


PART ONE

The theatres we refer to as *early theatres*—Greek, Roman, Asian, and medieval—actually cover a period of nearly 2,000 years: from Greek theatre in the fifth century B.C.E. through medieval theatre, which began 1,500 years later; and from Indian and Chinese theatres, which came to flower, respectively, in the fourth and seventh centuries C.E., to the emergence of Japanese theatre.

In western theatre—that is, in Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe—this is a long time span to encompass the beginnings of theatre. But it is important to remember that in Europe, for nearly 1,000 years—from the declining years of the Roman empire until the emergence of medieval theatre—there was no formal theatre: in the Middle Ages, theatre had to begin all over again. It was also during this thousand-year period that Indian and Chinese theatre began.

The Greek, Roman, and medieval theatres can legitimately be called *early theatres* because they established the foundations on which all subsequent western theatre was built. Not only in theatre, but in virtually every area of life, these cultures formed the basis of western civilization. The list of their accomplishments is monumental: the classical Greeks developed democracy, philosophy, the study of science and mathematics, and architecture; the Romans were great conquerors, architects, and lawmakers; the medieval Europeans organized methods of farming and established trade guilds.

We do not want to oversimplify the relationship among the theatres of these three societies, but there are important common elements. One is the significant connection in all three between theatre and religious and civic celebrations. It is often argued that the roots of theatre lie in religious rituals, and this seems to be substantiated by the Greek theatre's initial connection to rites honoring the god Dionysus, the Roman theatre's relation to the festival of Jupiter (Zeus), and the medieval theatre's close tie with the Roman



Catholic church. At the same time, a strong secular element permeated all three theatres; there was a desire to treat human as well as religious subjects. This is the natural development of theatre in any society; when theatre becomes an art form on its own, it concentrates on human problems and aspirations.

Another common element is that in each of these cultures, theatre was a significant civic and social event. This is reflected in the huge open-air theatres of Greece and Rome as well as in the spectacular outdoor medieval stage settings. We have large outdoor theatres today—for summer Shakespeare festivals and rock concerts, among other events—but in these earlier societies a large proportion of the population became involved in theatre to a degree that has never been equaled in modern times.

In Asia, the theatres of India, China, and Japan reached a high point of artistic achievement when religion and philosophy were also central in each culture. This level of excellence kept traditional theatre allied to religion and philosophy even when society changed and became more secular. Like culture in the west, the great Asian civilizations we will consider became the foundations for later societies.

As we begin to survey these early theatres, we should remember how much of their drama has survived and is still performed in our own day. Greek tragedies and comedies are still produced; plays of the Roman dramatist Plautus have been adapted as Broadway musicals; and there are modern versions of the medieval morality play *Everyman*. In Japan, the traditional theatres, such as *nō*, *bunraku*, and *kabuki*, are kept alive even today, and there is an almost unbroken line from past to present.

In Part One, as we explore theatre from its origins to a time several centuries later, we should not view it as a remote activity; rather, we should search for elements that continue to be part of our theatre today.

EARLY THEATRE

CHAPTER ONE



Greek Theatre

◌WESTERN DRAMA BEGINS.◌

The roots of Western theatre can be found in the fifth century B.C.E. in Athens, Greece. This is where playwriting, acting, and theatre production began. The works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were presented in the Theatre of Dionysus, where a good percentage of the population attended theatre festivals each year. We get some idea of the types of actors, their costumes, and their masks from the series of terra-cotta statuettes shown here. These statuettes date from the fourth century B.C.E. Note the many poses, the facial expressions, and the drape and shape of the costumes.

(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1913)



BACKGROUND: THE GOLDEN AGE OF GREECE

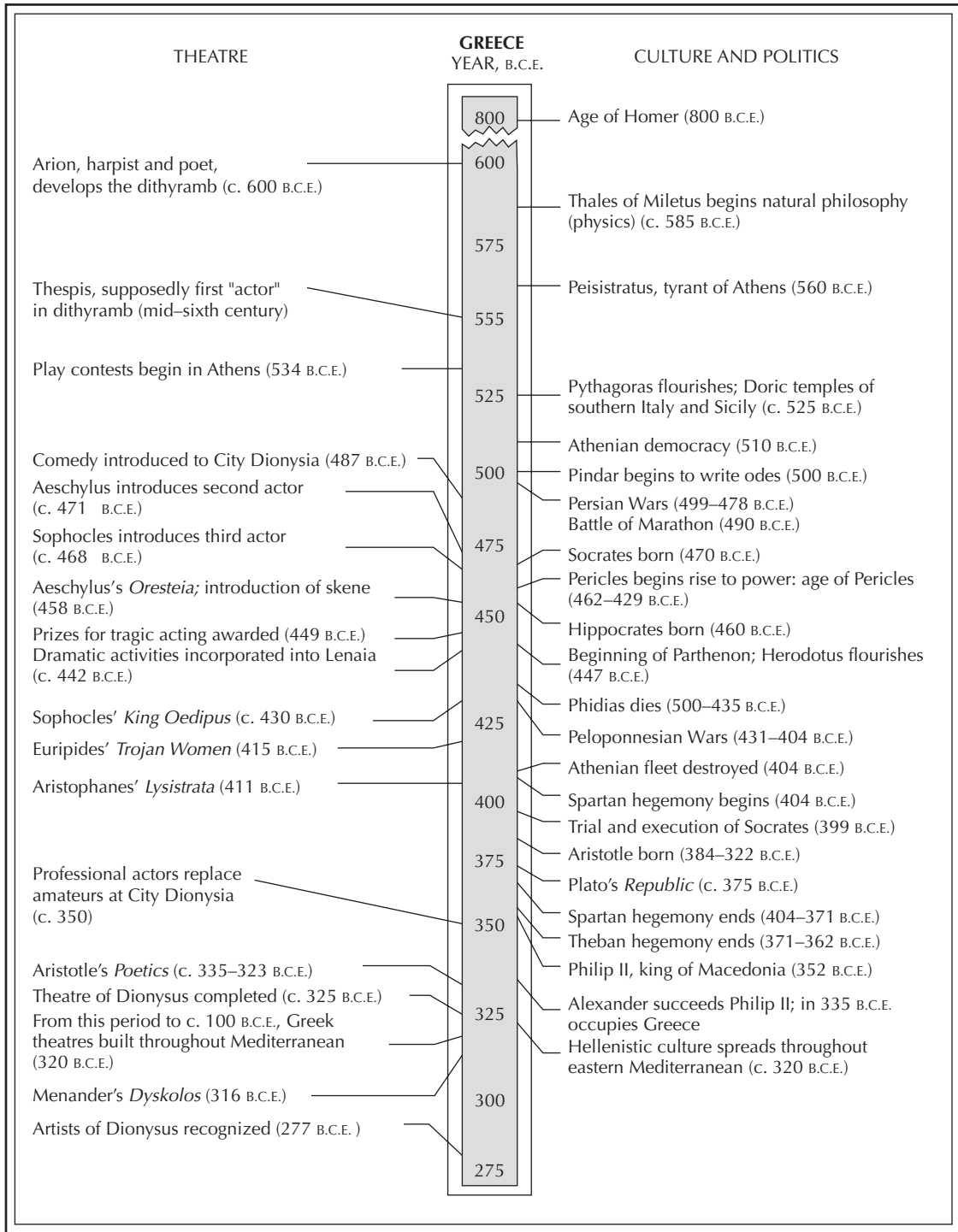
There are times in history when many elements come together to create a remarkable age. Such a time was the fifth century B.C.E. in Athens, Greece, when there were outstanding achievements in politics, philosophy, science, and the arts. As a part of this culture, western theatre was born.

A number of events had prepared the way. Long before 500 B.C.E., impressive civilizations had developed around the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea: in Egypt, in Persia (which included present-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and other countries), and in Greece. Advances had been made in art—in pottery, for example, and in the performance of elaborate ceremonies such as the one at Abydos in Egypt—as well as in science, astronomy, and mathematics. Athens carried this tradition forward.

Greece at this time was not an empire or even a united country but a series of independent city-states occupying parts of the Greek peninsula and nearby islands: at the start of the fifth century B.C.E., the most important city-state was Athens. Early in the century the Persians had attempted to conquer the Greeks, but in 490 B.C.E., the Greeks had won a decisive battle against them at the battle of Marathon. Later in the century—from 431 to 404 B.C.E.—there was a costly conflict between Athens and Sparta known as the Peloponnesian Wars. Between these two events, however, Athens enjoyed a period of remarkable achievements—a time known as the *classical period* and also as the *golden age* of Greece. There are good reasons for calling it a “golden age,” because there were important accomplishments in so many fields.

Athens is credited, for example, with being the birthplace of democracy. In 510 B.C.E., the rulers of Athens established a democracy of free citizens, which means that all male citizens—men who were not slaves or of non-Athenian origin—were given a voice in politics and government. Though there were slaves in Athens, and women were subservient, it should be remembered that the United States, also founded on democratic ideals, once suffered from similar limitations: slavery was not abolished until 1865, and women could not vote until 1920. Despite these drawbacks in ancient Athens, it was an admirable achievement to establish democracy for such a large portion of the population.

There were advances in other areas as well. Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, tried to explain the world around them; and Herodotus transformed history into a social science. A number of important scientific discoveries were made: the Greek mathematician Pythagoras formulated a theory that remains one of the cornerstones of geometry, and the physician’s oath written by Hippocrates is the one still taken by doctors. The classical Greeks were also remarkable artists and architects: Greek sculpture from this period is found in museums around the world, and the Parthenon, the temple on the Acropolis, has withstood time and natural catastrophes—its columns and proportions remain models for architects even today. Obviously, this was a time conducive to developments in many fields, and one of the most significant was theatre.





THE WORLD OF CLASSICAL GREECE

Greece was divided into a number of city-states. During the fifth century B.C.E., Athens (near the center of the map) was the most powerful of these. It was during this period that Greek drama was first performed at the City Dionysia and other festivals and reached a high point of development. Other cities important to Greek drama are Thebes (northwest of Athens), where the mythical events surrounding Oedipus and his family took place; and Delphi (northwest of Thebes), the site of an oracle visited by the Greeks and referred to in several plays. On the Hellespont (to the northeast) is the legendary city of Troy; the Trojan War figures prominently in plays about Agamemnon and others. Sparta (southwest of Athens, on the Peloponnesus) is the city that finally conquered Athens, at the end of the Peloponnesian Wars in 404 B.C.E.

ORIGINS: GREEK THEATRE EMERGES

Theatre is a complex art which requires the coming together of many elements: a story to be told, a dramatization of the story (the script by the playwright), a meeting place for performances, performers to enact the drama, costumes for the performers, some form of stage, perhaps scenery, and an audience for the performance.

In different ways, these elements had been developing in Athens before the fifth century B.C.E. Important forerunners of theatre in Greece were religious ceremonies, which were a prominent feature of Greek society: funeral services, festivals celebrating the seasons, and ceremonies honoring the gods.

