KARABÜK UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Letters

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Classical Literature

Elit 215

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Classical Literature and Classic Literature Books (to be studied this semester):

Weeks	Classical Literature
1	**Introduction to classical literature**
2	**Introduction to classical literature**
3	**The Odyssey** by Homer
4	**The Odyssey** by Homer
5	**The Aeneid** by Virgil
6	**Metamorphoses** by Ovid
7	**Oedipus Rex** by Sophocles
8	**Midterm Exam**
9	**Antigone** by Sophocles
10	**The Republic** by Plato

11	**The Epic of Gilgamesh** by Anonymous
Week	Classic Literature
12	**Birds** by Aristophanes
13	**Frogs** by Aristophanes
14	Review
15	Final Exam

Introduction

In all of literature, it has often been said, there are no more than a few basic tales, and humanity keeps repeating them through the ages with vigor as if they were new. A philosopher might identify them as human versus human, human versus nature, and human versus self; a writer mindful of character (human or nonhuman) might otherwise identify them as the tales of the conquering hero and the damsel in distress. Either way, they lie wrapped in the literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans who were among the first to relay them. Consider, for example, the conquering hero of Virgil's *Aeneid*, a man born of a mortal prince (Anchises) and a goddess (Aphrodite), who battles other characters, nature, and himself in a poem that has long been regarded as the pre-eminent epic of Rome.

Ancient Greek and Roman literature does more than tell stories, however. It enlightens, informs, and attempts to improve, making itself vital in the evolution of human affairs. "Roman," his dead father counsels Aeneas on a journey through the underworld, "remember by your strength to rule / Earth's peoples—for your arts are to be these: / To pacify, to impose the rule of law, / To spare the conquered, battle down the proud" (*Aeneid*, 6.1151-54). With these lines, Virgil clarifies for his ancient audience Rome's place in the collection of peoples living on the rim of the Mediterranean Sea, from the southern coast of Europe to the Middle East, to the northern coast of Africa.

Rome's was a world that boasted cultures older than that of the Romans, and of more rarefied accomplishment. In literature, Greece had already forged genres that did more than tell stories. As shown by the lines from the *Aeneid*, it was a primary function of literature in this Greco-Roman world to offer a significant comment on the relationship between an individual or community and the wider realm of existence, and in a way that retained value over time. Out of this conception came the birth of the literary classic.

The impulse that literature should serve such a purpose existed from the beginning of Greek literature through the generation of its Roman counterpart. The first Greek works were epics, narrative poems about the deeds of gods, heroes, and men, including Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (which emphasized heroic themes) and Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* (which emphasized the transmission of knowledge). Composed in the eighth and possibly the seventh century BCE, the four epics are written incarnations of rich oral traditions perpetuated in Greece. This was the Archaic Age, when society consisted of separate communities of Greeks, or *Hellenes* as they had always called themselves. Despite the prevalence of these separate communities, the four epics convey a sense of shared norms and beliefs, as well as a drive toward a common culture. The very circulation of the poems reflected and promoted this drive, as did the origin in the eighth century BCE of such pan-Hellenic institutions as the Olympic games and the Oracle of Delphi.

Meanwhile, true to the richness that literature afforded from the start, the epics treated an emerging, somewhat contrary phenomenon among the peoples of ancient Greece: the growth of their local communities into independent city-states, along with a preoccupation with a hero's relationship to his particular city-state.

Archaic Greek poetry conveyed the harsh beauty of battle and the gentler beauty of family loyalties. Other conceptions of beauty surfaced in antiquity as well:

> **Fragment 31** (originally numbered 16)
> Some say an army on horseback,
> some say on foot, and some say ships
> are the most beautiful things
> On this black earth,
> but I say
> It is whatever you love.

These lines are by Sappho, a female Greek poet of the seventh century BCE who wrote not *epic* but *lyric* verse. Composed in various meters and performed to the accompaniment of a dancing chorus, lyric broadened the range of themes, perspectives, and styles in written verse.

The meters of lyric became part of tragic drama in fifth-century BCE Athens, figuring in the songs of the chorus. By the end of the fifth century BCE, popular opinion had decided on the three greatest tragedy writers: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Seven of their plays are featured in this volume (Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*; Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*; and Euripides' *Medea*). In antiquity, as today, these seven were among the tragic "classics"; they not only entertained but also commented in enduring ways on a character's or community's relationship to wider existence. Meanwhile, the tragedies provided some insights into the beliefs and practices of the ancient Greeks. How many more insights could have been gleaned from the rest of their plays had a greater number survived? The seven featured here are but a fraction of the total output of these three dramatists. Altogether they wrote close to 300 plays, roughly 30 of which remain in existence today.

