

Antigone

by Sophocles



Greek Drama



- Greek drama was performed at annual festivals in honor of **Dionysos** – the god of wine and fertility
- Greek tragedies like *Antigone* often revolved around **well-known myths** and **heroic legends**



- Greek plays were performed in **outdoor amphitheaters**

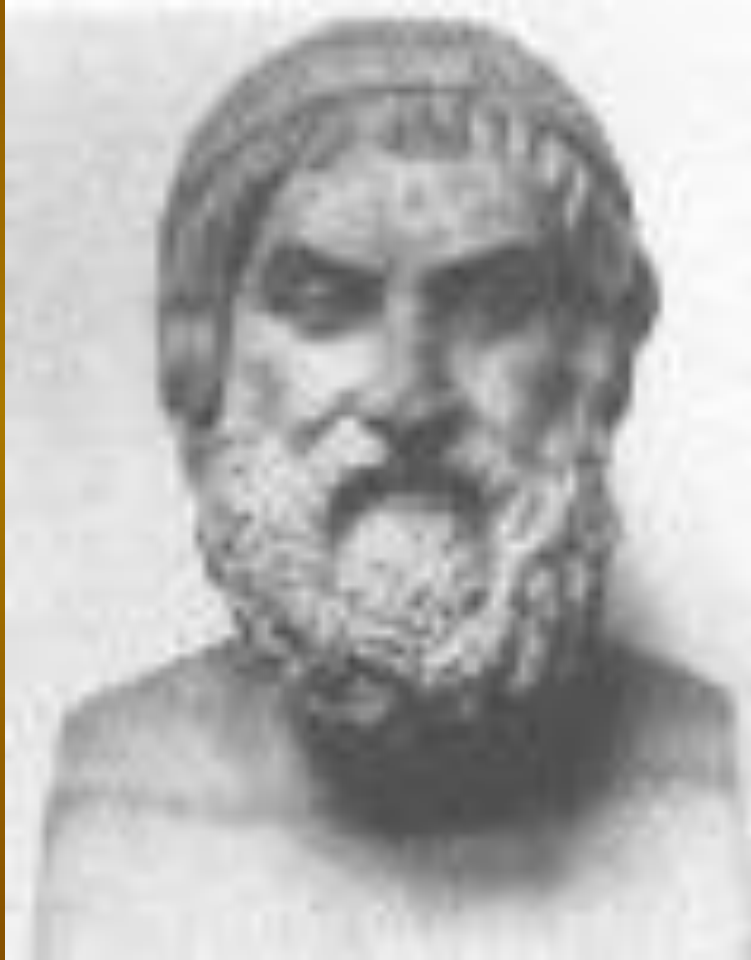
- Actors **wore masks** that reflected the personalities of their characters



- The **chorus** was integral in Greek drama, though its role varied depending on the play
- The chorus often provided commentary on the action of the play and did so in a **lyric chant**
- In *Antigone*, the chorus **represents the people of the town** where the story takes place



The Author: Sophocles



- Sophocles was one of the **most famous** and **respected** and of all Greek playwrights
- He wrote *Antigone* as a part of **a trilogy** of plays that centered around the legend of Oedipus
- It is believed that Sophocles wrote *Antigone* in approximately **422 B.C.**

The Story of Oedipus

- The legend of Oedipus was a famous story with which the **Greek people were already familiar**
- The famous psychological term "**Oedipus Complex**" was coined because of this story
- The **setting** of this story is the city of **Thebes**



How does the Oedipus legend begin?

- It all starts when an **oracle** (fortune teller) tells **King Laius** and **Queen Jocasta** of Thebes that their **newborn son** will one day **kill his father and marry his mother**
- Frightened by this prophecy, Laius **pierces the baby's feet** and **gives him to a shepherd to abandon in the mountains**
- A merciful man, the shepherd instead decides to give the baby to a friend, but **does not reveal his identity**
- This friend, a servant of the **King of Corinth**, in turn **gives the baby to the king and his wife**; they name the boy Oedipus ("**Swollen Foot**") and raise him as their son



- As a young man, Oedipus begins to **hear rumors** that the King is not his real father
- So, he consults an oracle and **is told about his destiny**
- Scared of what he is told, **Oedipus flees** Corinth in an effort to avoid his fate

Meanwhile, in Thebes...

A monster, **the Sphinx**, is tormenting the town, and **King Laius** has left the city to find out how to get rid of her

On his way out of the city, Laius has an ironic **encounter with Oedipus** who just so happens to be traveling towards Thebes

- With each feeling that he has the “right of way” on the road, **the men begin to argue** and a bad case of “chariot rage” ensues
- When Laius strikes Oedipus, **Oedipus retaliates by killing him** – and unknowingly, the first part of his terrible prophecy comes true

- As he continues down the road after his encounter with Laius, **Oedipus comes upon the gate of Thebes**
- When the **Sphinx dares Oedipus to answer her riddle** (the only way to rid the city of her), **he answers it correctly** and she **dies** The riddle is: What walks on 4 legs in the morning, 2 legs at noon, and 3 legs in the evening?
- The people of Thebes consequently see Oedipus as a hero, and **they offer Oedipus a position as king** (along with the hand of their recently widowed queen in marriage)



