

# Greek Drama



# Beginnings of Greek Drama

- Cult of Dionysus the god of wine and fertility spreads throughout Greece.
- Rites involve ecstatic singing and dancing
- Actor separates from the chorus to create a dramatic dialogue.
- Bi-annual festivals for Dionysus celebrated with play competitions.
- Tragedy and comedies are the two main genre of plays.
- Aeschylus (ca. 525-456 B.C.E.) is the first major Greek playwright.

# ROOTS IN WORSHIP OF DIONYSUS



*K12.1 Dionysos*

GOD OF WINE AND REVELRY



THEATER AT EPIDAUROS



DIONYSUS THEATER IN  
ATHENS

# Ancient Greek Theatre



MASKS OF GREEK THEATER

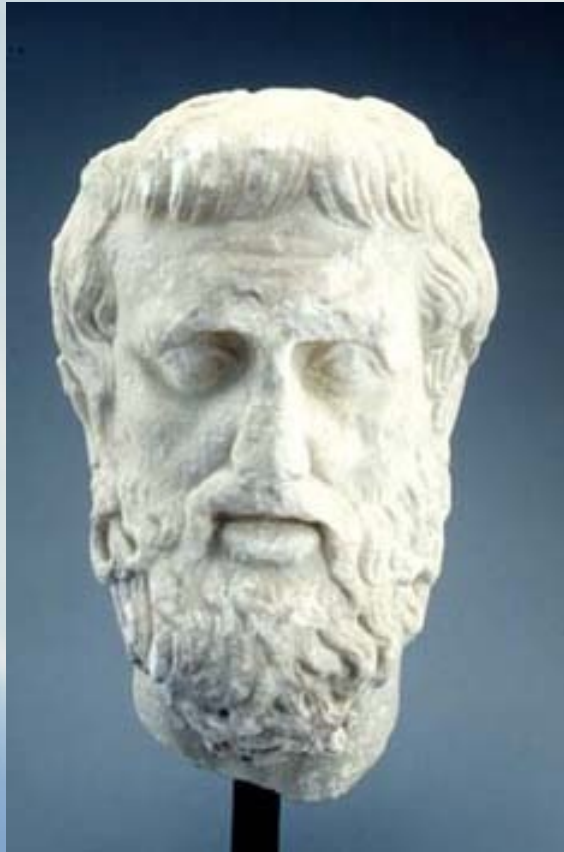
Only choruses used in the beginning , no individual actors

Hypocrites--Chorus leader began to deliver lines.  
Hypocrites became word for “actor”

Thespis--

The founder of the acting profession, writer and choral leader

The first actor or hypocrites



SOPHOCLES



# Playwrights

## Sophocles

496-406 BC

- Wrote ~90 plays (7 survive)
- Won 24 prizes; always 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>, never 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Wrote Oedipus *cycle* (not *trilogy*)
- Used chorus of 15, 2-3 actors
- Themes: complex human relationships
- ✓ Contribution: Added 3rd actor, created scene design, and enlarged chorus from 12-15

