

UNIVERSITY OF GONDAR



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS

MAJOR THEATRE STYLES (THAR 3014)

April /2020
GONDAR, ETHIOPIA

Contents

UNIT ONE	5
1. Theory of Classical Tragedy Aristotle's Poetics	5
1.1. Aristotle's Elements of Tragedy.....	9
1.2. EXERCISE.....	12
UNIT TWO	13
2. Elizabethan and Shakespearean Tragedy.....	13
2.1. The Problem Play or Drama of Ideas	14
2.2. The "Tragic Vision"	14
2.3. Some of the more identifiable acting and staging conventions common to Elizabethan theatre.	17
2.3.1. Soliloquy:.....	17
2.3.2. Aside:.....	17
2.3.3. Boys Performing Female Roles:	17
2.3.4. Masque:.....	18
2.3.5. Eavesdropping:	18
2.3.6. Presentational Acting Style:.....	18
2.3.7. Dialogue:.....	19
2.3.8. Play within A Play:.....	19
2.3.9. Stagecraft:	19
2.4. Common Elements that Appear in Shakespearean Tragedy.....	20
2.4.1. Contrast –	20
2.4.2. Fate –.....	20
2.4.3. The Supernatural –.....	20
2.4.4. Pathetic Fallacy –	20
2.4.5. Nemesis (compared to Poetic Justice) –	20
2.4.6. Catharsis –	21
2.4.7. Suspense –	21
2.4.8. Soliloquy –	21
2.4.9. Aside –	21

2.4.10.	Dramatic Irony –	22
2.4.11.	Humor –.....	22
2.4.12.	The Spectacular –.....	22
2.5.	Classical comedy (also a known as tragicomedy).....	22
2.5.1.	Tragedy: Purpose and Effect.....	22
2.5.2.	Comedy: Purpose and Effect	23
2.5.3.	Tragic Hero	23
2.5.4.	Comic Protagonist.....	23
2.5.5.	Tragic Struggle	24
2.5.6.	Comic Struggle	24
2.5.7.	Tragic Methods	24
2.5.8.	Comic Methods.....	25
2.6.	EXERCISE.....	25
	UNIT THREE.....	26
3.	Middle Ages Theatre.....	26
3.2.	Mystery Plays.....	31
3.3.	Miracle Plays.....	32
3.4.	EXERCISE.....	32
	UNIT FOUR.....	33
4.	EPIC THEATRE	33
4.1.	Form	33
4.1.1.	Movement & Gesture	34
4.1.2.	Technical aspect.....	35
4.1.3.	Acting and Characterization	36
4.2.	EXERCISE.....	36
	UNIT FIVE	37
5.	Absurdism	37
5.1.	The Theory.....	37
5.2.	The three methods to resolve absurdity.....	37
5.3.	Theatre of the Absurd.....	37
5.4.	Theatre of the Absurd has some stylistic precursors as in the following	39
5.5.	Movements that influenced the theatre of the absurd are as follows.....	42

5.6.	The artistic feature of theatre of absurd.....	42
5.7.	Themes of theatre of the absurd.....	43
5.7.1.	The Crisis and Cruelty of Human Beings.....	43
5.7.2.	The Dissimilation of the Society.....	44
5.7.3.	The Meaninglessness of the Existence of Human Beings.....	44
5.7.4.	The Isolation among People In the society described.....	45
5.8.	Convention of absurd theatre	45
5.8.1.	Plot and Structure	45
5.8.2.	Acting and Characterization	46
5.8.3.	Movement	46
5.8.4.	Mood and Atmosphere	46
5.8.5.	Dialogue.....	46
5.8.6.	Stage craft.....	47
5.9.	EXERCISE.....	47
	UNIT SIX	48
6.	REALISM AND NATURALISM.....	48
6.1.	REALISM	48
6.1.2.	The Emergence of Realism	48
6.1.3.	Beginnings of the Movement:	49
6.1.4.	Conventions of Realism Theatre	50
6.1.5.	Writers of Realism.....	51
6.2.	NATURALISM	52
6.2.2.	Conventions of Naturalism Theatre	53
6.3.	EXERCISE.....	54
7.	ANALYSIS OF “OEDIPUS THE KING” PLAY.....	55
7.1.	Author Biography.....	58
7.2.	Over all Oedipus Rex play analysis on element and convention.....	59
8.	Bibliography and Further Reading.....	92

UNIT ONE

1. Theory of Classical Tragedy Aristotle's Poetics

Classical tragedy – elements include a tragic hero who is of higher than ordinary moral worth. Such a man is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of a mistaken act, to which he is led by — an error in judgment or his tragic flaw. Most often the mistaken act ultimately leads to the hero's death. We feel pity for the tragic hero because he is not an evil man, so his misfortune is greater than he deserves. There is also a sense that the hero could have been more if not for his tragic flaw. Comic elements may be present in a classical tragedy. The classic discussion of Greek tragedy is Aristotle's Poetics. He defines tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself." He continues, "Tragedy is a form of drama exciting the emotions of pity and fear. Its action should be single and complete, presenting a reversal of fortune, involving persons renowned and of superior attainments, and it should be written in poetry embellished with every kind of artistic expression." The writer presents "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to interpret its catharsis of such of such emotions" (by catharsis, Aristotle means a purging or sweeping away of the pity and fear aroused by the tragic action).

The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres, such as comedy and the epic, is the "tragic pleasure of pity and fear" the audience feel watching a tragedy. In order for the tragic hero to arouse these feelings in the audience, he cannot be either all good or all evil but must be someone the audience can identify with; however, if he is superior in some way(s), the tragic pleasure is intensified. His disastrous end results from a mistaken action, which in turn arises from a tragic flaw or from a tragic error in judgment. Often the tragic flaw is hubris, an excessive pride that causes the hero to ignore a divine warning or to break a moral law. It has been suggested that because the tragic hero's suffering is greater than his offense, the audience feels pity; because the audience members perceive that they could behave similarly, they feel pity.

In the Poetics, Aristotle's famous study of Greek dramatic art, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) compares tragedy to such other metrical forms as comedy and epic. He determines that tragedy, like all poetry, is a kind of imitation (mimesis), but adds that it has a serious purpose and uses direct

action rather than narrative to achieve its ends. He says that poetic mimesis is imitation of things as they could be, not as they are — for example, of universals and ideals — thus poetry is a more philosophical and exalted medium than history, which merely records what has actually happened.

The aim of tragedy, Aristotle writes, is to bring about a "catharsis" of the spectators — to arouse in them sensations of pity and fear, and to purge them of these emotions so that they leave the theater feeling cleansed and uplifted, with a heightened understanding of the ways of gods and men. This catharsis is brought about by witnessing some disastrous and moving change in the fortunes of the drama's protagonist (Aristotle recognized that the change might not be disastrous, but felt this was the kind shown in the best tragedies — Oedipus at Colonus, for example, was considered a tragedy by the Greeks but does not have an unhappy ending).

According to Aristotle, tragedy has six main elements: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle (scenic effect), and song (music), of which the first two are primary. Most of the *Poetics* is devoted to analysis of the scope and proper use of these elements, with illustrative examples selected from many tragic dramas, especially those of Sophocles, although Aeschylus, Euripides, and some playwrights whose works no longer survive are also cited. Several of Aristotle's main points are of great value for an understanding of Greek tragic drama. Particularly significant is his statement that the plot is the most important element of tragedy:

Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of action and life, of happiness and misery. And life consists of action, and its end is a mode of activity, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is their action that makes them happy or wretched. The purpose of action in the tragedy, therefore, is not the representation of character: character comes in as contributing to the action. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of the tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be one without character. . . . The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: character holds the second place.

Aristotle goes on to discuss the structure of the ideal tragic plot and spends several chapters on its requirements. He says that the plot must be a complete whole — with a definite beginning, middle, and end — and its length should be such that the spectators can comprehend without

difficulty both its separate parts and its overall unity. Moreover, the plot requires a single central theme in which all the elements are logically related to demonstrate the change in the protagonist's fortunes, with emphasis on the dramatic causation and probability of the events.

Aristotle has relatively less to say about the tragic hero because the incidents of tragedy are often beyond the hero's control or not closely related to his personality. The plot is intended to illustrate matters of cosmic rather than individual significance, and the protagonist is viewed primarily as the character that experiences the changes that take place. This stress placed by the Greek tragedians on the development of plot and action at the expense of character, and their general lack of interest in exploring psychological motivation, is one of the major differences between ancient and modern drama.

Since the aim of a tragedy is to arouse pity and fear through an alteration in the status of the central character, he must be a figure with whom the audience can identify and whose fate can trigger these emotions. Aristotle says that "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." He surveys various possible types of characters on the basis of these premises, then defines the ideal protagonist as. . . a man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty; a personage like Oedipus.

In addition, the hero should not offend the moral sensibilities of the spectators, and as a character he must be true to type, true to life, and consistent.

The hero's error or frailty (*hamartia*) is often misleadingly explained as his "tragic flaw," in the sense of that personal quality which inevitably causes his downfall or subjects him to retribution. However, overemphasis on a search for the decisive flaw in the protagonist as the key factor for understanding the tragedy can lead to superficial or false interpretations. It gives more attention to personality than the dramatists intended and ignores the broader philosophical implications of the typical plot's denouement. It is true that the hero frequently takes a step that initiates the events of the tragedy and, owing to his own ignorance or poor judgment, acts in such a way as to bring about his own downfall. In a more sophisticated philosophical sense though, the hero's fate, despite its immediate cause in his finite act, comes about because of the nature of the cosmic

moral order and the role played by chance or destiny in human affairs. Unless the conclusions of most tragedies are interpreted on this level, the reader is forced to credit the Greeks with the most primitive of moral systems.

It is worth noting that some scholars believe the "flaw" was intended by Aristotle as a necessary corollary of his requirement that the hero should not be a completely admirable man. Hamartia would thus be the factor that delimits the protagonist's imperfection and keeps him on a human plane, making it possible for the audience to sympathize with him. This view tends to give the "flaw" an ethical definition but relates it only to the spectators' reactions to the hero and does not increase its importance for interpreting the tragedies.

The remainder of the Poetics is given over to examination of the other elements of tragedy and to discussion of various techniques, devices, and stylistic principles. Aristotle mentions two features of the plot, both of which are related to the concept of hamartia, as crucial components of any well-made tragedy. These are "reversal" (peripatetic), where the opposite of what was planned or hoped for by the protagonist takes place, as when Oedipus' investigation of the murder of Laius leads to a catastrophic and unexpected conclusion; and "recognition" (anagnorisis), the point when the protagonist recognizes the truth of a situation, discovers another character's identity, or comes to a realization about himself. This sudden acquisition of knowledge or insight by the hero arouses the desired intense emotional reaction in the spectators, as when Oedipus finds out his true parentage and realizes what crimes he has been responsible for.

Aristotle wrote the Poetics nearly a century after the greatest Greek tragedians had already died, in a period when there had been radical transformations in nearly all aspects of Athenian society and culture. The tragic drama of his day was not the same as that of the fifth century, and to a certain extent his work must be construed as a historical study of a genre that no longer existed rather than as a description of a living art form.

1.1. Aristotle's Elements of Tragedy

Aristotle said that tragedy has six main elements:

1. Plot; 2.Character 3.Thought 4.Diction; 5. Melody 6 Spectacle.

These will be described from least important to most important. The last four elements (Thought, Diction, Melody, and Spectacle) are the least important, but Aristotle felt they must be done well for the play to succeed.

Thought is the power of saying whatever can be said and should be said at each moment of the plot. Do the lines spoken by the actor s make sense? Are they saying what should be said at each particular moment in the play?

Diction is the actual composition of the lines that are recited. Thought deals with what is said, and diction deals with how it is said. There are many ways to say something. A good playwright composes lines that say something extremely well. In a good play, some lines are so well constructed that the audience can leave the play quoting the lines exactly.

Melody and Spectacle are accessories. The Greeks sometimes used musical accompaniment. Aristotle said the music (melody) h as to blend in with the p lay appropriately. Spectacle refers to the staging of the play .Again, as with melody, the spectacle should be appropriate to the theme of the play.

Character

Character is the second most important element of tragedy. Each character has an essential quality or nature that is revealed in the plot. The m oral purpose of each character must be clear to the audience. The characters should have four main qualities.

- A. No matter who they are (hero or slave), the characters must be good i n some way.
- B. The characters should act appropriately for their gender and stat ion in life.
- C. The characters have to have believable personalities.

D. Each character must act consistently throughout the play. In other words, nothing should be done or said that could be seen as —acting out of character.

Plot

Aristotle felt that the action of the play (its plot) was the most important of the six elements. He said, —All human happiness or misery takes the form of action Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions--what we do--that we are happy or miserable.

1. There must be Unity of Plot. This has already been described in the definition which talks about —one complete action. Any events or episodes must be necessary to the main issue and must also be probable or believable.

2. A good plot has Pripet or Discovery--sometimes both. Pripet is the change from one state of things at the beginning of the play to the exact opposite state by the end of the play. This could be something like the change from being rich to being poor, or from being powerful to being powerless, or from being a ruler to being a beggar. The change that takes place in a tragedy should take the main character (and possibly other characters) from a state of happiness to a state of misery.

Discovery is a change from ignorance to knowledge. This often happens to the tragic hero who starts out —clueless and slowly learns how he himself created the mess he ends up in at the end of the play.

3. Change by itself is not enough. The character involved in the change must have specific characteristics to arouse the tragic emotions of pity and fear. Therefore, Aristotle said that there are three forms of plot that should be avoided.

A. A totally good man must not pass from happiness to misery. This will make the audience angry that bad things happened to him. They won't pity him as much as be angry for him.

B. A bad man must not pass from misery to happiness. This won't appeal to the audience at all because they won't want to see evil rewarded.

C. A bad man cannot pass from happiness to misery. The audience won't feel sorry for him because they will believe he got what he deserved. The true tragic hero cannot be too good or too

bad, but he must end up in misery. Aristotle concluded that the best tragedy centers on a basically good man who changes from happiness to misery because of some great error. For example, he might have a good quality, like pride, that gets out of hand.

4. The plot of a tragedy also involves some horrible or evil deed. The tragic hero either does it consciously, does it out of ignorance, or mediates it (makes it easy for the deed to happen). For the audience to be horrified by the evil deed, the evil has to be done to someone important to the tragic hero. If the hero kills his enemy, the deed won't seem so bad. On the other hand, if the hero kills someone he doesn't care about, the audience won't care much either. To make it really horrible for the audience, Aristotle suggested that the evil deed should be done to a family member.

1.2. EXERCISE

1. Read Oedipus the king play and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention in terms of Greek Drama.
2. How classical Tragedy different from modern Tragedy?

UNIT TWO

2. Elizabethan and Shakespearean Tragedy

What exactly is Elizabethan theatre? I am convinced part of the confusion lies with the title, itself. Is Elizabethan theatre an historical period, just Shakespeare's plays, a theatre style, or all of the above? Sometimes, performance styles are associated with periods in history (and hence, theatre history) and Elizabethan theatre (or Elizabethan drama) is one of these examples. Historically, Elizabethan theatre refers to plays performed in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603). Students of theatre often forget Shakespeare was not the only playwright during this time (somewhat understandable when they hear the term —Shakespearean drama so regularly). Shakespeare's contemporaries included the likes of Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Heywood and Robert Greene. These and other playwrights also wrote and performed their plays in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. Many of the conventions used in public performances of Elizabethan plays were so recognizable, today Elizabethan theatre is not only referred to as a specific period in theatre history, but also as a theatre style.

A distinctly English form of tragedy begins with the Elizabethans. The translation of Seneca and the reading of Aristotle's Poetics were major influences. Many critics and playwrights, such as Ben Jonson, insisted on observing the classical unities of action, time and place (the action should be one whole and take place in one day and in one place). However, it was romantic tragedy, which Shakespeare wrote in Richard II, Macbeth, Hamlet, and King Lear, which prevailed. Romantic tragedy disregarded the unities (as in the use of subplots), mixed tragedy and comedy, and emphasized action, spectacle, and--increasingly--sensation. Shakespeare violated the unities in these ways and also in mixing poetry and prose and using the device of a play-within-a-play, as in Hamlet. The Elizabethans and their Jacobean successors acted on stage the violence that the Greek dramatists reported. The Elizabethan and later the Jacobean playwright had a diverse audience to please, ranging from Queen Elizabeth and King James I and their courtiers to the lowest classes.

Christopher Marlowe's tragedies showed the resources of the English language with his magnificent blank verse, as in the Tragedy of Dr. Faustus, and the powerful effects that could be

achieved by focusing on a towering protagonist, as in Tamburlaine. In Elizabethan tragedy, the individual leads to violence and conflict. A distinctly non-Aristotelian form of tragedy developed during this period was the tragicomedy. In a tragicomedy, the action and subject matter seem to require a tragic ending, but it is avoided by a reversal which leads to a happy ending; sometimes the tragicomedy alternates serious and comic actions throughout the play. Because it blends tragedy and comedy, the tragicomedy is sometimes referred to as a "mixed" kind.

2.1. The Problem Play or Drama of Ideas

The problem play or play of ideas usually has a tragic ending. The driving force behind the play is the exploration of some social problem, like alcoholism or prostitution; the characters are used as examples of the general problem. Frequently the playwright views the problem and its solution in a way that defies or rejects the conventional view; not surprisingly, some problem plays have aroused anger and controversy in audiences and critics. Henrik Ibsen, who helped to revive tragedy from its artistic decline in the nineteenth century, wrote problem plays. A Doll's House, for example, shows the exploitation and denigration of middle Class women by society and in marriage. The tragedy frequently springs from the individual's conflict with the laws, values, traditions, and representatives of society.

2.2. The "Tragic Vision"

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

- The conclusion is catastrophic.
- The catastrophic conclusion will seem inevitable.
- It occurs, ultimately, because of the human limitations of the protagonist.
- The protagonist suffers terribly.
- The protagonist's suffering often seems disproportionate to his or her culpability.
- Yet the suffering is usually redemptive, bringing out the noblest of human capacities for learning.
- The suffering is also redemptive in bringing out the capacity for accepting moral responsibility
- The Catastrophic Conclusion

In tragedy, unlike comedy, the denouement tends to be catastrophic; it is perceived as the concluding phase of a downward movement. In comedy, the change of fortune is upward; the happy ending prevails (more desirable than true, says Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*), as obstacles are dispelled and the hero and/or heroine are happily incorporated into society or form the nucleus of a new and better society. In tragedy, there is the unhappy ending—the hero's or heroine's fall from fortune and consequent isolation from society, often ending in death.

