



PLAYS  
AND THE  
THEATER

*Edited by*  
RUSSELL THOMAS

# PLAYS

## AND THE THEATER

Edited by  
RUSSELL THOMAS

Associate Professor  
in the ~~Department of the College~~  
The ~~University of Chicago~~



D. C. HEATH AND COMPANY  
Boston

COPYRIGHT 1937, BY RUSSELL THOMAS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO REPRODUCE THIS  
BOOK OR PORTIONS THEREOF IN ANY FORM. THE PLAYS IN THIS  
BOOK ARE REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE AUTHORS  
OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES. NO PERFORMANCE,  
PROFESSIONAL OR AMATEUR, CAN BE GIVEN  
WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE AUTHOR,  
WHO MAY BE ADDRESSED IN  
CARE OF THE PUBLISHERS

417

D. C. HEATH AND COMPANY

*Offices:*    BOSTON       NEW YORK       CHICAGO       DALLAS  
ATLANTA       SAN FRANCISCO       LONDON

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PLAYS AND THE THEATER

## *Preface*

THE plays in this volume have been selected in an effort to fulfill three aims. One is to provide plays which young students will enjoy reading and acting. Another is to present plays which fairly represent the best dramatic achievements of practically all important periods in the history of the theater. The third is to show the student that the stuff of which drama is made has been the same in all ages. Under the spell of good reading or good acting in the classroom, the false notion that a play cannot be interesting because it is old may disappear.

The truth is that the more we study history thoughtfully the more we are impressed by the qualities which people of all ages have shared. We come to see how much the Greeks and Romans were like us, not how different they were. We discover that we have all been driven by the same emotions and have argued over the same ideas. Drama, which is a representation of the actions of men, is one of the most effective of the arts in proclaiming the common heritage of all nations.

Customs change with time, of course. Therefore, enough of the history of the theater is given in this book to acquaint the student with the particular customs of the theater during each period of its development. If you like the theater and have any curiosity about the story of its development, the simple outlines of that story which are given here may add to your enjoyment of these plays. When you have finished reading the plays consider this: no matter what changes there have been in the outward appearance of the theater or in methods of staging from age to age, there have always been four elements present and just four: — a story, a stage, actors, and an audience.

The plays in this volume have been extremely successful on the stage. They were all popular when they were first produced, and most

of them have not lost that popularity in the theater today. If you attempt to act them, either in the manner in which they were originally produced or with all the equipment which a modern stage affords, you will see why they were successful. If you cannot act them, read them aloud. Much of their effectiveness will still be retained.

## Contents

PREFACE . . . . .	v
THE OLDEST THEATER IN THE WORLD . . . . .	3
ANTIGONE. <i>Sophocles</i> . . . . .	9
DRAMA IN THE MEDIEVAL WORLD . . . . .	39
MASTER PIERRE PATELIN. <i>Anonymous</i> . . . . .	43
THE RENAISSANCE OF DRAMA IN ENGLAND . . . . .	77
ROMEO AND JULIET. <i>Shakespeare</i> . . . . .	83
THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: THE THEATER OF MOLIERE	175
THE MISER. <i>Molière</i> . . . . .	179
DRAMA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY . . . . .	245
THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL. <i>Richard Brinsley Sheridan</i> . . . . .	249
DRAMA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY . . . . .	331
BOX AND COX. <i>John Maddison Morton</i> . . . . .	335
AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE. <i>Henrik Ibsen</i> . . . . .	357
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATER . . . . .	449
ELIZABETH THE QUEEN. <i>Maxwell Anderson</i> . . . . .	455
THE BARRETT'S OF WIMPOLE STREET. <i>Rudolf Besier</i> . . . . .	535
IN THE ZONE. <i>Eugene O'Neill</i> . . . . .	627
POOR AUBREY. <i>George Kelly</i> . . . . .	647
THE GIANTS' STAIR. <i>Wilbur Daniel Steele</i> . . . . .	685
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TECHNIQUE AND FORMS OF DRAMA	707





