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Edited, with an introduction and notes by

WHITNEY J. OATES and EUGENE O'NEILL JR.



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# Famous Greek Plays

Edited, with introductions, by 资料室

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and

EUGENE O'NEILL, JR.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## P R E F A C E

THE aim of this volume is to provide students and general readers with a representative selection of the extant Greek drama in the best available translations.

Every effort has been made to impress upon the reader the extreme importance of the musical element in the Greek plays. To accomplish this end, all choral or singing passages in the prose versions have been indented, and broken up into their various choric constituents. Likewise, speeches which are attributed to the Chorus in the manuscripts, if they are written in the regular meter of the dialogue passages, have been assigned to the Leader of the Chorus, who thus becomes almost another member of the cast. Furthermore, all passages which were sung or chanted, so far as can be determined by their meter in the original, have been so indicated in the present text.

The General Introduction attempts to present certain material, both historical and systematic, which is requisite to the understanding of the plays. It treats, for example, such subjects as the nature of the Greek theater, Greek Tragedy and Greek Comedy in general, and the lives and works of the individual dramatists. Accompanying each play is a short special introduction to that play, designed primarily to facilitate its understanding on the part of the reader. Each play also is accompanied by notes which endeavor to explain particular passages which otherwise might prove difficult to apprehend. A Glossary renders unnecessary

a number of specific notes on the individual plays. It is hoped that the Glossary will prove a useful and valuable adjunct to the book.

The editors together assume the responsibility for the selection of translations. Mr. Oates edited the text and prepared the individual introductions for the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He also prepared that part of the General Introduction which deals with tragedy and the tragedians. Mr. O'Neill edited the text, revised the translation, and prepared the introduction for the play by Aristophanes, as well as that portion of the General Introduction which deals with comedy and the comic poets. He likewise compiled the Glossary.

The resources of the two-volume Random House edition of *The Complete Greek Drama*, which contains all of the surviving forty-seven plays written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Menander, were drawn upon for this collection. The editors earnestly hope that this volume will further the understanding and appreciation of these masterpieces of Greek creative art.

WHITNEY J. OATES  
EUGENE O'NEILL, JR.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### I. Tragedy

THE plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were written during the fifth century B.C. Behind them lies a rich literary and dramatic, or at least quasi-dramatic, tradition, which accounts in no small measure for the depth, scope and complexity of the art form which the plays embody. The problem of fully understanding the dramas is therefore not a simple one, since they cannot be divorced completely from the epic, lyric, and dramatic tradition which precedes them.

By far the most important factor in the tradition is the epic which we know chiefly through the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the interval between the epics of Homer, which scholars date variously from the tenth to the eighth century B.C., and the age of the three great tragic poets, thinkers began to explore the various phenomena of the external world and came to understand many aspects of nature which had hitherto been shrouded in complete mystery. The creative literary activity of this epoch likewise betokens on the part of the Greeks an increasingly higher level of self-understanding and self-consciousness, in the best sense of the word. At this time appeared a group of lyric poets, who had looked deeply within their own natures, and through the vehicle of their poetry made abundantly evident how thoroughly they understood the essential character of man's inner being. In Greek tragedy as we now have it we meet a fully developed dramatic form.

## THE THEATER

It is absolutely necessary for anyone who desires to apprehend as completely as possible these Greek plays, to re-create them imaginatively as dramas, that is, as actual plays, produced dramatically before an audience. A spectator of a Greek dramatic performance in the latter half of the fifth century B.C. would find himself seated in the *theatron*, or *koilon*, a semicircular, curved bank of seats, resembling in some respects the closed end of a horseshoe stadium. He has climbed up the steps (*klimakes*) to reach his seat, which is in a section (*kerkis*). Probably he has in the process walked along the level aisle (*diazoma*) which divides the lower and the upper parts of the *theatron*. Below him, in the best location in the theater, is the throne of the priest of Dionysus, who presides in a sense over the whole performance, which is essentially religious in character. The *theatron* is large—in fact, the one in Athens, in the Theater of Dionysus, with its seats banked up on the south slope of the Acropolis, seated approximately 17,000 persons.

