

MAJORS:
CLASSICAL
CIVILIZATION,
GREEK, LATIN,
AND GREEK &
LATIN

**Classical Civilization
Major:**

- 3 LD Classics (all GEs)
- Year of Ancient Greek or Latin (FL)
- 9 UD Classics
- Capstone (research) seminar

MINORS:
CLASSICAL
CIVILIZATION,
LATIN, AND
GREEK

**Classical Civilization
Minor:**

- 3 LD Classics (all GEs)
- 5 UD Classics (20 units)

CONTACT:

Savannah Shapiro | Student Affairs Officer
sshapiro@humnet.ucla.edu | Dodd 212A

What Is (Greek) Tragedy?



“What a tragedy!”



Two Potential Models for Explaining Tragedy

- **Historicizing Model:** Ancient context explains tragedy best
- **Humanist Model:** Ancient tragedy is something about humans that other humans respond to, regardless of original context

Today's Lecture

1] Aspects of Ancient Historical Context

2] Some Humanist Aspects

3] Some aspects of Sophocles' play *Antigone*

The Three Major Tragedians with Extant (i.e., surviving) Works

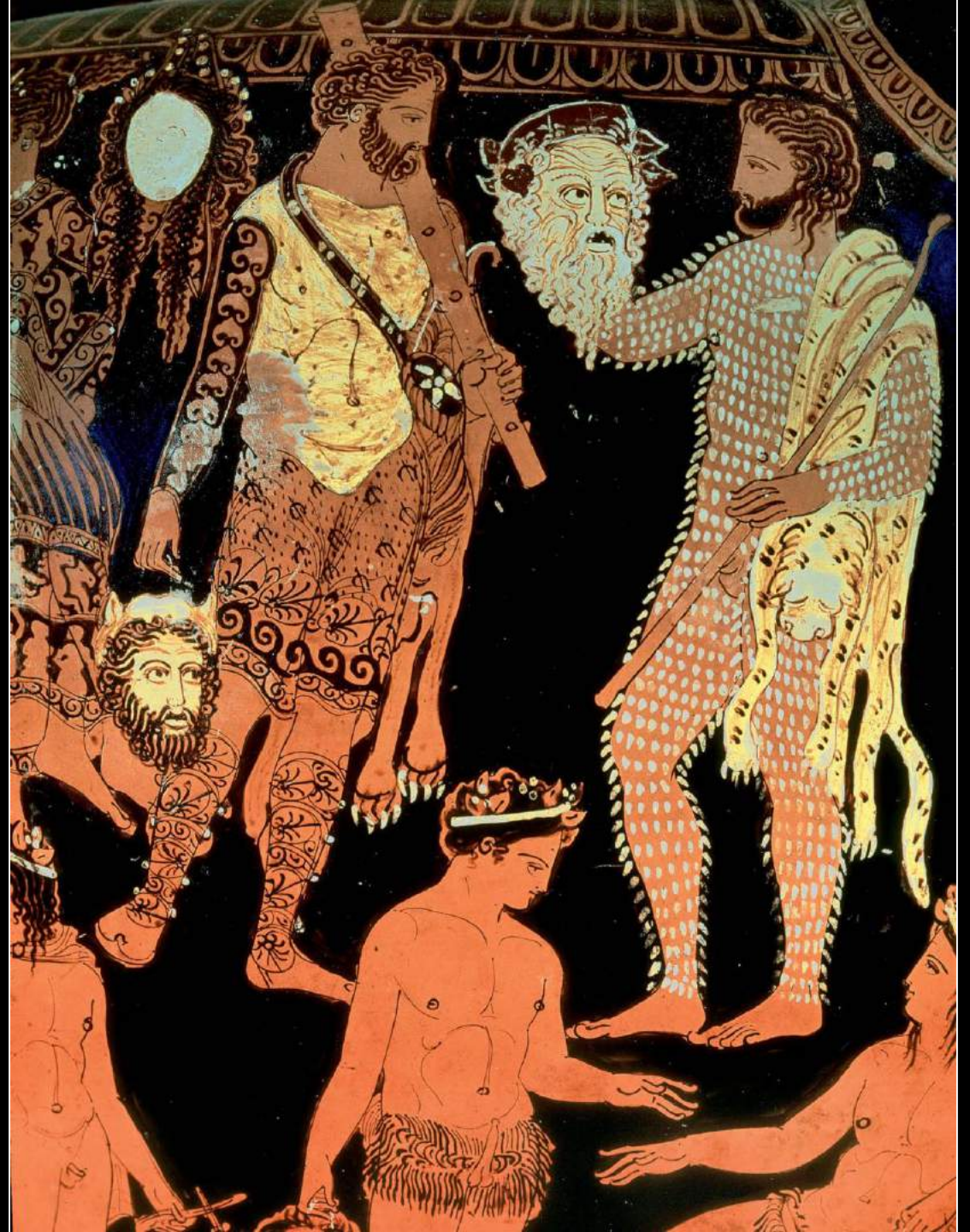
- Aeschylus (ca. 525-456 BCE)
- Sophocles (ca. 497-405 BCE) → → → → → → →
- Euripides (480-406 BCE)