## *The Oldest Theater in the World*

On a hillside in Athens there stand today the ruins of a great amphitheater. The picture of these ruins facing page 9 can suggest only faintly its ancient grandeur. The hill against which the rising tiers of seats form a semicircle, is the Acropolis; and these crumbling seats, the paved floor, and the fragments of platform facing it, are all that remain of the Theater of Dionysus. Even these fragments do not give us its exact plan as it stood during the Age of Pericles, when Athens was at the height of her glory; the Romans reconstructed it in later days. But the picture will help us to visualize that theater of the fifth century, B.C., when it was yet almost new. We can see the crowds of Athenian citizens coming here twice each year to celebrate the festivals in honor of the god, Dionysus. Always, the climax of the festival was the production of tragedies and comedies which were submitted by the dramatic poets of Athens; and we can imagine the crowd shouting its approval or disapproval of the plays, and waiting eagerly for the decision of the judges.

It is not hard to imagine those seats filled with fifteen thousand spectators. It is only when we remember that it is a theater, not a sports arena, that we are startled by its size. The stone-paved floor at the base of the amphitheater, which was a full circle before the Romans rebuilt the theater, was called the *orchestra*. It was occupied by the chorus, an important group in the acting of all Greek dramas. In the center of the *orchestra* stood an altar to Dionysus. Beyond the *orchestra* and facing the hillside arose a long, low, rectangular building called the *skene*. Along the façade of the *skene* ran a narrow, colonnaded porch, and in the façade were several doors leading to the interior of the *skene*. This narrow porch, backed by the walls and doors of the *skene*, was really the stage of the theater. Occasionally actors left the stage for the *orchestra*, and the chorus sometimes left the *orchestra* for the stage. Sometimes the plays called for action

which required actors to mount to the roof of the *skene*. In this theater the plays which are the oldest known to man were acted. It is the birthplace of drama in the Western World.

Such a theater did not spring full-blown into the world. Before the theater was erected there had been mimetic dances in honor of Dionysus. At some early time, a member of the dancing chorus detached himself from the chorus, impersonated a particular individual, and entered into dialogue with the chorus. With that event drama was born. For the first time, a story was told in action with words. The success of this new art is recorded in the rapid growth of a great body of dramas and in the growth of theaters for their presentation.

We must not forget that the theater in Greece was a religious shrine, nor that the days on which plays were given were religious holidays. Though the audience might enter the theater in a spirit of boisterous revelry rather than in one of quiet reverence which we are accustomed to associate with religious ceremonies, they were acting within the spirit of their religion. It is important to remember that the theater was a shrine, because that fact determined many of the conditions which governed the acting of plays and it determined what kinds of subjects might be used in the theater. Tragedies, for example, were restricted to stories of gods and legendary heroes.

Let us try to imagine the theater while a play is being acted. Perhaps it is a production of "Antigone." The *skene* represents very adequately the Royal Palace at Thebes. No scenery is necessary. The columns and doors of the building suggest the palace most effectively. We observe two persons on the stage. They are wearing masks, the lines of which suggest great sorrow and grief. The characters, we observe, too, impersonate women. They are Antigone and Ismene. We hear them clearly. Antigone declares her determination to bury her brother in spite of Creon's command. Ismene pleads in vain for restraint. Presently they leave, and our attention is drawn to the group of old men who are very quietly entering the *orchestra* in a procession. They face us now, and we recognize them as the chorus of Theban elders. They tell us of the battle which has just been fought before the gates of Thebes; of the death of Polynices and Eteocles, Antigone's brothers; of the Theban victory over the rebel Polynices and his Argive army. While they are speaking a

figure enters from the central door of the palace; the chorus turns to him immediately, for it is Creon, their new king, come to announce the first of his royal decrees.

Though the actors are far away from most of the audience they do not seem to be greatly dwarfed. Their masks are large and boldly outlined to reveal the dominant emotions of every scene. Each actor wears shoes with high soles and heels, which increase his height. We can hear well, too, for the actor is aided by a small cone-shaped device in the mouth of his mask which amplifies his voice.

The play moves on to its tragic close. The audience knows the legend well, but it is moved to pity by Antigone's defiance of Creon's will, and it regards with awe the terrible pride which compels Creon to enforce his decree against the counsel of his son and the Theban elders.