The Sense of Inevitability To the audience of a tragedy, the catastrophe will seem, finally, to be inevitable. Although tragedy cannot simply be identified with uncontrollable disasters, such as an incurable disease or an earthquake, still there is the feeling that the protagonist is inevitably caught by operating forces which are beyond his control (sometimes like destiny, visible only in their effects). Whether grounded in fate or nemesis, accident or chance, or in a causal sequence set going through some action or decision initiated by the tragic protagonist himself or herself, the operating forces assume the function of a distant and impersonal power.

Human Limitation, Suffering, and Disproportion ultimately, perhaps, all the instances that we find in tragedy of powerlessness, of undeniable human limitations, derive from the tragic perception of human existence itself, which seems, at least in part, to be terrifyingly vulnerable, precarious, and problematic. And it is precisely because of these human limitations

That suffering also becomes basic to the tragic vision. Tragedy typically presents situations that emphasize vulnerability, situations in which both physical and spiritual security and comforts are undermined, and in which the characters are pressed to the utmost limits—overwhelming odds, impossible choices, demonic forces within or without (or both). Against the tragic protagonist are the powers that be, whether human or divine, governed by fate or chance, fortune or accident necessity or circumstance, or any combination of these? The more elevated, the more apparently secure and privileged the character's initial situation, the greater is our sense of the fall, of the radical change of fortune undergone, and the greater our sense of his or her suffering. Tragedy testifies to suffering as an enduring, often inexplicable force in human life.

In the suffering of the protagonists, there is frequently, something disproportionate. Even to the extent that there is some human cause, the eventual consequences may seem too severe. In Lear's

case, we may or may not agree that he is "more sinned against than sinning," but Cordelier certainly is. This inequity is particularly profound for some of those who surround the protagonists, those who seem to bear (at worst) minor guilt, the so-called "tragic victims."

The Learning Process and Acceptance of Moral Responsibility Despite the inevitable catastrophe, the human limitation, the disproportionate suffering, the tragic vision also implies that suffering can call forth human potentialities, can clarify human capacities, and that often there is a learning process that the direct experience of suffering engenders--Lear and Phaedra are transformed by it. Gloucester may think that we are to the gods as flies to wanton boys--"they kill us for their sport"--but such a conception of brutal slaughter is alien to the tragic vision. Indeed, tragedy provides a complex view of human heroism, a riddle mixed of glory and jest, nobility and irony. The madness that is wiser than sanity, the blind who see more truly than the physically sighted, are recurring metaphors for the paradox of tragedy, which shows us human situations of pitiful and fearful proportions, but also of extraordinary achievement.

For tragedy presents not only human weakness and precarious security and liability to suffering, but also its nobility and greatness. Tragedies do not occur to puppets. While the "tragic victim" is one of the recurring character types of tragedy (Cordelier, Ophelia, Desdemona, Andromaque, Hippolytus, and even, perhaps, Richard II and Phedre), tragic protagonists more frequently have an active role, one which exposes not only their errors of judgment, their flaws, their own conscious or unwitting contribution to the tragic situation, but which also suggests their enormous potentialities to endure or survive or transcend suffering, to learn what "naked wretches" feel, and to attain a complex view of moral responsibility.

The terrifying difficulty of accepting moral responsibility is an issue in Hamlet as well as in Sophocles' Antigone or Oedipus Tyrannus. It is an issue in all tragedy, even when the moral status of the protagonist(s) is not admirable. Whatever Aristotle's hamartia is, it is not necessarily moral culpability, although it may be, as the case of Macbeth illustrates. Tragic vision insists upon man's responsibility for his actions. This is the essential element of the vision that permits us to deny access to its precincts to puppets, who, by definition, have neither free will nor ultimate responsibility for their existence. Tragedy acknowledges the occasional disproportion between human acts and their consequences, but imposes or accepts responsibility nevertheless.

In this way, pain and fear are spiritualized as suffering, and, as Richard Sewall suggests in *The Vision of Tragedy*, the conflict of man and his "destiny" is elevated to ultimate magnitude.

One of the conventions discerned and analyzed by Aristotle was that the change of fortune, peripety or reversal, experienced by the tragic hero, should be accompanied by anagnorisis or cognitio, "discovery" or "recognition." The conditions and the degree of this discovery vary considerably. It may even be relatively absent from the protagonist's awareness, as we have noted. But it is almost always central to the audience's responses. In the school of suffering we are all students, witnessing, like Lear, essential, "un accommodated" man, and we become caught up in an extended discovery, not only of human limitation, but also of human potentiality.

2.3. Some of the more identifiable acting and staging conventions common to Elizabethan theatre

2.3.1. Soliloquy:

Hamlet's —To be or not to be... is literature's most famous soliloquy. This popular Elizabethan convention is a literary or dramatic technique in which a single character talks aloud inner thoughts to him or her, but not within earshot of another character. Typically, a soliloquy is lengthy with a dramatic tone.

2.3.2. Aside:

The aside existed in Shakespeare's times, but happily continued into the melodramas of the 19th century many years later. An aside is a convention that usually involves one character addressing the audience —on the side, offering them valuable information in relation to the plot or characters that only the audience is privy to. The audience now feels empowered, knowing more about the events on stage than most of the characters do.

2.3.3. Boys Performing Female Roles:

Acting in Elizabeth's England was frowned upon by many in society as a profession unsuitable for women, as it was rough and rowdy instead of genteel. As a result,

women were not legally permitted to act on the English stage until King Charles II was crowned in the year 1660 (even though women were already acting in various European countries in *Compendia dell'Arte* plays for some years). Shakespeare and his contemporaries therefore had no choice but to cast young boys in the roles of women, while the men played all the male roles on stage.

2.3.4. Masque:

Existing before Elizabethan England and also outliving it, the masque was normally performed indoors at the King or Queen's court. Spoken in verse, a masque involved beautiful costumes and an intellectual element appropriate for the mostly educated upper class. Masques were allegorical stories about an event or person involving singing, acting and dancing. Characters wore elaborate masks to hide their faces.

2.3.5. Eavesdropping:

Eavesdropping was a dramatic technique that sat neatly between a soliloquy and an aside. Certain characters would strategically overhear others on stage, informing both themselves and the audience of the details, while the characters being overheard had no idea what was happening. This convention opened up opportunities for the playwright in the evolving plot.

2.3.6. Presentational Acting Style:

It is generally agreed by scholars Elizabethan acting was largely presentational in style. Plays were more overtly a —performance with clues the actors were aware of the presence of an audience instead of completely ignoring them as part of their art. Movements and gestures were more stylized and dramatic than one might ordinarily expect in a modern naturalistic or realistic drama, speech patterns were heightened for dramatic effect, and the use of conventions such as the aside, prologue, epilogue and word puns directly connected characters to the audience watching. The aside, the prologue, the soliloquy and the epilogue were all variations on a characters' direct address to the audience when staged.

2.3.7. Dialogue:

Elizabethan plays commonly consisted of dialogue that was poetic, dramatic and heightened beyond that of the vernacular of the day. While often the lower class characters' speech was somewhat colloquial (prose), upper class characters spoke stylized, rhythmic speech patterns (verse). Shakespeare took great care in composing dialogue that was sometimes blank (unrhymed), but at other times rhyming (couplets) and often using five stressed syllables in a line of dialogue (iambic pentameter).

2.3.8. Play within A Play:

This Elizabethan convention was a playwriting technique used by Shakespeare and others that involved the staging of a play inside the play itself. It was not a flimsy convention, but rather one that was used judiciously and with purpose. One of the most famous examples of this convention occurs in Hamlet, when the title character is convinced his uncle Claudius murdered his father for the throne. So Hamlet organizes an out-of-town troupe of performers to attend one evening and perform a play before King Claudius that involves the same plot line as the events in the larger play (murder of a King), but in a different setting ... all to let Claudius know Hamlet is on to him!

2.3.9. Stagecraft:

In terms of stagecraft, Elizabethan dramas used elaborate costumes, yet quite the opposite for scenery. Acting spaces were largely empty (bare stage) with isolated set pieces representing many of the same and minimal use of props (a single tree equaled a forest, a throne for a King's palace). This explains the use of rich dialogue full of imagery, as there was no set on stage to designate the scene's location. However, Elizabethan costumes were often rich and colorful, with a character's status in society being denoted by their costume, alone. There were no stage lights of any kind, with plays strictly performed during daylight hours. A simple balcony at the rear of the stage could be used for scenes involving fantastical beings, Gods or Heaven, while a trap door in the stage floor could also be used to drop characters into Hell or raise characters up from beneath. Entrances and exits were at two doors at the rear (tiring house) and not the side wings, as is the case in modern theatre. An Elizabethan actor

exiting side stage may well have landed in the groundings after falling off the edge of the (three-sided) thrust stage that jutted out into the audience!

2.4. Common Elements that Appear in Shakespearean Tragedy

2.4.1. Contrast -

one idea/character or object is thrown into opposition with another for sake of emphasis or clarity - use of contrast heightens distinctions of character and increases interest by placing opposites side by side (e.g. comic scene just before a tragic scene) - character foils (those who provide contrast, usually to the protagonist) are used extensively by Shakespeare

2.4.2. Fate -

Intervention of some force over which humans have not control - may complicate the plot but does not bring about the downfall of the hero (he ultimately chooses it for himself by his actions) - pathos/sympathy may be felt by the audience for those hurt by fate

2.4.3. The Supernatural -

Shakespeare knew the appeal of ghosts, witches, premonitions, prophecies and other supernatural events for his audience - thus he included them

2.4.4. Pathetic Fallacy -

since the hero's actions affect the entire Chain of Being, all of Nature appears to react through unnatural happenings in animal behavior or weather

2.4.5. Nemesis (compared to Poetic Justice) -

Nemesis is the Greek goddess of vengeance, the personification of righteous indignation; she pursues those who have displeased the gods - by Shakespeare's time, the term became associated with any agent of fate or bringer of just retribution.

2.4.6. Catharsis –

A term to describe the intended impact of tragedy on the audience; the reason we are drawn, again and again, to watch tragedy despite its essential sadness - by experiencing the events which arouse pity and terror, we achieve a purging (catharsis) of these emotions - detached pity and involved terror that leaves the spectator with —calm of mind, all passion spent!

2.4.7. Suspense –

Uncertainty in an incident, situation, or behavior - keeps the audience anxious concerning the outcome of the protagonist's conflict - two types: that which provokes intellectual curiosity and that which provokes emotional curiosity - Shakespeare uses conflict, precarious situations, apparently unsolvable problems, foreshadowing and delay to develop suspense

2.4.8. Soliloquy –

Speech made by character when he/she is alone on the stage (only audience is privy to the speech) Purposes include: - revealing mood of speaker and reasons for it - revealing character - revealing character's opinion of someone else in the play - revealing motives of speaker - creating suspense - preparing audience for subsequent developments - explaining matters that would ordinarily require another scene - reviewing past events and indicating speaker's attitudes - reinforcing theme

2.4.9. Aside –

Comments intended only for the audience (or occasionally for one other character on stage) - made in the presence of other characters on stage, but the audience is aware that these other characters cannot hear the asides - must be short, or would interfere with the course of the play Purposes include: - to indicate character to person speaking - to draw attention to significance of what has been said or done - to explain plot development - to create humor by introducing a witty comment - to create suspense by foreshadowing - to remind audience of the presence of speaker, while he/she remains in the background

2.4.10. Dramatic Irony –

This situation occurs when the audience is aware of the conditions that are unknown to the character on stage or when some of the characters are ignorant of what really is on the speaker's mind

2.4.11. Humor –

Humor may take many forms - Shakespeare was fascinated by word play; therefore, puns are common in his plays - may create humor through presenting the completely unexpected

2.4.12. The Spectacular –

Audiences enjoy scene which presents unusual sights - furious action, elaborate costumes, or stage props create the spectacular, thus Shakespeare frequently employs fight scenes, crowd scenes, banquets, dancing parties and royal courts

2.5. Classical comedy (also known as tragicomedy)

Comedies of this variety represent a serious action which threatened a tragic disaster to the protagonist, who resembles in most ways a tragic hero, yet by an abrupt reversal of circumstance, the story ends happily. Refer to the above definition for the elements in a classical comedy, noting the change in the ending.

2.5.1. Tragedy: Purpose and Effect

- ✓ Emphasizes human suffering
- ✓ Ends with rigid finality
- ✓ Moves with solemnity and foreboding
- ✓ Emotional Response (pity and fear)
- ✓ Identification with the hero 6) Laments man's fate
- ✓ Criticizes hubris, self-delusion, and complacency
- ✓ Offers some hope (man can learn), but stresses limitations of the human condition

2.5.2. Comedy: Purpose and Effect

- Emphasizes renewal of human nature
- Moves from rigidity to freedom
- Plays with prevailing high spirits
- Intellectual response (ridicule and absurdity)
- Scorn/approval of protagonist/others
- Celebrates life
- Criticizes folly, self-delusion, and complacency
- Suggests cynicism (man a fool), but offers hope of renewal.

2.5.3. Tragic Hero

- ❖ Hero recognizes great mistake, but too late to change it
- ❖ Hero demonstrates a personal flaw or error in perception
- ❖ Hero frequent hubristic
- ❖ Hero isolated from community in individuality
- ❖ Hero exercises free will
- ❖ Hero suffers terrible downfall
- ❖ Hero fails through error
- ❖ Hero aspires to more than he can achieve
- ❖ Hero is larger than life, considerably above the audience in status or responsibility

2.5.4. Comic Protagonist

- 🚩 "Hero" awakens to better nature after folly exposed.
- 🚩 "Hero" undergoes improbable improvement.
- 🚩 "Hero" frequently intolerant or prudish
- 🚩 "Hero" finds selfhood by joining flow of society and community, rejecting individuality
- "Hero" is a comic mechanism
- 🚩 "Hero" loses and recovers his equilibrium 7) "Hero" triumphs by luck, wit, acceptance
- 🚩 "Hero" pretends to be more than he is
- 🚩 "Hero" is just like everyone else, or might even be an anti-hero or buffoon.

2.5.5. Tragic Struggle

- Serious and painful struggle
- Life and societal norms at odds
- Struggle against unchangeable
- Struggle dominated by Fate or necessity
- Discovery of true nature leads to hero's isolation
- Struggle against predictable and inevitable
- Struggle between man and destiny, or between man and social forces beyond man's control

2.5.6. Comic Struggle

- ✓ Less serious and painful struggle
- ✓ Norms valid and necessary
- ✓ Struggle against movable
- ✓ Struggle dominated by Fortune (chance)
- ✓ Discovery of true nature leads to hero's conformity with group norms.
- ✓ Struggle against coincidence (unpredictable)
- ✓ Struggle between individual and group or between groups (e.g., men and women)

2.5.7. Tragic Methods

- Tragedy depends on validity of universal norms
- Cohering episodes clarify action
- Causality dominates pattern of (a) deed, which leads to (b) suffering, which leads to (c) recognition or understanding
- Plot moves from freedom of choice to inflexible consequence

2.5.8. Comic Methods

- Comedy exploits conflicting values
- Plot more intricate, less plausible
- Coincidence dominates a pattern less grappling with the unpredictable and the absurd.
Plot forwarded by chance discoveries and accidental encounters.
- Plot moves from rigidity at the beginning to greater freedom for characters at end.

2.6. EXERCISE

1. Compare and Contrast Elizabethan and Shakespearean tragedy.
2. Read Hamlet play, and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention as Elizabethan Drama.

UNIT THREE

3. Middle Ages Theatre

The Middle Ages are the period in European history from the collapse of Roman civilization in the 5th century AD to the period of the Renaissance (variously interpreted as beginning in the 13th, 14th, or 15th century, depending on the region of Europe and on other factors). This period was also called —The Dark Ages, since it was marked by frequent warfare and a virtual disappearance of urban life. Though sometimes taken to derive its meaning from the fact that little was then known about the period, the terms more usual and pejorative sense is of a period of intellectual darkness and barbarity.

Medieval Theatre refers to the theatre of Europe between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the beginning of the Renaissance. Most medieval theatre is not well documented due to a lack of surviving records and texts, a low literacy rate of the general population, and the opposition of the clergy to some types of performance. At the beginning of the middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church banned theatrical performances, mostly as an attempt to curb the excesses of the Roman theatre.

In the tenth century, the liturgical drama was born in the Qualm Quadrates? This Latin kernel is based on the story from the New Testament in which Mary Magdalene and her companions discover Christ's empty tomb, and it was performed in the church or cathedral at Easter time. Eventually, liturgical drama would encompass many stories from many parts of the Bible and be performed at diverse times of the year, according to local custom.

By about 1250, however, the plays would move outdoors into the churchyard and into open fields, town squares, or the city streets. As geographically further from the church, the clergy had less control over the content. The plays were also presented in the local vernacular languages, instead of in Latin, as was the mass. This allowed the message of the Bible to be more accessible to the illiterate audience. These new plays in the vernacular based on Bible stories are called mystery plays. In England, they would sometimes be performed in day-long festivals (often during Corpus Christi) in groups of dozens of plays that traveled through town on wagons. Mystery plays were also written about the lives and miracles of saints, especially the Virgin Mary.

By the late medieval period, several genres had developed in theatre. Morality plays, such as *Everyman*, personified Christian virtues and vices as they battled with one another for control of a mortal's soul. These plays were explicitly designed to teach a moral and improve the behavior of their audience.

Secular plays in this period existed, although documentation is not as extensive. Farces were popular, and the earliest known vernacular farce was the French *Le garçon ET l'aveugle* ("The Boy and the Blind Man"), dating from the thirteenth century. In England, Robin Hood plays were popular, and all over Europe interludes with simple plotlines were performed at various social functions. Secular dramas were usually performed in winter indoors, and were often associated with schools, universities, and nobility, who would have the resources, time, and space to perform organized plays.

3.1. Morality Play

Morality Plays continuing the development of Medieval Drama, Morality Plays emerged during the 15th century. *The Castle of Perseverance* is often described as the first and most complete Morality Play while *Everyman* is the best known. Morality Plays differ from Mystery and Miracle in that they focused neither on The Bible nor the saints but on the common man. The main character in a morality play represents all humanity: *Everyman*, *Mankind*, and *Humanism Genus*. The theme of every Morality Play dealt with the struggle for salvation – What can man do to be a Christian and save his soul? The main character must make a conscious decision against temptation to be saved, thus showing the free will of man. It's the universal battle between good and evil. Vice versa us virtue. Which will mankind choose?

Morality Plays used allegory. Allegory is often seen in Medieval Drama, where a message or meaning is expressed through symbolic representation: ideas and values, vices and virtues become personified. Some examples: the character of Knowledge in *Everyman*, The Seven Deadly Sins in *The Castle of Perseverance*, Mercy and Mischief in *Mankind*.