Of particular significance to theatre were the ceremonies honoring Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility, and revelry; later Greek drama was presented in honor of Dionysus, and a number of historians, though not all, believe that Greek drama originated in the dithyrambic choruses presented to honor Dionysus. The *dithyramb* was a long hymn, sung and danced by a group of fifty men. Its format may have been similar to a modern-day choral presentation: the leader of the chorus recited or sang an improvised story while the other members sang a popular refrain. By about 600 B.C.E., the dithyramb became a literary form, detailing heroic stories.

Arion, a talented harpist and poet who had been born in Lesbos but lived in Corinth at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E., is thought to have been an influential figure in the development of the dithyramb. According to the historian Herodotus, Arion made significant changes in the dithyramb and moved it toward a dramatic form by interspersing spoken sections with the musical portions; these spoken segments were supposedly more dramatic than the songs.

Even more than Arion, a performer named Thespis, in the sixth century B.C.E., is customarily credited with transforming the dithyramb into tragedy by stepping out of the dithyrambic chorus and becoming an actor. Thespis delivered a prologue and presented dialogue that required him to impersonate a character: thus a purely narrative or storytelling form became a dramatic form in which characters exchanged lines. Thespis is said to have been the first writer of tragedy as well as the first actor; his decisive contribution is reflected in the modern term *thespian*, a synonym for “actor.” The ancient Greek word for “actor” was *hypokrite*—literally, “answerer”—underscoring the fact that drama required the verbal give-and-take of dialogue and interaction between actor and chorus.

We should note that there are other theories about the origin of Greek theatre, including storytelling and other types of performance. The Greek philosopher Aristotle suggested that theatre developed out of human beings’ natural desire to imitate, a subject we referred to in the Introduction. Some contemporary historians have suggested that because of the popularity of storytellers before the classical period, a storyteller was added to the dithyrambic presentation, creating dramatic interaction. However, these theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in fact, they all point to the strong relationship between Greek theatre and religion, which we discuss below.

THEATRE IN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C.E.

GREEK THEATRE AND GREEK RELIGION

It is important to understand the part religion played in the life of the people of Athens, because Greek theatre is intimately bound up with Greek religion. Through the centuries, the Greeks had developed a religion based on the worship of a group of

gods, of whom Zeus was the leader along with his wife, Hera. The Greeks did not regard the gods as all-powerful, but they did believe that the gods could protect them and reveal the future. In the cities, annual festivals were held in honor of those gods who the people felt would guide and protect them.

Theatre became a central feature of certain religious festivals, and theatrical presentations were both religious events and entertainment. Partly because of these religious connections, people of all social classes attended theatrical performances. We know that the lower as well as the upper classes participated because Pericles, the great ruler of Athens in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E., established the Theoric Fund in 450 B.C.E. to assist those who were too poor to afford admission to the theatre.

FESTIVALS AND THE CITY DIONYSIA

The significance of the “religious-theatrical” event in Greek society gave theatre a far more important place than it occupies in our society. Business came to a standstill during dramatic festivals; wars ceased; political concerns were ignored. Today, certain televised events—such as the Super Bowl and the election returns after a presidential race—attract the attention of millions of Americans. But the total cessation of a society’s activities for religious purposes, as practiced by the Greeks, has no present-day equivalent; moreover, obviously, the Greeks attended their festivals in person as opposed to watching them on a television screen.

(© Michael Nicholson/CORBIS)



THE THEATRE OF DIONYSUS

The theatre at which the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and all the early Greek dramatists were first performed was the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. It had semicircular seating cut into a hillside, surrounding a circular orchestra, with a wooden stage area at the rear. Today remnants of a later version of the theatre (with stone seats replacing the original wooden ones) remain on the same site in Athens.

One festival in particular became important for theatre in Athens. This was the *City Dionysia*, a festival honoring the god Dionysus. The City Dionysia was a signal event in Athens; it was held toward the end of March, when spring had arrived and the port near Athens, which was closed for the winter, had reopened and visitors began pouring into the city. This was also the season when trees and flowers began to come to life again. In 534 B.C.E., tragedy was incorporated into the City Dionysia, and by 486 B.C.E., two other forms of drama—comedy and the satyr play—had been added. (The *satyr play*, a brief comic parody, discussed below, was added in 501 B.C.E.)

The City Dionysia in Athens lasted for several days. Before the opening of the festival, all the major theatrical participants paraded and appeared in the *proagon*, a preliminary presentation designed to advertise and provide information about the coming plays. On one or two other days, there were parades and sacrifices honoring Dionysus. Five days were then assigned to dithyrambs and plays. On two of these days, ten dithyrambic choruses were presented: probably, one day was assigned to choruses made up of men and one day to choruses of boys. Three days were allotted to tragedies and satyr plays, with three tragedies and one satyr play by a single playwright being presented each day; these four plays by one dramatist were called a *tetralogy*.

There has been considerable debate over when the comedies, which were added to the City Dionysia in 486 B.C.E., were staged. At one time, historians believed that a separate day of the festival was devoted to five comedies, each by a different playwright. Some scholars now suggest that a comedy was added on the five days in which dithyrambs and tragedies were performed.

A few days after the festival, awards were given, the festival operation was reviewed by a representative body, and people who had behaved improperly or disrespectfully were judged and penalized. We are told, for example, that punishment would be meted out to a festivalgoer who used violence to prevent someone else from taking a seat in the theatre or who carried a whip and struck an enemy with it while intoxicated. (Like most accounts passed down through the ages about misconduct in the theatre, these are difficult to date or prove, but they provide a flavor of the event.)

The Greeks were great proponents of competition; the Olympic Games, for example, originated during the classical era. At the end of the City Dionysia, the best tragic and comic playwrights were awarded prizes; in 449 B.C.E., the best tragic acting in the festival was also recognized with an award. (Modern counterparts are the Tony awards in theatre, the Oscars in film, and the Emmys for television.)

Since theatre was both a religious and a civic event, the organization of the dramatic presentations was undertaken by the city-state. The *archon*, an appointed government official, chose the plays 11 months before the next festival.

The archon appointed a *choregus*, the equivalent of a modern-day producer, for each of the selected playwrights. In commercial theatre today, the producer raises funds for a production. In the fifth century B.C.E., the choregus, a wealthy individual, provided the money himself and paid all major expenses connected with the chorus: rehearsals, costumes, and musicians. The city provided the theatre space, the

DEBATES IN THEATRE HISTORY: Did Women Attend Dramatic Festivals?

There is no way of knowing for certain if women attended the Athenian dramatic festivals in the fifth century B.C.E. The question has been debated by historians because it is known that women did not participate fully in the Greek democracy of the golden age and did not act in tragedies or comedies.

One historian of classical Greek theatre, Peter Arnott, notes in *Public and Performance in the Greek Theatre*, “It is still not certain . . . whether or not women were admitted (though it is a reasonable surmise that they were).”^{*} J. Michael Walton, in *Greek Theatre Practice*, lists sources which argue that women were present at classical Greek performances. He cites an account by a contemporary choregus indicating that men and women were impressed by his dress for the theatre and an often-repeated tale that some women in attendance at Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* suffered miscarriages.[†] In Aristophanes’ comedy *The Frogs*, the character of Aeschylus states, satirically, that all decent women committed suicide after seeing one of Euripides’ plays; although this comical remark is obviously not to be taken lit-

erally, it does indicate that women attended the theatre. Walton suggests that women were probably segregated in separate sections in the theatre, a seating process which would have been facilitated if (as some scholars believe) tribes were also seated in distinct areas.

The question whether or not women were part of the classical Greek audience reminds us, of course, that women did not have equal status with men. Some contributions to this debate also remind us that scholars themselves have sometimes made “sexist” generalizations. For example, Victorian historians believed that Greek women could not have attended comedies because these were bawdy and sexual, but that they could attend tragedies. In many of his plays, however, Aristophanes jokes about women in attendance at performances, demonstrating the fallacy of this reasoning. Moreover, if women were present at tragedies, then they would also have been present for the satyr plays—which, as we will see, were as sexual as the early comedies.

^{*}Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 5.

[†]Greenwood, Westport, Conn., 1980.

awards, and the playwrights’ and actors’ salaries. While it is true that a stingy choregus could hurt a playwright’s chances of winning the contest, usually the choregus would strive to produce a winner because winning was a source of great prestige. When their productions won, for example, some choregoi erected monuments in their own honor.

During the classical era, theatre became part of other festivals, though not to so great an extent as with the City Dionysia. Before the end of the fifth century B.C.E., theatrical activities were added to the Lenaia, a festival celebrated at the end of January in the city of Athens; and to the Rural Dionysia, celebrated in December by the rural areas of the Athenian city-state.

The concept of the Dionysian theatre festival still inspires contemporary theatre producers and directors. A variety of international theatre festivals, for instance, have been held in cities throughout the world. The many Shakespeare festivals held throughout the United States each year are also in the tradition of these ancient events. These modern versions are not religious festivals or contests, but the idea of regularly scheduled festivals, highlighting significant playwriting and theatrical accomplishments, is an attempt to remind audiences of the centrality of theatre in our lives and of its ability to establish a sense of community.

GREEK THEATRE AND GREEK MYTHS

The sources of the subject matter of most of the plays written for the festivals were Greek myths. The stories found in the myths provided the action, the characters, and the conflicts.

Along with festivals and the move from dithyrambic choruses to drama, other aspects of theatre had been developing before the fifth century B.C.E. One was the accumulation of a group of stories on which much of Greek drama, particularly tragedy, was based. In the centuries before the golden age, a number of myths had become an important part of the Greek heritage.

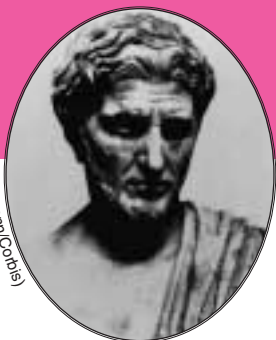
A *myth* is a story or legend—sometimes invented, sometimes based loosely on fact—that is handed down from generation to generation. Frequently, a myth is an attempt to explain natural and human events: the changing of the seasons, for example, or a cataclysmic occurrence like an earthquake or a civil war. Myths may also deal with extreme family situations: one branch of a family opposing another, or a difficult relationship between a husband and wife or between parents and children. In each culture, certain myths are seized on because they seem to sum up its view of human relationships and of the problems and opportunities life presents to individuals.

In Greece, there were a multitude of myths. Good examples are the poet Homer's accounts of the Greek war with the Trojans in the *Iliad* and the hero Odysseus's return from the Trojan War in the *Odyssey*. These and other myths furnished many of the stories for Greek drama, but before they could be performed at the theatre festivals, they had to be transformed by a playwright into dramatic form.

GREEK TRAGEDY

Tragic Playwrights

The first Greek writers of whom we are aware who attempted to create dramatic pieces appeared in the sixth century B.C.E. Though their works have not survived, we know the names of a few writers, including Arion and Thespis. It was in the fifth century B.C.E. that the drama which we still read and perform took shape. The three best-known writers of Greek tragedy in this period were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.



AESCHYLUS



(525–456 B.C.E.)

Of writers whose works still exist, Aeschylus was the first to develop drama into a form separate from singing, dancing, or storytelling. For this reason he is often considered the founder of Greek drama and therefore of all western drama.