The spectator sees before him a level circular area called the *orchestra*, in the center of which stands an altar, which figures frequently as a stage-property in a number of the plays. A part of the dramatic action will take place in the *orchestra*, as well as the manoeuvres and dance figures performed by the Chorus as they present their odes. To the right and left of the *theatron* are the *parodoi*, which are used not only by the spectators for entering and leaving the theater, but also for the entrances and exits of actors and the Chorus.

Directly beyond the circular *orchestra* lies the *skene* or scene-building. In most plays the *skene* represents the façade of a house, a palace, or a temple, and normally had three doors which served as additional entrances and exits for the

actors. Immediately in front of the scene-building was a level platform, called the *proskenion* or *logeion*, where much of the dramatic action of the plays takes place. Flanking the *proskenion* were two projecting wings, the so-called *paraskenia*.

Dramatic productions of the fifth century B.C. involved the use of two mechanical devices, with which the student of Greek drama should be familiar. One, the *eccyclema*, was developed in the fifth century. It was some kind of platform on wheels, which, so far as we can discover, was rolled out from the *skene*, and in this position was supposed to represent an interior scene. The other was the "machine." Frequently at the close of a play the dramatist introduced a god into the action, who would naturally be expected to appear from above. He apparently was brought in by some kind of crane or derrick, called the "machine." Inasmuch as the god who was thus introduced usually served to disentangle the complicated threads of the dramatic action, and on occasions seemed to be brought in quite gratuitously by a playwright unable to work out a *dénouement* from elements already in the situation, the term *deus ex machina*, "the god from the machine," has become standard in dramatic criticism.

## THE PERFORMANCE

In Athens of the fifth century B.C. dramas were presented only on two occasions, both of which marked religious festivals. At other times plays were presented at rural festivals in various Greek communities, when the productions, so to speak, would "go on the road." In the city, the less important of the festivals, called the *Lenaea*, or Festival of the Wine-Press, was held in January/February of each year. The more important festival, however, was the so-called *Greater* or *City Dionysia*, which was celebrated annually in March/

April in honor of the god, Dionysus.<sup>1</sup> Large audiences attended the festival, and witnessed the various performances. Earlier in the century admission to the performances was free, but later the cost was two obols, which would be refunded by the State to anyone who could show legitimate need.

Three contests for poets were held in the *Greater Dionysia*, one in comedy, one in tragedy, and one in the dithyramb. Prior to the Peloponnesian War the festival apparently lasted six days. On the first took place the great ceremonial procession which was followed on the second by the competition for the dithyrambic choruses. The dithyramb was an elaborate choral ode sung and performed by a trained chorus of fifty, the song itself having a direct bearing upon the central religious orientation of the whole festival and its connection with the god, Dionysus. Ten dithyrambs were presented in the contest on this day. Five comic poets each submitted a play for the competition in comedy which occupied the third day. Three tragic poets each submitted a tetralogy for the contest in tragedy which filled the last three days of the festival. A tragic poet had to present a group of four plays, three of them tragedies, either on separate themes or all on the same subject, plus a somewhat lighter after-piece known as a satyr-play. During the days of the Peloponnesian War, 431-404 B.C., the festival was reduced from six to five days in length, and the number of

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<sup>1</sup>Greek drama had a common close association with the spring festivals which were held to celebrate the worship of Dionysus. This god, as one of the Greek anthropomorphic divinities, symbolized the spirit of fertility, of generation and regeneration, which marks the season of spring, and he also came to be identified with the vine. Even in the fifth century the dramatic performances in the *Greater Dionysia* were still an integral part of a very elaborate religious service. The Theater of Dionysus in Athens lay within the sacred precinct of the god. The very altar in the center of the *orchestra* was not primarily a stage property, though the dramatists sometimes took advantage of its presence there, but it was a real religious altar. Behind the *skene* were temples dedicated to the god. Hence it is no wonder that the Greek drama tends to be more religious than secular.

comic competitors was diminished from five to three. During these years the program for the last three days contained a tragic tetralogy in the morning followed by a comedy in the afternoon.