Only five medieval English morality plays survive: *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Wisdom*, *Mankind* and *Everyman*, to give them their common titles, together constitute the entire corpus of an apparently influential native dramatic genre. The identification of the genre has been retrospective and depends largely on the perceived influence of these plays on the more

abundantly surviving Tudor interlude. It is possible on the basis of the few surviving texts to construct a working definition of a characteristic dramaturgy for the morality play, yet their absolute cohesion as a group is bound to be questioned in any attempt to define that form in its individual manifestations and theatrical contexts, particularly as *The Pride of Life* is a corrupt Anglo-Irish text and *Everyman* a translation from a Dutch original. What these plays have in common most obviously is that they offer their audiences moral instruction through dramatic action that is broadly allegorical. Hence they are set in no time, or outside historical time, though their lack of historical specificity is generally exploited by strategically collapsing the eternal with the contemporary.

The protagonist is generally a figure of all men, reflected in his name, *Everyman* or *Mankind*, and the other characters are polarized as figures of good and evil. The action concerns alienation from God and return to God, presented as the temptation, fall and restitution of the protagonist. The story of man's fall and redemption presented in a cycle of mystery plays as an epic historical narrative is thus encapsulated in the morality play. The dramatic variety this material offered was a direct product of the details of contemporary belief, particularly regarding the degree of control that the individual had in this world over his fate in the next. Orthodox Augustinian thought held that a person's endeavors towards the attainment of heaven were ineffectual without the direct intervention of God's grace through the Redemption. This was tempered by other currents of thought which held that man had absolute free will to choose in this world between vice and virtue and that those choices affected his fate in the next. The late fourth-century writer Prudential's *Psychomachia*. An imaginative portrayal of the battle between vice and virtue for the soul of man was most evocative of the latter line of thought.

The element of free will allowed to man in deciding his eternal fate led to an increasing refinement of people's imaginative perception of the forces of good and, particularly, evil, varying according to degree and kind. Popular schemes of vices and virtues abounded, the most prevalent being the designation of seven cardinal or deadly sins, corroborated by a body of visionary literature in which various witnesses, such as Lazarus of Bethany and St Patrick, offered first-hand accounts of how individual sins were punished in hell. Further categories of venial sins were identified for which self-help was possible in this world or, with the development of the concept of purgatory, in the next. Dante's *Commedia*, written at the

beginning of the fourteenth century, is perhaps the best known and most widely influential developed imaginative vision of the entire other world in terms of crime, punishment and reward. The believer faced both individual judgment when he died and final judgment on Doomsday when he would be relegated body and soul either to heaven or to hell for all eternity. He also knew that his encounter with a differentiated sin did not take the form of being snatched in an instant by some grisly misshapen 'bug', but was the matter of protracted struggle, demanding constant personal vigilance as well as the invocation of grace through the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of penance. In other words, against the variegated temptations to sin, he could invoke the fortification of Christ and the compensatory effects of his own good deeds. This struggle is the matter of the plot of an individual morality play, the whole dynamic of its action. Although the action of a morality play is frequently described as allegorical, the term is used loosely to describe how action, character, space and time are related to the real world through a tissue of metaphor. The use of prosopopoeia, or personification, in creating dramatic characters involves a fundamental rhetorical separation between the play world and the real world, as players take on the roles of qualities, e.g. Mercy; supernatural beings (Good Angel); whole human categories (Fellowship) and human attributes (Lechery). The original audience's perception of reality was in any case different to that of a modern one (391), and it is not always clear what is an outside agent sent by God or the Devil and what an internal motive. Each role, as actualized in a theatrical context, is presented as a distinct consciousness and is, therefore, a dramatic character. The action can be seen securely only in terms of its own mimesis, as an instance imitating an eternal reality. What may seem abstract was, for the period when the plays were written, representative of true reality, transcending the ephemeral and imperfect world of everyday existence. Later allegorical fiction, such as *A Pilgrim's Progress*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Animal Farm*, presents its audience with a sustained, developed literal story, structurally separable from the message for which it is the vehicle.

The only literal storyline in the medieval morality plays is, however, the actualization on stage of their moral 'sentence'. Hence the imaginative development of the situation or instance, constituting the plot of a play, is essentially thematic, rather than narrative, because it deals directly in eternal truths. To anchor their action in the world, the plots of these plays depend heavily on extended metaphor instead of a causal pattern of domestic events. In some instances this may be a battle, as at the climax of *The Castle of Perseverance*, where the forces of evil

besiege the eponymous castle and are repulsed with a deluge of roses, a scene borrowed directly from the *Psychomachia* (316). Elsewhere in this play, however, the plot corresponds more nearly to a journey, or pilgrimage, from birth to death — another commonplace in contemporary literature for man's life, notably in Deguileville's *Pelerinage de la vie humaine*. Everyman also is a pilgrimage, but one which focuses on the end of the journey, as the protagonist confronts his death, whereas the unfinished *Pride of Life* appears to present the same journey interrupted by the untimely early arrival of death. Mankind employs yet another metaphor for fallen existence, the life of hard agricultural labor being equated with virtuous penitential living for the protagonist. The more socially refined tone of *Wisdom* unites its highly complex theological argument by presenting the movement towards a hard-won final harmonious relationship between the soul and Christ in terms of marriage metaphors. What all have in common is an argument directed against a specific sin, based on a package of doctrine and illustrated through these systems of sustained metaphors, drawing on the received commonplaces of virtuous living. As aspects of an argument intended for edification, time, place, plot and character are all morally directed. The same strategies extend to the spoken text. All the plays under consideration are in verse and employ clear rhetorical markers. The speaker is instantly placed at any given moment on a scale between absolute good and absolute evil by the controlled choice of lexis, syntax and register, as well as by manipulation of stanza structure. The transformational nature of fall and redemption are both indicated in this manner: fall into sin is characterized by fragmented lines, blasphemy and nonsense. Virtue, on the other hand, is characterized by high-style, Latinate structures, characters more usually talking in complete stanzas. The rhetoric of theatrical communication must be ambivalent in a play that offers its audience prescribed doctrine. Although these plays are often described as didactic, that term also requires qualification. As is the case with the cycle plays, their orthodoxy serves to confirm and to celebrate rather than to argue. In fifteenth-century religious drama, the desired effect was concordance, achieved by a conspiracy of the verbal and the visual: diction, costume, placing and gesture all function as clear supportive signs of moral status.

The dynamic nature of these plays lies not in internally contrived conflicts, but in the manner in which they generate pressure upon their audiences emotionally and physically, as well as intellectually. The precise manner in which these various effects are achieved is best explored by reference to individual plays. In what follows, the five plays are treated in an order that allows for

a developed analysis of their form, rather than one determined by their strict chronology, which cannot be positively established in any case.

3.2. Mystery Plays

Mystery Plays were based on scenes and stories from The Bible and were often performed together in a series called a cycle. Depending on the cycle, the series could take all day, or span multiple days. There are four intact cycles that remain from the era: Wakefield, York, Chester, and N-town. The Wakefield Cycle was the most comedic and irreverent of the four, often mentioning contemporary events. Chester was the most faithful to the religious nature of the original stories. In the N-town Cycle, N stands for the Latin word —no menll which means name. Any town could use their own name for that cycle. Cycles could range from the fall of the Angels to Judgment Day.

A common theme of Mystery Plays was to show a fall, then Redemption. Story examples include:

- Adam and Eve
- Abraham and Isaac
- The Last Supper
- The Resurrection

In England, Mystery Plays were performed on pageant wagons. Each wagon held a different story and moved from location to location around the town. Each wagon was also the responsibility of a different trade guild (such as bakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and plasterers.) The guild produced the play, took care of the wagon, built the sets, and made the costumes. Guilds often received stories related to their craft.

- ✓ The shipwrights performed Noah's Ark.
- ✓ The goldsmiths performed the Three Wise Men.
- ✓ The shepherds performed The Nativity. Were the plays always serious?

There is a misconception that Mystery Plays, because of their origin and subject matter, were dour and serious. Certainly some were. But as they moved away from the church's control, the more secular they became, and elements of humor found their way through. For example, in The

Second Shepherd's Play, a shepherd and his wife steal a sheep and try to hide it for comic effect. They pretend the sheep is their newborn son. Even in the medieval era, theatre had to relate to its audience. The Medieval audience could not read or write. For the most part they were blue collar working men and women. In order for the plays to connect to the audience, they had to speak the language of the audience, have modern references, and feature characters who were familiar to their audience.

The Origin of the term Mystery Play There are a number of different views as to how Mystery Plays came to be called such.

- ✓ The word mystery also means —religious truth.¶
- ✓ From the French mystery, meaning secret.
- ✓ That it has to do with the trade guilds who performed the plays. Craftspeople were called misterm.

3.3. Miracle Plays

The Miracle Plays were some of the earliest in the era, developing during the 12th century. In some areas the terms Miracle and Mystery are interchangeable when describing medieval drama, particularly in reference to English plays. But true Miracle Plays have their own focus. Instead of Bible stories, they dramatized the lives, the legends and miracles of Roman Catholic saints. This type of religious drama flourished in France with writers such as Jean Bode and Rutebeuf. Some of the saints most typically portrayed were the Virgin Mary, St. George, and St. Nicholas. Few examples exist today. Miracle Plays were eventually banned in England because of their Roman Catholic leanings.

3.4. EXERCISE

1. Read "Every man" play, and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention as Liturgical Drama.

UNIT FOUR

4. EPIC THEATRE

Epic – applied to a work that meets at least one of the following criteria: it is a long narrative poem on a great and serious subject, told in an elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race. The epic typically emphasizes the struggle between the hero's ethos (the disposition, character, or attitude peculiar to a specific people, culture, or group that distinguishes it from other people or groups; fundamental values or spirit; mores) and his human failings or mortality. An epic contains the following elements:

4.1. Form

Brecht's form of theatre was known as epic theatre, most likely coined by collaborator Erwin Piscator. Some scholars argue the term epic theatre was already in use in European experimental theatre. Epic plays employed a large narrative (as opposed to a smaller plot), spanning many locations and time frames.

- ❖ Brecht called scenes episodes, with each scene being relatively self-contained in the story
- ❖ epic plays used non-linear, fractured plots, where the events of an episode were not necessarily a result of the preceding episode
- ❖ this juxtaposition of scenes employing multiple locations and time frames created a montage effect
- ❖ he used his acting troupe at the Berliner Ensemble to perfect his theories on acting and the theatre
- ❖ some of his plays were historical, chronicling the life of a person (Life of Galileo, Saint Joan of the Stockyards)
- ❖ focus was always on the society being presented in the play, not individual characters. Events in plays were sometimes told from the viewpoint of a single storyteller (alienation device)
- ❖ Brecht wrote his plays with no act or scene divisions; these were added later

- ❖ long scenes told the main events of the story and were interspersed with occasional shorter scenes
- ❖ shorter scenes normally involved parables, used to emotionally detach the audience marginally
- ❖ parable scenes often involved the use of song, an alienation device employed by Brecht to help deliver the (Marxist) message of the play
- ❖ historification‘/‘historicisation‘ was a Brecht term defining the technique of setting the action of a play in the past to draw parallels with contemporary events
- ❖ _historification‘/‘historicisation‘ enabled spectators to view the events of the play with emotional detachment and garner a thinking response
- ❖ Brecht crushed Aristotle’s model of the three unites of time, place and action (one location, single day)

4.1.1. Movement & Gesture

- mix of realistic and non-realistic movement
- movement was at times graceful, but at other times forceful
- Brecht used the Latin word *gestus*‘ to describe both individual gestures and whole body postures
- character *gestus* denoted one’s social attitude and human relationships with others (linked to Marxist principles)
- some Oriental gesture used (Brecht’s influence of a Balinese dance showing)
- groups of characters often positioned on the stage for functional and not aesthetic reasons
- characters grouped according to their social relationships in the play (Marxist)
- Space & Actor Audience Relationship
- Brecht’s plays were performed in traditional proscenium arch theatre houses
- however, the stage curtain was often dispensed with or a half curtain used instead of a full one
- Brecht preferred to call the audience _spectators‘
- direct address by actors/characters to audience was a strong and unconventional technique used by performers

- direct address broke the (invisible) fourth wall and crushed traditional realistic/naturalistic conventions
- the narrator was a common figure in Brechtian dramas (Brecht was probably the father of the modern narrator)

4.1.2. Technical aspect

- costume was not individually identifiable e.g. the farmer's costume represented a (typical) farmer
- costume was sometimes incomplete and fragmentary e.g. tie and briefcase for the businessman
- costume often denoted the character's role or function in society (plus wealth/class) sets were sometimes non-existent or fragmentary (either partial sets or one object representing many of the same)
- at other times sets were industrial e.g. ramps, treadmills (influence of Meyerhold's constructivist set design)
- some makeup and mask use, but non-realistic and theatrical e.g. grotesque and/or caricatured
- makeup and costume used to depict a character's social role in the play, not that of his/her everyday appearance
- signs/placards used to show audience a range of information
- screen projection used to reinforce play's theme/s (to garner an intellectual response, not emotional)
- open white light only (as color would generate an emotional response from the audience)
- if the house lights were left on during a performance, open white light also allowed for the spectators and performers to share a single same-lit space
- lighting instruments in full view of audience (no attempt to hide them, but rather remind the audience they were watching a play)
- music and song used to express the play's themes independent of the main spoken text in the play (in parable scenes)

4.1.3. Acting and Characterization

- ❖ actor was never to fully become the character, as in the realistic/naturalistic theatre
- ❖ actor was asked to demonstrate the character at arm's length with a sense of detachment
- ❖ often characters tended to be somewhat oversimplified and stereotyped
- ❖ yet other characters were sometimes complex
- ❖ historical, real-life characters in some Brecht plays
- ❖ some (but not all) character names were generic e.g. the worker, the peasant, the teacher
- ❖ mix of presentational and representational acting modes utralize emotion, rather than intensify it (opposite to a modern-day musical)

4.2. EXERCISE

1. Read "Mother Courage" play, and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention as epic theatre.

UNIT FIVE

5. Absurdism

A philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the Absurdism became popular in the 20th century alongside nihilism.

Two main authors: Søren Kierkegaard (free will and existentialism), and Albert Camus. Kierkegaard took a spiritual approach and is thus out of line with modern absurdist philosophy. Most absurdists are atheists or apatheists. search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe.

5.1. The Theory

The universe is inherently random and meaningless, and therefore any attempt by humans to find meaning is considered absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus states “the absurd is born out of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.” Thus, we are all free. Structures, rules, laws etc. are all simply attempts to impose order in an order less

5.2. The three methods to resolve absurdity

- ✓ Suicide: “There is but one serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide,” (Camus, *An Absurd Reasoning*).
- ✓ Embracing a meaning framework through spirituality or religion (Kierkegaard)
- ✓ Acceptance (Camus): “I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself — so like a brother, really — I felt I had been happy,” (Camus 122).

5.3. Theatre of the Absurd

The term ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ was coined by Martin Esslin in his 1962 book by that title. It refers to the work of a loosely associated group of dramatists who first emerged during and after World War II. Theatre of the Absurd came about as a reaction to World War II.

The global nature of this war and the resulting trauma of living under the threat of a nuclear annihilation put into stark perspective the essential precariousness of human life.

It takes the basis of existential philosophy.

The playwright of the absurd views life existentially and expresses the senselessness of it. Most of the plays express a sense of wonder, incomprehension, and at times despair at the meaninglessness of human existence. Since, they do not believe in a rational and well-meaning universe, they do not see any possibility of resolution of the problems they present, either.

The absurdist playwrights give artistic expression to Albert Camus' existential philosophy, as illustrated in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that life is inherently meaningless. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the harbinger of the theatre of the absurd.

The Theatre of the Absurd does not argue about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being via concrete stage images.

- It creates a style of theatre which presented a world which cannot be logically explained.
- It uses techniques that seemed to be illogical to the theatre world. The arbitrary structure of the plays reflects the arbitrary and irrational nature of life.
- Structurally, in contrast to a well made play with a beginning, middle and a neatly tied up ending, the plays by the absurdist playwrights often start at an arbitrary point and end just as arbitrarily. The plots often deviate from the more traditional episodic structure, and seem to be cyclic, ending the same way it begins. It rejects narrative continuity and the rigidity of logic.
- The scenery is often unrecognizable.
- The dialogue never seems to make any sense. Language is seen as a futile attempt to communicate. In short, the communication is impossible.
- The general effect is often a nightmare or dreamlike atmosphere in which the protagonist is overwhelmed by the chaotic or irrational nature of his environment.
- Most absurdist intermix farce and tragedy in which the poignantly tragic may come upon the funny, or vice versa.

Unlike the traditional theatre which attempts to create a photographic representation of life as we see it, the Theatre of the Absurd aims to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams. The focal point of these dreams is often man's fundamental bewilderment and confusion, stemming from the fact that he has no

answers to the basic existential questions: why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering.

The Theatre of the Absurd, in a sense, attempts to reestablish man's communion with the universe. The Theatre of the Absurd hopes to achieve this by shocking man out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical and complacent. It is felt that there is mystical experience in confronting the limits of human condition.

One of the most important aspects of absurd drama is its distrust of language as a means of communication.

- ✓ Language is nothing more than a vehicle for conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges.

The Theatre of the Absurd shows language as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which it distorts, parodies and breaks down. By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically.

5.4. Theatre of the Absurd has some stylistic precursors as in the following

- ❖ Tragicomedy: The mode of most 'absurdist' plays is tragicomedy. Writers associated with the theatre of the absurd have been particularly attracted to tragicomedy. Tragicomedy is a form of drama that combines tragic and comic elements. Sudden reversals, averted catastrophes, and happy endings were the standard ingredients of the form.
- ❖ Dadaism: Many of the Absurdist had direct connections with the Dadaists. Dadaism or Dada is a post-World War I cultural movement in visual art as well as literature (mainly poetry), theatre and graphic design. The movement was a protest against the barbarism of the War and what Dadaists believed was an oppressive intellectual rigidity in both art and everyday society; its works were characterized by a deliberate irrationality and the

rejection of the prevailing standards of art. Dada began as an anti-art movement, in the sense that it rejected the way art was appreciated and defined in contemporary art scenes.