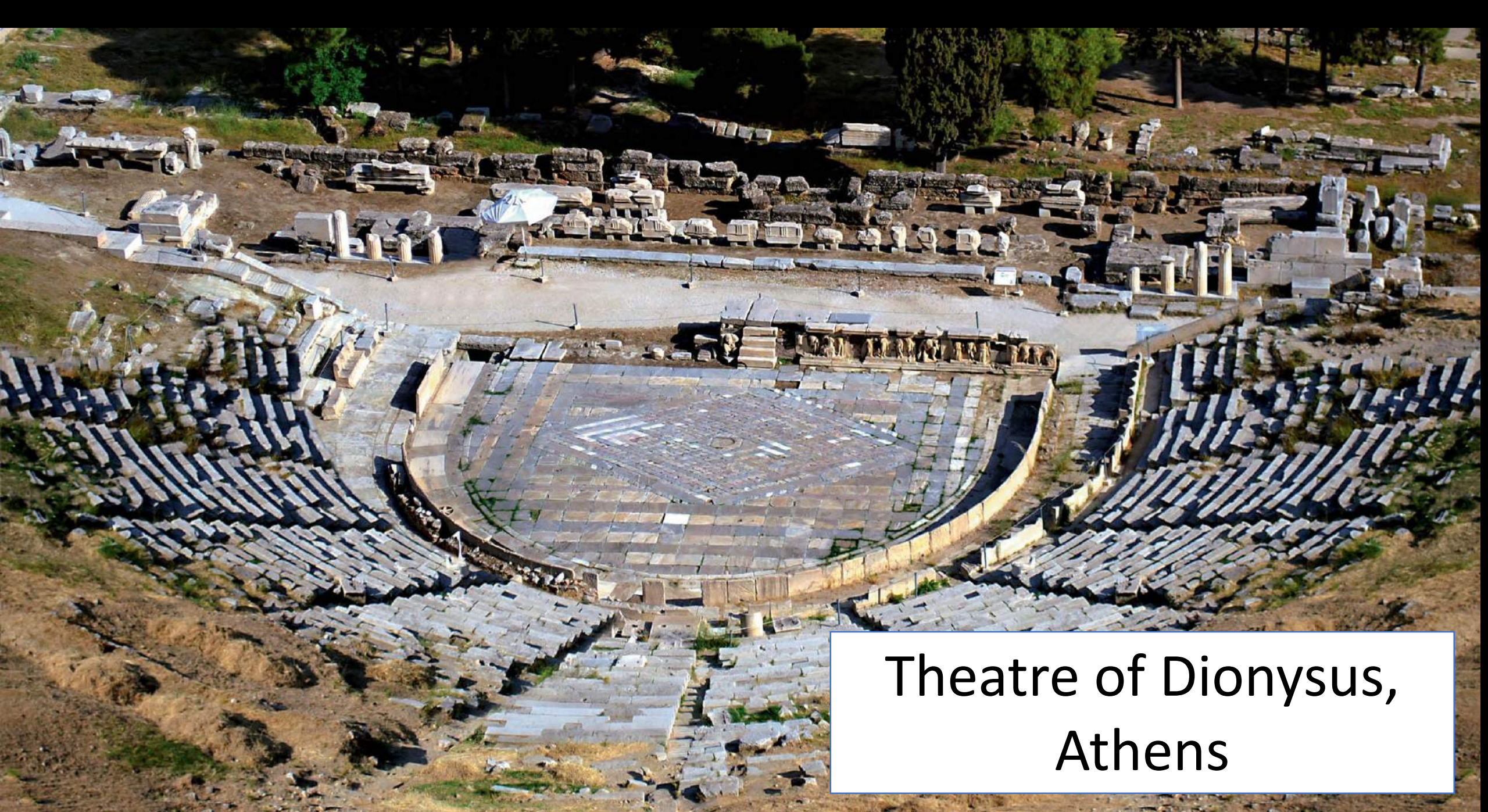
Historicizing: Tragedy as Ritual

- *Dithyramb* – choral song or hymn, often in honor of Dionysus
- “Goat song” (*tragos* + *ôdê*)
- Costumed and Stylized

Detail of red-figure krater depicting actors preparing for a play, c. 410 BC.