Great care and expense went into the individual dramatic productions. The poet himself in many instances directed his own play, or even acted in it. In all probability he helped select his cast, all the parts of which were taken by male actors, coached them and supervised the training of the Chorus. Normally in the tragedies there were not more than three actors for each play, any one of whom might take more than one part if the exigencies of the piece demanded it. A wealthy citizen stood the cost of a play's production, a responsibility which was placed upon him by the State, and was regarded as a legitimate obligation of his position and citizenship.

The tragedies combined within them many variegated elements: rhythm in the poetry, vivid action, and brilliant color. There was also solo and choral singing, plus a strikingly posed and highly stylized dancing. A further effect was added by the fact that the actors all wore masks. This may have been partially because the audience was so far removed from the actors that it was impossible to achieve any effects through facial expressions.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE TRAGEDY

The typical Greek tragedy is divided into certain definite parts. The play opens with a *prologue*, a scene in which a single character may speak, or a dialogue may take place. In general in this short introductory scene, the poet acquaints the audience with the requisite information concerning the dramatic situation of the play.

After the *prologue* comes the *parodos*, the first appearance of the Chorus. The members of this group enter the *orchestra*

*tra*, singing and dancing, clearly suiting the rhythm of their motion and their gesticulations to the gravity and import of the words they sing. As time passes in the fifth century the Chorus in tragedy steadily diminishes in importance. In Euripides, particularly in his later plays, the Chorus merely sings lyrical interludes which have little or no coherence with the play. Normally the members of the Chorus serve as interested commentators upon the action, sometimes functioning as a background of public opinion against which the situation of the particular play is projected, or again becoming the vehicle whereby the poet is able to make clearer the more universal significance of the action. At the conclusion of the *parodos*, the Chorus almost always remains "on stage" throughout the remainder of the play. In the tragedies there are usually fifteen members in the Chorus. One of this number normally acts as a leader who may do solo singing and dancing, or may become virtually another character in the *dramatis personae*. Sometimes the Chorus breaks into two groups which sing responsively.<sup>2</sup>

As soon as the opening choral song has been completed, there comes the first *episode*. This is the exact counterpart of the act or scene in a modern play. A *stasimon* or choral ode succeeds the *episode* and the remainder of the piece is made up of these two parts in alternation. A normal play contains four or five of each. On occasion a *commus* takes the place of a *stasimon*. The *commus* is a lyric passage, sung by an actor or actors together with the Chorus. Intricate meters distinguish the *stasimon* and *commus*, whereas the spoken passages of dialogue or monologue in the *episodes* are written in the iambic trimeter, a close equivalent to the

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<sup>2</sup>It is possible in translation to give only an incomplete impression of the highly complicated rhythmic and metric structure of the choral passages. Suffice it to say that they had a carefully articulated and balanced symmetry of constituent parts, for which there were certain flexible conventions. The *strophe* is balanced by the *antistrophe*; the pair is sometimes followed by an *epode*. This basic pattern is varied on occasion by the use of repeated refrains and similar devices.

iambic pentameter or blank verse in English. After the series of *episodes* and *stasima*, there is the finale or *exodus*, the closing scene of the play at the end of which the Chorus leaves the view of the audience by way of the *parodoi*.

## ARISTOTLE ON TRAGEDY

The most important document to come out of antiquity concerning Greek tragedy is of course the justly famous *Poetics* of Aristotle. In it, though it was written some fifty years after the heyday of Greek tragedy, Aristotle devotes himself almost exclusively to this form of art.