- ❖ Surrealism: Surrealism style uses visual imagery from the subconscious mind to create art without the intention of logical comprehensibility. The movement was begun primarily in Europe, centered in Paris, and attracted many of the members of the Dada community. Influenced by the psychoanalytical work of Freud and Jung, there are similarities between the Surrealist movement and the Symbolist movement of the late 19th century.
- ❖ ‘The Theatre of Cruelty’ was a particularly important philosophical treatise. Artaud claimed theatre's reliance on literature was inadequate and that the true power of theatre was in its visceral impact. Artaud rejected realism in the theatre, calling for a return to myth and magic and to the exposure of the deepest conflicts within the human mind. He demanded a theatre that would produce collective archetypes and create a modern mythology.

The Theatre of the Absurd departs from realistic characters, situations and all of the associated theatrical conventions. Time, place and identity are ambiguous and fluid, and even basic causality frequently breaks down.

Meaningless plots, repetitive or nonsensical dialogue and dramatic non-sequiturs are often used to create dream-like or even nightmare-like moods. There is a fine line, however, between the careful and artful use of chaos and non-realistic elements and true, meaningless chaos. While many of the plays described by this title seem to be quite random and meaningless on the surface, an underlying structure and meaning is usually found in the midst of the chaos.

Characters: The characters in Absurdist drama are lost and floating in an incomprehensible universe. Many characters appear as automatons stuck in routines speaking only in cliché. Characters are frequently stereotypical, archetypal, or flat character types. The more complex characters are in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible. Characters in Absurdist drama may also face the chaos of a world that science and logic have abandoned. Characters may find themselves trapped in a routine. The plots of many Absurdist plays feature characters in interdependent pairs, commonly either two males or a male and a female. The two characters may be roughly equal or have a begrudging interdependence (like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*). One character may be clearly dominant and may torture the

passive character (like Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*); the relationship of the characters may shift dramatically throughout the play.

Plot: Plots are frequently cyclical: generally, begins where the play ended – some lines at the beginning responding to some lines at the end – and it can be assumed that each day the same actions will take place. Plots can consist of the absurd repetition of cliché and routine, as in *Godot*. Often there is a menacing outside force that remains a mystery. Absence, emptiness, nothingness, and unresolved mysteries are central features in many Absurdist plots: for example, the action of *Godot* is centered around the absence of a man named Godot, for whom the characters perpetually wait. The plot may also revolve around an unexplained metamorphosis, a supernatural change, or a shift in the laws of physics.

Language: Despite its reputation for nonsense language, much of the dialogue in Absurdist plays is naturalistic. The moments when characters resort to nonsense language or clichés—when words appear to have lost their denotative function, thus creating misunderstanding among the characters (Esslin [1961] 26)—make Theatre of the Absurd distinctive. Language frequently gains a certain phonetic, rhythmical, almost musical quality, opening up a wide range of often comedic playfulness. Distinctively Absurdist language will range from meaningless clichés to Vaudeville-style word play to meaningless nonsense.

The theatre of the absurd was a short-lived yet significant theatrical movement, centered in Paris in the 1950s. Unusual in this instance was the absence of a single practitioner spearheading the form. Largely based on the philosophy of existentialism, absurdist was implemented by a small number of European playwrights. Common elements included illogical plots inhabited by characters who appeared out of harmony with their own existence. The typical playgoer had never seen anything like this on the stage before. The theatre of the absurd will be remembered in history for many things, the most significant of these being Samuel Beckett's masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*, one of the great plays of the 20th century. Absurdist is commonly studied in senior high school and university drama and theatre courses. Below are the main conventions of the theatre of the absurd.

5.5. Movements that influenced the theatre of the absurd are as follows

Commedia dell'arte: A form of comic drama developed by guilds of professional Italian actors. It relied on the use of stock characters and situations, plenty of comic situations, and the actors used masks to represent their characters.

Expressionism: An artistic theory of the late 19th century where the subconscious thoughts are presented by a series of non-naturalistic techniques.

Dadaism: A nihilistic movement in the arts that flourished chiefly in France, Switzerland, and Germany in the early 20th century. The movement is marked by a disgust for bourgeois values and despair over World War I.

Surrealism: Launched as an artistic movement in France by Andre Breton's Manifesto on Surrealism (1924), surrealism can be considered an off-shoot of Dadaism. Gradually this movement had a far-reaching influence on the literature of the absurd, antinovel, magic realism and postmodernism.

Silent film comedy: Actors such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton embodied the alienation of men when faced with mechanical devices and rapid industrialization. Eugene Ionesco even announced that his *The Chairs* was influenced by the works of the Marx brothers. The most prominent names associated with the theatre of the absurd are: Arthur Adamou, Fernando Arrabal, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Gunter Grass, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard.

5.6. The artistic feature of theatre of absurd

Artistic feature is an extensive category in literary field. It can be expressed in many ways by playwrights or writers. It is also a key point when we make a research on a literary work both at home and abroad. As a rule, every kind of theater has its own artistic features with regard to its special background and social demands. The Theatre of the Absurd is not an exception. In the Theater of the Absurd, multiple artistic features are used to express tragic theme with a comic form. The features include anti-character, anti-language, anti-drama and anti-plot.

5.7. Themes of theatre of the absurd

The existence of human being is full of suffering, cruelty and danger. Such existence forms an atmosphere of the devaluation of life in modern society. Facing this atmosphere, human beings lose themselves in it. Gradually, they feel lonely, frightened and despairing. Emptiness therefore becomes the true essence of their daily lives. Isolation and absurdity gradually fill their minds. The Theater of the Absurd actually reflects the reality of life in a bleak society. From it, we find that people in their daily lives are tired, obscure and aimless. The Theater of the Absurd is the product of modern society. People do not know the real meaning and destination of their lives. Some advanced writers have an insight in it and write it in a special form, which is called the Theater of the Absurd. At the beginning, it is difficult for the public to accept. When people appreciated the Bald Soprano on the stage for the first time, only several people were left in the theater. As time goes by, more and more people think highly of this kind of theater and consider that it is suitable for their lives. Theater originally is used to show the reality on the stages. But everybody knows that reality is serious and full of dangers and adventures and it usually gives us tragic effects. Using comic form to end a play is a relative comfortable and moderate way. It can be accepted by common people more easily after comparing with other forms. When you begin to read the play, you may laugh at the characters and their words and behaviors. But after you finish reading the play, you may change your mind and consider its theme once again. You will consider that it is worthwhile to regard the play as a tragicomedy. Degradation and oppression should have been part of the tragic theme, but many playwrights in the Theater of the Absurd describe them in a happy and comic form. When you read this kind of play, you may feel ridiculous about them.

5.7.1. The Crisis and Cruelty of Human Beings

In the Theater of the Absurd, playwrights try to explore the crisis and cruelty of human beings. The Theater of the Absurd appeared in 1950s. At that time, economy developed very fast in western world. All kinds of new technologies were used in every field. People who wanted to survive must catch up with the step and variation of the society as soon as possible. If they could not keep pace with the speed of the society, they would be abandoned and lose themselves in it. Some of them were destined to be left and they could not find their status and identification. So it doomed that their minds were full of crisis and cruelty and usually their thoughts were strange

and curious. Some pioneers wrote their minds and thoughts in the Theater of the Absurd to reveal their inner feelings. In contrast, traditional playwrights involve in more extensive themes, such as politics, economics and culture. Playwrights in the Theater of the Absurd regard the crisis and cruelty of human beings as one of its themes (Wang, 1995).

5.7.2. The Dissimilation of the Society

Dissimilation means that people regard the metamorphic things as normal things. Dissimilation of the society means that many abnormal things have appeared, what's more, these phenomena have been regarded as normal things. Disease, death and hunger are often regarded as the themes to discuss. Evil, crime and violence are often thought to be natural things in the society. When people come across these occasions, they would feel sad and sympathetic for the dead or the patients. But in the Theater of the Absurd, people consider it in an indifferent attitude. The world makes people feel unconcerned and even unmerciful. People no longer believe in any gods who can save them from the heaven. Material life is thought at the first place. Meanwhile, money is considered the most important thing in the world. Money is the first condition before people do everything. People live in a world where love and mutual assistance are meaningless. There is no love and trust among them.

5.7.3. The Meaninglessness of the Existence of Human Beings

To the two characters in *Waiting for Godoy*, the meaning of their lives is just endless waiting. They could not find what they are waiting for. Their life is meaningless. They even could not find the essence of human existence. Though they live in the real world, their lives are ridiculous. In the Theater of the Absurd, playwrights express their true feelings to this world by means of the protagonist whom they have depicted in their plays. A play, in fact, is a mirror which reflects the real phenomena in the society. In the Theater of the Absurd the playwrights strive to express the senselessness of the human race and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. While Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theater of the Absurd goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumption and the form in which these are expressed. They live in a real world, but they don't feel their existence. In fact, they are afraid of their existence, so they would rather put themselves in a confused or unconscious condition. Only

when they don't realize their existence can they feel that they are alive. Most poor people exist and live in endless poverty, and life is terrible to them. If they consider their lives earnestly, their lives are miserable and painful. Only when they forget the reality can they abandon the suffering and feel their existence. But suffering is endless as long as they live, so they have to endure them from cradle to grave (Dial, 2008).

5.7.4. The Isolation among People In the society described

By the Theater of the Absurd, the relationship among people is measured through material and money. When they face some dangers and problems, few people come to help them. People who live in this society for a long time will feel lonely and indifferent. Human beings communicate with each other in a cold and detached attitude. Because of this, people gradually have less communication and would rather locked themselves in cages. And once more the chain reactions lead to a serious isolation among people. Therefore, the isolation is just like a snowball which is growing in people's heart. People seldom communicate with each other and hardly believe in each other. Because selfishness and fright fill their hearts, they are afraid that people who have higher social status than them will laugh at or look down upon them. So they try their best to cover and hide themselves under the surface of the material. And their desires and pursuits are put in their hearts silently even if they have rights to express them. In *Waiting for Godoy*, the boys seem to be good friends, but the relationship between them is isolated and unconcerned. They cannot bring any warmth and comfort to each other. They communicate in just a few of words without much feeling and concern (Wang, 2001). The condition of little care or concern would make people feel lonely and helpless. Only in the Theater of the Absurd can this phenomenon express the original and true features of the society.

5.8. Convention of absurd theatre

5.8.1. Plot and Structure

- ❖ anti---realistic, going against many of the accepted norms of conventional theatre
- ❖ has been labeled by some critics as 'anti---theatre'
- ❖ frequently characterized by a deliberate absence of the cause and effect relationship between scenes

- ❖ non---linear plot developments, often circular, ending where they began
- ❖ occasionally appearing as though there is no plot at all
- ❖ Deliberate lack of conflict

5.8.2. Acting and Characterization

- ✚ Both presentational and representational modes of acting
- ✚ sometimes stereotypical
- ✚ often an absence of character development
- ✚ time, place and identity are frequently blurred with characters often unsure about who or where they are
- ✚ characters are often out of sync with the world in which they live

5.8.3. Movement

- Combination of realistic and non---realistic
- Elements of circus, vaudeville and acrobatics
- Ritualistic
- slow
- illogical
- repetitive
- action sometimes defies logic or easy understanding

5.8.4. Mood and Atmosphere

- moves between extremes, from serious to comical

5.8.5. Dialogue

- language was devalued as a communication tool (unreliable and distrusted)
- Often illogical
- Sometimes telegraphic and clipped
- Long pauses
- Clichéd
- Repetitive

- Rhythmical
- Frequent use of silence

5.8.6. Stage craft

- ✓ Often simple and minimalist use of stagecraft
- ✓ barren set pieces barely denoting a location

5.9. EXERCISE

1. Read “Waiting for Godot” play, and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention as absurd Drama.

UNIT SIX

6. REALISM AND NATURALISM

6.1. REALISM

Realism in the last half of the 19th-century began as an experiment to make theater more useful to society. The mainstream theatre from 1859 to 1900 was still bound up in melodramas, spectacle plays (disasters, etc.), comic operas, and vaudevilles. But political events—including attempts to reform some political systems—led to some different ways of thinking. Revolutions in Europe in 1848 showed that there was a desire for political, social, and economic reform. The many governments were frightened into promising change, but most didn't implement changes after the violence ended.

Technological advances were also encouraged by industry and trade, leading to an increased belief that science could solve human problems. But the working classes still had to fight for every increase in rights: unionization and strikes became the principal weapons workers would use after the 1860s—but success came only from costly work stoppages and violence. In other words there seems to be rejection of Romantic idealism; pragmatism reigned instead. The common man seemed to feel that he needed to be recognized, and people asserted themselves through action.

6.1.2. The Emergence of Realism

1. **August Comte (1798-1857)**, often considered to be the "father of Sociology," developed a theory known as Positivism. Among the Comte's ideas was an encouragement for understanding the cause and effect of nature through precise observation.
2. **Charles Darwin (1809-1882)** published *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and created a worldwide stir which exists to this day. Darwin's essential series suggested that life developed gradually from common ancestry and that life favored "survival of the fittest." The implications of Darwin's Theories were threefold:

1. people were controlled by heredity and environment
 2. behaviors were beyond our control
 3. humanity is a natural object, rather than being above all else
3. **Karl Marx (1818-1883)** in the late 1840's espoused a political philosophy arguing against urbanization and in favor of a more equal distribution of wealth

Even Richard Wagner (pronounced "Rih-Kard' Vahg'-ner") (1813-1883), while rejecting contemporary trends toward realism, helps lead toward a moderate realistic theatre. Wagner wanted complete illusionism, but wanted the dramatists to be more than a recorder—he wanted to be of "myth-maker."

True drama, according to Wagner, should be "dipped in the magic founding of music," which allows greater control over performance than spoken drama. Wagner wanted complete control over every aspect of the production in order to get a "*gesamtkunstwerk*," or "master art work."

Because Wagner aimed for complete illusion, even though his operas were not all realistic, many of his production practices helped lead the way for realism. For instance the auditorium was darkened, the stage was framed with a double proscenium arch, there were no side boxes and no center aisle, and all seats were equally good. Further, he forbade musicians to tune in the orchestra pit, allowed no applause or curtain calls, and strove for historical accuracy in scenery and costumes. Therefore, even though Wagner's operas are fantastic and mythical, his attempts at illusionism helped gain public acceptance for realism.

6.1.3. Beginnings of the Movement:

Realism came about partly as a response to these new social / artistic conditions. The "movement" began in France and by 1860 had some general precepts:

1. truth resides in material objects we perceived to all five senses; truth is verified through science
2. the scientific method—observation—would solve everything
3. human problems were the highest were home of science

Art—according to the realist view—had as its purpose to better mankind.

Drama was to involve the direct observation of human behavior; therefore, there was a thrust to use contemporary settings and time periods, and it was to deal with everyday life and problems as subjects.

As already mentioned, realism first showed itself in staging and costuming. Three-dimensional details had been added by 1800. By 1850, theater productions used historically accurate settings and costumes and details, partly as a result of romantic ideals. But it was harder to get realism accepted widely.

The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen helped unify productions; Richard Wagner wanted theatre to fuse the emotional and the intellectual, though his operas were highly mythical and fantastic.

6.1.4. Conventions of Realism Theatre

- characters are believable, everyday types
- costumes are authentic
- the realist movement in the theatre and subsequent performance style have greatly influenced 20th century theatre and cinema and its effects are still being felt today
- triggered by Stanislavski's system of realistic acting at the turn of the 20th century, America grabbed hold of its own brand of this performance style (American realism) and acting (method acting) in the 1930s, 40s and 50s (The Group Theatre, The Actors Studio)
- stage settings (locations) and props are often indoors and believable
- the 'box set' is normally used for realistic dramas on stage, consisting of three walls and an invisible 'fourth wall' facing the audience
- settings for realistic plays are often bland (deliberately ordinary), dialogue is not heightened for effect, but that of everyday speech (vernacular)
- The drama is typically psychologically driven, where the plot is secondary and primary focus is placed on the interior lives of characters, their motives, the reactions of others etc.

- Realistic plays often see the protagonist (main character) rise up against the odds to assert him/her self against an injustice of some kind (egg. Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House)
- realistic dramas quickly gained popularity because the everyday person in the audience could identify with the situations and characters on stage
- Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (A Doll's House, Huda Gabbler) is considered the father of modern realism in the theatre

6.1.5. Writers of Realism

In France, two Playwrights helped popularized the idea of realism but both clung to two inherent traditional morality and values:

Alexandre Dumas fils (the *fils* stands for "son," and designates the "illegitimate son of Alexandre Dumas") – (1824-1895)

His novel, *Camille*, was dramatized in 1849. About a "kept woman," the play was written in prose, and dealt with contemporary life. Eventually, he wrote "thesis plays," about contemporary social problems.

In Norway: Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is considered to be the father of modern realistic drama. His plays attacked society's values and dealt with unconventional subjects within the form of the well-made play (causally related).

Ibsen perfected the well-made play formula; and by using a familiar formula made his plays, with a very shocking subject matter, acceptable. He discarded soliloquies, asides, etc. Exposition in the plays was motivated, there were causally related scenes, inner psychological motivation was emphasized, the environment had an influence on characters' personalities, and all the things characters did and all of things the characters used revealed their socio-economic milieu. He became a model for later realistic writers.

Among the subjects addressed by Ibsen in his plays are: *euthanasia, the role of women, war and business, and syphilis*.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) – in England

Uncommon for his witty humor

Made fun of societies notion using for the purpose of educating and changing. His plays tended to show the accepted attitude, then demolished that attitude while showing his own solutions.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) – in Russia

Chekhov is known more for poetic expiration and symbolism, compelling psychological reality, people trapped in social situations, hope in hopeless situations. He claimed that he wrote comedies; others think they are sad and tragic. Characters in Chekhov's plays seem to have a fate that is a direct result of what they are. His plays have an illusion of plot lessens.

6.2. NATURALISM

While Ibsen was perfecting realism, France was demanding a new drama based on Darwinism:

1. all forms of life developed gradually from common ancestry,
2. evolution of species is explained by survival of the fittest

The implications of Darwin's ideas seemed to be that 1) heredity and environment control people; 2) no person is responsible, since forces are beyond control; 3) the must go to society; 4) progress is the same as improvement/evolution; it is inevitable and can be hastened by the application of the scientific method; 5) man is reduced to a natural object.

France had been defeated in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, ending Napoleon III's empire, and making France a Republic. Attitudes shifted: the working man had few privileges, it appeared, and socialism gained support. By 1900, every major country in Europe had a Constitution (except Russia); there was therefore a strong interest in the plight of the working class. Science and technology became major tools for dealing with contemporary problems.

Naturalism became a conscious movement in France in the 1870's; Emile Zola (1849-1902) was an admirer of Comte and an advocate of the scientific method. Literature, he felt, must become scientific or perish; it should illustrate the inevitable laws of heredity and environment or record

case studies. To experiment with the same detachment as a scientist, the writer could become like a doctor (seeking the cause of disease to cure it, bringing the disease in the open to be examined), aiming to cure social ills.

