come to fear it's best to hold the laws
of old tradition to the end of life*

Hyporcheme (1115-1154)

- Call for the presence of Dionysus

Exodos (1155-1353); Kommos (1261-1347)

- The Messenger announces the death of Antigone and Haemon.
- Eurydice enters and hears further details of her son's fate. She exits in silence. The Messenger follows inside
- Creon returns mourning his sons death
- The Messenger announces Eurydice's death by sword
- Creon leaves in sentiment reminiscent of Oedipus, only with role's reversed (1329):

Creon: *Let me go, let me go. May death come quick,*

bringing my final day.

O let me never see tomorrow's dawn.

Chorus: *That is the future's. We must look to now.*

What will be is in other hands than ours.

Outline of Sophocles' *Antigone*

Prologue (1-99) Antigone and Ismene. Creon to order that Polyneices not to be buried on pain of death by stoning. Antigone decides to defy the order but Ismene is unwilling to do the same

Parados (100-154) Polyneices failed in his attack; Zeus hates the proud; Let us turn now from battle to sacrifice

1st Episode (155-331) Creon, Chorus, Guard. Creon's rationale for his order—the primacy of loyalty to the state. The Chorus approves (213-4). Guard announces Polyneices mysteriously covered. Creon accuses the guards.

1st Stasimon (332-375) Man's 'inventive craft' has tamed the sea, the earth, birds, beasts, language, thought, emotion, even sickness; all but death.

2nd Episode (376-581) Guard, Chorus, Creon, Antigone. The guard brings in Antigone, who was caught in the act. She admits to covering Polyneices but attempts to justify her actions. The Chorus and Creon disapprove. Creon charges Ismene as silent participant.

2nd Stasimon (581-625) The curse on the house of Labdacus, Folly and Fury, the power of Zeus, wandering Hope

3rd Episode (626-780) Chorus, Creon, Haemon. Haemon at first appears loyal to his father. Creon justifies his decision. Haemon responds that the people grieve Antigone, Creon should not be so rigid; Creon refuses and they argue. Haemon runs off. Creon relents in his plan to kill Ismene, announces plan to hide Antigone in a cave.

3rd Stasimon (781-800; Choral interlude 801-805) Powerful Love is responsible for the present quarrel

Kommos (806-882; *kommos*: formal song between actor(s) and chorus). Antigone escorted to her death.. The chorus, though sympathetic, faults her actions (872ff.).

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5th Episode (988-1114) Teiresias appears with news of strange omens and the gods' rejection of sacrifices: Creon is to blame. Creon accuses him of trying to make a profit. Teiresias reveals that Creon will pay with the lives of those close to him. The chorus convinces Creon to bury Polyneices and free Antigone.

Hyporcheme (1115-1154) Call for the presence of Dionysus

Exodos (1155-1353); Kommos (1261-1347) Messenger announces death of Antigone and Haemon. Eurydice enters and hears further details of her son's fate, exits in silence. Creon returns mourning his son's death. Messenger announces Eurydice's death by sword. Creon leaves in sentiment reminiscent of Oedipus, only with role's reversed.

CLCV 2000 Classical Mythology

Euripides' *Bacchae*

The *Bacchae* was produced by Euripides' son in Athens, after the death of Euripides, around 405 BCE.

I. Outline of the *Bacchae*

Prologue (1-63)

Soliloquy spoken by Dionysus: declaration of his divinity, he has been slighted, his plans to obtain vengeance.

Parados (64-169)

A hymn to Dionysus incorporating elements of myth and ritual.

Episode 1 (170-369): Teiresias, Cadmus, Pentheus

Teiresias and Cadmus, two old men, set out to worship the god; Pentheus ridicules them.

Stasimon 1 (370-433)

The Chorus denounce the hybris of Pentheus and appeals to the spirit of Reverence; they long to escape to where their rite is allowed; sing of the struggle between the arrogance of godless intellectuals and instinctive religious feeling of the people.

Episode 2 (434-518): an attendant, Pentheus, the Stranger

Attendant brings in compliant Stranger and tells of the escape of the women. First of three scenes between Pentheus and the Stranger.

Stasimon 2 (519-575)

Chorus makes appeal to Thebes, reaffirms faith in Dionysus, denounces Pentheus; ends with a cletic hymn

Episode 3 (576-861)

Palace miracles (earthquake scene, the Stranger's narrative, Pentheus' second meeting with the Stranger), the messenger scene, the tempting of Pentheus.

Stasimon 3 (862-911)

Chorus sings of hope restored, tables will be turned on the doubter, god is not mocked

Episode 4 (912-976)

The Stranger reenters as god, Pentheus reenters as maenad, both transformed in a reversal of Episode 2.