Aeschylus's plays dealt with noble families and lofty themes and were praised for their superb lyric poetry as well as their dramatic structure and intellectual content. They won a number of first prizes in the drama contests, and Aeschylus was the acknowledged master of the tetralogy—four plays which can stand separately but are united by a single story or theme. In addition, he used the chorus more extensively and more effectively than the playwrights who came after him. The power of his poetry and the majesty of his themes are often expressed most fully in the choral sections of his plays.

Before Aeschylus, a drama would have only one actor, who interacted with the chorus. Aeschylus added a second actor; this was an important development in theatre practice, since it allowed for a true dialogue. He also reduced the size of the chorus, perhaps from fifty to twelve, making it more manageable. Later, Sophocles introduced a third actor, and Aeschylus then incorporated this new feature into his own plays. Aeschylus's theatrical work included directing and acting as well as playwriting. He was fond of theatrical spectacle and is sometimes credited with having developed new forms of stage scenery, painted scenery, and elaborate costumes.

In Aristophanes's comedy *The Frogs*, Aeschylus was caricatured as pompous and rhetorical. In the same play, however, he was also judged a superior dramatist to Euripides.

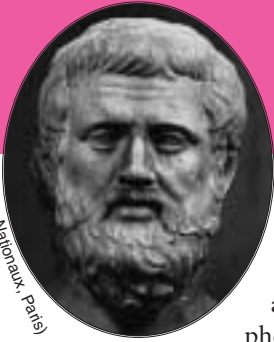
Aeschylus was born of a noble family in Eleusis, near Athens, and was highly regarded not only as a playwright and poet but also as a soldier and prominent citizen. Among his other military exploits, he fought for Athens against the Persians at the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E. Ten years later he served with the Athenian fleet during a second Persian invasion and was present at the important victory at Salamis. He died in 456 B.C.E. at the age of 69.

Aeschylus is believed to have written ninety plays. The titles of seventy-nine are known, indicating a diversity of subject matter. However, only seven of his plays still exist (the dates given here indicate when the plays are known or thought to have been first produced): *The Suppliants* (ca. 490 B.C.E., but possibly considerably later); *The Persians* (c. 472 B.C.E.); *Seven Against Thebes* (c. 469 B.C.E.); *Prometheus Bound* (c. 460 B.C.E.); and *The Oresteia* (458 B.C.E.), a trilogy consisting of *Agamemnon*, *The Choephoroi* (*Libation Bearers*), and *The Eumenides*. Aeschylus competed in the City Dionysia drama contest for the first time in 499 B.C.E.; he won first prize for the first time in 484 B.C.E.

SOPHOCLES

(c. 496 B.C.E.–406 B.C.E.)

(Musées
Nationaux, Paris)



Sophocles developed Aeschylus’s dramatic techniques even further. He was particularly noted for his superb plot construction: he introduces characters and information skillfully and then builds swiftly to a climax. The Greek philosopher Aristotle used Sophocles’ *King Oedipus* as the model for his own analysis of tragedy. Exploration of character and a focus on the individual are also characteristic of Sophocles’ plays. In addition, his poetry is widely admired for both its beauty and its lucidity.

As a boy, Sophocles performed in a public celebration of the victory of the Athenians over the Persians at the battle of Salamis. As an adult, in addition to being a playwright, he acted in his own early dramas. His first victory as a dramatist came when he defeated Aeschylus in the contest of 468 B.C.E. From his very first play, Sophocles was a popular success. Over the years he evidently wrote more than a hundred plays, winning first prize eighteen times and never finishing lower than second.

Aristotle credits Sophocles with realistic innovations in scene painting. Sophocles also increased the tragic chorus from twelve to fifteen members and is credited with introducing a third actor to Greek tragedy—a development which, by increasing the number of characters in a play, enlarged the possibilities for conflict and interaction.

Sophocles told his stories as single dramas instead of extending them into the traditional trilogy of three connected plays; this change added more action to the plot. Today, three of Sophocles’ surviving plays—*King Oedipus*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*—are sometimes grouped as a trilogy because they all concern the fate of the same family; but they were originally written and performed as parts of different trilogies.

As a general, a civic leader, an ambassador, and a priest, Sophocles participated fully in Athenian life during the Greek golden age. He was born near Athens at Colonus (where Oedipus received sanctuary in his final years), the son of a wealthy Athenian factory owner. He was devoted to his native city-state, Athens, and refused many invitations to live at the courts of foreign kings. He died, age 90, in 406 B.C.E. and thus was spared the sight of the defeat of his beloved Athens by Sparta. Throughout his long life, he was known for his good nature, a fact noted by Aristophanes in *The Frogs*.

Though Sophocles wrote over 120 plays, only seven complete tragedies have survived: *Ajax* (c. 450 to 440 B.C.E.); *Antigone* (c. 441 B.C.E.); *King Oedipus* (c. 430 to 425 B.C.E.); *Electra* (c. 418 to 410 B.C.E.); *Trachiniae* (c. 413 B.C.E.); *Philoctetes* (409 B.C.E.); and *Oedipus at Colonus* (c. 406 B.C.E.). Fragments of some of his satyr plays also survive, including a large portion of *The Trackers*.



(Bettmann/Archiv/Corbis)

EURIPIDES



(c. 480–406 B.C.E.)

Of the three great tragic playwrights of ancient Greece, Euripides is considered the most “modern.” This description is particularly telling because Euripides actually was a contemporary of Sophocles and died a few months before him.

There are several reasons why Euripides is often thought of as a more modern writer: his sympathetic portrayal of women, the greater realism of his plays, his mixture of tragedy with melodrama and comedy, and his skeptical treatment of the gods.

In fact, Euripides was often criticized for “modernism” during his own time: his characters behaved as people do in everyday life, and such realism was not considered appropriate for tragedy. His plays were also criticized for other reasons, such as their plots (which were held to be weak), their diminished use of the chorus, and their sensational subject matter. His mixing of comedy and tragedy was derided (though it became a model for the tragicomedy and melodrama of later periods). The most controversial element of Euripides’ plays was his portrayal of the gods as human and fallible, a treatment that was said to undermine the traditional moral order.

Unlike Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides took no active part in the political or social life of Athens. He was probably born on the Athenian island of Salamis and was the son of a wealthy citizen. But though his family background and education prepared him for public life, he was by temperament reclusive and moody, interested in observing society and examining the philosophical and scientific movements of the day. It was often said that he had marital problems and disliked women; these reports about his personal life may have developed because many of his plays focus on strong-willed, passionate women. As a dramatist, Euripides created believable female characters and showed a greater understanding of women than his contemporaries.

The comic playwright Aristophanes frequently parodied scenes from Euripides, ridiculing both his philosophy and his dramatic methods. Only five of Euripides’ ninety-two plays received prizes during his lifetime, but his reputation grew rapidly after his death. He came to be much admired for his originality and independence of thought, and many of his dramatic methods were copied by both ancient and modern playwrights.

Eighteen plays by Euripides still exist: *Alcestis* (438 B.C.E.); *Medea* (431 B.C.E.); *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.E.); *The Children of Heracles* (c. 425 B.C.E.); *Andromache* (c. 424 B.C.E.); *Heracles* (c. 421 B.C.E.); *The Suppliants* (c. 420 B.C.E.); *Hecuba* (c. 417 B.C.E.); *The Trojan Women* (415 B.C.E.); *Electra* (c. 412 B.C.E.); *Helen* (412 B.C.E.); *Ion* (c. 411 B.C.E.); *Iphigenia in Tauris* (c. 410 B.C.E.); *The Phoenician Women* (c. 409 B.C.E.); *Orestes* (408 B.C.E.); *The Bacchae* (c. 406 B.C.E.); and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (c. 406 B.C.E.), as well as *The Cyclops*, a satyr play whose date is unknown.



◡ A TRAGIC FIGURE ◡

Greek playwrights perfected tragedy, which is described by Aristotle in *The Poetics*. One of the best-known tragic heroines is *Medea*, played here by Brenda Wehle at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis; her unfaithful husband, *Jason*, is played by Stephen Yoakam.

The Chorus

All the Greek playwrights of the fifth century B.C.E. included a chorus in their plays. In fact, the chorus, which sang and danced as well as recited, was an integral and unique feature of classical Greek drama. Its importance is seen in the fact that a *chorodidaskalos*—a choral trainer—was employed for all festival productions. It is thought that at the time when Aeschylus began writing, there were fifty men in the chorus; this is an assumption based on the fact that there were fifty men in the dithyrambic chorus. As we have pointed out, Aeschylus is said to have reduced the number to twelve, which would be much more manageable, but, again, the actual number is conjectural. It is further believed that Sophocles increased the number to fifteen, where it remained—again, this number is based on a certain amount of speculation, but most commentators agree on it.

One fact to keep in mind about the chorus is that its importance in Greek tragedy decreased during the fifth century. In the plays of Aeschylus, fully half the lines are often given to the chorus. That number is reduced in the plays of Sophocles and diminished even further in the works of Euripides.

In comedy, there were twenty-four men in the chorus. Greek comedy often employed a double chorus, with the twenty-four members divided into two groups of twelve. In *Lysistrata*, there are choruses of old men and old women. Chorus members probably intoned or sang their lines in unison; on occasion, the

choral leader delivered his lines independently.

The Greek chorus performed a number of dramatic functions. It provided expository or background information, commented on the action, interacted with other characters, and described offstage action. In tragedy, the chorus often represented the common people of the city-state ruled by the tragic hero or heroine; audience members could identify with the feelings and ideas of these people. Since choruses sang and danced, they also provided spectacle, as choruses do today in musical theatre. In Old Comedy, the chorus was frequently fantastical; for example, chorus members appear as birds in *The Birds* and as frogs in *The Frogs*.

Of the various Greek dramatic conventions, it is the chorus that is probably most difficult for modern audiences to envision; a group of performers speaking in unison, chanting, and dancing is hard for modern spectators to imagine.



THE GREEK CHORUS

The chorus in classical Greek theatre served many functions. It provided exposition, narrated the action, interacted with the other actors, and added spectacle. In this production of *Iphigenia at Aulis* at the Guthrie Theatre in 1992, the chorus adds a visual component to the drama: dance and unique costuming.

Aristotle and the Tragic Form

The first critic who tried to pinpoint the characteristics of the Greek tragedies written by the great dramatists of the fifth century B.C.E. was the philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle wrote nearly a hundred years after the golden age and thus was describing a type of drama that had flourished long before his own lifetime, but his work on the subject—*The Poetics* (c. 335 B.C.E.)—is still the best starting point for a discussion of tragedy.

In addition to being a philosopher, Aristotle was a scientist who described and catalogued the world he saw around him. In analyzing tragedy, he followed the same careful, sensible approach that he brought to other fields; and though *The Poetics* is loosely organized and incomplete—it may have been based on a series of lecture notes—it is so intelligent and penetrating that it remains today one of the most important pieces of dramatic criticism we have.

