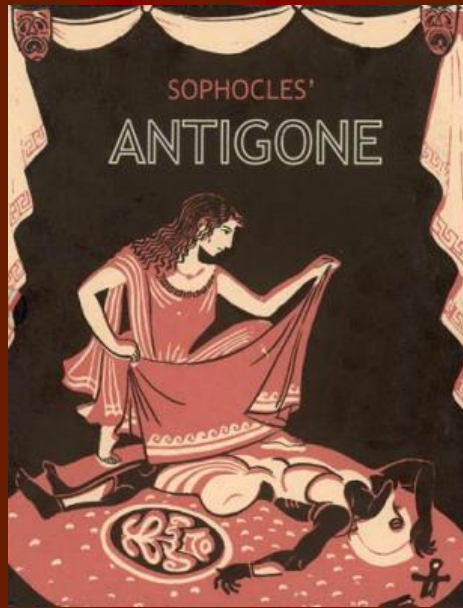


# *Antigone*

## Background Notes



# I. Origin of Tragedy

## A. Religious festivals in the spring to honor Dionysus



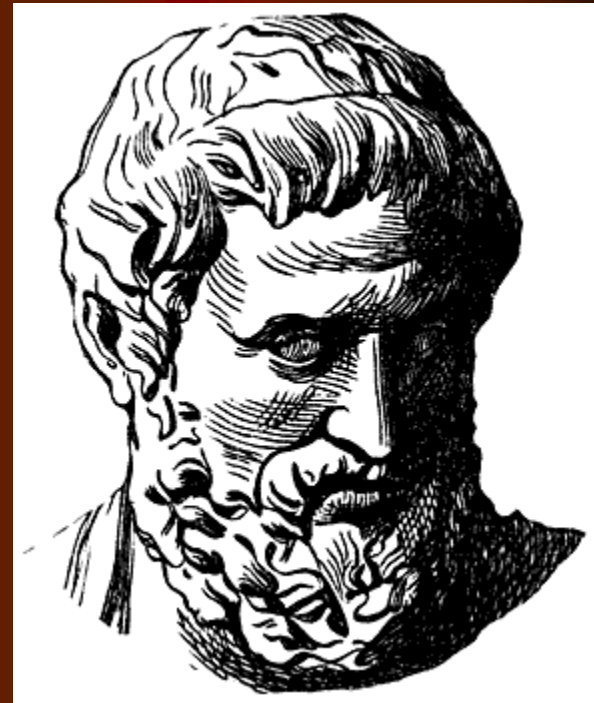
*Dionysus (Bacchus),  
god of wine*

## B. Thespis, "Father of Drama" (thespians)

- introduced the first actor and dialogue

## C. Sophocles

1. added third actor
2. fixed number of the Chorus to 15
3. introduced painted scenery
4. made each play of a trilogy separate in nature (each play could stand alone)
  - *Oedipus Rex*
  - *Oedipus on Columnus*
  - *Antigone*



*Sophocles*

## II. Structure of Theatre

- A. theatron: “seeing” place where the audience sat
- B. orchestra: circular dancing place where actors and Chorus performed
- C. skene: building used as dressing room
- D. parados: entrance to the theatre used by Chorus

# Greek Theatre video 1 & 2



# III. Actors and Acting

- A. The playwright took the leading role
- B. All male performers (played female roles too)
- C. Never more than 3 actors (changed characters)
- D. Costumes and Masks
  1. long, flowing robes (colored symbolically)
  2. high boots with raised soles
  3. large masks made of wood, linen, cork
    - a. identified age, gender, emotion
    - b. exaggerated features (eyes, open mouth)



## IV. The Chorus

### A. Music and Dance

1. music: flute, lyre, drums
2. dance: expressive rhythmic movements

### B. Function of the Chorus

1. sets overall mood and expresses theme
2. adds beauty through song and dance
3. gives background information
4. divides action and offers reflection on events
5. questions, advises, expresses opinion (usually through Chorus leader)



# V. Conventions of Greek Theatre

## A. Aristotle's Unities

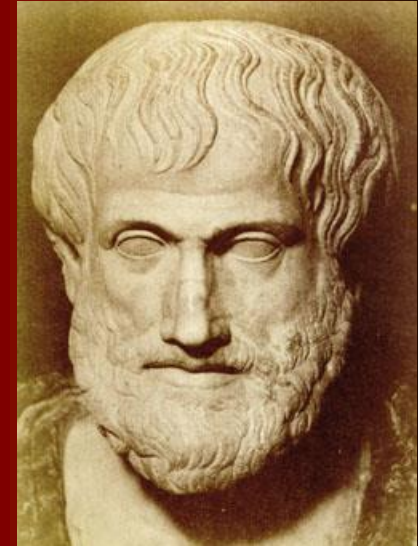
1. action (simple plot)
2. time (single day)
3. place (one scene throughout)