Upon analysis Aristotle concludes that there are in tragedy six basic elements which he calls Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song. However, preliminary to his whole study in the *Poetics*, he introduces the conception of *mimesis*, or "imitation," which Plato had already used before him, as fundamental to the phenomena of art. In saying that the artist "imitates" his models, Aristotle does not use the word in its primary sense of "copying," but rather is seeking to give a secondary meaning to the term. By the word he seems to mean the process which takes place when an artist creates his work of art. It is through *mimesis* that form comes to be imposed upon the artist's material, broadly conceived. Aristotle insists that "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars." Hence poetry "imitates" universals, and the process of *mimesis* produces a resultant work of art in which the "universal" aspect constitutes the very essence. Aristotle classifies the six basic elements according to the rôle each of them occupies in the process of artistic "imitation." He maintains that Diction and Song refer to the medium of "imitation," Spectacle to the manner of "imitation," while Plot, Character, and Thought refer to the objects of

"imitation." Of the six elements Aristotle holds that Plot is the most important, with Character second.

An acquaintance with these six elements and with the Aristotelian conception of *mimesis* are necessary preliminaries to an understanding of his famous definition of tragedy: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these and similar emotions." Aristotle's analysis and definition contain much that is valuable for one who is endeavoring to comprehend the inner nature of Greek tragedy. First, in his analysis of the elements he has shown that the dramatic synthesis is rich and complicated. He likewise properly emphasizes the elements of Plot and Character. Second, in the definition he insists upon its essential seriousness, its completeness, that is, its unity as an artistic whole, and its "magnitude," that is, its scale and elevation, which in some way raises it above the ordinary run of things human. Furthermore, he indicates what he believes the function of tragedy to be, the *catharsis*, or "proper purgation" of pity, fear, and similar emotions.

One more conception of Aristotle in the *Poetics*, his theory of the ideal tragic hero and the "tragic flaw," merits our attention. Aristotle says that tragedy must involve a change of fortune for a character, but this personage cannot be a completely virtuous man passing from fortune to misfortune, because this would be simply odious to the spectator. Nor can it involve a bad man passing from misery to happiness, because this would outrage our human feelings, our moral sense, and accordingly no appropriate tragic emotions would be aroused within us. Nor again can it involve a bad man passing from happiness to misery. Perhaps this would satisfy the moral sense, but it again would not arouse in us the appropriate tragic emotions. Hence Aristotle defines the

ideal tragic hero in these words: "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 and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty."

There are several points to be particularly noted concerning Aristotle's conception of tragedy. First of all, he emphasizes the human element and insists implicitly that tragedy involves human beings. Second, he emphasizes the single individual in his argument concerning the tragic hero. Furthermore, he recognizes in human life states of happiness and misery, fortune and misfortune, in and out of which men pass. Here also he both implicitly and explicitly rejects the mechanical conception of "poetic justice," that the good prosper and the evil suffer. Aristotle likewise assumes the existence of some kind of moral order in the universe, as well as, by implication, the element of chance or luck, which may be possibly extended to include fate or destiny. In summary, then, for Aristotle tragedy is serious and elevated. It involves emotions of a particular sort. It looks at man and his states, in a world in which there is an element of chance or fate, but in which, at least so far as man himself is concerned, there is a definite moral order in some sort, and not moral chaos.

#### A E S C H Y L U S

Of the many writers of Greek tragedy only Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are represented in the plays which have survived. Aeschylus, the earliest of the three, was born of a rather prominent family in Athens in 525 B.C., at a time long before the city had achieved much distinction among the peoples of the Greek area.

Aeschylus first competed in the dramatic contests in Athens in 499 B.C. He achieved his first victory in 484 B.C.

and continued from then on to be highly successful in the theater. Aside from his dramatic activity, he apparently gained distinction in military affairs, having fought both at Marathon and Salamis. In all, he wrote approximately ninety plays, of which only seven have survived. We are told that he won first prizes in competition on thirteen occasions, his last victory occurring in 458 B.C. with his great trilogy, the *Oresteia*. He died in 455 B.C. while in Sicily, where he had gone shortly after his final tragic competition.