According to Aristotle, there are six elements of drama, which he ranked in order of priority:

1. Plot—the arrangement of dramatic incidents
2. Characters—the people represented in the play
3. Thought or theme—the ideas explored
4. Language—the dialogue and poetry
5. Music
6. Spectacle—scenery and other visual elements

The implication in *The Poetics* is that tragedy deals with the reversals in fortune and eventual downfall of a royal figure. In “complex” tragedies, which Aristotle feels are the best type, the suffering hero or heroine makes a discovery and recognizes what has led to his or her downfall. There are also a number of what Aristotle calls “simple” tragedies, in which there is no such scene of recognition.

Though there are variations in the structures of the thirty-one Greek tragedies that still exist, many follow the same pattern in the unfolding of their scenes. First comes the *prologos*, the opening scene, which sets the action and provides background information. Next comes the *parodos*, in which the chorus enters. This is followed by the first *episode*, a scene in which the characters confront each other and the plot starts to develop. Next there is a *choral ode* performed by the chorus. Throughout the body of the play, episodes alternate with choral odes until the *exodos*, the final scene, in which all the characters exit from the stage. Aristotle suggests that Greek tragedy usually focuses on one major plot without bringing in subplots or unrelated secondary concerns, though some plays do have subplots.

Several points raised by Aristotle have been subject to different interpretations because his language is sometimes ambiguous; it is difficult to know exactly what he meant. Below, for instance, are two translations of his definition of *tragedy*, neither of which gives a fully satisfactory explanation of his meaning:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.¹

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action which is serious, complete, and has bulk, in speech that has been made attractive, using each of its species separately in the parts of the play; with persons performing the action rather than through narrative carrying to completion, through a course of events involving pity and fear, the purification of those painful or fatal acts which have that quality.²

¹S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 3d ed. Macmillan, London, 1902, p. 23.

²Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1957, p. 221.

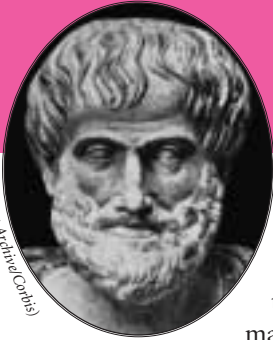
Parts of this definition are clear enough: tragedy presents a complete story (an action) that is serious and important (has magnitude and bulk) and is dramatized for presentation on the stage rather than recounted by a narrator. When we come to the last part of the definition, though, there is disagreement. Aristotle says that tragedy produces the emotions of pity and fear but that there is a *katharsis* of these emotions. One of the translators above calls *katharsis* a “purgation” of emotions and the other a “purification.”

The most widely accepted explanation of *katharsis* is the one suggested by the first translation: members of the audience feel pity for the suffering tragic hero and fear that a similar fate could befall them. If a king or queen suffers so greatly, how much more probable it would be for an ordinary person to confront similar circumstances. These emotions, however, are purged by the drama because the audience acknowledges them, and by doing so cleanses itself of their deleterious effects.

Some critics, however, would not define *katharsis* in this way. They suggest that the tragic character, rather than the audience, is purged of pity and fear by discovering the reason for his or her suffering and downfall; this is the implication of the second translation above. Still others suggest that *katharsis* occurs in the chorus, as it is confronted with the tragic details of the plot, and that the audience is meant to identify with the emotional impact on the chorus. What Aristotle does make clear, however, is that changes occur as a result of the strong emotions associated with tragedy.

There is another debate, concerning Aristotle’s discussion of the tragic hero, often called the *protagonist*, who is usually a royal figure. Why does the tragic hero suffer? The traditional interpretation of Aristotle’s commentary suggests that the hero suffers because of a tragic flaw, or *hamartia*, in his or her character. Scholars see the flaw of *hubris*, or excessive pride, in many of the Greek tragic figures. There is, however, a great deal of disagreement over what Aristotle actually means by *hamartia*. The literal translation is “missing the mark,” which has suggested to some scholars that *hamartia* is not so much a character flaw as an error of judgment made by the protagonist. Other critics have suggested that the “flaw” is often not in the leading character but in the tragic world represented by the play, a world that is temporarily disordered or “out of joint.” The characters themselves may act nobly but are damned by circumstances or fate.

Despite the debates about the meaning of certain passages in *The Poetics*, Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy is still considered one of the most important documents ever written on the subject.



ARISTOTLE



(384–322 B.C.E.)

Born at Stagira in northern Greece, Aristotle was the son of a doctor who became court physician to the king of Macedon. Aristotle’s lifelong interest in the sciences, especially biology, may be a reflection of his upbringing. As a young man he went to Athens to study with Plato at his Academy, where he remained for 20 years. There he began to develop his own philosophic system, at first by suggesting improvements in Plato’s ideas. After Plato died in 347 B.C.E., Aristotle left the Academy and spent 13 years away from Athens, including 3 years as tutor to the young Alexander the Great in Macedon.

Aristotle returned to Athens in 335 B.C.E. and opened his own school, the Lyceum. He remained in Athens until a wave of hostility against Macedon—the region where he was born—swept Athens following Alexander’s death in 323 B.C.E. Aristotle left Athens and died the following year on a nearby island.

Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the work in which he outlines his views on literature, is incomplete and (as we noted above) may have originally been written as notes for a series of lectures. Most of the treatise is on tragedy; comedy, epic poetry, and other forms of literature are mentioned only briefly. Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy, however, is of supreme importance. Plato had charged that drama, especially tragedy, is a danger to society because it encourages irrationality. As if answering Plato, Aristotle argues in *The Poetics* that tragedy is positive and helpful because it not only arouses pity and fear but also purges these emotions, restoring harmony to the soul.

Logic, metaphysics, psychology, physics, theology, ethics, politics, biology, and literary theory are among the topics covered by Aristotle in his 170 works. In his writings he stressed the importance of detailed observation and description of a phenomenon before attempting to form a theory—a process that still forms the basis of scientific method. Aristotle applied the same technique when examining drama. In *The Poetics*, rather than formulating rules, he carefully observed classical Greek tragedy and described it in detail. Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato are recognized as the most influential Greek philosophers, but Aristotle was the only one of the three to include an analysis of drama in his philosophic writings.

The Poetics was little studied by the Greeks and Romans, but it became the basis of dramatic criticism when it was rediscovered by Renaissance scholars. During this period, Aristotle’s descriptions and suggestions were often misinterpreted as inflexible rules for the writing of tragedies; Aristotle never intended that, but certain of the distortions have unfortunately persisted to modern times.

CLIMACTIC DRAMA

Aristotle's analysis of tragedy emphasizes plot. The Greeks developed an approach to dramatic structure that became the prototype—in an altered and more rigid form—for plays written in the Renaissance (in Italy and France) and the modern period (the well-made plays of Ibsen, Strindberg, and others). We will refer to this structure as *climactic drama*. At various times this form of dramatic structure has also been referred to as *crisis drama*, *intensive drama*, and *drama of the catastrophe*. Though not every Greek play conformed to it, its elements were first developed in Greece and are evident in a number of dramas, particularly those by Aeschylus and Sophocles.

In climactic drama the action begins near the climax, or high point, of the story, with the characters already in the midst of their struggles. There are very few characters, and there is only one main action; the play occurs within a short span of time (frequently 24 hours or less) and usually takes place in one locale. Dramatic tension is increased because calamities befall the characters in a very short time. Since the play begins in the midst of the crisis, the audience must be provided with a great deal of background information, which is known as *exposition*. Thus the plot of a crisis drama often unravels like a mystery.

King Oedipus

To understand the structure of Greek tragedy, it will be helpful to examine a single play, Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, which was first presented around 430 B.C.E. There are structural similarities among all extant Greek tragedies, but it should be noted that *King Oedipus* is the only one that conforms exactly to Aristotle's description.

Like most Greek tragedies, *King Oedipus* is based on a myth. In this case, the myth tells how the infant Oedipus, son of the king and queen of Thebes, is left on a mountaintop to die because of a prophecy that he will murder his father and marry his mother. He is rescued by a shepherd, however, and taken to be raised by the king and queen of Corinth. When he grows up, Oedipus hears about the prophecy that he will murder his parents and, not knowing that he is adopted, leaves home so that he will not kill the king of Corinth, the man he thinks of as his father. On the road he encounters a stranger, argues with him, and subsequently kills him, unaware that it is actually his own father whom he has slain. Later, Oedipus becomes king of Thebes and, still in ignorance, marries the woman who is really his mother, Jocasta. When a plague strikes Thebes, Oedipus sets out to find the cause.

Following the pattern of climactic drama, Sophocles begins his play near the major crisis in the story. He also structures his plot by using the basic elements of classical Greek tragedy. The play opens with a prologue in which Oedipus learns about the plague and also learns from his brother-in-law, Creon, that an oracle has said that the plague will end when the murderer of the former king is found and punished. Next comes the *parodos*: the appearance of a chorus of elderly men, who pray to the gods to end the plague. Then begins the first episode. Oedipus proclaims that he will find and punish the guilty person. The blind prophet Teiresias arrives and professes ignorance of past events, but when accused by Oedipus of conspiring with Creon against him, Teiresias hints that the guilty person is Oedipus himself. Oedipus is incensed at



◌KING OEDIPUS◌

In Sophocles's King Oedipus—one of the most famous Greek tragedies—Oedipus becomes king of Thebes after unknowingly killing his father and marrying his mother. Upon learning what he has done, Oedipus puts out his eyes. According to Aristotle, King Oedipus represents the quintessential Greek tragedy. In the scene here, from a production in Rome, Oedipus (Grigoris Valtinos) appears in front of his palace after he had blinded himself.

the suggestion. Following this, in the first choral song, the chorus asks who the murderer can be and expresses doubt that it is Oedipus.

In the second episode, Creon defends himself against an angry Oedipus, who accuses him of conspiring with Teiresias. Jocasta, Oedipus's wife, enters to tell her husband to ignore the oracle; it had predicted that her first husband would be killed by his son, but according to all reports he was killed by thieves at a crossroads. Oedipus, remembering that he has killed a man at a crossroads, begins to fear that he is the murderer; but he is reassured by Jocasta, who urges him to ignore his fears. (Notice how skillfully Sophocles alternates good news and bad news for Oedipus, carrying him from the heights to the depths and back again time after time.)

In the next choral song, the chorus—beginning to have doubts about Oedipus's innocence—says that reverence for the gods is best; prosperity leads to pride, which will be punished. In the third scene, or episode, a messenger from Corinth announces that the king of Corinth is dead. Jocasta is jubilant, for this means that the oracle cannot be trusted: it had said that Oedipus would kill his father, but the father has died of natural causes. The messenger then reveals that Oedipus is not the son of the king of Corinth. Fearing the worst, Jocasta tries to persuade Oedipus to cease his search for the facts. When he will not, she rushes into the palace. Oedipus sends for a shepherd who knows the full story of his origins and forces the shepherd to tell it. Learning the truth, Oedipus then goes into the palace himself.