## B. The Messenger (sentry)

1. tells news happening away from the scene
2. reports acts of violence not allowed to be seen

## C. Limitations of the Theatre

1. the Chorus is constantly on the stage
2. no intermission
3. no lighting, no curtains

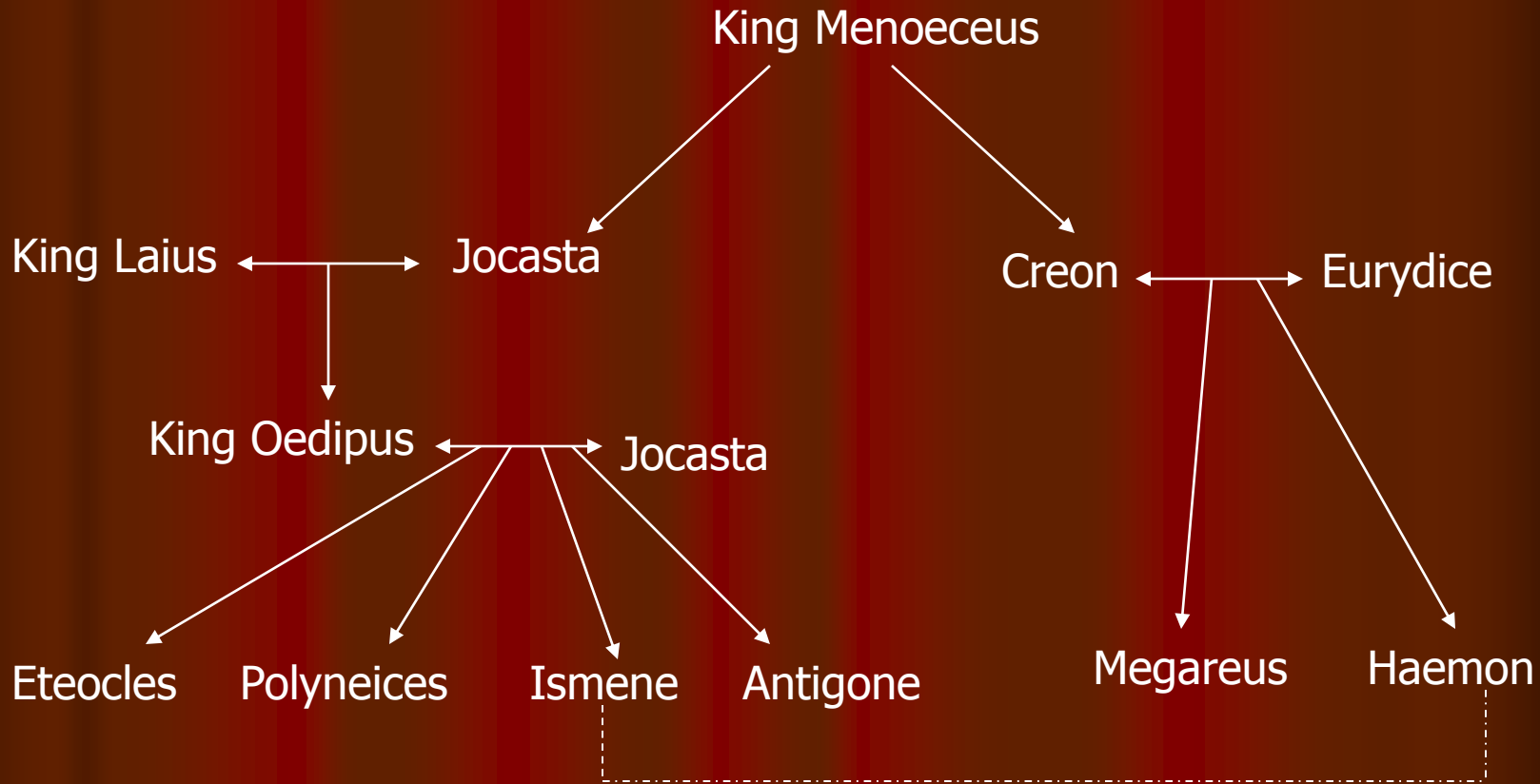


## VI. Important Terms

1. tragedy: an imitation of a serious action which will arouse pity and fear in the viewer
2. tragic hero: a character, usually of noble birth, neither totally good nor totally evil, whose downfall is brought about by some weakness and error in judgment (a tragic flaw)

3. Tragic flaw, weakness of a character or error in judgment which causes the downfall of the hero
4. hubris: the tragic flaw of pride
5. catharsis: the “purging” or release of emotions the audience feels

# VII. The Original Dysfunctional Family



- King Laius and Jocasta have a son, Oedipus.
- The Oracle predicts Oedipus will grow up and kill his father, so Laius drops Oedipus over a cliff into the ocean.