There are a few facts which we must know if we are to see the play or if we are to read it in the spirit similar to that of its first audience. First of all, we should know that this story is the climax of a series of tragedies which have overtaken the family of Ædipus, former king of Thebes and father of Antigone. You may read the earlier tragedies in "Ædipus the King" and "Ædipus at Colonus", both written by Sophocles.

After Ædipus left Thebes in voluntary exile, a struggle arose between his sons and Creon for the throne of Thebes. For a time Eteocles was sovereign. Against him Polynices led an army of Argive soldiers. Clearly he was a rebel, leading alien soldiers against his native city. Both he and Eteocles were killed in battle. Since Eteocles died defending his city, it was right that he should be buried with honor. But Polynices must be treated as a rebel. There could be no greater shame to a Greek than to be left unburied. The spirit could only wander homeless and unhappy forever. The audience, therefore, realizes the import of Creon's harsh decree. Polynices was a rebel; a rebel's fate he should suffer. Antigone is faced with a choice for which there could be no happy solution. Either she must obey the will of the State or obey the will of the gods, who command proper burial. The audience could not but be moved to pity by the unfortunate girl's lot. Yet they are aware that she is reckless and openly defiant, both defects which lead to defeat. They realize the justice of Creon's effort to restore respect for law in Thebes, but they know

that his pride of power is another defect that must bring disaster to its possessor. Of such materials is tragedy compounded.

Of the many dramatists who competed for the prizes at the festivals of Dionysus, three writers of tragedy and one writer of comedy have remained famous for all time. Sophocles, the author of "Antigone", was the second in the succession of these four. Many consider him the greatest of all. Each of the great tragic poets possessed individual merits. Æschylus, the oldest, was gifted with great powers of simple narration and of lyric poetry. To him, also, must be given the credit for making narration more flexible by introducing a second actor to the stage. Before him, one actor had impersonated all the rôles in a play. One of his greatest plays is "Prometheus Bound", which tells of Prometheus' punishment for bringing fire to mortals in defiance of Zeus' will. In another play, "Agamemnon", Æschylus tells of the fate of the Greek hero upon his return from the Trojan War to his hostile wife. The struggle of Man with Fate is an important element in all of Æschylus' plays.

Sophocles introduced a third actor to the stage, making possible even more complicated action on the stage. He was a more skillful craftsman. Aristotle says that Sophocles introduced scenery to the stage. It is true that an elementary kind of scenery was used, not for representing realistically the scene of action, but rather for suggesting the kind of place. In any case, Sophocles understood stagecraft, and he knew how to combine the resources of the theater with effective story-telling.

Euripides, the youngest of the three, is commonly regarded as the most modern, because he seems more interested in the human motives of behavior than in the struggle with Fate. Certainly we find more violent, unrestrained action in his plays. It was his lack of restraint that brought down much criticism from many of his contemporaries. Among his most popular plays are "Medea", "Electra", "Iphigenia at Aulis", and "The Trojan Women."

Aristophanes is the only great comic poet of the Greek theater. Unlike the tragic dramatists, he took his material from everyday life. His plays are attacks on the manners and foibles of his day. The most prominent Athenian citizens were lampooned in his plays. In "The Frogs" he attacked Euripides; in "The Clouds" he scored Socrates. His weapon is the most powerful of all — laughter.

Let us repeat one statement. The drama of Greece is the oldest that we know. It has influenced the drama of all countries in the Western World down to the present day. The Romans made but a few minor innovations in the architecture of the Greek theater. Latin drama was either an imitation or a frank reworking of earlier Greek plays. The best work of the Greek dramatists has never been surpassed. Only a few dramatists in later history have attained the same high level which the best of these ancient Greek playwrights achieved in the Theater of Dionysus nearly twenty-five hundred years ago.