In the following choral song, the chorus says that all life is sorrowful and bemoans the fall of Oedipus. In the exodos, or final scene, a messenger from the palace describes how Jocasta has killed herself and Oedipus has put out his own eyes. The blind Oedipus reappears to recite his sad story, courageously accepts his fate, and goes into exile. One of the features of Greek tragedy is that violence, such as murder or suicide, generally occurs offstage; rarely does it take place in view of the audience. The death of Jocasta and the blinding of Oedipus are no exception.

King Oedipus is admired for several reasons. One is the masterful way in which Sophocles unfolds the plot; it is like a detective story in which Oedipus is the detective tracking down a murderer. Another is the beauty of Sophocles' language. Though most modern readers do not understand ancient Greek, even in translation we can often appreciate the effectiveness of Sophocles' poetic expressions. For example, here are the words of the chorus just after Oedipus has discovered his fate; the chorus is saying that life is only a shadow and happiness often an illusion.

Alas, you generations of men, I count your life as nothing more than a shadow. Where, where is the mortal who wins more of happiness than just the appearance, and, after the appearance, a falling away? Yours is a fate that warns me, unhappy Oedipus, to call no earthly creature blessed.

King Oedipus is also admired because of the religious and philosophical questions it raises. Why does a man like Oedipus suffer? Is it because of some flaw in his character—his pride, for example—or because of an error in judgment? Is it, perhaps, to test Oedipus, as Job is tested by God in the Bible? Or is it because the world is a place where life is sometimes cruel and unjust and the innocent must suffer?

King Oedipus also affects audiences because of the tragic fall of the protagonist. Oedipus not only loses his kingdom; equally affecting is his loss of his family—dramatized by his separation from his children at the close of the play—and of his community as he goes into exile. We should note that in the great classical tragedies, the playwrights frequently dramatized the political, familial, and social suffering of their protagonists, possibly to heighten katharsis.

People have been studying *King Oedipus* for over 2,000 years, and they continue to find profound and complex meanings in what its characters say and do. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, for instance, developed a theory that each man subconsciously wishes to murder his father and marry his mother; Freud called this desire the *Oedipus complex*.

Antigone

Antigone, another play by Sophocles based on the Oedipus myth, features a female as the leading character. It too follows the form of crisis drama, with limited characters, locales, and a single action. In the myth, Antigone is the daughter of King Oedipus. After her father's death, her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, become involved in a war against each other to see who will be king of Thebes, and they kill each other. Antigone's uncle, Creon, then becomes king of Thebes. Creon blames one of the two dead brothers, Polynices, for the conflict, and he issues an edict that Polynices is not to be given an honorable burial. Antigone decides to defy Creon's order and bury her brother Polynices.

The above information serves as background to the action. As the play begins, two actors, each wearing the mask and costume of a woman, appear in the playing area: they represent Antigone and her sister, Ismene. As the scene begins, Antigone tells Ismene that she means to defy their uncle, the king, and give their brother Polynices an honorable burial. Ismene, unlike her sister, is timid and frightened, and she argues that women are too weak to stand up to a king. Besides, Ismene points out, Antigone will be put to death if she is caught. Antigone argues, however, that she will not be subservient to men, even the king.

When the two women leave, a chorus of fifteen men enters. These men represent the elders of the city, and throughout the play—in passages that are sung and danced—they will fulfill several functions: providing background information, raising philosophical questions, and urging the principal figures to show restraint. As in other Greek tragedies, the choral sections alternate with scenes of confrontation between the main characters—in this case, Antigone, Creon, and others.

Antigone does attempt to bury her dead brother, is caught, and is brought before the king. When the showdown between Antigone and Creon comes, Antigone defies him, and as punishment is put into a cave to die. In the end, not only is she dead, but so too are Creon's wife and son, who have killed themselves. In the final scene, we see Creon standing alone, wearing his tragic mask, bereft of all those he held dear.

(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1925)



◌SATYRS◌

Because we have few visual records of Greek theatre itself, we rely on evidence from artifacts such as vases. This vase painting depicts satyrs—the mythical half-man, half-goat creatures who appeared in short plays presented after a set of three tragedies. The satyrs in the painting are playing harp-like instruments called lyres.

SATYR PLAYS AND OLD COMEDY

As was mentioned earlier, on the days devoted to tragedy at the dramatic festival, three tragedies by a single playwright were presented. (*King Oedipus* would have been performed as one of three tragedies by Sophocles, as would *Antigone*.) When the three tragedies presented were linked to form a connected dramatic whole—for example, *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus—they were called a *trilogy*. Following the presentation of the three plays, whether they formed a trilogy or were independent, a short play by the same author, called a *satyr play*, was given as an afterpiece.

A satyr play was a comical play involving a chorus of satyrs, mythological creatures who were half-goat and half-man. It was structured like a Greek tragedy but parodied the mythological and heroic tales that were treated seriously in tragedies. Satyr plays poked fun at honored Greek institutions, including religion and folk heroes, and often had elements of vulgarity. For example, these plays often included explicit sexual material, and the costumes worn by the actors usually

consisted of a short tunic, below which protruded a false erect phallus. The only complete satyr play still in existence is *The Cyclops* by Euripides.

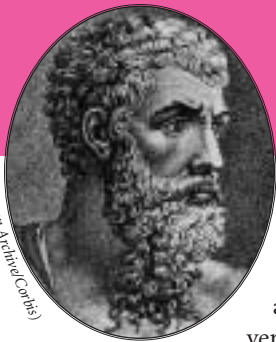
The third type of drama presented at Greek festivals was comedy. The comedies of this period are called *Old Comedies*; the only ones that survive are all by Aristophanes and have certain recurring characteristics. Most Old Comedies do not follow the pattern of climactic drama: they do not take place in a short span of time, are not restricted to one locale, and have a large cast of characters. Old Comedy always makes fun of society, politics, or culture, and frequently its characters are recognizable contemporary personalities. In *The Clouds*, for instance, the philosopher Socrates is shown as a character suspended in midair in a basket—in other words, his head is always in the clouds. A present-day equivalent might be the kind of television variety-show sketch that caricatures political figures, such as the president of the United States.

Old Comedy uses fantastical and improbable plots to underline its satire. In *The Birds*, two characters who are unhappy with their earthly existence leave for Cloud-cuckooland to observe the lives of the birds and discover ludicrous parallels between bird society and human society. In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes uses a comic premise, a parable, in order to condemn the Peloponnesian Wars, which were then raging in Greece. The Greek women in this comedy go on a sex strike, refusing to sleep with their husbands until the men cease warring. Miraculously, the scheme works.

Old Comedies employ a chorus and have sections similar to those in tragedy: prologos, episodes alternating with choral odes, and the exodos. There are, however, certain unique episodes in Old Comedy. One is the *agon*, a scene with a debate between the two opposing forces in a play—each representing one side of a social or political issue. Another is the *parabasis*, a scene in which the chorus speaks directly to the audience, makes fun of the spectators and specific audience members, or satirizes other subjects. Religious and political officials attended dramatic festivals and were seated in the front row of the theatre; during the parabasis, the chorus would single them out for ridicule. (A counterpart today would be television or standup comics who attack their audiences.)

ARISTOPHANES

(c. 448–380 B.C.E.)



(Bretmann Archive/Corbis)

The best-known comic playwright of the Greek golden age was Aristophanes. In his play *The Clouds*, Aristophanes complains that other playwrights are copying his plots and ideas; if this was true, it suggests that his comedies were very popular. Written in the style of Old Comedy, Aristophanes' plays reflect the social and political climate in Athens as it declined in power toward the end of the fifth century B.C.E.

The son of a wealthy citizen, Aristophanes was a member of the prosperous, conservative Athenian middle class. His plays indicate that he came from a cultured, old-fashioned home. Life in Athens was changing rapidly during his lifetime—greed for an empire was undermining the traditional simplicity, stability, and moral order—and he used his plays to ridicule the ideas and people that he felt were leading Athens to ruin. One of his targets was the Peloponnesian Wars with Sparta, a conflict that drained Athens of wealth and destroyed its social order. His death came after these wars had reduced Athens to poverty and disarray.

In spite of his conservative outlook, Aristophanes' plays are full of bawdy wit—a reflection of the open attitude toward sex in Athenian society. Since Old Comedy did not emphasize plot or character, Aristophanes' plays are distinguished for their inventive comic scenes, witty dialogue, and pointed satire. Because of their many references to contemporary people and events, his plays are difficult to translate into playable modern versions.

Besides what we know about him from his plays, an incident recorded in Plato's *Symposium* reveals that Aristophanes was very much involved in the daily life of Athens, including attending parties with friends. Plato reports that after outdrinking and outtalking all the guests at an all-night party, Aristophanes left with the philosopher Socrates, debating whether one man could write both comedy and tragedy.

Though he wrote approximately forty plays, Aristophanes did not feel competent to stage his own works and usually turned his plays over to a producer-director. Eleven of the plays survive. Among the best known are *The Archanians* (425 B.C.E.), *The Knights* (424 B.C.E.), *The Clouds* (423 B.C.E.), *The Wasps* (422 B.C.E.), *Peace* (421 B.C.E.), *The Birds* (414 B.C.E.), *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.E.), and *The Frogs* (405 B.C.E.). Aristophanes' last plays—in particular, *Plutus* (388 B.C.E.)—are often categorized as *Middle Comedies*, transitional works which led to the development of the nonpolitical New Comedy. (New Comedy is described later in this chapter.)

GREEK THEATRE PRODUCTION

The Theatre Building

An important element of Greek theatre was the kind of space in which plays were presented. Since tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays were offered at religious festivals, huge theatres were necessary: the classical Greek theatre probably accommodated 15,000 to 17,000 spectators. The most noted of these theatres was the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens.

Greek theatres were outdoor amphitheatres with illumination provided by the sun, and the Greeks were often resourceful in the use of natural lighting in their dramas; if a play required a “sunrise effect,” for example, it would be presented as the first drama of the day, at dawn.

