

THET110

Notes

October 15, 2012

What are the difficulties in studying theater history?

- We are focusing on Western Theater
- We make large generalizations about time and geographies
- Theater is ephemeral
- There is limited extant (in existence) material

Sources of information about Greek Theater

- Extant texts
- Archeological remains
- Visual art – in Greece primarily statues and vase paintings
- Commentaries – such as Aristotle

Shakespeare's The Globe Theater

- De Witt/Van Buchell drawing of The Swan Theater 1596

Origins of Western Theater

- Ritual Theories
 - Origins of Tragedy – Dithyramb
 - Choral odes to honor – Dionysus
 - Origin of comedy – Phallic processions
- Gerald Else's Great Man Theory
 - Actor Thespis – stepped out of dithyramb chorus to enact role of god (thespians)
 - Playwright Aeschylus – introduced second actor

Ancient Greece

- Political structure
 - Democratic
 - City-states (Polis)
 - Example:
 - Athens – artistic center
 - Sparta – military center
 - Delphi – magic center
- Religion
 - Polytheistic
 - Gods interacted with humans
- Cultural Values
 - Competition
 - Wisdom and reason

Dionysus and Theater

- God wine, fertility, revelry

Theater Practice in Ancient Greece

- Occasional and competitive
 - Tragedy means “goat song”
- Festivals
 - 534 BC – first festival specifically devoted to theater
 - After – each year three major festivals
- Largest festival was City Dionysia
 - Five days
 - Day 1- processional
 - Days 2-4 – playwrights presented a “package” – 3 tragedies and 1 satyr play
 - Day 5 – comedy
- Audience – whole polis (unsure about women/slaves)

Theater as a Civic Duty

- Choregus
 - Houses, feeds, and trains chorus actors
- Theoric fund
 - Free tickets for poor Athenians

Three Types of Plays

- Tragedy
 - Comedy
 - Satyr play
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- There were thousands of plays written but only 32 tragedies and 12 comedies survive from 4 playwrights

Based on Oedipus, what are the qualities of tragedy?

- Part of a trilogy
- Based on historical or mythic stories
- Feature kings, queen, gods
- Hero has a flaw (hamartia) that leads to his/her downfall
- Teaches the audience a lesson and allows them to release their emotions (catharsis)

Comedy

- Everyday people
- The main character faces a difficult situation and has “happy idea”
- Humor comes from sex jokes, scatological (potty) jokes, and satires of famous people

Satyr Play

- Features the satyr (part man, part goat)
- Parodies mythical stories
- Only 1 extant satyr play – Cyclops

Thespis – First “actor”

- Aeschylus – earliest play existing, introduced 2nd actor
- Sophocles – introduces 3 actors, never have more than 3 on the stage
- Euripides – wrote 90 plays, medea, 1st prize five times