# Playwrights

## Eurpides

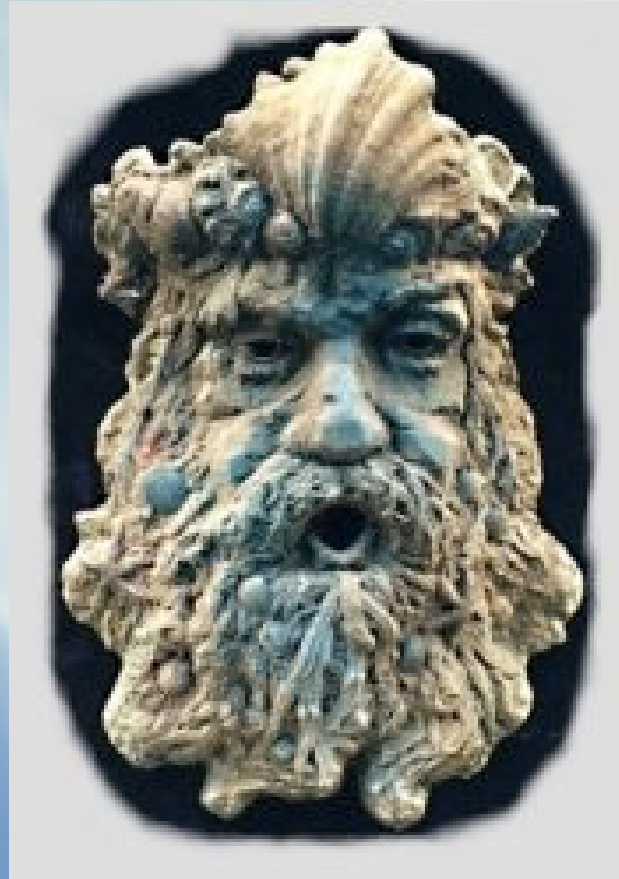
- 484-406 BC
- Wrote ~92 plays (19 survive); won 5 times
- Wrote *Medea*
- Themes: some melodramatic, abnormal states of mind, women
- ✓ Contribution: Invented prologue  
Made chorus less important

# Playwrights

## Aeschylus

~525 - 465 BC

- Soldier, citizen, poet
- Wrote 80-90 plays (7 survive along with fragments)
- *Oresteia* the only surviving example of trilogy
- Earliest plays used chorus of 50, 1 actor
- Later used chorus of 12, 2 actors
- Themes: cosmic (gods & people)
- ✓ Contribution: Added the second actor



MASKS OF GREEK THEATER

# Greek Theatre Terms

- **Orchestra:** The orchestra (literally, "dancing space") was normally circular. It was a level space where the chorus would dance, sing, and interact with the actors who were on the stage near the skene.

- **Theatron:** The theatron (literally, "viewing-place") is where the spectators sat.
- **Skene:** The skene (literally, "tent") was the building directly behind the stage. The skene was directly in back of the stage, and was usually decorated as a palace, temple, or other building, depending on the needs of the play.

- **Parodos:** The parodoi (literally, "passageways") are the paths by which the chorus and some actors (such as those representing messengers or people returning from abroad) made their entrances and exits.
- **Alter**
- **Proscenium**

# Structure of Play

- After a prologue spoken by one or more characters, the chorus enters, singing and dancing.
- **Prologue:** Spoken by one or two characters before the chorus appears. The prologue usually gives the mythological background necessary for understanding the events of the play.



- **Parodos:** This is the song sung by the chorus as it first enters the orchestra and dances.c.
- **First Episode:** This is the first of many "episodes", when the characters and chorus talk.
- **First Stasimon:** At the end of each episode, the other characters usually leave the stage and the chorus dances and sings a stasimon, or choral ode. The ode usually reflects on the things said and done in the episodes, and puts it into some kind of larger mythological framework.

- For the rest of the play, there is alternation between episodes and stasima, until the final scene, called the...
- **Exodos:** At the end of play, the chorus exits singing a processional song which usually offers words of wisdom related to the actions and outcome of the play.