There were three separate parts in a Greek theatre: the *theatron* (literally, “viewing place”), which was the seating area for the audience; the *orchestra*, or playing area for



☞ GREEK OLD COMEDY ☞

*The comedy of Aristophanes, known as Old Comedy, was a form that has never appeared in quite the same way since. Usually there was a “comic premise,” which might have been quite fantastical. In the scene here, from a production of *The Frogs* at Yale University in 1974, the members of the chorus are frogs. In the play, Dionysus goes to the underworld to bring back the dead Euripides.*

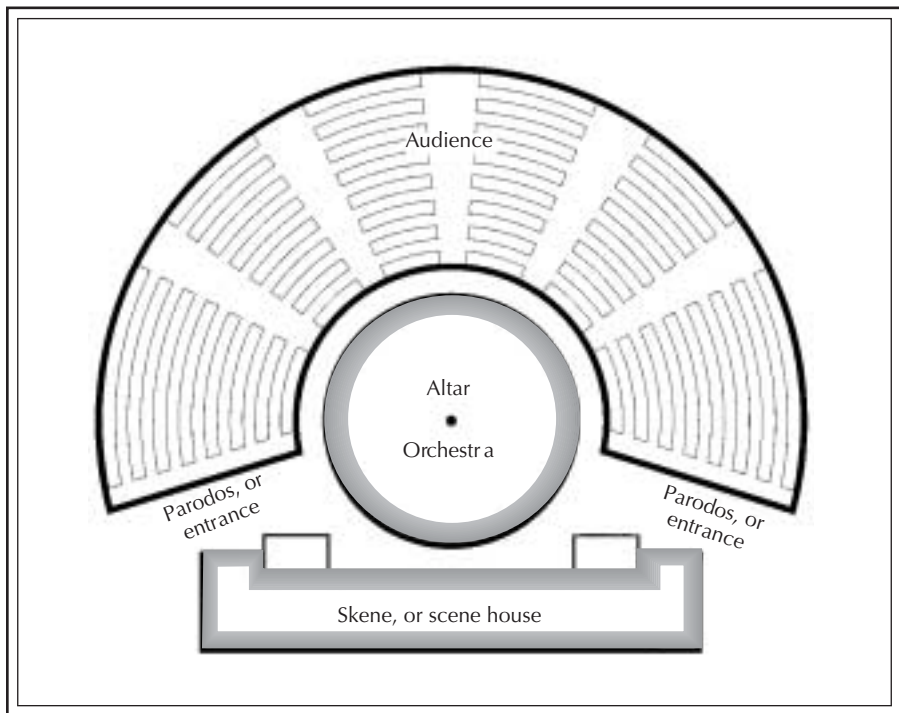
Typical of Old Comedy, the play is full of political commentary as well as literary criticism.

the actors; and the *skene*, or scene building. These three units were adjacent but unconnected architectural entities.

The audience sat in the theatron. The Greeks ingeniously built their theatres into hillsides which provided naturally sloped seating and excellent acoustics. During the classical period the hillside theatron probably had temporary wooden bleachers, but these were replaced by stone seats during the later Hellenistic period (336–146 B.C.E.). Some historians believe that a specific seating plan was followed in the Greek theatron; they suggest that the various Greek tribes were segregated and that men and women (if women were present) sat separately.

Front-row seats, known as the *proedria*, were reserved for political and religious dignitaries. The theatres, though huge, could not accommodate everyone, and therefore in the fifth century B.C.E. entrance fees were charged. It is important to remember, though, that (unlike a theatre event today) each play was seen by a substantial portion of the population. (Today, it would be as if virtually the entire population of a small town took part in a single event—truly a communal occasion.)

In commercial American theatres, the orchestra is the audience seating area on the ground floor. In the classical Greek theatre, the orchestra was the playing area. The orchestra was the first permanent structural element in the Greek theatre; it was a circle probably about 66 feet in diameter, paved with stone. Here again, there had been a transformation from earlier practices. In ceremonies of earlier days, it is believed, a circle was beaten down in a field of grain to serve as an area for presentations, and this circle was the forerunner of the orchestra. (We should note that some historians, on the basis of studies of excavations of the Theatre of Dionysus, suggest that the first orchestra may have been a rectangle.)



❧ GROUND PLAN OF A TYPICAL GREEK THEATRE ❧

The theatres of ancient Greece were set into hillsides which made natural amphitheatres. At the base of the seating area was a circular space (orchestra) in which the chorus performed; at the center of the orchestra was an altar (thymele). Behind the orchestra was a temporary stage house (skene), at each side of which was a corridor (parodos) for entrances and exits.

The acting area was surrounded on three sides by audience members—a configuration similar to the modern thrust theatre or three-quarter-round theatre. In this type of theatre, the stage juts out into the auditorium and the audience sits around the stage in a semicircle or on three sides. In the center of the orchestra there was probably a *thymele*, an altar; this is a reminder that Greek drama was a part of religious rituals. Some scholars believe that the thymele may have been used as a scenic element. (For example, in *King Oedipus* Jocasta makes an offering, suggesting one possible use of the thymele.) Other commentators, however, argue that the altar was too holy to have been used in dramas; and still others doubt that the altar was included in the orchestra at all.

The third element in the classical Greek theatre building was the skene, or scene building, located behind the orchestra. Our knowledge of the skene is sketchy, but we do know that it contained dressing space for actors who needed to change costumes and was used to store properties. (A *property*, or *prop*, in the theatre is any object used by the actors during a play, such as a sword or shield in a battle scene.) It is also believed that the skene building was used as the basic setting for all plays after 458 B.C.E.

DEBATES IN THEATRE HISTORY: The Greek Stage

The difficulty of reconstructing the classical Greek theatre building can be easily seen in the debate among historians over whether there was an elevated stage in front of the skene. Many of the arguments have to do with the appearance of the scene building because no skenes from the classical era survive.

Margarete Bieber, a renowned historian of the Greek and Roman theatres, states categorically, “The most important thing to bear in mind when reading Greek plays is that in the classical age there was no such thing as a raised stage.”* The Roman architect Vitruvius, on the other hand, argued that there was a stage, 10 to 12 feet high—although this was probably not true of the classical era but is more accurately a description of the Hellenistic stage. Other historians argue that there was a slightly raised platform (or possibly a flight of stairs) in front of the skene, which would spatially separate the actors from the cho-

rus. These scholars base their argument on needs implied by texts of plays, on contemporary references to staging, and on analysis of excavations of the Theatre of Dionysus.

These differing views lead historians to form different ideas about how the Greek tragedies and comedies were originally staged and about how the skene was used. There is also disagreement about whether there were doors in the skene and if so, how many. Ultimately, these arguments demonstrate how little we actually know about the configuration of this key element in classical Greek theatre architecture. They also indicate that most of our theories are based on later historical commentaries rather than on primary sources from the classical era itself.

*Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre*, 2d ed., Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1961, p. 73.

What the skene looked like is another major point of contention among theatre historians: how tall was it, for example, and how many doors did it have? At first it was a temporary wooden structure; after the classical period, it became a permanent stone edifice. In the earlier classical period, the building was probably one story high, but it later became a two-story structure. The skene also had side wings (*paraskenia*). Since the most common setting for Greek tragedies is a palace, the skene had to be patterned after such an edifice. There were doorways—probably three, although some historians think there was only one—for entrances and exits.

There is another controversy surrounding the architectural configuration of the playing area. Some scholars believe that there was a raised stage area in front of the skene and directly behind the orchestra; others strongly reject the idea of a raised stage. We do know that after the classical period, huge raised stages were constructed in Greek theatres. A possible compromise is the suggestion that there was a slightly raised platform in front of the skene.

Scenery and Special Effects

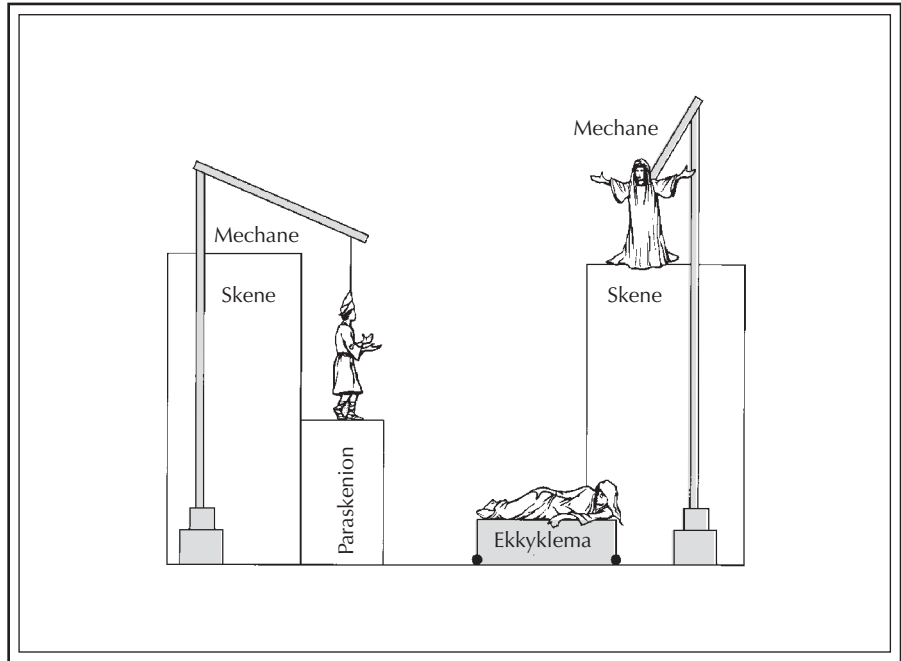
The standard setting for Greek tragedy, with its royal heroes and heroines, was a palace; but there are some tragedies with other scenic requirements, and the comedies require a wide variety of locales. How, then, did the Greeks transform the facade of the skene so that it might appear to be a different setting for different plays?

We have no definite knowledge about the methods used during the classical period, but some scholars believe that the scene-changing techniques of the later Hellenistic period were adopted from classical theatre. One device was the *pinake*, a type of flat—a wooden frame covered with stretched fabric. Another was the *periaktoi*: these consisted of three painted flats hinged together, each showing a different scene; rotating these flats would reveal one new scene to the audience while hiding the other two.

What should be kept in mind is that scene changes in classical Greek theatre were not realistic. Modern audiences expect the environments of different plays to be markedly distinct; but in Greek theatre there were only hints that the setting had changed—and frequently these hints were provided only by the dialogue. Because of the vast size of the theatres and the limitations imposed by an outdoor space, it was impossible to create a unique environment for every tragedy, comedy, and satyr play. Also, many historians argue that such devices as the pinakes and periaktoi were not used at all in the classical era but appeared much later in Greek theatre. (Part of the debate revolves around the interpretation of Aristotle's statement that Sophocles introduced scene painting to Greek theatre.)

The skene also masked the mechanisms for special effects. If modern audiences are hypnotized by technological wonders in theatre, the classical Greeks were no different. The two most popular special-effects devices were the *mechane*, or “machine,” and the *ekkyklema*.

Greek dramas often reached a climax with the sudden appearance of a deity who resolved all the dramatic problems. The *mechane*, a crane hidden behind the upper level of the skene, was used to effect the entrance of the actor playing the god or goddess in such a way as to suggest a descent from the heavens; hence the later Latin term



☞ GREEK MECHANE AND EKKYKLEMA ☞

A conjectural reconstruction of Greek stage machinery: on the left, a crane used for flying in characters located on a side wing (*paraskenion*) of the scene building. On the right, a *mechane* higher up on the roof of the skene. The *ekkyklema* below was a platform on wheels used to bring out characters from inside the building.

deus ex machina, which means “god from a machine.” (In subsequent usage, of course, this term has been broadened; today, any arbitrary dramatic device employed to unravel a plot is referred to as a *deus ex machina*.)

Since the Greeks did not present violence onstage, stage machinery was needed to reveal climactic offstage deaths. One such machine was the *ekkyklema*, a wagon that would be wheeled from behind the skene. A character who had died offstage would be laid out on the *ekkyklema*, which would be rolled out from behind the scenes into the full view of the audience.

Acting in Greek Theatre

Actors may or may not have been paid for their participation in festivals during the classical period; but even if they were paid, there were not enough of these events for them to make a living by acting, and so they could not have been full-time professionals. At first, when tragedy had only one actor, the role was usually performed by the playwright; both Thespis and Aeschylus wrote plays and performed in them. As far as we know, Sophocles was the first playwright to give up acting.