Theatre of Dionysus,
Athens

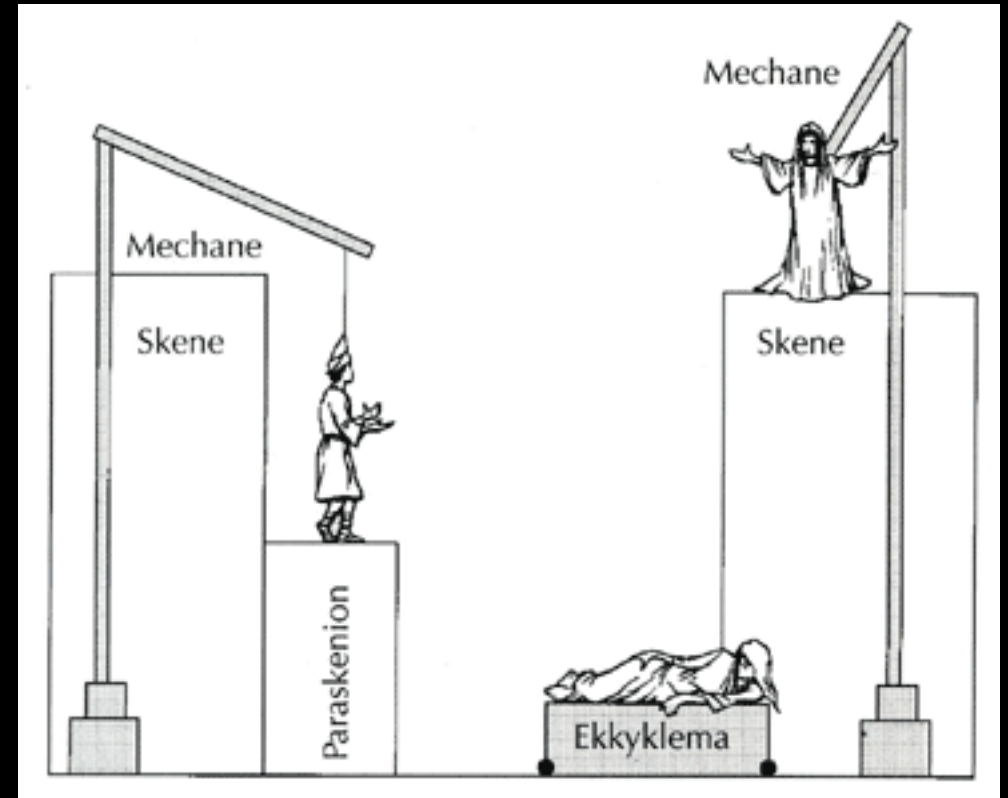


The Dionysia as Spring Break?



A few other historicizing details

- *Skênê*
- *Ekkyklêma*
- *Mêchanê*
- *Chorus*
 - *Strophê*
 - *Antistrophê*
- *Stichomythia*
- March, Dirge, Hymn, Dance (moods of rhythm and music)



A few other historicizing details

- ~~Skênê~~
- ~~Ekkyklêma~~
- ~~Mêchanê~~
-
- ~~Chorus~~
- ~~Strophê~~
- ~~Antistrophê~~
- ~~March, Dirge, Hymn, Dance (styles of rhythm)~~



Humanist Model



Tracie Thoms, 2004 production of
The Antigone Project, New York



Ralph Fiennes as Oedipus, National
Theatre, London, 2009

Humanist Model

“Ancient tragedy is not ancient. It is quintessentially modern.”

Critchley 2020, p. 118

“Tragedy presents a conflictually constituted world defined by ambiguity, duplicity, uncertainty, and unknowability. Tragedy is the experience of transcendental *opacity*.”

Critchley 2020, p. 137.



TRAGEDY, THE GREEKS AND US

Simon
Critchley

“Tragic Consciousness”

Humans and human actions in ancient tragedy are presented

“ ... not as stable realities that can be placed, defined, and judged, but as problems, unanswerable questions, riddles whose double meanings remain enigmatic however often decoded.”

Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The God of Tragic Fiction,” 1981, p. 186

“No-Choice Choices”

- Tragedy as about dilemma and impossible situations
- Example of Antigone:
“Which of the gods can I summon to my side — I, whose piety has made me impious?”
- Example of Agamemnon (in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*):
“He put on the harness of necessity”
(line 217)

Humanist Model?