Prose is a younger form of writing than epic or lyric verse. The first great prose genre for the Greeks is historiography, which emerged in the fifth century BCE in Athens through the work of Herodotus. Much like epic, Herodotus's *Histories* engaged in cultural education. But his narrative, unlike epic, showed concern for verifying and sifting through contradictory interpretations of information. Herodotus took as his subject the Greco-Persian Wars of 490 and 480 BCE, and prior events that had contributed to them. Using prose, he adapted Homer's poetic scheme of a monumental narrative of pan-Hellenic heroism to rational inquiry. It was a type of inquiry inherited from the vibrant intellectual center of Miletus in Asia Minor.

For the fifth-century BCE historian Thucydides, the Trojan and Persian Wars paled in importance next to the *Peloponnesian War*, a domestic struggle between Sparta and Athens that consumed all of Greece for decades. At one point in his history, Thucydides uses the third-person, referring to himself as "he" to create an impression of objective reporting, a method adopted in the next century by Xenophon, whose *Persian Expedition* recounts his own participation in an ill-fated military campaign.

By the fifth century BCE, Homeric epic had emerged in written form as a pan-Greek cultural text full of basic principles on how life ought to be lived—what courage means, what constitutes a sound relationship to the gods, and so forth. Socratic philosophy, as it unfolds in the writings of Plato in the fourth century BCE, challenges this view, arguing that familiarity with poetic literature does not make one wise. Plato developed the genre of philosophical dialogue, depicting Socrates as he debates and develops ideas among a group of speakers who are sometimes hostile, sometimes supportive. Wisdom, argues the Socrates of Plato's *Apology*, can be pursued only through constant self-examination and critical inquiry into the nature of virtue. In his dialogue *The Republic*, Plato has Socrates banish the poets from the ideal state he conceives, on the grounds that poetry falsifies by its very nature while poets themselves are deeply ignorant of their subject matter. It follows that a state's poets—Homer included—should not be trusted to shape the minds of the people. The only exception, according to Plato's dialogue, is for poets who sing praises of the state. It is the philosophers, the *Republic* argues, who should rule a state, since they devote their lives to knowledge of truth.

In Plato's view, one of the most destructive influences on the public's impression of Socrates was Aristophanes (whose career spanned the fifth to the fourth century BCE). Aristophanes leaves to posterity the only surviving works of Old Comedy, including the *Clouds*, a play that typecasts Socrates as a highly eccentric inquirer after the secrets of the natural world and a thinker with dangerous ideas who absurdly worships

clouds as deities. The power of literature to shape public opinion is at full flourish in this Old Comedy. It furthermore shows that while the genre featured outlandish characters and crude sexuality, it also lampooned prominent men and addressed real-life issues of the day. Female characters appear in Old Comedy too. Among the surviving plays of Aristophanes, the genre's foremost poet-playwright, is *Lysistrata*, a comedy featuring women who take a highly aggressive stance in political affairs. The plot of this imaginative Old Comedy is nothing less than a hilariously effective scheme, planned and executed by the women of Athens and Sparta, to end the Peloponnesian War. Their behavior is so atypical of real-life women at the time that the characters must have seemed utterly fantastical to ancient audiences.

From the late fifth century BCE, the themes and style of comedy changed, finally ushering in another distinct form, New Comedy (late fourth to mid-third century BCE). Private and family matters take precedence in New Comedy, along with both love, which invariably triumphs, and problems born of prejudice and misunderstanding. Among the most notable of the New Comedy playwrights was Menander, whose Greek plots were adapted for Roman audiences by Plautus and by Terence (third and second centuries BCE).

Plautus and Terence provide our earliest complete works in Latin (the language of Rome) that survive today. Typically at issue in a Plautus play is a youth's desire for a young woman, blocked at first by social custom or, as in *The Braggart Soldier*, by a rival. Social barriers are acknowledged in the course of these plays, but not challenged. The later comedies of Terence go further, using the same brand of plot to dwell on ethical questions (in *The Brothers*, the right to marry a partner of one's own choosing) and on subtle issues of one's moral integrity.