As we have seen, Aeschylus is credited with introducing a second actor, and Sophocles supposedly introduced a third actor. Sophocles also introduced a “three-actor rule” in tragedy, calling for no more than three actors, excluding the chorus; this rule seems to have been followed by other Greek dramatists. (Comedy was not restricted by the three-actor rule.) The rule was bent to allow additional performers to portray mute roles, that is, minor characters who did not speak lines. Since one actor could *double*—play more than one part in a play—there could be more than three characters in a play, though never more than three onstage at one time. Sophocles’ *King Oedipus*, for instance, has seven speaking parts, and the same actor might play several minor parts.

At first, playwrights chose their own performers and also oversaw the production of their own plays. The tragic playwrights, in particular, functioned as directors; they worked with the chorus and also assisted the actors, conferring with them about roles and scripts. After acting contests were introduced in 449 B.C.E., to ensure fairness the state conducted a lottery that determined which star performers would appear in which plays. Greek dramatists—like today’s playwrights, directors, and producers—were aware that it is difficult to discern the quality of a play when the acting is poor.

To imagine the acting style of the fifth century B.C.E. is almost impossible. It could not have been very realistic—that is, it could not have conformed to everyday speech and gestures—because many of the conventions of classical theatre seem to argue against such realism. For example, in many plays (such as *Lysistrata*), it is important for the audience to believe that the female characters are sexually alluring; but women were not allowed to perform, and men played the female roles. Furthermore, all forms of Greek drama required dancelike movement and chanting.

Costumes and Masks

The major element in Greek costuming was the mask. All Greek performers wore masks, which covered the entire head and included hair, beards, and other distinctive facial features. These helped the audience identify characters and allowed the actors to perform multiple roles. During the classical period, the facial coverings were not highly exaggerated, and in tragedies, the masks for all the chorus members were probably the same. Comic choruses, on the other hand, often required unusual masks; in two of Aristophanes’ plays, as we’ve seen, chorus members represented frogs and birds.

Greek costuming, for the most part, was fairly conventional. Our knowledge of costumes comes mostly from scenes painted on Greek vases. Tragic characters of Greek origin, regardless of historical period, probably wore a very ornate tunic and a short or long cloak. Illustrations often depict Greek performers wearing a thick-soled boot known as a *kothornos*, but this was not used until the later Hellenistic period; in the classical period, soft-soled footwear was used. (There is, however, much debate over the validity of drawing conclusions from vase paintings about costuming during the classical era.)

Comic costumes, which were based on everyday clothing, were often cut tight to create a humorous effect by emphasizing certain physical features. As mentioned

earlier, a unique element in comic costuming was the phallus, an exaggerated penis which all male characters wore around the waist. It has been suggested that this use of the phallus originated in the fertility rites out of which comedy possibly originated. Some historians believe that the phallus was a foot long, made of leather, and stuffed. At times, it was probably rolled up and concealed; at other times, it hung loose for a comic effect.

THEATRE IN THE HELLENISTIC AGE

The Athenians had defeated Persia at the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E. Later, toward the end of the century, the Peloponnesian Wars, between Athens and Sparta, began in 431. In the 60-year period between 490 and 431, Athens ruled supreme in the Greek world, and it was during this time that the classical theatre took shape and achieved greatness. The war with Sparta was to last off and on for 37 years, until 404 B.C.E., when Sparta decisively defeated Athens. Both during and after the Peloponnesian Wars, however, the theatre at Athens continued to flourish. And after 404, though Athens itself was no longer the power it had been, the theatre which originated there continued to have influence throughout that part of the world. Athenian actors were sought by other nations, and the plays of the best-known writers were presented in a variety of places.

At the same time, we do not hear of important playwrights emerging in the six decades between 404 and 336 B.C.E. Rather, there seem to have been changes under way in the importance accorded to actors, and in the physical characteristics of theatre spaces. We mention the year 336 because that is when Alexander the Great, as he came to be known, began his reign as king of Macedonia, a region that included northern Greece. Though he was only 20 years old when he became king, Alexander established himself as probably the greatest general in the ancient world. Within a few short years he had conquered not only southern Greece but much of the known world in that area, including Egypt, Asia Minor, central Asia, and parts of India. He died in 323 when he was only 32.

Alexander identified strongly with the intellectual achievements, art, and culture of Greece. Wherever he went he carried these values with him and therefore was said to have made the entire area Greek, or "Hellenistic." Thus the period from when he began his reign, until Greece was conquered by the Romans in 146 B.C.E., is known as the Hellenistic era.

Among Alexander's other activities was the initiation of a number of theatre festivals to honor his many military victories. During and after his reign, dramatic festivals proliferated throughout the Hellenistic world. Theatrical presentations were no longer confined to such festivals as the Dionysian and the Lenaia but took place on many other occasions.

This increase in festivals was part of a number of changes that took place in theatre during the Hellenistic period. There were changes as well in theatre architecture, acting, and writing.

HELLENISTIC THEATRES

Between 400 and 150 B.C.E. a number of changes took place in the structure and characteristics of Greek theatres. We do not know at what points over this time period the various alterations occurred. We do know two things, however. One is that by 150 B.C.E. a definite shape had developed for Hellenistic theatre spaces. The other is that theatres of this type were built throughout the Hellenistic world—over forty that we know about, stretching from Asia Minor in the east to Italy in the west. The size of the theatres ranged from seating for 3,000 to more than 20,000.

One significant alteration was in the audience area: the substitution of stone seats for the wooden seats we believe were used during the classical period of the fifth century B.C.E. Among other things, the stone seats are one reason why so many theatre sites from the later Hellenistic period have survived. Gradually, though, between 400 and 150 B.C.E., other changes took place. One was in the development of the stage itself. Eventually it was quite high: anywhere from 8 to 13 feet. It was also long, stretching at times to 140 feet. The depth was anywhere from 6 feet to 14 feet. The side pieces of the classic stage, the *paraskenia*, were eliminated. This larger, higher stage was in sharp contrast to the modest stage house used for the first productions of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The stage house, or *proskenion*, at the back of the stage went through a series of transformations. At first it seems to have been a relatively simple one-story structure with several openings at the back known as *thyromata*. Later this stage house became increasingly elaborate, with columns separating the openings. One question raised by the developments is just what scenic elements were used. Were various pinakes or painted panels, placed in between the columns? Were they used at all? We are not certain. Another unanswered question concerns the use of the orchestra, the circular area between the stage house and the audience. How much was it used, and for what? Possibly when the classics were performed, it was used for the chorus as it had been originally. But what of newer plays such as those referred to as New Comedy? We do not know the exact answers. What we do know is that this type of theatre was built throughout the ancient world, and so there was doubtless an enormous amount of theatrical activity taking place.

The large, raised stage suggests that the actors were given more and more prominence in the Hellenistic theatre, and there is other evidence of this as well.

HELLENISTIC ACTING

The Rise of the Actor

Throughout theatre history, there are shifts in focus from one theatrical element to another: from script, for instance, to performers to visual effects. Such a shift occurred during the Hellenistic period as new scripts—which had been a prominent feature of the classical era—became less important and the work of performers became more prominent. This is similar to the focus of much of contemporary film



THE THEATRE AT EPIDAUROS

One Hellenistic theatre still standing is at Epidauros. Note the semicircular seating area in the hillside and the circular orchestra. However, only remains of the skene's foundation have survived.

and television, which, like Hellenistic theatre, is actor-centered: scripts take second place to star performers.

As we have pointed out, in the Hellenistic era there was a general increase in both number and kind of theatrical activities. Worship of Dionysus was no longer the sole reason for staging drama, and plays were therefore included in other festivals, such as those honoring military victories. With more productions, a need for professional actors developed.

The ascendancy of the actor led to the establishment, by 277 B.C.E., of a guild known as the Artists of Dionysus (*technitai*). Actors, chorus members, playwrights, and various other theatre personnel belonged to it; and if a local government wanted to stage a play, local members of the Artists of Dionysus had to be hired. The Artists of Dionysus—an early ancestor of the Actor's Equity Association, the union of American professional actors—provided actors with professional security. (Wealthy individuals were no longer expected to produce plays, probably because there was a decrease in personal wealth in Greece at this time. Instead, the govern-

ment became the producing agency, with a government official, the *agonthetes*, in charge of production details.)

During times of war, actors, who were not expected to take part in military service, could travel unhindered, and performers were called on to serve as ambassadors and messengers.

Developments in costumes also indicate the ascendancy of the actor. Unlike actors in the classical Greek period, actors in the Hellenistic era wore masks which were larger than life and had exaggerated facial features. Tragic characters wore a large, exaggerated headdress known as the *onkos*, and according to some scholars, the shoes (*kothornoi*) worn by tragic characters were extremely elevated. Because the actor was costumed to look bigger than life and performed on a raised stage, he became the clear focus of the audience's attention.

Social Position of Actors

Though the actor was the center of the Hellenistic theatre, this should not obscure the fact that he was viewed as less than socially acceptable. In the classical period, the actor had been a semiprofessional involved in religious activity. Yet even in the early fourth century B.C.E., the philosopher Plato, in *The Republic*, expressed his disapproval of theatrical performers, concluding that they should not be allowed to enter the ideal state. Plato's distrust was rooted in his fear that actors would use their chameleon-like personalities to harm society.

In the Hellenistic era, this distrust intensified, and even Aristotle, a great admirer of drama, considered actors disreputable. (The belief that actors are "less moral" than the average citizen still persists; today's gossip columnists feed the public's obsession with "immorality" in Hollywood and on Broadway.) It was because Hellenistic performers wanted to avert public hostility and remind audiences of their ties with religion that they named their guild the Artists of Dionysus.

MIMES The disrepute of actors was reinforced by the lifestyle of the *mimes*, who were probably the earliest professional performers in Greece. The mimes were not originally involved in religious festivals; they were traveling players who presented a variety of entertainments, including juggling, acrobatics, wordless dances dramatizing fables, and sketches with dialogue. (Greek mimes, who spoke and engaged in varied entertainment activities, were not the equivalent of modern mimes, who perform without words.) Many of the mime troupes originated in southern Italy, and their most popular dramatic pieces were satires of the great tragedies.

Their lifestyle seems to have earned them general condemnation. These performers were nomads who entertained at banquets and probably in the streets on temporary stages. After 300 B.C.E., they were allowed to perform at festivals, but they were never given recognition in the Artists of Dionysus. The traveling mime troupes were also criticized because they included women. The Greeks—and many succeeding civilizations—considered theatre an unsuitable profession for women, and women involved in theatrical endeavors were castigated as licentious and immoral.

Nevertheless, mimes represent an early recorded instance in western theatre of popular entertainment. Throughout theatre history, performances without intellectual or moral pretensions that appeal to ordinary people, as well as the more affluent, have played an important role in keeping theatre alive. As we move through time, we will take note of these popular entertainments, along with those that have been noted and written about by theatre historians.