Zola's first major statement came in a novel, *Thérèse Raquin*, which was dramatized in 1873; his preface states his views. He also wrote a few treatises about naturalism in the theatre and in the novel: he wanted art to detect "a scrap of an existence."

Even though *Thérèse Raquin* failed to adhere to most of the principles of naturalism, except in the setting (it was mostly a melodrama about murder and retribution), his followers were even more zealous. The most famous phrase we hear about naturalism is that it should be "a slice of life." We often tend to forget what a later French writer stated should be included with that phrase: "... put on the stage with art."

Naturalism, as it was interpreted, almost obliterated the distinction between life and art. As you can imagine, there is a serious lack of good naturalistic plays and embodying its principles, has it is virtually impossible to do. Henri Becque (1837-1899) most nearly captured the essence of naturalism in two of his plays, *The Vultures* (1882) and *La Parisienne* (1885), both of which it dealt with sordid subjects, were pessimistic and cynical, had no obvious climaxes, had no sympathetic characters, and progressed slowly to the end. However, Becque refused to comply with suggested changes when the show was first produced in a conservative theatre, so naturalism was still not really accepted.

6.2.2. Conventions of Naturalism Theatre

- in terms of style, naturalism is an extreme or heightened form of realism
- as a theatrical movement and performance style, naturalism was short-lived
- Stage time equals real time egg. three hours in the theatre equals three hours for the characters in the world of the play
- costumes, sets and props are historically accurate and very detailed, attempting to offer a photographic reproduction of reality (slice of life')
- as with realism, settings for naturalistic dramas are often bland and ordinary
- naturalistic dramas normally follow rules set out by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, known as the three unities' (of time, place and action)

- the action of the play takes place in a single location over the time frame of a single day
- jumps in time and/or place between acts or scenes is not allowed
- playwrights were influenced by naturalist manifestos written by French novelist and playwright Emile Zola in the preface to *Therese Raquan* (1867 novel, 1873 play) and Swedish playwright August Strindberg in the preface to *Miss Julie* (1888)
- naturalism explores the concept of scientific determinism (spawning from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution) – characters in the play are shaped by their circumstances and controlled by external forces such as hereditary or their social and economic environment
- often characters in naturalistic plays are considered victims of their own circumstance and this is why they behave in certain ways (they are seen as helpless products of their environment)
- characters are often working class/lower class (as opposed to the mostly middle class characters of realistic dramas)
- naturalistic plays regularly explore sordid subject matter previously considered taboo on the stage in any serious manner (egg suicide, poverty, prostitution)

6.3. EXERCISE

1. Read “A doll’s house” play, and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention as absurd Drama.
2. Read “The Father” play, and then write short analysis on element, genres, style and convention as absurd Drama.

7. ANALYSIS OF "OEDIPUS THE KING" PLAY

The history of the critical reception to Oedipus Rex begins with Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), who in his Poetics inaugurated the history of formalist and structural analysis of literature, two important cornerstones for the enterprise of the critical interpretation of literature. In some ways it can be regarded as the first book of literary criticism, and its significance for the subsequent study of the works of popular form of entertainment, the festivals surrounding public performances are rarely state-funded.

Sophocles in general and Oedipus Rex in particular is enormous, due to the exemplary status he granted the play, as the greatest tragedy ever written. He gave it high praise for its outstanding fulfillment of the requirements he set out for tragedy, including reversal of situation, characterization, well-constructed plot, and rationality of action.

Oedipus Rex contains an excellent moment of "reversal" in the scene in which the messenger comes to tell Oedipus of the death of Polybos, whom he believes to be Oedipus's father. According to Aristotle, because Oedipus learns from him inadvertently that Polybos is not his father, "by revealing who he is, he produces the opposite effect." Aristotle also praised the play for its characterization of the hero, who causes the audience to feel the right mixture of "pity and fear" while observing his actions. The hero should not be too virtuous, nor should he be evil: "there remains, then, the character between these two extremes—that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous—a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families."

The plot receives commendation by Aristotle for its ability to stir the emotions of not only its audience members but, even more significantly, those who merely hear the story: —he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place." In addition, Oedipus Rex succeeds in shaping the action in such a way that its ramifications are unknown until after the event itself occurs: "the deed of horror may be done, but done in ignorance, and the tie of kinship or friendship be discovered afterwards here, indeed, the incident is outside the drama proper."

Lastly, Aristotle remarks that he prefers the role of the chorus in Sophocles to that of Euripides, and that the *Oedipus Rex* excludes from the play proper any irrational elements, such as Oedipus's ignorance of the mode of Laius's death. This last point is taken up by Voltaire, who subjected the play to intense questioning on the basis of the improbability of aspects such as this one.

After Aristotle, the major figures who have analyzed the play include those dramatists, from antiquity to the present, such as Seneca, Corneille, Dryden, and Hofmannsthal, who respectively translated the play into Latin, French, English, and German. Poets and dramatists are themselves acting as critics when they embark on projects of translation, even if they have not given explicit accounts of how and why they have proceeded. Implicitly, these works ask their readers to attempt to answer these questions for themselves, and a short list of the variations on Sophocles' play should begin to generate such study. In 50 A.D, the Roman writer Seneca, for instance, decided to add an unseen episode narrated by Creon in which the ghost of Laius identifies his murderer to Tiresias.

In the 1580s in England the Tudor university dramatist William Gager sketched out five scenes for an unfinished version of the play, combining elements of Seneca's *Oedipus* and his *Phoenician Women* with scenes of his own creation; the first original scene is a lament of a Theban citizen for his dead father and son, to whom he seeks to give a proper burial in the midst of the plague-ridden city. His Jocasta kills herself because of her sons' fratricidal struggle for power. In 1659 Corneille prefaced his neo-Classical version of the play with a notice that he has reduced the number of oracles, left out the graphic description of Oedipus's blinding because of the presence of ladies in the audience, and added the happy love story of Theseus and Dice in order to satisfy all attendees. He keeps Seneca's additional scene but makes Laius's speech vaguer. Dryden, two decades later, self-consciously drew upon Corneille's subplot but changed its ending to an unhappy one. Like Corneille he laments the fact that audiences demand such light entertainment accompanying their experience of great tragic drama.

In the next century, translators and commentators in England and France beginning with Voltaire and including Pierre Brumby, Thomas Maurice, and R. Potter brought unique perspectives to the play. Voltaire believed the play to be defective in ways that many scholars expected from the Enlightenment thinker. Following Aristotle and going much further in his skeptical stance, in

1716 Voltaire criticized the lack of plausibility in Oedipus's ignorance of the manner of Laius's death: "that he did not even know whether it was in the country or in town that this murder was committed, and that he should give neither the least reason nor the least excuse for his ignorance, I confess that I do not know any terms to express such an absurdity." Another famous criticism of his concerns the fact that Oedipus, upon learning that the shepherd who knows his origins is still alive, chooses to consult the oracle "without giving the command to bring before him the only man who could throw light on the mystery." In contradistinction to Voltaire, in the middle of the eighteenth century Brumby movingly expressed his satisfaction with the play. Of the opening scene he wrote: "This is a speaking spectacle, and a picture so beautifully disposed, that even the attitudes of the priests and of Oedipus express, without the help of words, that one relates the calamities with which the people are afflicted, and the other, melted at the melancholy sight, declares his impatience and concern for the long delay of Creon, whom he had sent to consult the Oracle." Brumby also recognizes that the play's values are pagan rather than Christian, and specifically he emphasizes the influential classical notion of destiny, after him, the English translators Thomas Maurice (1779) and R. Potter (1788) did the same.

German authors, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, dominate the reception history of Oedipus in the nineteenth century.

This is capable of inspiring fear and pity not only in its audience but especially in those who have merely heard of the story. Following Aristotle's appraisal, many prominent authors including Voltaire, Frederic Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud reacted at length to the play's themes of incest and patricide. In the twentieth century, the most influential of these thinkers, Freud, showed that Oedipus's fate is that of every man; the "Oedipus Complex" is the definitive parent-child relationship. Throughout history, writers have drawn upon the myth of Oedipus, and dramatists, composers, and poets, including Pierre Corneille, Fredric von Schiller, Heinrich von Kleist, William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, Igor Stravinsky, and Jean Cocteau, have both written on, translated, and staged the tragedy; contemporary filmmakers such as Pier Paolo Gasoline and Woody Allen have directed self-consciously autobiographical versions of Oedipus Rex.

7.1. Author Biography

Sophocles was born in Colons, Greece, and c. 496 B.C. and died in Athens c. 406 B.C. The son of an armor manufacturer, he was a member of a family of considerable rank, was well-educated, and held a number of significant political positions, in addition to being one of the best dramatists in his age—an age in which his dramatic peers included the famed playwrights Euripides and Aeschylus. Sophocles studied under the musician Lampas and under Aeschylus, later becoming his rival. He lived and wrote during an era known as the Golden Age of Athens (480–406 B.C.); in 480 and 479 B.C. the city had won the battles of Salamis and Plataea against Persian invaders, thereby inaugurating what would become a definitive period in the history of western literature and society, famed for its flourishing political and cultural life. The Golden Age lasted until Athens's humiliating defeat to Sparta in 404 B.C., after 27 years of war between the two city-states (commonly referred to as the Peloponnesian War).

In many ways, the dramatic arts stood at the center of the cultural achievements of the Golden Age, and the popularity and success of the plays of Sophocles were evident in his own day. His works were produced at the Great Dionysian in Athens, an annual festival honoring the god Dionysus and culminating in the famous dramatic competitions. Sophocles won first prize over twenty times in the competition, beginning with Triptolemos in 468 B.C., the first year that Aeschylus lost the contest to him. Euripides lost to Sophocles in 438 B.C. Unfortunately, Triptolemos is one among many of Sophocles' lost plays. He is purported to have written over one hundred tragedies, yet only seven have survived to the modern era; Ajax (c. 450 B.C.); Antigone (c. 442 B.C.); Ichneutai (translated as The Trackers,, c. 440 B.C.); The Trichinae (c. 440–430 B.C.); Oedipus The King (c. 430–426 B.C.); Electra (c. 425–510 B.C.); Philoctetes (409 B.C.); and Oedipus at Colonus (c. 405 B.C.).

While there is some dispute among scholars as to their actual relationship, three of Sophocles' surviving works are thought to comprise a trilogy. Known as the Theban Trilogy the plays are Antigone, Oedipus the King, and Oedipus at Colons. All of these plays draw upon the ancient story of Oedipus, King of Thebes. The sources for Sophocles' version of this legendary tale are thought to include Book XI of Homer's Odyssey, two ancient epic poems entitled the Oedipodeia and the Thebes, and four plays by Aeschylus, including seven against Thebes.

In addition to being a dramatist and a public official, Sophocles also was a priest of the god Amynos, a healer. He married a woman named Nicostrata and had two sons, Iophon and Agathon.

7.2. Over all Oedipus Rex play analysis on element and convention

Act I

Prologue Oedipus Rex begins outside King Oedipus's palace, where despondent beggars and a priest have gathered and brought branches and wreaths of olive leaves. Oedipus enters and asks the people of Thebes why they pray and lament, since apparently they have come together to petition him with an unknown request. The Priest speaks on their behalf, and Oedipus assures them that he will help them. The Priest reports that Thebes has been beset with horrible calamities—famine, fires, and plague have all caused widespread suffering and death among their families and animals, and their crops have all been destroyed. He beseeches Oedipus, whom he praises for having solved the riddle of the Sphinx (an action which justified his succession to King Laius, as Jocasta husband and as king) to cure the city of its woes. Oedipus expresses his profound sympathy and announces that he sent Creon, the Queen's brother, to Delphi to receive the Oracle of Apollo, in order to gain some much-needed guidance.

Creon arrives and Oedipus demands, against Creon's wishes, that he report the news in front of the gathered public. Creon reports that the gods caused the plague as a reaction against the murder of their previous king, Laius, and that they want the Thebans to "drive out pollution sheltered in our land"; in other words, to find the murderer and either kill or exile him (Laius had been killed on the roadside by a highwayman). Oedipus vows to root out this evil. In the next scene, the chorus of Theban elders calls upon the gods Apollo, Athena, and Artemis to save them from the disaster.

Act I Declaring his commitment to finding and punishing Laius's murderer, Oedipus says that he has sent for Tiresias, the blind prophet. After much pleading and mutual antagonism, Oedipus makes Tiresias say what he knows: that it was Oedipus who killed Laius. Outraged at the accusations Oedipus calls him a "fortuneteller" and a "deceitful beggar-priest." Both are

displaying what in Greek is called orge, or anger, towards each other. Oedipus suspects the seer of working on Creon's behalf (Creon, as Laius's brother, was and still is a potential successor to the throne). Tiresias thinks the king mad for not believing him and for being blind to his fate (not to mention ignorant of his true parentage). Oedipus then realizes that he does not know who his real mother is. Tiresias is led out while saying that Oedipus will be discovered to be a brother as well as a father to his children, a son as well as a husband to the same woman, and the killer of his father. He exits and the Chorus enters, warning of the implications of the decisive, oracular charges against Oedipus.

Scene 1: Oedipus, Priest, Citizens of Thebes

Oedipus asks the citizens why they come to him begging for help. A priest explains that a disastrous disease is spreading over the city destroying crops and cattle as well as people. Oedipus has sent Creon to ask advice from Apollo and he returns as they speak. He tells them that Thebes is being polluted (made dirty) by a sinful act because the person who killed king Laius, is still in the city. Until he is found and punished Thebes will continue to suffer.

Cadmus was the person who built Thebes. The Greek audience would know the story and, by mentioning his name so early on, Sophocles tells them that the play is in Thebes and the main story concerns the royal descendants of Cadmus; the audience would know that Oedipus was, in fact, the son of Laius and so everyone is very tense as they wait to see how and when Oedipus himself will find out the truth.

The royal family is as follows:

- First King Cadmus
- Second King Polydorus (son)
- Third King Labdacus (son)
- Fourth King Laius (son)

Oedipus seems to be a caring king, genuinely concerned for his people. He talks to them as though they were his own children and promises to do everything in his power to find the killer of Laius.

The dramatic tension increases for the audience who know that he himself is the man he is seeking. This play is full of dramatic irony and it is important you appreciate what this term means. Dramatic irony happens when the audience know details which the actor does not know; the actor speaks and his words have two meanings- a simple meaning and a more complicated one known to the audience and not the speaker. For example, Oedipus says that in taking revenge for Laius _ death he is acting in his own interests; he means that he is acting in his own interests because the same killer may turn on him. The double meaning is that the audience know that he is acting in his own interests because he is, in fact, the killer.

The Sphinx was a creature which had the body of an animal and face of a woman. It terrorized the city and gave the people of Thebes riddle, promising that it would not leave until it was solved. The riddle was: What walks on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon and three in the evening? Oedipus had solved it by guessing that it meant a man: who crawls on all fours when he is a baby, walks on two legs when he is a young man, and uses a stick as a third leg when he is old. The people of Thebes were so grateful to him for freeing them from the Sphinx they made him the king.

Creon is the brother of Jocasta, Oedipus _ wife. He has gone to the oracle of Apollo to ask for help. This temple to Apollo at Delphi was famous in the ancient world and many people went there to find out what would happen to them in the future, as Apollo was god of prophecy (predicting the future). We can see from this scene how important it was for the Greeks to have the gods on their side and religion was important in everyday life with prayer and sacrifice. They feared and respected the gods and felt they controlled the forces of nature. They thought it wrong to compare a person to a god as this would make the god seek revenge for a human who was arrogant enough to think that he was on the same level as a god. This is why the priest is careful to tell Oedipus that they think he is a very wise man but not on a par with a god. If a person did directly compare himself to a god this was an act of hubris (extreme arrogance) and resulted eventually in his being punished. The eye witness to the murder of Laius is introduced in this scene. He will play a key role later on but for now all we are told is that he said robbers killed Laius.

Questions

1. Who was Cadmus and why is he mentioned so early in the play?
2. What opinion do you get of Oedipus from what he says and does in this scene?
3. Describe in your own words the disaster which has struck the city.
4. The priest says that although Oedipus is an excellent man he is not equal to a god. Explain why He adds that Oedipus is not equal to a god.
5. Give two reasons why the priest wants Oedipus to help the people.
6. What has Oedipus done about the situation so far?
7. Explain what Creon says is the reason for this disaster.
8. Why had the people not held a public inquiry into Laius _death at the time?

Act II

Creon expresses great desire to prove his innocence to Oedipus, who continues to assert that Creon has been plotting to usurp the throne. Creon denies the accusations, saying he is quite content and would not want the cares and responsibilities that come with being king. Oedipus calls for his death. Jocasta, having heard their quarrel, enters and tries to pacify them, and the Chorus calls for proof of Creon's guilt before Oedipus punishes him. Jocasta reminds Oedipus of Apollo's oracle and also of the way Laius died. She recounts the story as it was told to her by a servant who was there at the crossroads where a charioteer and an old man attacked a man, who in turn killed them. Hearing the tale, Oedipus realizes that he was the murderer and asks to consult the witness, the shepherd, who is sent for. The Chorus expresses its trust in the gods and prays to Heaven for a restoration of faith in the oracle.

The original assumption is too unreasonable, and this fairy-tale quality affects and infects the plot. Aristotle's apology is that the irrationality is outside of and precedes the main action. That may serve as an apology for Oedipus's ignorance of well-known facts about the Thebes in which he had been King for years and about the former husband of the woman he had married. But the fundamental folk-lore or fairy-tale irrationality is irremediable. In fact the underlying thought is

not to be taken seriously. It is merely an answer to a primitive riddle: what is the worst thing that could happen to a man? Why, to kill his father, and marry his mother!

Scene 2: Oedipus, Chorus, Tiresias

Oedipus announces that he is looking for information about the killer of Laius. He promises that if the killer owns up he will only send him away but if he does not, he and anyone trying to protect him, will be driven out of the city. He will not be allowed to have anything to do with any one; he will be driven out publicly with no friends or means of support. The Chorus advises Oedipus to listen to the words of Tiresias, a respected prophet, and Oedipus greets him with courtesy, asking for any information he can give him. When Tiresias seems reluctant to tell what he knows, Oedipus angrily accuses him of having something to do with the murder himself. This makes Tiresias openly accuse Oedipus. Shocked and enraged, Oedipus goes on to accuse Creon of the murder, accusing him of plotting with Tiresias and trying to steal his throne. Tiresias seems to Oedipus and to the Chorus to be speaking in riddles when he talks of a son who is also a husband and a father who is also a brother.