In the first century BCE, the poet Catullus strove to adapt lyric poetry, introduced by the Greeks, into a Latin form. In his *Carmina*, Catullus gives love and its emotional consequences a new centrality for Rome, also refashioning the type of language used in esteemed verse. Part of a revolutionary movement of Roman poets at the time, Catullus became a founding voice of the genre known as Latin lyric.

Like Catullus, Lucretius built on the Greek legacy. Only Lucretius used the language of epic verse to conceive his masterpiece—*On the Nature of the Universe* (otherwise known as *On the Nature of Things*). The poem imparts the ideas of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, teaching that the highest good is the absence of pain. Aggravating emotions, even those thought pleasurable or desirable, such as passionate love or political ambition, are to be avoided. Apparently Lucretius inherited from Epicurus, and Plato before him, the aversion of "truth-seeking philosophy" to what was regarded as falsifying, emotionally manipulative poetry. Yet Lucretius uses poetic form to relay Epicurean ideas, among them, a scientific explanation of the atoms of existence. Conveying philosophy in verse, the work appears to be a paradox attempting to resolve itself.

In the 50s BCE, the decade of Catullus and Lucretius, various prose genres also found champions in Rome. In the tradition of Plato, Cicero composed his own *Republic*, making real-life Romans, rather than Socrates, the speakers in his dialogue. As a remedy for an ailing state, Cicero prescribes not an imaginary ideal, as Plato does, but a return to an earlier, "better" age of Roman government. In historical writing, Julius Caesar spent the 50s BCE in Gaul, governing the province for Rome and waging war against neighboring peoples. Keen to keep his name and version of events in public view while away from Rome, he wrote *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, annual reports in which he refers to himself in the third person, adopting an air of objectivity, as others before him had. Like most Roman political and social climbers, Caesar craved not only the material riches but also the public honors that normally came with military conquest. He showed a common lust for status that surfaced in politically ambitious Romans and that Lucretius had already exposed and condemned in *On the Nature of the Universe*. After Caesar's victories in Gaul, this lust would thrust Rome into bloody civil war.

Virgil and Horace, influenced by Lucretius, used poetry to challenge the drive for wealth, property, and public honors. Virgil set his first published volume, the *Eclogues* (c. 40 BCE), in a pastoral landscape representative of communities of rural Italy that were first endangered, then encroached upon by harsh political realities. Horace, like Catullus before him, sought to revive Greek lyric in the Latin language. To this end, Horace adapted different styles to create poetry for a Rome that was no longer beset by civil strife and that, despite any appearances to the contrary, was no longer a republic. The resulting *Odes* at times addressed political subjects, but more often Horace blended public and private matters in poems that could boast a rich variety of themes.

Introduction

Horace wrote during the formative years of a new regime, when Rome was under the rule of its first emperor, the grandnephew of and successor to Julius Caesar—Augustus (63 BCE–14 CE). Augustus, who saw the advantages of sponsoring literary works to help define his political achievements, built two libraries near his home for Greek and Latin literature, respectively. Supportive in return, Virgil and Horace produced poems that celebrated the achievements of the emerging Augustan regime (the end of civil strife, domestic peace, and military conquest). But these verses were not unqualified songs of praise, for they at the same time disclosed an anxiety over the future.

The various genres flourished in imperial Rome. In poetry, love elegy soared in the hands of Propertius and Tibullus, then expired after Ovid created verse on erotic love (see *Roman Elegy* and *Art of Love*). Along with Virgil, Ovid also shaped Roman verse by creating grand epic poetry. A worthy parallel to Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* treats the lofty story of a survivor of the Trojan War—only from the other side of the conflict, the Trojan camp. Virgil takes as his starting point the well-established belief that Aeneas is an ancestor of Augustus's own clan, making the poem relevant to a picture of Roman history as an evolution that culminates in the reign of Augustus. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is an epic with no less a theme than the history of the universe, envisioned as a clever, sometimes frightening pageant of transformation from the creation of the world down to where all classical stories cannot but help but go—the present-day of Augustan Rome.

The next century saw the growth of satire, which the Romans, not the Greeks, developed into a separate genre (according to the ancient teacher Quintilian). Sometimes good-humored, sometimes biting, Roman satire generally used verse to expose the follies of people and their pursuits. The earliest Roman to create satire (Gaius Lucilius) wrote in the second century BCE. Now, in the second century CE, Juvenal honed the genre. His *Satires*, composed in the same meter as epic poetry (dactylic hexameter), became a type of protest literature centered on public and private morality. Adopting the persona of an outraged citizen, his speaker lambasted perceived social evils, from corruption among the elite members of Roman society, to the flawed wives of Rome, to its ailing system of patron-client relationships.