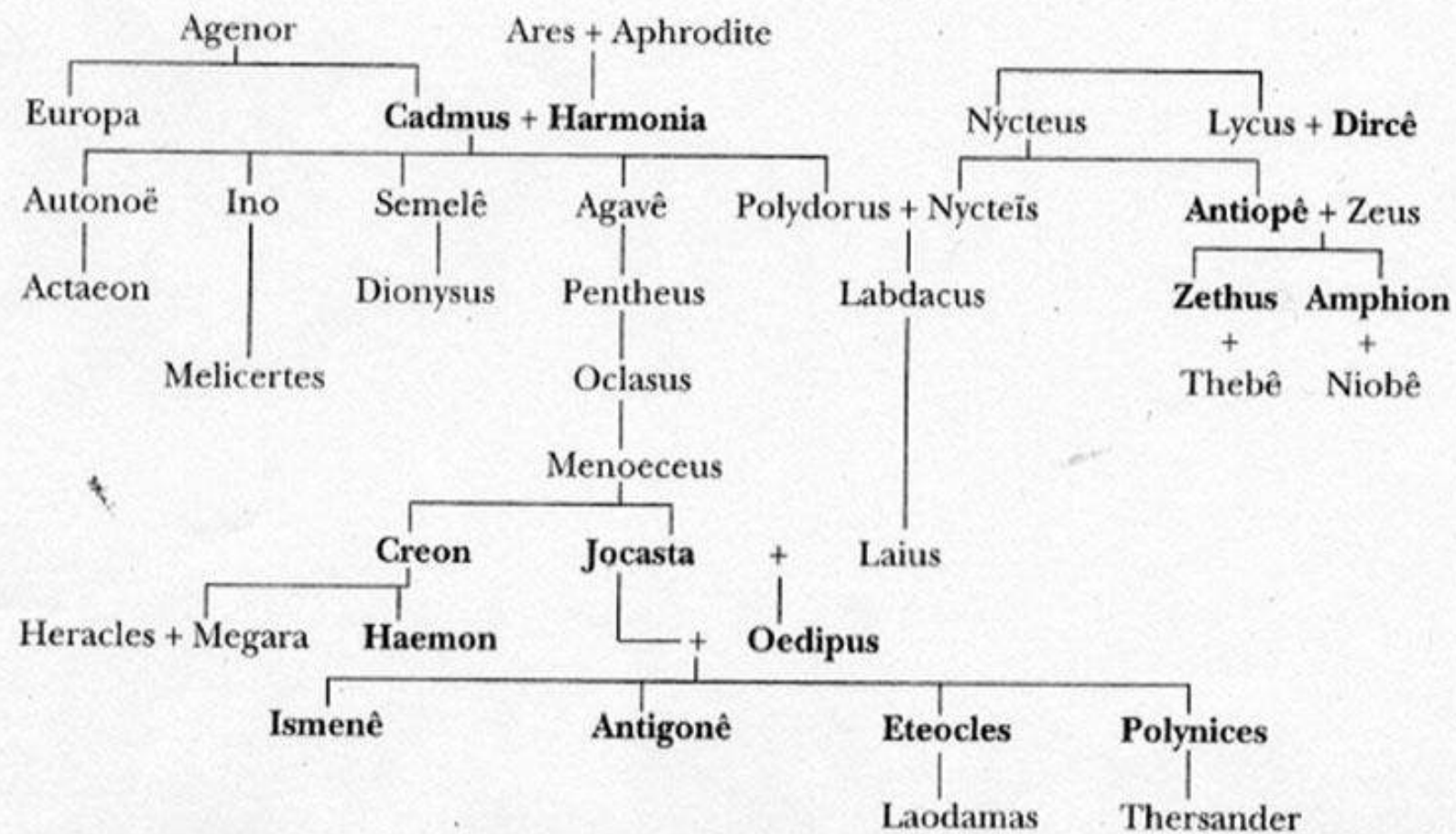
Aristotle on Tragedy in the *Poetics*

“Tragedy ... is an imitation of an action that is serious and complete, and which has some greatness about it. ... It imitates people performing actions and does not rely on narration. **It achieves, through pity and fear, the *katharsis* (“cleansing”) of these sorts of feelings.**” (*Poetics* 1449b21–29)

Hamartia – mistake, error, ~~“tragic flaw”~~

Sophocles' *Antigone* (ca. 441 BCE)





The House of Cadmus

Piety and Defiance

Ismene:

To act in defiance of the citizens (*biai politōn*) my nature does not give me means for that. (77-79)

...