*From "The Greek Theatre and Its Drama" by R. C. Fickenger. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Press*

THE THEATER OF DIONYSUS ELEUTHEREUS AT ATHENS AS SEEN FROM THE ACROPOLIS

# ANTIGONE <sup>1</sup>

BY SOPHOCLES

(Translated by SIR RICHARD CLAVERHOUSE JEBB)

## CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE	} daughters of <i>Ædipus</i>
ISMENE	
CREON,	<i>King of Thebes</i>
EURYDICE,	<i>his wife</i>
HÆMON,	<i>his son</i>
TIRESIAS,	<i>the blind prophet</i>
GUARD,	<i>set to watch the corpse of Polynices</i>
FIRST MESSENGER	
SECOND MESSENGER,	<i>from the house</i>
CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS	

SCENE — *Before the Royal Palace at Thebes.*

## ARGUMENT

*Polynices, supported by an Argive army, had marched against Thebes, in order to wrest the sovereignty from his brother Eteocles. The day before that on which the drama opens had been disastrous for the invaders. At six of the city's seven gates, a Theban champion slew his Argive opponent; at the seventh, Eteocles met Polynices, and each fell by the other's hand. The Argive army fled in the night. Creon, now King of Thebes, has just issued an edict, proclaiming that Eteocles shall be interred with public honors, but that the corpse of Polynices shall be left unburied.*

<sup>1</sup>From "The Tragedies of Sophocles", edited by Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

ANTIGONE: Ismene, sister, mine own dear sister, knowest thou what ill there is, of all bequeathed by Ædipus, that Zeus fulfils not for us twain while we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught with ruin, no shame, no dishonor, that I have not seen in thy woes and mine.

And now what new edict is this of which they tell, that our Captain hath just published to all Thebes? Knowest thou aught? Hast thou heard? Or is it hidden from thee that our friends are threatened with the doom of our foes?

ISMENE: No word of friends, Antigone, gladsome or painful, hath come to me, since we two sisters were bereft of brothers twain, killed in one day by a twofold blow; and since in this last night the Argive host hath fled, I know no more, whether my fortune be brighter, or more grievous.

ANTIGONE: I knew it well, and therefore sought to bring thee beyond the gates of the court, that thou mightest hear alone.

ISMENE: What is it? 'Tis plain that thou art brooding on some dark tidings.

ANTIGONE: What, hath not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honored burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he hath laid in the earth, for his honor among the dead below. But the hapless corpse of Polynices — as rumor saith it, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will.

Such, 'tis said, is the edict that the good Creon hath set forth for thee and for me, — yes, for *me*, — and is coming hither to proclaim it clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but, whoso disobeys in aught, his doom is death by stoning before all the folk. Thou knowest it now; and thou wilt soon show whether thou art nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE: Poor sister, — and if things stand thus, what could I help to do or undo?

ANTIGONE: Consider if thou wilt share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE: In what venture? What can be thy meaning?

ANTIGONE: Wilt thou aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE: Thou wouldst bury him, — when 'tis forbidden to Thebes?



ANTIGONE: I will do my part, — and thine, if thou wilt not, — to a brother. False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE: Ah, over-bold! when Creon hath forbidden?

ANTIGONE: Nay, he hath no right to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE: Ah me! think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both eyes with self-blinding hand; <sup>2</sup> then the mother wife, two names in one, with twisted noose did despite unto her life; and last, our two brothers in one day, — each shedding, hapless one, a kinsman's blood, — wrought out with mutual hands their common doom. And now *we* in turn — we two left all alone — think how we shall perish, more miserably than all the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or his powers. Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men; next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein, will hearken to our rulers; for 'tis witless to be over-busy.

ANTIGONE: I will not urge thee, — no, nor if thou yet shouldst have the mind, wouldst thou be welcome as a worker with *me*. Nay, be what thou wilt; but I will bury him: well for me to die in doing that. I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my crime; for I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living: in that world I shall abide forever. But if *thou* wilt, be guilty of dishonoring laws which the gods have stablished in honor.

ISMENE: I do them no dishonor; but to defy the State, — I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE: Such be thy plea: — I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

ISMENE: Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE: Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright.

ISMENE: At least, then, disclose this plan to none, but hide it closely, — and so, too, will I.

ANTIGONE: Oh, denounce it! Thou wilt be far more hateful for thy silence, if thou proclaim not these things to all.

<sup>2</sup> *Cædipus*, father of *Antigone*, had unwittingly slain his father and married his mother. When he discovered what he had done, in a rage of fury and remorse, he blinded himself, while *Jocasta*, his wife and mother, killed herself. The tragedy is told by *Sophocles* in "*Cædipus the King*."