Stasimon 4 (977-1023)

Chorus sings a song of vengeance, summoning the demons of madness, they describe what will happen in the mountains and request that Dionysus reveal himself as a destroyer.

Episode 5 (1024-1152)

Pentheus' death is announced by his personal attendant; the Chorus takes pleasure at the news.

Stasimon 5 (1153-1164)

Chorus sings a song of triumph.

Exodus (1165-1392)

Agave's madness scene, the return of Cadmus with Pentheus' body, Agave regains sanity, lamentation over Pentheus, the *Deus ex Machina*, concluding words as Cadmus and Agave leave Thebes.

II. Ritual background to the Bacchae

- A. There is a connection between the play and the ritual elements of Dionysian festivals, especially the festival known as the *Agrionia* 'Of the Wilds'.
- B. This is "a festival of dissolution and inversion, with a women's uprising, madness and cannibalistic fantasies." Walter Burkert
- C. Like other festivals of Dionysus, it featured a period of intoxicated licence.
- D. Dionysus not solely or mainly a god of wine to the Greeks of the classical age
 - 1. He is the god of liquid power (*hygra physis*): the potential in the juice of the grape, the sap of a young tree, the blood in the animal's veins, all the mysterious and uncontrollable tides and ebb and flow in the life of nature.
 - 2. "His cult was originally an attempt on the part of human beings to achieve communion with this potency. The psychological effect was to liberate the instinctive life in man from the bondage imposed on it by reason and social custom: the worshipper became conscious of a strange new vitality which he attributed to the god's presence within him." Dodds, commentary p. xx.
 - 3. The jolly Bacchus wine-god is more a creation of Renaissance than ancients
- E. *orgia*
 - 1. 'secret rites,' not orgies, but acts of devotion
 - 2. secret in the sense that only those taking part may know what the initiation involves and in this case, only those involved may know what advantage is to be gained by joining.
- F. *bakcheuein*

1. Not merely 'to revel' but to have a religious experience of communion with the god which transformed a human into a Bacchant (βάκχος or βάκχη).
2. The state of frenzy is like that described in the parodos of the Bacchae: earth is like paradise, maenads suckle animals.
3. Wine (such as the intoxicating substances of other cultures) aids in this experience. One who drinks it becomes *entheos*.

G. *oreibasia*

1. 'mountain dancing,' a ritual practice by women, usually midwinter, in which participants became maenads or *bacchae* (βάκχαι), wild women whose personality change was brought on by the dancing.
2. Such effects of dancing seen in many religious practices: the Shakers, Whirling dervishes, some branches of charismatic Christianity, among the Jewish Hasidim, shamanism of all sorts
3. In the ritual, the maenads sometimes pursue and kill the king, or a goat, his stand-in, as part of the *oreibasia*.

H. *sparagmos*

The two culminating acts of the Dionysiac winter dance, *sparagmos*, tearing the victim to pieces and

I. *omophagia*

1. eating the victim raw. Cf. line 138.
2. Of particular importance in Kwakiutl culture is the secret society called Hamatsa. During the winter, there is a four-day, complex dance that serves to initiate new members of Hamatsa. Some of the dancers represent various spirits, including Bakbakwalanooksiwae ("cannibal at the north end of the world"; he is actually invisible and each dancer represents a mouth). The initiates are possessed by Bakbakwalanooksiwae on the first day of the ceremony and wanders into the woods until the end. When the initiate returns, he enacts a cannibalistic experience symbolically. Kwakwalanooksiwae is the

most prestigious role in the ceremony; he is a cannibalistic raven monster. Galokwudzuwis ("crooked beak of heaven") and Hokhokw (cannibalistic bird who crushes skulls) are other participants.

3. The fir tree (38, 110, 684, 741, 817, 1061, 1085): perhaps a remnant of ritual practice in which the victim was tied or hung to a pine-tree before being tewn to pieces
- J. In the end, in myth the maenads and Dionysus are driven away. In ritual there is some reconciliation with the god and the bacchants return to their previous state.

A mock search for the vanished Dionysus was part of the Agrionia ritual in some areas.

K. The story of Cadmus

L. The Daughter of Minyas

The daughters of Minyas, Leukippe, Arsippe and Alkithoe, alone refused to take part in the dances of Dionysos . . . but Dionysos grew angry. And they were busy at their looms, vying earnestly with one another in the service of Athena Ergane. Then suddenly ivy and vine tendrils coiled around the looms, serpents lurked in the wool baskets, and from the roof there dripped drops of wine and milk. Then they threw lots into a pitcher and all three drew the lots; and when the lot of Leukippe came out, she vowed aloud to make a sacrifice to the god, and with the help of her sisters, she tore Hippsasos, her own son, to pieces, and then they rushed out to join the other maenads in the mountains.