ANT. Had I been a mother / of children,
and my husband dead and rotten,
I would not have taken this weary task
upon me / **against the will of the city**
(*biai politōn*, 904-07)



Antigone and the Impossible Family

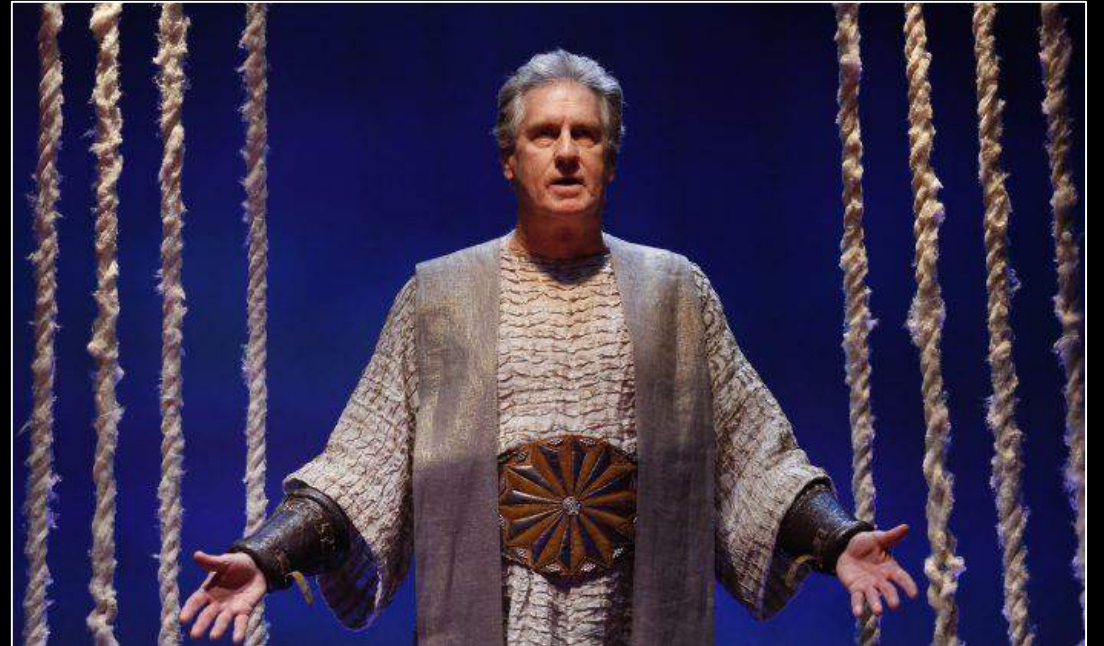
Antigone: I know I am pleasing those I should please most.

Ismene: If you can do it. But you are in love / with the impossible (*amēchanōn erās*, 88-90).

Instability of Power: Creon

Now here I am, holding all authority / and the throne ...

I think that a man, supreme ruler of a whole city,
if he does not reach for the best counsel,
but through some fear, keeps his tongue
under lock and key,
him I judge the worst of any;
I have always judged so; **and anyone thinking
another man more a friend than his own
country,
I rate him nowhere.** (171-83)



“Antigone v. Creon?” Or “Antigone ~ Creon?”

ANTIGONE: “I shall be a criminal – but a religious one.

The time in which I must please the dead
is longer than I must please those of this world.
For there I shall lie forever.” (73-77)

CREON: “Polyneikes, who sought to burn with fire from
top to bottom / his native city, and the gods of his own
people; who sought to taste the blood he shared with us
... I here proclaim to the city that this man / shall no one
honor with a grave” (197-204)

GUARD: “It’s a bad thing if one judges and judges
wrongly.” (323)

Choral “Ode to Man” (really, “human”)

Many are the wonders, the terrors, and none
is more wonderful, more terrible, than man.

(Antigone 333-4)

DEINOS

Antigone's “Transcendental Opacity”?

“Yes, it was not Zeus that made the proclamation; nor did Justice, which lives with those below, enact such laws ... I do not believe your edict had such power to enable one who will someday die to override the ordinances of the gods.” (lines 450ff.)



Antigone's Claim

“If my husband were dead,
I might have had another,
and child from another man,
if I lost the first.

But when father and mother
both were hidden in death
no brother's life would bloom
for me again.”

(lines 909-12)

Some Questions for Reading Tragedy

- What aspects of the historicizing approach help you to understand the *Antigone* or the *Bacchae*?
- In what ways do the plays present their apparent antagonists (Antigone and Creon; Pentheus and Dionysus) as similar to each other?
- What makes these plays so attractive for the humanist approach to reading?