# Greek Masks

Philosopher



Warrior



The God Pan



Masks allowed for multiple role-playing

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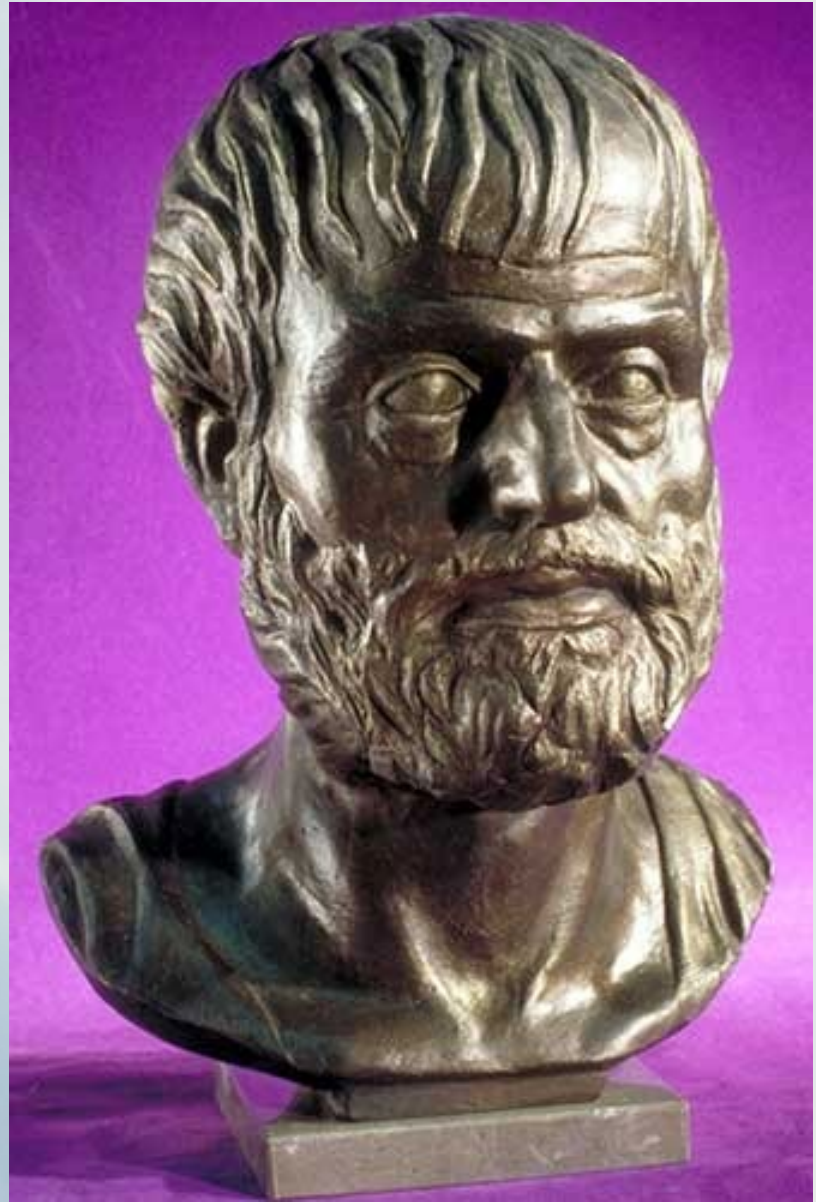
# The Tragic Vision

Aristotle

# Aristotle

- Biography and Poetics
- 384 B.C. to 322 B.C.
- Student of Plato

ARISTOTLE'S  
POETICS



# The Tragic Vision

- In tragedy, there seems to be a mix of seven interrelated elements that help to establish what we may call the "Tragic Vision":

- The conclusion is catastrophic.
- The catastrophic conclusion will seem inevitable.
- It occurs, ultimately, because of the human limitations of the protagonist.
- The protagonist suffers terribly.



- The protagonist's suffering often seems disproportionate to his or her culpability.
- Yet the suffering is usually redemptive, bringing out the noblest of human capacities for learning.
- The suffering is also redemptive in bringing out the capacity for accepting moral responsibility.
- Always ends in illumination or new perspective.

# 6 Elements of Tragedy According to Aristotle

*Tragedy* has six parts, which he viewed in this order of importance:

- *Plot* (combination of incidents) is most important because drama is action.
- reversal" (*peripeteia*): occurs when a situation seems to be developing in one direction, then suddenly "reverses" to another.
- recognition" (*anagnorisis* or "knowing again" or "knowing back" or "knowing throughout" ): a change from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate.
- suffering" (*pathos*): Also translated as "a calamity," the third element of plot is "a destructive or painful act."

- *Characters* (moral qualities of the agents) are second in importance, reveal the moral purpose.

- *Diction* (composition of verses) is the expression of thought in words.