The New King and Queen of Thebes

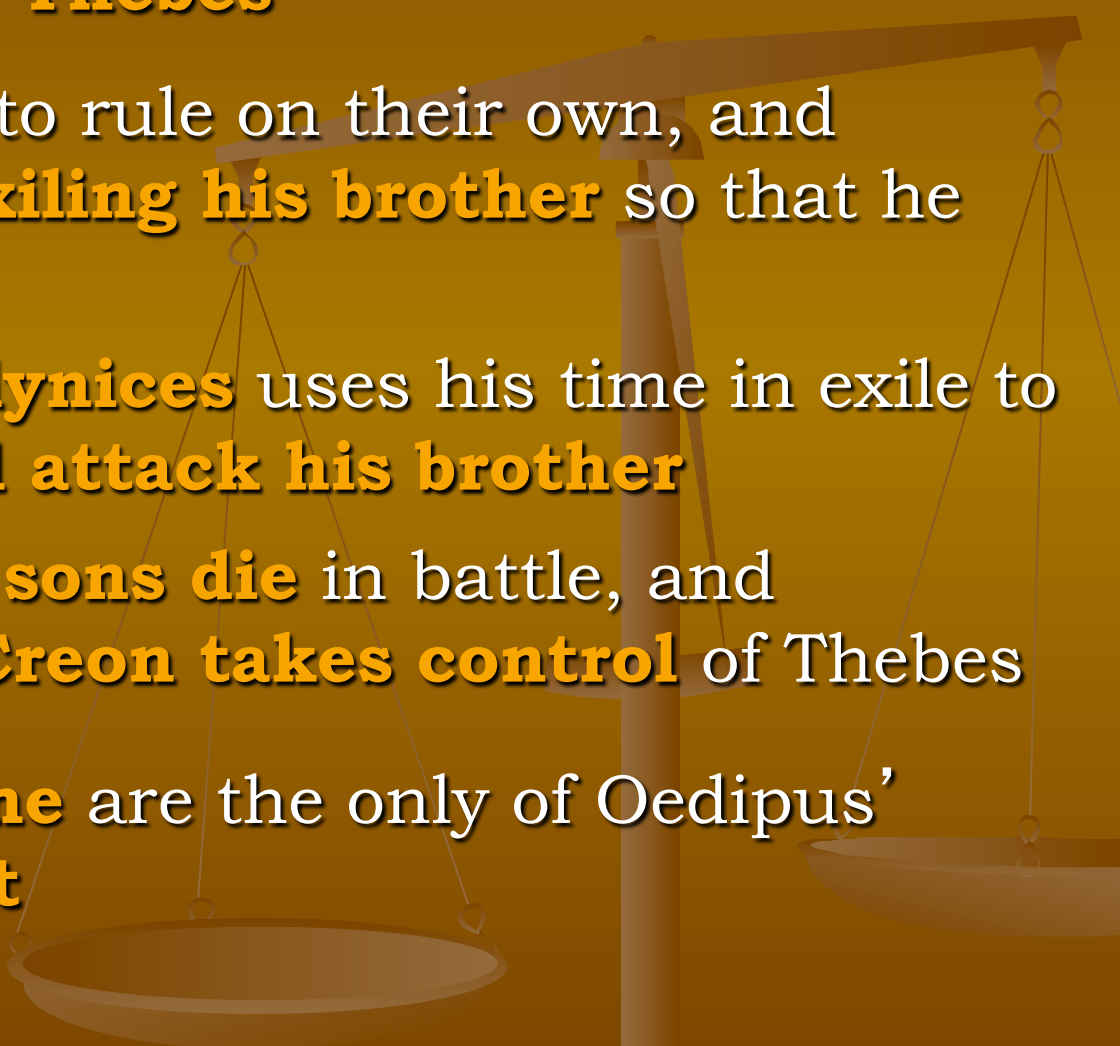


- When Oedipus marries Jocasta, the final part of the prophecy comes true, but **no one knows the truth**
- Oedipus and Jocasta end up having four children together: **Eteocles & Polynices** (boys) and **Antigone & Ismene** (girls)
- However, Oedipus' world begins to unravel when a **terrible plague comes upon the city**, and the only way to get rid of it is the **find the killer of the original King**



- Desperate to rid his town of the plague, **Oedipus visits Teresias** (a blind prophet) to find out the truth
- When he finds out that the prophecy about him has come true, he is so horrified that **he flees and rips his own eyes out**
- **Jocasta**, in turn, **hangs herself** – and their children are left to pick up the pieces

Who Takes Over As King?

- Oedipus' two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, **decide to share the rule of Thebes**
 - However, both want to rule on their own, and **Eteocles ends up exiling his brother** so that he can take charge
 - Seeking revenge, **Polynices** uses his time in exile to **gather an army and attack his brother**
 - Unfortunately, **both sons die** in battle, and **Jocasta's brother Creon takes control** of Thebes
 - **Antigone and Ismene** are the only of Oedipus' children who **are left**
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What makes Antigone so important?

- One of Creon's first decrees as king is to **bury Etecoles with honors, but not Polynices**
- Due to the spiritual ramifications of this action, **Antigone strongly opposes the neglect of her other brother**
- This is where the story of *Antigone* begins – **Antigone must decide whether to follow her uncle's laws or those of her heart**



What to consider while reading...

- 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? A tragic hero is a person who, either through choice or circumstance, is **caught in a series of events that lead to disaster**. Unfortunately, it is **his/her own error in judgment (tragic flaw)** that leads to his/her demise.
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