NEW COMEDY

For 75 years after the end of the fifth century B.C.E., Greek theatre continued to follow classical conventions. The major change in Greek drama in the fourth century B.C.E. occurred in comedy. By 336 B.C.E., Old Comedy had given way to a form called *New Comedy*. The only playwright of New Comedy whose work still exists is Menander.

Written a hundred years after Aristophanes and Old Comedy, New Comedy differs from its predecessor in a number of important ways. Gone are the fantasies, the political satire, the sharp topical observations of the plays of Aristophanes. Gone, too, is the vital role of the chorus in its flights of fancy and its active participation in the contemporary political debates of Old Comedy.

In place of these was another kind of play: a subtle comedy of manners and well-wrought intrigue which focused on domestic—that is, family—situations and bourgeois life in the cities. In short, New Comedy was more realistic, more down-to-earth, and its comedy arose not from satire and extreme exaggeration but from the foibles, pretenses, and complications of the everyday life of Greek citizens. A typical romantic plot can be summarized as “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl.” A domineering parent usually comes between the young lovers, and the romantic complications are resolved by sudden dramatic coincidences and discoveries. The plots are usually ingeniously contrived. The characters in New Comedy are recognizable stock types, such as domineering parents, romantic young lovers, and comic servants. The plays are usually written in five acts.

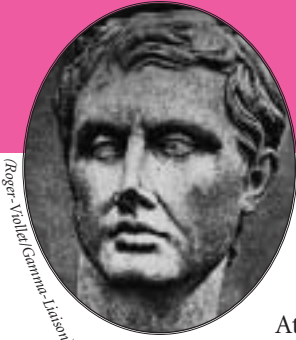
The reduction in the role of the chorus had already begun in the plays of Euripides, and in other ways Menander’s work echoes the later, nontragic plays by Euripides. The only remnant of the chorus is that singing and dancing interludes occur between the acts.

The influence of New Comedy is almost incalculable. As we have said, both Plautus and Terence borrowed heavily from Menander. But beyond that, there is a line of domestic comedy which stretches from Menander through Roman comedy all the way to the films of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s to today’s situation comedies on television, which also focus on domestic and romantic complications.

MENANDER



(c. 342–291 B.C.E.)



(Roger-Viollet/Courtesy, Liaison)

Menander, the best-known writer of Greek New Comedy, studied philosophy with Theophrastus, who had been a pupil of Aristotle. Though Menander was urged to come to Egypt by the court of Ptolemy I, he preferred to stay in Athens.

For a long time he was known mostly by reputation and through the plays of Plautus and Terence; three plays by Plautus and four by Terence were based on Menander's works. No complete, original plays by Menander were known to exist. In 1905 a papyrus scroll was found (it is now in Cairo), which contains a large part of four plays and a fragment of a fifth. Parts of other plays have been added in subsequent years. Among the plays, portions of which have been recovered, are: *Samia* (*The Girl from Samos*), *Aspis* (*The Shield*), *Epitrontes* (*The Men Who Went to Arbitration*), *Perikeiromene* (*The Girl Who Had Her Hair Cut*), *Sicyonius* (*The Sicyonian*), and *Misoumenos* (*The Chief Aversion*). In 1957 a complete play, *Dyskolos* (*The Grouch*), was discovered on papyrus. It is believed that *Dyskolos* was an early play, written when Menander was about 25 and first performed in 317 B.C.E.

While theatre continued to flourish in Greece long after 146 B.C.E., it was no longer purely Greek but, rather, theatrical art influenced by the omnipresent Roman civilization. Therefore, we turn next to Rome in our study of the unfolding of the dramatic arts.

SUMMARY

Greek theatre set the stage for all western theatre to follow. A dramatic form known as *climactic structure* evolved during the classical era, and the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—which dramatize the downfall of a royal figure caught in a difficult or impossible situation—set a standard for all subsequent tragedy. Aristotle's *Poetics* began the development of serious critical consideration of drama and theatre. The Greeks were leaders in comedy as well: Aristophanes' Old Comedies, which poked fun at contemporary political, social, and cultural events as well as personalities, are forerunners of later satire.

Classical Greek theatre buildings were large outdoor spaces built into hillsides; they accommodated audiences attending religious festivals in honor of the god Dionysus. Behind the orchestra, which was a circular playing space, the scene

building served as the basic scenic unit. The performers, all of whom were males, almost certainly acted in a style that did not conform to everyday life. The chorus was an integral element of all classical Greek drama and theatre.

Major changes took place during the Hellenistic period. New Comedy, which was concerned with domestic and romantic situations, prepared the way for almost all popular comedy to follow; in fact, it continues to influence contemporary playwrights. The drama of the Hellenistic period was not as noteworthy as that of the classical era, but the ascendancy of the actor was an important development, prefiguring today's star system. The huge raised stage in theatres, the distinctive footwear and large headdresses in costuming, and the founding of the Artists of Dionysus—a theatre guild for actors—all indicate a new focus on the performer. The permanent stone theatre structures suggest the permanent hold that theatre was to have in western civilization.

Mimes, who toured and presented various forms of amusement—juggling, acrobatics, dances, and dramatic sketches—provided popular entertainment for audiences in many locales.

GREEK THEATRE—Period Index

THEATRE HISTORY	TIME PERIOD	CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT
<p><i>Dithyramb</i>, lengthy hymn, sung and danced by large chorus Arion, harpist and poet, develops dithyramb (c. 600 B.C.E.) Thespis, considered first “actor” in dithyramb (mid-sixth century B.C.E.) Tragedy incorporated into <i>City Dionysia</i>, spring festival honoring Dionysus in Athens (534 B.C.E.) <i>Satyr</i> plays, comic parodies, added to City Dionysia (501 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Comedy introduced to City Dionysia (486 B.C.E.) Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.E.), tragic playwright: competes in City Dionysia for first time (499 B.C.E.); introduces second actor (ca. 471 B.C.E.): <i>The Suppliants</i> (c. 490 B.C.E.), <i>The Persians</i> (c. 472 B.C.E.), <i>Seven Against Thebes</i> (c. 469 B.C.E.), <i>Prometheus Bound</i> (c. 460 B.C.E.), <i>The Oresteia</i>, only surviving trilogy: <i>Agamemnon</i>, <i>The Choephoroi</i>, and <i>The Eumenides</i> (458 B.C.E.)</p>	<p>Geometric 1000–700 B.C.E.</p> <p>Archaic 640–490 B.C.E.</p> <p>Classical 490–450 B.C.E.</p>	<p>Age of Homer (800 B.C.E.): <i>Iliad</i>; <i>Odyssey</i></p> <p>Thales of Miletus begins natural philosophy (c. 585 B.C.E.) Peisistratus, tyrant of Athens (560 B.C.E.) Pythagoras, mathematician, flourishes; Doric temples of southern Italy and Sicily (c. 525 B.C.E.) Athenian democracy established (510 B.C.E.) Pindar begins to write odes (500 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Olympic festival flourishes (fifth century B.C.E.) Persian Wars (499–478 B.C.E.) Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.E.) Herodotus, historian (c. 484–425 B.C.E.) Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.E.)</p>

(continued)

GREEK THEATRE—Period Index

THEATRE HISTORY	TIME PERIOD	CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT
<p>Sophocles (c. 496–406 B.C.E.), tragic playwright: introduces third actor (c. 458 B.C.E.); credited with innovations in scene painting and increasing chorus from twelve to fifteen members: <i>Ajax</i> (c. 450–440 B.C.E.), <i>Antigone</i> (c. 441 B.C.E.), <i>King Oedipus</i> (c. 430–425 B.C.E.), <i>Electra</i> (c. 418–410 B.C.E.), <i>Trachiniae</i> (c. 413 B.C.E.), <i>Philoctetes</i> (409 B.C.E.), <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> (c. 406 B.C.E.); fragment of satyr play, <i>The Trackers</i></p> <p>Skene in use as scenic setting by 458 B.C.E. Prizes for tragic acting awarded (449 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Euripides (c. 480–406 B.C.E.), tragic playwright: <i>Alcestis</i> (438 B.C.E.), <i>Medea</i> (431 B.C.E.), <i>Hippolytus</i> (428 B.C.E.), <i>The Children of Heracles</i> (c. 425 B.C.E.), <i>Andromache</i> (c. 424 B.C.E.), <i>Heracles</i> (421 B.C.E.), <i>The Suppliants</i> (c. 420 B.C.E.), <i>Hecuba</i> (c. 417 B.C.E.), <i>The Trojan Women</i> (415 B.C.E.), <i>Electra</i> (c. 412 B.C.E.), <i>Helen</i> (412 B.C.E.), <i>Ion</i> (c. 411 B.C.E.), <i>Iphigenia in Tauris</i> (c. 410 B.C.E.), <i>The Phoenician Women</i> (c. 409 B.C.E.), <i>Iphigenia in Aulis</i> (c. 406 B.C.E.); <i>Cyclops</i> (date unknown), only complete surviving satyr play</p> <p>Aristophanes (c. 448–380 B.C.E.), playwright, Old Comedy: <i>The Archanians</i> (425 B.C.E.), <i>The Knights</i> (424 B.C.E.), <i>The Clouds</i> (423 B.C.E.), <i>The Wasps</i> (422 B.C.E.), <i>Peace</i> (421 B.C.E.), <i>The Birds</i> (414 B.C.E.), <i>Lysistrata</i> (411 B.C.E.), <i>The Frogs</i> (405 B.C.E.), <i>Plutus</i> (388 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Professional actors replace amateurs at City Dionysia (c. 350 B.C.E.); importance of chorus in tragedy decreases Theatres built throughout Mediterranean; developments in theatre structure (400–150 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Beginning social disrepute of actors; rise of New Comedy (336 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Aristotle's Poetics (c. 335 B.C.E.) Theatre of Dionysus completed (c. 325 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Menander (342–291 B.C.E.), playwright, New Comedy: only complete surviving play, <i>Dyskolos</i> (<i>The Grouch</i>, c. 317 B.C.E.) Artists of Dionysus, actors' guild, established (277 B.C.E.)</p>	<p>Golden Age 450–400 B.C.E.</p> <p>Late classical 400–336 B.C.E.</p> <p>Hellenistic 336–146 B.C.E.</p>	<p>Age of Pericles; rise of Athenian power (462–429 B.C.E.) Hippocrates, physician (c. 460–377 B.C.E.) Pericles establishes the Theoric Fund (450 B.C.E.) Beginning of Parthenon (448–432 B.C.E.) Death of Phidias, artist (500–435 B.C.E.) Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 B.C.E.) Plato (c. 428–347 B.C.E.) Athenian fleet destroyed; Spartan hegemony begins (404 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Trial and execution of Socrates (399 B.C.E.) Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) Plato's <i>Republic</i> (c. 375 B.C.E.) Spartan hegemony ends (404–371 B.C.E.) Philip II, king of Macedonia (352 B.C.E.)</p> <p>Alexander "the Great" succeeds Philip II; occupies Greece (336 B.C.E.) Death of Alexander (323 B.C.E.) Hellenistic culture spreads throughout eastern Mediterranean (c. 320 B.C.E.) Greece conquered by Romans (146 B.C.E.)</p>