- *Thought* (theme) consists of saying what can be said and what is appropriate (philosophy).

- *Melody* (song) is an element of pleasure.

- *Spectacle* (stage appearance) is the last consideration. (*Poetics*, 1.VI)



# Elements of Drama

Representation

Reversal

Recognition

Pathos

Catharsis

# Three Unities of Tragedy

- **Unity of Time**
  - All events occur within one 24-hour period
- **Unity of Place**
  - All action occurs in one place
- **Unity of Action**
  - Plot is unified
  - No subplots
  - No mix of comedy and tragedy

# Tragic Hero

## Protagonist

- Person of high or noble birth with good intentions
- Has a tragic flaw—*hamartia*
  - Often *hubris*—*excessive pride or contemptuous violence (deceit, lying, betrayal, revenge, cruelty, murder, suicide, patricide, infanticide, self-mutilation)*

CENTRAL CHARACTER  
IS OF THE ELITE CLASS

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CENTRAL CHARACTER  
SUFFERS A DOWNFALL

CENTRAL CHARACTER IS  
NEITHER WHOLLY GOOD  
NOR WHOLLY EVIL

DOWNFALL IS THE RESULT  
OF A FATAL FLAW



MISFORTUNES INVOLVE  
CHARACTERS WHO ARE  
RELATED OR WHO ARE  
FRIENDS

TRAGIC ACTIONS TAKE  
PLACE OFFSTAGE

CENTRAL CHARACTER  
HAS A MOMENT OF  
RECOGNITION

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AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES  
PITY AND FEAR



PITY AND FEAR  
LEADS TO A  
CATHARSIS

# Irony

Situational

Cosmic

Dramatic

# Play Parts?

- Prologue
- Parados
- Episodes
- Stasimons
- Exodus
- Chorus

OEDIPUS REX

OEDIPUS AT  
COLONUS

ANTIGONE





DELPHI



DELPHI

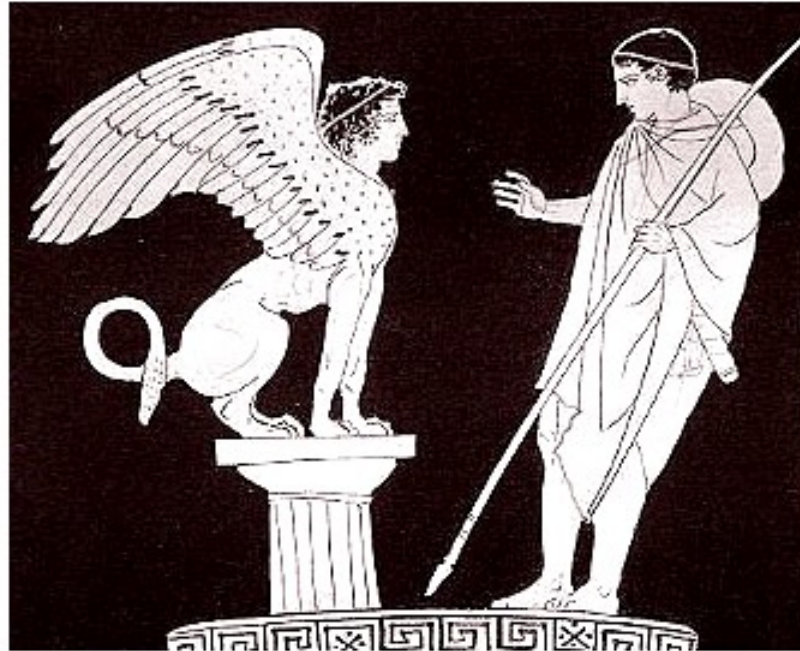


# ORACLE OF DELPHI



Oedipus and the Sphinx. (Fragment of an archaic Greek Vase found at Daphnae.)

# OEDIPUS AND SPHINX



*M18.3 Sphinx & Oedipous*

# OEDIPUS AND SPHINX