Oedipus' speeches in this scene are full of dramatic irony; he describes himself as an outsider to Thebes (the audience know he was born there) and says he will fight to find Laius' killer as if he were doing this for his real father (the audience know he is his real father). The idea of the relationship of men and religion/gods is continued here with purification being necessary. The fact that the murderer had not been punished was seen as polluting or putting a curse on the city. The only way to clean the city is to find the murderer. People today would think this act was more of a legal than a religious one. This shows how much the Greeks linked the actions of the gods with the actions of people and relied on the gods for making sure evil was punished. Here, Oedipus shows respect for the gods when he points out that a human being cannot force a god to give him information. Tiresias, the blind prophet, is a highly respected character, who knows what the gods want and can predict what will happen to people. From the entry of Tiresias, Sophocles continually talks about seeing and being blind in this play; Tiresias, though physically blind, can see the truth; Oedipus though physically able to see, is blind to the truth; later on, when Oedipus finds out the truth he chooses to blind himself physically. The speeches here are examples of dramatic irony as the audience know what he will do from the beginning of the play.

Oedipus thinks that because Tiresias does not want to tell him bad news he is guilty and accuses him of having a hand in the murder. When Tiresias points out he has no real motive for killing Laius, Oedipus jumps to the conclusion that Creon had put him up to it because he was jealous of Oedipus and wanted to steal his throne. He thinks that this was why Creon had asked to go and consult Apollo personally. Oedipus loses his temper and insults Tiresias and we see another side of his character. He seems arrogant and cruel, assuming that he is right and he refuses to listen to others.

He only stops for a moment when Tiresias mentions his parents. This seems to strike a chord with him (which he explains later on to Jocasta) and he hesitates, asking Tiresias to tell him more about his parents. However, he cannot understand what Tiresias means and the Chorus are unclear too, so Tiresias leaves, with Oedipus convinced that he and Creon are plotting together to get rid of him by making up this accusation.

Questions

1. What will happen to the killer of Laius if he confesses quickly?
2. What will happen to him, or any one shielding him, if he does not come forward of his own Accord?
3. Give an example of dramatic irony from this scene, explaining why it is dramatic irony.
4. Who do the Chorus advise Oedipus to consult and why

Unanswered Questions

As to the probability of the story of the play, one could ask some awkward questions. For example: Why did the servant of Laius give the false report of —a band of brigands!? Why did he say nothing when he saw Oedipus in Thebes but ask to go to the country? Why was he treated so well, when he had run away and left his master and fellow-servants on the road? One may answer these questions thus: The servant suspected the truth all the time, beginning with the encounter on the road, for he knew that the son of Laius did not die, and recognized him in this young man who looked like Laius. The servant was loyal to his protégé, and perhaps disliked Laius, of whom no good has ever been told, here or elsewhere; the story of brigands protected

both him and Oedipus. These answers are plausible, but are we intended to work them out, or is there even time to consider them in the rapid progress of the action?

Some More Such Questions

There are other points of verisimilitude. For instance, why had Oedipus never gone even superficially into the question of Laius's murder? Or again, how could Jocasta know nothing at all about the stranger she married? Sophocles himself raised a couple of questions which he did not answer. Why, if Tiresias was wise and inspired, positively omniscient, did he not answer the Sphinx? Why, after the death of Laius and the arrival of Oedipus, did Tiresias say nothing about the connection between the two events? Creon's answer to this is wise and temperate: —I do not know. And where I have no idea I prefer to keep quiet.¶ But it does not take us far. It may be, rather, that Oedipus is the man who must find, and condemn, and punish himself. Likewise it was not for Tiresias to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. The Sphinx is there for Oedipus to answer. To say he was —fated¶ is to overstate it with prejudice toward the grand designs of heaven; but it is a part of the pattern or story-type, which in Greek does not mean —fate¶ or —chance¶ or —fortune¶ so strictly as it means —contact¶ or —coincidence,¶ or the way things are put together.

Act III

Jocasta prays to Apollo to restore Oedipus's sanity, since he has been acting strange since hearing the manner in which Laius's died. A messenger tells her that King Polybos (the man Oedipus believes to be his father) has died and that the people of Isthmus want Oedipus to rule over them. Oedipus hopes this news means that the oracle is false (he hasn't killed his father since Polybos has died of old age), but he still fears that he is destined to marry his mother. The messenger tells him that Polybos was not his father and that he, a shepherd, had been handed the child Oedipus by another shepherd, one of Laius's men. Jocasta tries to intervene and stop the revelations, but Oedipus welcomes the news.

Voltaire's View

Voltaire expressed the following opinion in this connection: —it is already contrary to probability that Oedipus, who has regarded for such a long time, should not know how his

predecessor died. But that he should not even know whether it was in the country or in the city that this murder was committed, and that he should not give the slightest reason or the slightest excuse for his ignorance—I confess that I know of no word to express such an absurdity. It is, one might say, a fault of the subject and not of the author; as if it were not up to the author to correct his subject when it is defective!!

Voltaire goes on to say: —But what is still more astonishing is that Oedipus, when he learns that the Theban herdsman is still alive, does not dream of simply having him sought out; he amuses himself by pronouncing curses and consulting oracles, without commanding that the only man who could enlighten him be brought before him. The Chorus itself, which is so intent on seeing an end to the misfortunes of Thebes, and which gives Oedipus constant advice, does not advise him to question this witness to the death of the late King; it asks him only to send for Tiresias.¶

Possible Symbolic Meaning

It may be supposed that Oedipus represents human suffering while the gods symbolize the —universe of circumstance as it is.¶ The play then becomes a dramatic expression of the universe of circumstance as it is and of the suffering of man.

Lack of Universality in the Play

But to argue thus is merely one more way of smuggling significance into the play, and of showing that the play is universal. The action of this play is in reality exceptional. Oedipus in his peculiar destiny is a freak. He is a man selected out of millions to undergo this stunning fate; that is why the story is so fascinating. He stands, because of the extreme rarity of his destiny, outside the common lot of mankind. And so the special disaster that befalls him is a thing quite apart from the universe of circumstance as it is. The gods who really do stand for circumstance are very much milder beings. That is why it is so misleading to reduce this play to the normal.

The Lesson of the Play

Oedipus Rex shows the humbling of a great and prosperous man by the gods. This treatment is not deserved by Oedipus. It is not a punishment for insolence, nor in the last resort is it due to any fault of judgment or character in the man. The gods display their power because they must.

But since they display it, we may draw a lesson. This lesson is stated at the end of the play in the comment by the Chorus: —And, being mortal, think of that last day of death, which all must see, and speak of no man's happiness till, without sorrow, he has passed the goal of life.¶

Act V

A second messenger reports that Jocasta has just committed suicide, having realized that she was married to her son and thus had given birth to his children. He also reports that the king, suffering intensely upon hearing the news of his identity, blinded himself with the Queen's brooches. Oedipus has also requested that he be shown to the people of Thebes and then exiled; he comes out, bewildered and crying, asking for shelter from his painful memory, which cannot be removed as easily his eyes could be.

In the darkness of his blindness he wishes he were dead and feels the prophetic weight of the oracle. His blindness will allow him to avoid the sight of those whom he was destined to wrong and toward whom he feels immense sorrow and guilt. He asks Creon to lead him out of the country, to give Jocasta a proper burial, and to take care of his young daughters, Antigone (who comes to play a central role in the play named after her) and Siemen. In an extremely moving final moment with his children (who, he reminds himself, are also his siblings), Oedipus hears them and asks to hold their hands for the last time. He tells them they will have difficult lives and will be punished by men for sins they did not commit; for this reason he implores Thebes to pity them. He asks Creon again to exile him, and in his last speech he expresses regret at having to depart from his beloved children. The Chorus ends the play by using Oedipus's story to illustrate the famous moral that one should not judge a man's life until it is over.

Oedipus, a Personification of Human Suffering

To know oneself is for Sophocles is to know man's powerlessness. But it is also to know the victorious majesty of suffering humanity. The agony of every Sophocles character is an essential element in his nature. The strange fusion of character and fate is most movingly and mysteriously expressed in the greatest of his heroes, Oedipus. Sophocles returned once again to his character in Oedipus at Colonus, when Oedipus, a blind man, begs his way through the world, led by his daughter Antigone, another of Sophocles' most beloved figures. From the first,

the tragic king who was to bear the weight of the whole world's suffering was almost a symbolic figure. He was suffering humanity personified.

Act IV

The shepherd enters and tells Oedipus, after a great deal of resistance, that he is Laius's son and that he had had him taken away to his own country by the messenger so as to avoid his fate. The chorus bewails the change in Oedipus from revered and fortunate ruler to one who has plunged into the depths of wretchedness.

Freud's Interpretation of the Myth and the Play

Oedipus did all he could to avoid the fate prophesied by the oracle, and he blinded himself in self-punishment on discovering that in ignorance he had committed both these crimes. The play traces the gradual discovery of Oedipus's deed, and brings it to light by prolonged inquiry which has a certain resemblance to the process of psycho-analysis. In the dialogue the deluded mother wife, Jocasta, resists the continuation of the inquiry. She points out that many men have in their dreams mated with their mothers, but that dreams deserve no attention. To us today dreams are of great importance. The reader reacts to the play as though by self-analysis he had detected the Oedipus complex in himself, as though he had recognized the will of the gods and the oracle as glorified disguises of his own unconscious. The reader feels as if he remembered in himself the wish to do away with his father and in his place to marry his mother, and must abhor the thought. The dramatist's words seem to him to mean: —In vain do you deny that you are answerable; in vain do you proclaim that you have resisted these evil designs. You are guilty, because you could not eradicate them; they still survive unconsciously in you. And there is psychological truth in this; even though man has repressed his evil desires into his unconscious and would then gladly say to himself that he is no longer answerable for them, he is yet compelled to feel his responsibility in the form of a sense of guilt for which he can perceive no foundation.

The Flaw in the Freudian Interpretation

Superficially, the play seems to confirm Freud's theory. But if Freud's interpretation is right we should expect the myth to tell us that Oedipus met Jocasta without knowing that she was his mother, fell in love with her, and then killed his father, again unknowingly. But there is no sign

whatsoever in the myth that Oedipus is attracted by or falls in love with Jocasta. The only reason we are given for Oedipus's marriage to Jocasta is that she as it were, goes with the throne. Are we to believe that a myth with an incestuous relationship between mother and son would entirely omit the element of attraction between the two?

The Son's Rebellion against the Father's Authority

A more convincing interpretation would be to say that the myth (and therefore the play) should be regarded as a symbol not of the incestuous love between mother and son but of the rebellion of the son against the authority of the father in the patriarchal family. From this point of view, the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta is only a secondary element; the marriage is only an evidence of the victory of the son who takes the father's place with all its privileges.

Champion of Traditional Religion

Sophocles in this play supports the traditional religion against contemporary attacks. Apollo and his ministers are shown as justified, while the skepticism of Jocasta and Oedipus is condemned. Criticism of oracles was becoming common at the time. In such an atmosphere Sophocles wrote this play to defend what was for him, as for Socrates one of the basic facts of religion.

The Evil Resulting From Incest

Among many peoples, breaches of marriage laws and other sexual offences have been thought to be productive of disastrous consequences. Adultery has often been regarded as being destructive of the fruits of the earth. Ancient Greeks and Roman perhaps had similar notions of the wasting effect of incest. According to Sophocles, the land of Thebes suffered from blight, from pestilence, and from the sterility both of women and of cattle under the reign of Oedipus, who had unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. The Delphic oracle declared that the only way to restore the prosperity of the country was to banish the sinner from it, as if his mere presence withered plants, animals, and women. No doubt these public calamities were attributed in great part to the guilt of parricide which rested on Oedipus, but much of the evil must have been thought to be due to his incest with his mother.

The Value of Guiltless Suffering

There are numerous religious myths that depend on guiltless suffering. The misery of a blameless man has been thought somehow to lighten the burden for the rest of mankind. The power of the Book of Job, and also of Prometheus Bound, Antigone, Hamlet, etc. seems to require a similar consciousness of innocence on the part of the sufferer. Christ was thought to be entirely undeserving of the humiliation, pain, and public execution—that is obvious. He also found these experiences difficult and painful in the extreme, in spite of his divinity. And the fact that Christ suffered thus though he deserved nothing but good is believed to relieve the rest of mankind from guilt. Others are more innocent because of his having suffered innocently.

The Gods Not Justified

Another question to consider is whether Sophocles in this play tries to justify the ways of God to man. The answer to this question is —no! if —to justify! means to explain in terms of human justice. If human justice is the standard, then nothing can excuse the gods. But that does not mean that Sophocles intended the play to be an attack on the gods. In fact it is pointless to look for any message or meaning in this play. According to a critic, A.J.A. Wedlock, —there is no meaning in Oedipus Rex; there is merely the terror of coincidence. G.M. Kirkwood, takes a similar view: —Sophocles!, he says, —has no theological pronouncements to make and no points of criticism to score. Both these opinions come close to saying that the gods are merely agents in a traditional story which Sophocles, a —pure artist!, uses for dramatic purposes without raising the religious issue or drawing any moral. The text of the play seems at first sight to support this view. After the catastrophe no one on the stage says a word either in justification of the gods or in criticism of them. Oedipus says: —These things were Apollo!—and that is all. Nor is there any reason why we should always be looking for a message from a work of art. The true function of an artist, as Dr. Johnson said, is to enlarge our sensibility.

Sophocles' Religious Opinions

And yet it is possible to infer from the plays of Sophocles the opinions or religious views of the author. We can, for instance, safely say that (i) Sophocles did not believe that the gods were in any human sense —just! and (ii) he did always believe that the gods existed and that man should revere them.

Disbelief in Divine Justice, and the Need to Revere the Gods

The first of these opinions is supported by the implicit evidence of *Oedipus Rex*, while the second opinion is supported by at least one passage in this play. The celebrated choral ode about the decline of prophecy and the threat to religion was of course suggested by the scene with Creon which precedes it; but it contains generalizations which have little apparent relevance either to Oedipus or to Creon. The question which the Chorus seem to be asking is this: —If Athens loses faith in religion, what significance is there in tragic drama, which exists as a part of the service of the gods? In short, while Sophocles did not claim that the gods were in any human sense just he yet held that they were entitled to human worship. Nor should we think these two opinions to be incompatible. Disbelief in divine justice as measured by human standards can perfectly well be associated with deep religious feeling. Sophocles would have agreed that men find some things unjust, other things just, but that in the eyes of God all things are beautiful and good and just. There is an objective world-order which man must respect, but which he cannot hope fully to understand.

-“Hamartia” or Tragic Error

Aristotle used the word —hamartia to mean simply a mistake, but critics have always tended to interpret —hamartia as a moral weakness or sin. Aristotle’s ideal form of tragedy is simply one in which the destruction of the hero or heroine is caused by some false step taken in ignorance. This false step may be either a crime like Clytemnestra’s or a mere miscalculation like Dayanara’s. It is only a craving for poetic justice that interprets Aristotle’s view to mean that the tragic disaster is due to a moral defect or a sin. Yet even Aristotle felt that the misfortunes of the absolutely righteous characters were too shocking for the tragic stage.

Representing the Ways of Life, Not Justifying Them

Sophocles is concerned not to justify life’s ways but to show them. He finds no difficulty in representing even the downfall of a man doomed before his birth, in the very moment he was begotten. Oedipus has a pride, a hot temper, an imperiousness, that serve to make us dread his fall; but it is significant that his fall is not caused by these faults. The ruin of Dejanira comes only from her excessive trustfulness; Antigone’s from her unflinching sense of duty. Still less in

Euripides is there any justifying of the ways of God; often they are openly denounced, and the tragic error is sometimes not moral, sometimes absent altogether.

Tragedy at its Best

At its best, tragedy is a story of human blindness leading human effort to defeat itself—a tragedy of error. The hamartia is the tragic error; the peripatetic, its fatal working to a result the opposite of that intended; the anagnorisis, the recognition of the truth. The error may or may not be moral. And its dramatic importance is not based on any conception of life's justice, but on the purely artistic and logical consideration that it is neater, formally, that calamities should begin at home the universe may proceed by law: but it seems heedless of justice. For its laws are those of cause and effect, not of right and wrong. Similarly in the theatre there may or may not be justice, but there must be law if we are to feel that inevitability which a play needs in order to convince. And the peculiar virtue of the tragedy of error is that it is convincing in its logic, neat in its form, poignant in its irony. It remains not the only kind of tragedy; but, as Aristotle says, the best.

Oedipus Legend

The Greek audience, unlike a modern one, knew the plot of the play before they came to see it. This is because dramatists chose to write plays based on popular legends and stories passed down from father to son. A Greek audience, therefore, would be fascinated not by what was happening but by how the playwright showed the story to them. So that you will feel like one of the Greek audience, here are some details of the legend of Oedipus.

The story so far . . .

Laius, king of Thebes, is told by Apollo (god of predicting the future) that his baby son will grow up to kill him. To avoid this happening, he pins his son's ankles together and gives him to a shepherd to leave on a mountainside to die. This will seem very cruel to a modern reader but leaving babies to die was quite common in ancient Greece, especially if the baby was a girl or if the baby was disabled in any way.

The Theban shepherd feels sorry for the baby and decides to give him to a Corinthian shepherd, who is on his way there. The Corinthian shepherd gives the baby to the king (Polybus) and

Queen (Merope) who have no children and who bring him up as their own son. They call him Oedipus or ‘swollen foot’ (in Greek) because of the injury to his ankles caused by being pinned to a rock. When Oedipus is a young man he hears rumors which lead him to go and ask Apollo for information about his parents. When he is told by the priestess that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother, he leaves Corinth immediately so that he cannot - even accidentally - harm the people he thinks are his real parents. On his travels he comes to a crossroads and there meets an old man and some servants. The old man whips Oedipus and tells him to get out of the way; there is a fight and Oedipus angrily kills the old man and all but one of the servants he has with him. He then makes his way to Thebes which is terrified because of a monstrous Sphinx (a beast with the head of a woman). She has set a riddle and refuses to leave until someone solves it. Oedipus manages to solve it and the people are so grateful they make him king. He marries queen Jocasta, the widow of king Laius who was murdered by bandits on the road, and he becomes a new father for her children. He is an intelligent and caring ruler who puts his people first. He is widely respected and Thebes seems to be doing well until one day a mysterious disease destroys cattle, making crops die, causing pregnant women to have babies born dead, spreading a fatal infectious disease all over the city. The people are in a panic and turn to the gods and to Oedipus.