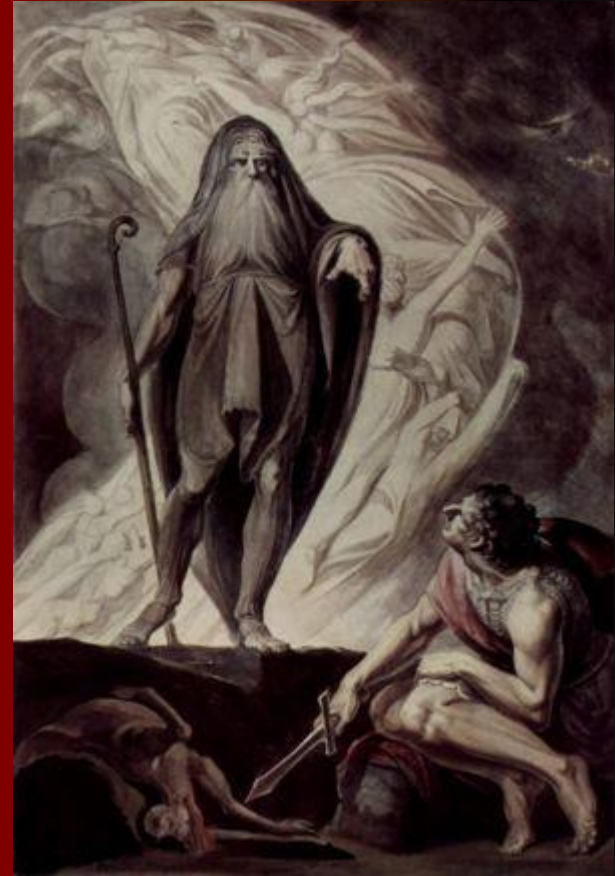


- Baby Oedipus is rescued by a shepherd.
- He grows up and hits the road, meets the Sphinx, and answers the Sphinx's riddle.
- The Sphinx kills herself.



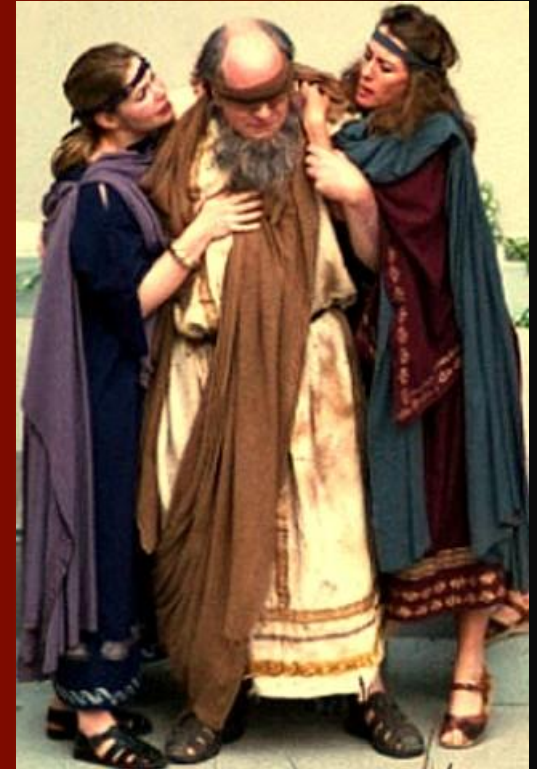
- Oedipus argues with and kills a man on the road who, unbeknownst to Oedipus, is his father Laius.
- Oedipus continues, and when he reaches Thebes, he is rewarded for killing the Sphinx that has been plaguing their town (no one has been able to come and go since the Sphinx has been guarding the road).
- Oedipus is given the newly widowed queen to marry. Look back at the family tree...

- Oedipus and his “wife” have four children.
- Eventually, a new plague strikes Thebes and the Oracle is consulted again.
- The soothsayer, Teiresias, tells them that Thebes is suffering because of Oedipus and Jocasta’s crime against nature.





- Jocasta hangs herself, and Oedipus takes her brooch and blinds himself.
- He is exiled from Thebes.
- Antigone and Ismene, his daughters, dutifully lead him through the lands during his exile.



- A civil war breaks out about who will be the new ruler of Thebes.
- Eteocles and Polyneices fight to be heir to the throne.
- They kill each other and their Uncle Creon steps up.
- He believes one was the rightful heir (the oldest son) and other was a traitor to the state for challenging him.

- Creon refuses a proper burial for the “traitor” and this makes Antigone angry.
- She believes BOTH her brothers deserve a proper burial.

*Why was a proper burial so important to the Greeks?*

# You need to get to Hades!

Once a person has died, he or she must pay the ferryman, Charon, to take him or her across the River Styx to the Underworld. Otherwise, the soul will not be able to rest.



Michelangelo's  
*Last Judgment*

# Things to consider while reading

- Antigone must decide whether to follow her uncle's laws or those of her heart
- Was Antigone justified in her actions? What is more important – following the government's laws, or those of one's heart?
- Who is the tragic hero of this play?