The loftiness of Aeschylean language and imagery is most notable, even though on some occasions the poet comes dangerously near bombast, a fact on which Aristophanes capitalized with great comic effect in *The Frogs*. However, Aeschylus' images possess a poetic depth and intensity which could only come from a mind driving deeply into the essence of that which it was seeking to express. Aeschylus' primary interest is in religion and theology. To be sure, he considers human phenomena, but not on the human level, or as ends in themselves. Aeschylus rather studies human affairs as means of throwing light upon the problems of religion and theology, which he considered more universal and more significant.

#### E U R I P I D E S

For general purposes of exposition it seems best to pass by Sophocles for the moment and turn to Euripides, who in many ways lies at the opposite extreme from Aeschylus in his basic interests. Euripides was born between the years 485 and 480 B.C. During his lifetime Euripides presented approximately eighty-eight plays, though he wrote in all about ninety-two. In the contests he was successful only four times, probably because his somewhat new and unorthodox views did not find immediate favor with the public. Certainly there is a strong strain of scepticism in his writing, and one becomes aware of the increasing doubt and uncertainty which

pervade the plays, particularly those written towards the close of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens, the great city of ante-bellum days, was tottering upon the brink of ruin. Though Euripides' plays were not well received during his life, it is evident that after his death, during the fourth century B.C. and later, he was by far the most popular of the three tragedians. Euripides left Athens for the court of King Archelaus of Macedonia in about 408 B.C. and died there in 406 B.C.

Euripides' greatest claims to fame rest on his superb studies of human problems considered on the human level, his penetrating psychological analyses of his characters, his capacity to create genuine pathos, his sense of the dramatic possibilities of an individual scene, and his ability by means of dramatic innovations to reinterpret the traditional legends upon which all the dramatists relied for their material.

Euripides had a profound influence upon the drama. He seems to have shaken the domination which the traditional sagas exerted upon the playwrights; he reduced the importance of the Chorus, until it only served to provide lyric interludes between actual dramatic scenes, but above all he raised to supreme importance the study of character. Unlike Aeschylus he is not predominantly interested in religion and theology, but rather in ethical problems, in human beings face to face with the pain and evil of human life, as they exhibit now strength and now pathetic weakness. Although he never consistently formulates his ideas concerning the gods or the superhuman elements in the universe, he nevertheless seems to believe that they exist and are relevant to human life in some way or other.

#### SOPHOCLES

There remains to consider Sophocles, the great mediating figure between Aeschylus and Euripides. He was born about

495 B.C., some ten years or so before the birth of Euripides, and lived to the great age of ninety, when he died about 405 B.C., surviving his younger contemporary by approximately a year. The poet's family was wealthy, and he himself served in public office on several occasions. In the main, however, he devoted himself completely to the theater and in all wrote about one hundred twenty-five plays of which now there are but seven extant, and unfortunately none of these derives from the first twenty-five years of his creative activity. His plays met with wide popular success, as is indicated by his twenty victories in tragic competition. Unlike Euripides, who, as we have already noted, became bitterly disillusioned towards the end of his life, and whose works show evidence of this change of temper, Sophocles in his plays seems to maintain a consistent and firm approach to the problems of tragedy.

Sophocles' mastery of dramatic technique is apparent in all his plays, most notably, of course, in *Oedipus the King*. Likewise in this tragedy, he demonstrated his ability to use with overwhelming effectiveness the device of dramatic irony. But his greatest excellence clearly lies in his general view of life, which can scarcely be communicated in the necessarily conceptual terms of criticism. It is, however, most clearly expressed in two great choral odes, one on the wonders of man in the *Antigone* and the other on the laws of Heaven in *Oedipus the King*. In the first of these Sophocles eloquently asserts the dignity, worth and value of man, even though there is death that he cannot conquer. In the second the poet proclaims his belief in a mysterious and powerful force behind the universe which sets and ordains the eternal laws of the world, which are holy, though ultimately incomprehensible to man. These seem to be the two fundamental aspects of Sophocles' view of life: man the marvel working out his own destiny, making his own choices, but under the guidance of Heaven and its everlasting laws. Sophocles concentrates on the continual interaction of these two as-