The Plot

Sophocles creates suspense in this play by having his audience ‘in’ on what will happen. They want events not to happen, and are helpless to stop what must happen. The end of the play has been described as a time bomb waiting to explode and shows the way Sophocles uses the play to create tension and suspense all the way through. Firstly, he does this by allowing Oedipus to find out small clues which he pieces together as the play proceeds. The trail begins when Jocasta mentions that Laius was killed at a place where three roads meet. This leads Oedipus to ask for more details about Laius’ death. The mention of this place stirs up a memory for him of killing a man at such place after leaving Corinth when the oracle told him he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. This makes him send for the Theban shepherd, the surviving eyewitness. Tension mounts as the Corinthian shepherd comes in and tells Oedipus that Polybus is dead. Oedipus, though upset, is relieved that the oracle he heard cannot now come true but still

is worried about marrying his mother. The Corinthian tells him not to worry as he knows that Polybus and Merope are not his real parents. As Oedipus and Jocasta feel relief, tension mounts for the audience who know that the Corinthian messenger will tell him that the Theban shepherd they have sent for is the same man who gave baby Oedipus to the Corinthian. The audience, like Jocasta in scene five wish that Oedipus does not find out the truth. Suspense is brought to a climax in scene six when the shepherd tells him that Laius and Jocasta are his real parents. Sophocles creates an interesting plot in this play because the criminal detects himself. In scene one Oedipus describes what he will do to the murderer and then in scene six carries out his threat on himself. Sophocles writes the play so that we see Oedipus, not just as a tragic person in his own right, but as an example of what can happen to all of us. Other characters in the play, like Oedipus, do things for admirable motives which cause disaster. Jocasta tells him about the murder of Laius to put his mind at rest about fortune-tellers - this makes him realize that he might have killed Laius and leads to her own death. The Corinthian shepherd gladly tells Oedipus that Polybus and Merope are not his real parents to put his mind at rest - this makes the Theban shepherd tell him Laius and Jocasta are his real parents. The Corinthian shepherd, who had hoped for a reward of money is rewarded by knowing he caused great pain.

The Theban shepherd, who feels sorry for Oedipus and lets him live, is punished because he was the eye-witness to the death of Laius and also sees the killer become king; this means he has to go away in case the killer recognizes him. His reward for kindness, therefore, is banishment.

These minor tragedies are all part of the major one and show Sophocles 'message that life can be cruel, even to innocent people, but that things do not happen just by chance - there is a pattern worked out in advance by the gods which human beings cannot change, whatever the

Themes

Oedipus Rex is the story of a king of Thebes upon whom a hereditary curse is placed and who therefore has to suffer the tragic consequences of fate. During a time of plague, fires, and other forms of decimation, Oedipus decides to take action to restore life and prosperity to his kingdom, only to discover through this quest that his identity is not what he thought. He learns that he has killed his father, married his mother, and had children with her; his wife-mother Jocasta kills

herself, and Oedipus blinds himself and goes into exile; his uncle Creon becomes King of Thebes.

Knowledge and Ignorance

Oedipus's desire to gain knowledge that will help to rid Thebes of its pollution is evident from the beginning of the play. When the priest comes to him to ask for help, Oedipus has already begun the process of searching for solutions; he has sent Creon to Delphi to learn from Apollo what measures should be taken. When Creon enters, Oedipus begins questioning him intensely, declares a search for Laius's murderer, and asks for Tiresias's assistance as well as that of others; when a member of the chorus offers information Oedipus says, "Tell me. I am interested in all reports." His strong belief that the search for the truth will lead to a successful cleansing of Thebes is juxtaposed with the reluctance on the part of other characters to deliver their knowledge. Most fear retribution, since their knowledge points to Oedipus as the source of Thebes's troubles. This belief should also be understood in the context of Oedipus's ignorance and final, tragic discovery of his identity; by demanding that others tell him all they know he is forced to confront the hideous facts of his patricide and incest.

Choices and Consequences

Another theme in the play is the distinction between the truthfulness of oracles and prophecies of the gods (fate), as opposed to man's ability to influence his life's trajectory through his own actions (free will or self-determinism). While arguments exist regarding the predominance of these schools of thought, Oedipus Rex emphasizes the eventual and tragic triumph of the former over the latter. Despite his best efforts to be a good and wise king and to substantiate his claims about the evil machinations of Creon and Tiresias, fate works against him and finally shows that he was wrong to believe in a conspiracy. For example, when Oedipus wishes to punish Creon, he expresses to a member of the chorus his intention to shape his policy in forcefully self-determining language: "Would you have me stand still, hold my peace, and let this man win everything, through my inaction?" Again, Oedipus struggles against the oracle that predicts his hand in his father's death and boldly asserts that it is wrong when Polybos's death is reported: "Polios/ has packed the oracles off with him underground. They are empty words." But the oracle remains true, and Oedipus is helpless in the face of its powerful prophecy.

Public vs. Private

Life the extent to which Oedipus desires public disclosure of information is particularly striking in the play's first scenes. He asks the priest and Creon to speak publicly about the troubles of Thebes and to offer possible clues and solutions in front of his subjects, in spite of their reservations. Creon asks: "Is it your pleasure to hear me with all these/ Gathered around us? I am prepared to speak, /But should we not go in?" Oedipus consistently refuses to hide any knowledge he will receive and wants his informers to adopt a similar attitude. When Tiresias refuses to answer Oedipus's call and later resists revealing the king's dark truth, Oedipus grows impatient, hostile, and abusive. Tiresias would like to keep his information to himself, as will the shepherd in a later scene, but Oedipus will hear nothing of it. In addition, Jocasta is inclined to evade or gloss over the truth as it is about to be revealed from various people. She views the matter a private one and tries to protect Oedipus from the disastrous disclosures. Oedipus, however, refuses to tolerate a world in which secrets exist. He publicly learns the truth—at the expense of his sanity and happiness. His desire for a Theban society that fosters truth and openness is an admirable one, one that albeit contributes to his demise.

The Genre of Greek Tragic Drama

Ever since Aristotle's high praise regarding its structure and characterization in his *Poetics*, *Oedipus Rex* has been considered one of the most outstanding examples of tragic drama. In tragedy, a protagonist inspires in his audience the twin emotions of pity and fear. Usually a person of virtue and status, the tragic hero can be a scapegoat of the gods or a victim of circumstances. Their fate (often death or exile) establishes a new and better social order. Not only does it make the viewer aware of human suffering, tragedy illustrates the manner in which pride (hubris) can topple even the strongest of characters. It is part of the playwright's intention that audiences will identify with these fallen heroes—and possibly rethink the manner in which they live their lives. Theorists of tragedy, beginning with Aristotle, have used the term catharsis to capture the sense of purgation and purification that watching a tragedy yield in a viewer: relief that they are not in the position of the protagonist and awareness that one slip of fate could place them in such circumstances.

Structure

The dramatic structure of Greek drama is helpfully outlined by Aristotle in the twelfth book of *Poetics*. In this classical tragedy, a Prologue shows Oedipus consulting the priest who speaks for the Theban elders, the first choral ode or Parodos is performed, four acts are presented and followed by odes called stasimons, and in the Exodos, or final act, the fate of Oedipus is revealed.

Staging

Tragedies in fifth-century Athens were performed in the marketplace, known in Greek as the agora. The dramatic competitions of the Great Dionysia, Athens's annual cultural and religious festival, were held in a structure made of wood near the Acropolis. The chorus performed on a raised stage. There were no female actors, and it is still unknown (though much speculated upon) whether women attended these performances. It is also noteworthy that the performance space was near the Pnyx, the area in which the century's increasingly heated and rhetorically sophisticated political debates took place—a feature of Athenian cultural life that suggests the pervasive nature of spectacles of polished and persuasive verbal expression.

The Chorus the Greek chorus,

Like the genre of tragedy itself, is reputed to be a remnant of the ritualistic and ceremonial origins of Greek tragedy. Sophocles added three members of the chorus to Aeschylus's twelve. In terms of form, the choral ode has a tripartite structure which bears traces of its use as a song and dance pattern. The three parts are called, respectively, the strophe, the antistrophe, and the epode; their metrical structures vary and are usually very complex. If the strophe established the dance pattern, in the antistrophe the dancers trace backwards the same steps, ending the ode in a different way with the epode.

With respect to content, the choral odes bring an additional viewpoint to the play, and often this perspective is broader and more socio-religious than those offered by individual characters; it is also conservative and traditional at times, potentially in an effort to reflect the views of its society rather than the protagonist. The Chorus's first set of lyrics in *Oedipus Rex*, for example, express a curiosity about Apollo's oracle and describes the ruinous landscape of Thebes. Its

second utterance reminds the audience of the newness of Tiresias's report: "And never until now has any man brought word/Of Laius's dark death staining Oedipus the King." The chorus reiterates some of the action, expressing varying degrees of hope and despair with respect to it; one of its members delivers the play's final lines, much like the Shakespearean epilogue. Sometimes the chorus sings a dirge with one or more characters, as when it suggests to Oedipus not to disbelieve Creon's protestations of innocence.

Setting

Setting the play's action occurs outside Oedipus's palace in Thebes. Thebes had been founded, according to the myth, by Cadmus (a son of Agenor, King of Phoenicia) while searching for his sister Europa, who had been abducted by Zeus in the form of a bull. A direct line of descent can be traced from Cadmus to Oedipus; between them are Polydorus, Labdacus, and, of course, Laius.

Imagery and Foreshadowing

Associated with knowledge and ignorance are the recurring images of darkness and light in the play, and these images work as examples of a kind of foreshadowing for which the play is justly famous. When the play begins, the priest uses this set of contrasts to describe the current condition of Thebes: "And all the house of Kadmos is laid waste/All emptied, and all darkened." Shortly after this moment, Oedipus promises Creon: "Then once more I must bring what is dark to light," that is, the murder of Laius will out and Oedipus will be responsible for finding and exposing the culprit(s). Metaphorical and literal uses of darkness and light also provide foreshadowing, since it is Oedipus's desire to bring the truth to light that leads him to a self-knowledge ruinous and evil enough to cause him to blind himself. After the shepherd

reveals his birth he declares, "O Light, may I look on you for the last time!" In saying this he sets up for the audience, who are, presumably, familiar with the legend of Oedipus, his subsequent actions. The second messenger describes his command to himself as he proceeds to perform the gruesome task: "From this hour, go in darkness!" thereby enacting both a literal and metaphorical fall into the dark consequences of his unbearable knowledge. These are but a few examples of how imagery and foreshadowing as techniques can meet, overlap, and mutually inform one another in the play; through subjective interpretation, many more may be found.

Historical Context

Sophocles lived and worked in a time of great cultural significance, not only in the history of Athens but the greater sense of western democratic culture. Wars with Persia and Sparta, the development of democratic culture, public architectural projects, and theatrical entertainments, as well as the rise of a distinctively rhetorical culture (a culture based on the strength of language and writing) are important features of the Athens during Sophocles's life, known as the Golden Age of Athens.

Soon after Cleisthenes established democracy in Athens in 507 B.C., Athens was threatened by outside enemies. At the beginning of the fifth century B.C., the Persians, led by Darius, crossed the Aegean to conquer Athens. After its triumph over Miletos in 494, the Persian army began to be defeated, with Athens winning the decisive victory at Marathon in 490. The battles of Salamis, Platea, and Mycale in 480–79 were also won by Athens, and the Persian forces (led by Xerxes I) finally lost the war. The Athenians prided themselves on their victory over Xerxes; roughly fifteen years after Sophocles's birth, Athens had become an Empire in its own right, forming the Dehan League in 478–77. From 492–60 the city–state was led by Pericles, a populist leader who is famous today for his military skill, his rhetorical prowess, and his public building projects—including the Parthenon. Sophocles himself took part in some of Pericles's projects and in the city's military life, aiding Pericles in the Samian war (441–39), becoming an ambassador some years later, and joining the ruling council in 413.

Although the Persian threat had subsided, a new threat arose: the Peloponnesian War with Sparta and other states under their leadership began in 432. Thucydides, an Athenian general and historian noted for his impartiality and accuracy, tells the story of this war in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Athens, defeated in Sicily in 413, surrendered to Sparta (which was being supported by Persia) in 404, the year after Sophocles died.

In the midst of all this war, Athenian democracy flourished during Sophocles's lifetime, its commercial enterprises along the eastern Mediterranean coastline were successful, and its cultural life enjoyed immense nourishment and development. Greek religious life centered on the shrines frequented by worshippers of Apollo at Delphi, Apollo and Artemis at Delos, and Zeus at Olympia. Festivals were often held at the shrines, and athletic competitions, dance, song, and

theatrical performances also took place. Intellectually, Athens was thriving—its mathematicians and scientists, after the work of Pythagoras and Xenophanes during the previous century, began to make new discoveries in arithmetic and geology; Pericles, who studied sophistry with Zeno, brought the skill of oratory to new, unprecedented heights, and his support of the plastic and literary arts allowed Athenians to enjoy the lasting achievements of their contemporaries. While public building was interrupted by the Persian war, it resumed with vigor in the latter half of the fifth century, with the Temple of Zeus at Olympia and, in Athens, the Temple of Athena Nike, as well as the Parthenon, Propylaea, and the Erechtheum. Pericles saw to it that elaborate public building projects motivated artists of his time to achieve greatness for their city.

Greek drama also flourished. Pericles provided entertainments and pageantry, granting allowances for public festivals so that all men could attend them. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were the three great dramatists of the age; Sophocles competed successfully with both his teacher Aeschylus and with his contemporary, Euripides, in the annual tragic competitions of the Great Dionysia. Some of the drama of this period concerned specific political issues, such as Phrynichos's *Capture of Mileros* (493) and Aeschylus's *Persians* (472). Other plays, like Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and *Oedipus Rex* address broader questions about mythological leaders and their relationships to the gods, fate, and their native Greek cultural heritage. While critics have argued that readers are not meant to draw any parallels between the plague-ridden Thebes in which *Oedipus Rex* takes place and the plague in Athens in 430–29 B.C., it is not difficult to surmise that an audience for whom the experience of such devastation was familiar would have felt particular connections with their own situation.

Character Analysis

Creon1. Jocasta2. Oedipus3. Teiresias4. Other Characters5.

Creon

Creon is the brother of Laius. Before the play begins Oedipus sent him on a mission to receive the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and he returns with its news during the prologue. With great hesitation he reports that "The god commands us to expel from the land of Thebes/An old defilement we are sheltering." He says that in order to rid the city of its woes, Oedipus must find the murderer of King Laius, his predecessor. Oedipus feels threatened by Creon and believes that

he covets the throne (by some accounts Creon was to have been the next ruler following his brother's death, and he is thus filled with resentment).

When Tiresias tells the unbelieving Oedipus what he will come to know, his true identity and responsibility for his father's murder, Oedipus immediately assumes that Tiresias is working for Creon, trying to get him the throne. Creon takes these accusations seriously and wishes to clear his name: "The fact is that I am being called disloyal/ To the State, to my fellow citizens, to my friends." Creon defends himself to Oedipus in the next scene, saying that he has no desire to become king and that Oedipus harms himself and the state in leveling such accusations. Oedipus grows more incensed and calls for Creon's death; only the pleading of Jocasta and a member of the chorus prevent him from acting. At the end of the play, after Oedipus has blinded himself, Creon becomes king and acts with compassion towards the repentant Oedipus, leading him into the palace and then, as Oedipus requests—and Apollo has ordained—into exile.

Creon is a moderate man who knows the power of the gods. He behaves in ways which show what the Greeks thought right for a civilized ruler. The Chorus point this out on several occasions.

Find two quotes where the Chorus praise something Creon has said or done. Explain why they

Admire him.

- Creon shows respect to Oedipus even when he is accused of treason.
- He tries to use reason rather than letting his temper take over.
- He puts the law of the gods before that of men and feels they should be consulted regularly.
- He thinks it is wrong for men to think they can act on their own, without asking the gods.
- He is generous to Oedipus and his family, even after Oedipus has treated him so badly.

Jocasta

Jocasta is Oedipus's wife and mother; she is also the mother of his children. Her first entrance onstage occurs when Oedipus and Creon are in the midst of arguing; Jocasta storms in and demands that they resolve their petty personal dispute because the country's troubles are far more urgent: "Poor foolish men, what wicked din is this?/With Thebes sick to death, is it not shameful/That you should rake some private quarrel up?" She pleads with Oedipus to believe Creon's good intentions towards him, and their hostilities momentarily abate. She assures Oedipus that the oracle proclaiming Laius's murder by his own son was false, since Laius was killed by highwaymen, and his son had been left "to die on a lonely mountainside." Rather than placating Oedipus, her words haunt him, he recalls "a shadowy memory," and asks her to give details about Laius's death. The surviving witness to the crime, tells Jocasta, had come to her when Oedipus was made king and asked her if he could be sent far away; she granted him his wish and now is asked by Oedipus to recall this witness—a shepherd—to the palace to testify about the murder.

Jocasta tells Oedipus not to trust in the truth of oracles. When the messenger arrives to tell of Polybos's death, Jocasta is hopeful that she can allay Oedipus's fears about fulfilling the prophecy. Later in the same scene she tries to stop him from questioning the messenger regarding his true father: "May you never learn who you are!" In her final speech she calls Oedipus "miserable" and says she will have no other name for him. Towards the end of the play a second messenger reports that she has hanged herself, giving a moving account of her wailing and physical expressions of grief during her last moments. Thornton Wilder, the American playwright, eloquently described Sophocles' artistry in portraying Jocasta in *American Characteristics and Other Essays*: "The figure of the Queen is drawn with great precision, shielding her husband from the knowledge she foresees approaching; alternately condemning and upholding the authority of the oracles as best suits the direction of the argument at the moment, and finally giving up the struggle."

Like Oedipus, she is a victim of a plan of the gods which treats her badly. She is a character who commands the respect of her people and Oedipus trusts her. She is sensitive and thoughtful

towards Oedipus and she tries to keep the horrible truth about his parents from him even when she knows herself.

Find a quote from the play showing her as being:

- respected by the people
- a person whom Oedipus trusts
- Trying to save Oedipus from more pain.

If she has a flaw, it is to believe that things in life happen by chance. This can be clearly seen by the contrast between what she says in scene three about fortune-tellers and what she does in scene four: in scene three she tells Oedipus she has proof that Apollo's oracles are false and tells him the story of the baby and Laius's death. On hearing Oedipus's account of killing someone where three roads meet she is obviously upset, though trying to hide it from Oedipus. At the beginning of scene four she enters carrying incense and garlands of flowers (offerings to the gods) and calls on Apollo to purify the city.

When she discovers the truth she, like Oedipus, punishes herself by taking her own life.

Oedipus

Oedipus, the title character, is the protagonist of the play. His name means "swell-foot" or "swollen-foot." One of the most famous dramatic characters in the history of western literature, he was singled out by Aristotle in his *Poetics* as the right kind of protagonist because he inspires the right combination of pity and fear. "This is the sort of man who is not preeminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no badness or villainy of his own that he falls into the misfortune, but rather through some flaw in him; he being one of those who are in high station and good fortune, like Oedipus and Thyestes and the famous men of families such as these." Oedipus's fatal flaw, the technical Greek term for which is *hamartia*, can be thought of as a character fault

or a mistake, or more like an Achilles heel rather than a flaw for which he can be held directly responsible. A hereditary curse has been placed on his family, and he unknowingly has fulfilled the terms of the prophecy that Laius's son would kill him and marry his wife.

The play's action is concerned with the gradual and delayed revelation of the fulfillment of this oracle. It specifically focuses on Oedipus's quest for knowledge, on the one hand, and, on the other, the other characters' resistance to discovering the truth; Jocasta tries to protect her husband/brother from the facts, and the shepherd cannot be forced to speak until his life is at stake. Oedipus impatiently confronts Creon and Tiresias with their hesitation to answer his summons to the palace to share their knowledge with him and the public. Connected with this frustration is a feature of Oedipus's personality for which he is somewhat more responsible; Oedipus is also said to suffer from a character flaw known as hubris, or pride, and his cruel treatment of Creon and Tiresias in the aforementioned situations evidences this trait. He insists on hearing the truth, again and again, in the face of reluctant tellers who are scared for their lives, for his life, and for the Perhaps it is Oedipus's pride which rounds him out and allows Aristotle to hold him up as a well-fashioned character, since without it he would seem too virtuous and the tragedy would be too "unlikely." Oedipus's speech is also given a good dose of irony in the play. For example, when he calls for an investigation of Laius's murder and says "then once more I must bring what is dark to light," he is also foreshadowing his future blinding, since his investigation will reveal the dark secret of his parentage, metaphorically enlightened by the truth, but literally blinded by it as well. When he curses the murderer of Laius he is cursing himself and predicts his own exile and consequent life of "wretchedness." Oedipus is wise (he has solved the riddle of the Sphinx), revered by his subjects, and dedicated to the discovery of truth. He wants to rid Thebes of the plague (pollution, a common theme in Greek drama) that is decimating its population. Fate and the gods, however, have other things in store for Oedipus, and his helplessness and utter ruin at the play's conclusion are a painful spectacle.

Oedipus Heroes in tragedy sometimes have qualities we admire and a fault or flaw which makes them act in a way which leads to disaster. In Greek tragedy the fate of the hero is linked to a system beyond the control of one person and may even (as with Oedipus) be decided before he is born. Oedipus possesses both admirable qualities and human flaws.

Good Qualities

- He is a concerned king who earned the respect of his people.
- He saves Thebes from the Sphinx by his intelligence.
- Classical Studies Support Materials: Oedipus the King 26

- He shows courage and honesty when he finds out he is the killer by punishing himself and
- Accepting responsibility. A weaker man might have tried to cover up his guilt.

Find a quote from the play which shows each one of these points.

Flaws

- He is quick tempered and unreasonable towards Creon and Tiresias (and Laius).
- He shows arrogance/hubris in putting his decisions above the law of the gods when he tells Creon
- That asking he will decide and what he says must be obeyed as if it were law.
- Find a quote from the play which shows each one of these points.

Things beyond Oedipus' Control

- Fate/the gods have marked him out for disaster, even before he was born.
- However much he tries to do the right thing, it will make no difference

Tiresias

Tiresias, a blind prophet and servant of Apollo, twice was asked by Oedipus to come to the palace to discuss the crisis in Thebes. In the first act of the play he finally appears, revealing the reasons for the city's devastation, knowledge that he is reluctant to reveal to Oedipus for fear of making him miserable. Oedipus, feeling himself to be betrayed by the prophet's resistance, verbally abuses Tiresias ("You sightless, witless, senseless, mad old man!!) and accuses him of working on behalf of the "usurper" Creon.

Reluctantly, Tiresias tells Oedipus that he should not mock him so quickly; in a famous moment of foreshadowing, he tells the king that it is he who is blind: "But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind:/You cannot see the wretchedness of your life, /nor in whose house you live, no, nor with whom." Significantly, Tiresias is also the first character in the play to question Oedipus's assumption that he knows his parentage and to tell him that he has committed atrocities that he does not yet know are his own. He tells Oedipus that he will become blind and

poor, that Oedipus is himself Laius's murderer, and that he will learn that he has fathered children with his mother. While Tiresias's presence on stage is brief, as a prophet representing the god Apollo he remains one of the most powerful characters in the play; in addition, the Athenian audience would have recognized him from Homeric mythology (in *The Odyssey* the title character must go down into the underworld to gain information from the dead prophet).

Other Characters

Chorus of Theban Elders Unlike the chorus in *Antigone*, who's *Ode on Man* historically has been regarded as a model expression of Athenian individualism, the chorus in this play has no famous statement, though its role is not insignificant. The Theban elders of the chorus are considered to be fairly representative men of Thebes who honor and respect the king and the gods; their odes reveal both a strong attachment to the king as well as a grounding in religious culture. In *The Idea of a Theater*, Francis Fergusson likens the chorus' role to that of a character who provides a broader context for the action of the play as a whole: "the chorus' action is not limited by the sharp, rationalized purposes of the protagonist; its mode of action, more patient, less sharply realized, is cognate with

Messenger The messenger enters in Scene iii and tells Oedipus that King Polios of Corinth, whom Oedipus had believed to be his father, is dead. Oedipus also learns from this messenger that Polios was not his father; the messenger himself had been given Oedipus as an infant by one of Laius's men, and that he had untied Oedipus's bound ankles. He causes the shepherd who left Oedipus to die (having been given him by Jocasta, his mother) to come in and testify that Oedipus is Laius's son.

Messengers were common devices used in Greek drama. They were often used to relate action that occurred offstage or to summarize events that have taken place between acts or scenes.

Priest after Oedipus's opening lines, the Priest of Zeus is the next character in the play to speak, and he does so as a religious leader and elder representative of the people of Thebes. Standing before the king's palace, surrounded by the Theban people, the priest informs Oedipus (and the audience) of the misery-laden condition of Thebes: a plague is killing many of the city's human and animal populations, and fires are destroying the lands and its crops. He praises Oedipus, who

has solved the riddle of the Sphinx, for his wisdom and ability to improve their lives, and asks of him, on behalf of the people, swiftly and decisively to act and end the suffering.

Second Messenger The second messenger appears in the last scene to announce and describe Jocasta's suicide. He also relates Oedipus's discovery of her body and his subsequent blinding. He predicts future sorrows for a people whose kings descend from this polluted line. The second messenger also announces Oedipus's entry onstage after his self-mutilation: "You will see a thing that would crush a heart of stone."

Shepherd of Laius The old shepherd is summoned by Oedipus so that he can discover his true parentage. The shepherd reveals his information only after Oedipus threatens his life if he remains silent. He admits to receiving the infant he gave to Polybus's messenger from Laius and Jocasta. Oedipus realizes his identity and his crimes of patricide and incest after hearing the shepherd's story.

Various Interpretations

Various views have been advanced about the meaning of Oedipus Rex. According to one view, the play justifies the gods by showing that we get what we deserve. Oedipus is a bad man as is seen in his treatment of Creon, and so the gods punish him. Or, he is not altogether bad; he is even rather noble in some ways; but he has one of these defects which all tragic heroes have. According to a second view, Oedipus Rex is a tragedy of destiny.

The play shows that man has no free will but is a puppet in the hands of the gods who pull the strings. According to yet another view, Sophocles was a —pure artist, and was therefore not interested in offering a thesis about the gods. He took the story of Oedipus as he found it and used it to write an exciting play, with the gods simply a part of the machinery of the plot

Oedipus's Goodness

All the above interpretations of the play, says F.R. Dodd's, are unsound. The first two of these interpretations are linked with Aristotle's view that the tragic hero is a man highly esteemed and prosperous who falls into misfortune because of some serious hamartia or defect. Oedipus is

proud and over-confident; he harbors unjustified suspicions against Tiresias and Creon; in one place he goes so far as to express some uncertainty about the truth of oracles. But the flaw in this argument is that, even before the action of the play, Oedipus has been declared to be a would-be incestuous parricide, which means that the punishment has been decided upon before the crime has been committed. Apart from that, Sophocles has depicted Oedipus as a good man. In the eyes of the Priest in the opening scene Oedipus is the greatest and noblest of men, the savior of Thebes who with divine aid rescued the city from the Sphinx. The Chorus has the same view of him: he has proved his wisdom; he is the darling of the people; and never will the people believe ill of him.

Offence Committed in Ignorance

By hamartia, Aristotle did not mean a moral defect as is generally supposed; he means an offence committed in ignorance of some material fact and therefore free from wickedness or vice. An example of such an offence is Thyestes eating the flesh of his own children in the belief that it was butcher's meat, and subsequently begetting a child on his own daughter, not knowing who she was. The story of Thyestes has much in common with that of Oedipus. Both these men violated the most sacred of Nature's laws and as incurred the most horrible of all pollutions. But they both did so without wickedness, because they knew not what they did. Had they acted knowingly, they would have been inhuman monsters. In that case we could not have felt for them that pity which tragedy ought to produce. As it is, we feel both pity and terror—pity for the fragile state of man, and terror because of a world whose laws we do not understand. The hamartia of Oedipus did not lie in losing his temper with Tiresias; it lay quite simply in killing his father and marrying his mother. It is a wrong notion to say that the dramatist has a moral duty to represent the world as a place where the good are always rewarded and the bad are always punished. This notion is completely foreign to Aristotle as well as to the practice of the Greek dramatists. Aristotle did not say that the tragic hero must have a serious moral defect of character.

“Moral Innocence” of Oedipus

A suggestion is sometimes made that Oedipus should have taken every possible precaution to avoid his fate. But the oracle’s prediction was unconditional; it did not say that if Oedipus did such and such a thing he would kill his father and marry his mother. The oracle simply said that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother. What an oracle said, was bound to happen. Oedipus does what he can to evade his fate: he resolves never to see his (supposed) parents again. But it is quite certain from the first that his best efforts would be unavailing. What should be emphasized is Oedipus’s essential moral innocence.

Oedipus, No Puppet but a Free Agent

If Oedipus is the innocent victim of a doom which he cannot avoid, is he a mere puppet? Is the whole play a —tragedy of destiny‖ which denies human freedom? Such a view would be wrong, too. Sophocles did not intend that we should treat Oedipus as a puppet and not a free agent. Neither in Homer nor in Sophocles does divine foreknowledge of certain events imply that all human actions are predetermined. The Messenger in the present play emphatically distinguishes Oedipus’s self-blinding as voluntary and self-chosen from the involuntary parricide and incest. Certain of Oedipus’s actions were fate-bound; but everything that he does on the stage from first to last he does as a free agent.

Even the Major Sins not Fate-Bound

Even in calling the parricide and the incest fate-bound we perhaps go too far. The average citizen of Sophocles’ day would not perhaps have thought so. As has been said, the gods know the future but they do not order it. This view may not satisfy the analytical philosopher, but it seems to have satisfied the ordinary man at all periods. Let us recall Jesus’s words to St. Peter, —Before the cock-crow, thou shall deny me thrice.‖ We are not to think that Peter’s subsequent action was fate-bound in the sense that he could not have chosen otherwise. Peter fulfilled the prediction, but he did so by an act of free choice.

The Real Cause of Oedipus’s Ruin

According to one view, the gods force on Oedipus the knowledge of what he has done. This view is unconvincing. The gods do nothing of the kind. On the contrary, what fascinates us is the

spectacle of a man freely choosing, from the highest motives, a series of actions which lead to his own ruin. Oedipus could have left the plague to take its course; but pity for the sufferings of his people compelled him to consult the oracle. When Apollo's word came, he might still have left the murder of Laius uninvestigated; but piety and justice compelled him to act. He need not have forced the truth from the reluctant Theban Shepherd; but he could not rest content with a lie and therefore wanted to tear away the last veil from the illusion in which he had lived so long. Tiresias, Jocasta, the Shepherd, each in turn tries to stop Oedipus, but in vain: he must read the last riddle, the riddle of his own life. The immediate cause of Oedipus's ruin is not —fate! or —the gods!: no oracle said that he must discover the truth. Still less does the cause of his ruin lie in his own weakness. What causes his ruin is his own strength and courage, his loyalty to Thebes, and his loyalty to the truth. In all this we are to see him as a free agent. And his self-mutilation and self-banishment are equally free acts of choice.

The Theme in the Other Two Plays of the Trilogy

This view is supported by Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone, the other plays of Sophocles' trilogy. We find that the theme of the conflict between father and son runs through all the three tragedies. In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus kills his father Laius who had intended to take the infant's life. In Oedipus at Colonus, Oedipus gives vent to his intense hate against his sons. In Antigone, we find the same hate again, between Creon and his son Harmon. The problem of incest exists neither in the relationship between Oedipus's sons to their mother nor in the relationship between Harmon and his mother, Eurydice. Thus it is quite valid to hold that the real issue in Oedipus Rex too is the conflict between father and son and not the problem of incest.

The feeling of curiosity behind the tragedy

The pressure of curiosity is sweetly bitter; curiosity is also uncontrollable. Curiosity leads Oedipus to the greatest of disasters. It was while inquiring into his own identity in the belief that he was not a Corinthian but a foreigner, that he met Laius. When he had killed Laius, won the throne, and married his mother as well, he once more made inquiry into his identity. His wife

tried to stop him but he grew all the more insistent in questioning the old man who knew the facts. Finally, when the affair was already leading him to a suspicion of the truth and the old man had cried out, —Alas! I am on the very point of saying the fearful thing! Oedipus nonetheless

answered, —And I of hearing it. But all the same it must be heard.‖ The consequence was a most painful tragedy.

A Victim of His Victory over Unconscious Fantasies

The treasure which the Sphinx guards is not gold, but an intellectual one, namely knowledge. The hidden and closely guarded secret is the unknown of the sexual riddle. While the fabulous dragon must be killed in other mythical stories in order that the treasure of gold may become the possession of man, the Sphinx significantly kills herself when her secret is broken in time of maturation. Oedipus, the swollen-footed hero, does not kill the monster by physical force but defeats her through insight and knowledge. The primary anxiety, connected with the sexual riddle, shapes the pattern of all subsequent anxiety arising from the unknown, especially if one is confronted with the riddle of existence and non-existence. The dragon-killer is a hero if he is the victor in the struggle with his own monster—with the feeling of anxiety and guilt that lies hidden in his unconscious fantasies. All dragon-killer heroes become finally the victims of their victory over unconscious fantasies. Oedipus, just because he has defeated the monster of the unknown, personifies the greatest blunder, the final defeat of the conscious self-evident thinking and the victory of the Sphinx, that is, of the psychic forces which are hidden in the unconscious and the unknown of the own self. He is the victim of his infatuation.

Oedipus's Real Fruit

Oedipus's hamartia is not bad temper, suspiciousness, or hastiness in action, for his punishment does not fit these crimes. Nor is it ignorance of who his parents are, for ignorance of this type is not culpable. Still less is it murder and incest, for these things are fated for him by the gods. Oedipus's fault is his failure in existential commitment, a failure to recognize his own involvement in the human condition, a failure to realize that not all difficulties are riddles to be solved by the application of pure intellect but that some are mysteries not to be solved at all but to be coped with only by the engagement of the whole self. Oedipus's punishment, then, is not really punishment at all, but the only means by which the gods may enlighten blindness of this destiny. Sophocles was not concerned to tell a crime and punishment story; this is shown by his leaving the —crimes‖ out of the action.

8. Bibliography and Further Reading

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Macmillan, 1907.

Aristotle. *The Poetics*. Translated by W. Hamilton Fyfe. London: Heinemann, 1927. Aristotle's important discussion of effective tragic form includes many references to the exemplarity of Sophocles' play, and provides a useful understanding of classical poetic theory.

Bates, William Nickerson *Sophocles, Poet and Dramatist*. London: Oxford University Press, 1940. In a chapter on Oedipus, Bates summarizes the plot and offers general, laudatory remarks on Sophoclean tragedy, followed by discussions of the protagonist and Jocasta.

Boora, C. M. *Sophoclean Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944. Boora's focus is on the role of Apollo and the gods in the play, offering a historical reading that contextualizes the oracle in Athenian society.

Bushnell, Rebecca *Prophesying Tragedy: Sight and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays*. Cornell

University Press, 1988. Bushnell compellingly argues that Oedipus's desire to speak and his aversion to silence together create a character whose faith in the efficacy of human words unsuccessfully challenges oracular knowledge.

Philosophy Index. "Absurdism." *Existentialism and the Absurd* { Philosophy Index }. N.p.,

n.d. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.

Shmoop Editorial Team. "The Stranger Theme of Philosophical Viewpoints: The Absurd."

Shmoop.com. Shmoop University, Inc., 11 Nov. 2008. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.

Liturgical drama and the reimagining of medieval theatre: medieval institute press, 2017

The staging of 12th c liturgical drama in the fleury "play book" 1984

Chang Kaolin. (2006). *A Survey of English Literature*. Tianjin: Nankeen University Press.

Kelli. (2008). *Classical Readings of English Literature*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Barton J –*Playing Shakespeare* (Methuen, 2001) ISBN 9780713687736

Berry C –*Text in Action: A Definitive Guide to Exploring Text in Rehearsal for Actors and Directors* (Virgin, 2001)

Chang Kaolin. (2006). *A Survey of English Literature*. Tianjin: Nankeen University Press.

Kelli. (2008). *Classical Readings of English Literature*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Liturgical drama and the reimagining of medieval theatre: medieval institute press, 2017

The staging of 12th c liturgical drama in the fleury “play book”1984

Caret Griffith. (1993). *Socialism and Superior Brains*. London and New York: Rutledge. Dial

Philosophy Index. "Absurdism." *Existentialism and the Absurd* { Philosophy Index }. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.

Shmoop Editorial Team. "The Stranger Theme of Philosophical Viewpoints: The Absurd."

Shmoop.com. Shmoop University, Inc., 11 Nov. 2008. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.

Barnet, Sylvan, et al. *Types of Drama: Plays and Context*. Longman, Inc. 1997. Print.

Parker, Gerald D. "The Modern Theatre As Autonomous Vehicle". *Modern Drama*. Vol. XVI. Sept 1973. 373-387. Print.

Styan, J.L. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 2: Symbolism, Surrealism, and the Absurd*. Cambridge Univ. Press. 1981. Print