Prose genres thrived in imperial Rome too. Taking up historiography were Livy and Tacitus. Written in rich, flowing style, *From the Founding of the City* is a mammoth history of Rome, from its mythic origins to Livy's own early first century CE. Tacitus followed in the second century with *Annals of Imperial Rome*, an account of the first five emperors written in a style bristling with short barbed comments that reveal terrible truths, lifting the fog of lies and fears that prevailed under earlier rulers. Between Livy and Tacitus came Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who had participated in his people's revolt from Roman rule under the emperor Nero. A minority voice that manages to make itself heard, Josephus recounts the history of the revolt from a standpoint sympathetic to the Jews.

An offshoot of historical writing, biographical writing made notable progress in the second century. Plutarch, a Greek under Roman rule, helped forge a Greco-Roman synthesis by pairing the lives of illustrious men, one Greek and one Roman, and relaying their deeds in ways that reveal the nature or character of a man behind his actions. Suetonius, a secretary on the imperial staff, profiled the first dozen Caesars of Rome, sharing sordid details of their private lives, which gave readers a voyeuristic sense of peering into an otherwise hidden realm of Roman society. A few hundred years later, still under Roman rule, Augustine wrote an autobiographical work, his *Confessions*. Composed in the fifth century, well after Christianity had been adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire, *Confessions* is a first-person account of Augstine's spiritual development. Departing from the traditional emphasis on public life with its achievements and failures, *Confessions* links spiritual self-scrutiny to a sensitivity to psychological issues that had surfaced earlier, in the biographies of Plutarch and Suetonius.

Augustine's spiritual search was a natural successor to a moral introspection conducted for centuries in Rome. Already in the 60s CE Seneca had written a series of essays masquerading as *Moral Letters* to a friend on a wide range of topics, from false friendship, to treatment of slaves, to virtue. The use of literature as a vehicle for moral, spiritual, and philosophical growth would continue beyond Augustine in the fourth century to Boethius in the sixth century, just after Roman rule had collapsed in the West. Thrown into prison by the Goths and then executed, Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, distinguishing himself as the last major voice in the West to write philosophy in Latin from the perspective of someone schooled in Greek.

A latecomer, the novel, the most popular form in modern Western literature, did not fit easily into the mix of ancient genres. The form was either scorned or ignored by critics in antiquity, yet, judging by the numerous fragments found since, novels seem to have been enormously popular then too. While fragments are plentiful, only a few ancient tales of lengthy prose fiction still exist today. In Latin, the two main texts are Petronius's *Satyricon* (first century CE) and Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (second century CE): the first exists only in fragments; the second survives complete. In Greek, five novels survive complete, culminating with *An Ethiopian Story* by Heliodorus (fourth century CE). Each of the texts named here shows a fascination with life on the margins of social existence. Apparently even in antiquity, the novel fixed on the lives of commoners and/or outsiders. The *Satyricon* follows some ne'er-do-wells comically in search of their next dinner, meanwhile revealing much about social customs of the era, especially when an ex-slave, whose background drives him to absurd extravagances, hosts a lavish dinner party. In seriocomic fashion, *The Golden Ass* transforms a rather dim, arrogant man into a beast of burden for a period of life akin to the worst existence of a slave. Finally, An *Ethiopian Story* treats love, ethnic, and other relations in a tale that reaches beyond the frontier of Greek culture to bridge distant societies, as Greco-Roman literature had already shown itself uniquely capable of doing.

Chronology of Relevant Events

Classical Literature and Its Times

DAWN OF THE CLASSICAL WORLD: FROM THE BRONZE AGE TO THE DARK AGE

While it is difficult to pinpoint the beginnings of Greek or Roman civilization, many historians regard the Bronze Age, an era when humans used bronze tools and weapons, as the approximate starting date for both. During this period, Mycenaean-Minoan culture dominated the region that would become Greece. Legend has it that the Mycenaean people were united under a single king, Agamemnon, although there is no historical evidence for his existence. This same king, it is said, served as the model for Agamemnon in Homer's Iliad, an epic poem about Mycenae's destruction of the city of Ilium (also known as Troy). By 1100 BCE, Mycenaean civilization had collapsed, which led to three centuries of economic, political, and artistic decline among the Greek-speakers. Early in this period, around 1050 BCE, some of the Greek-speaking mainlanders began to migrate to the Aegean Islands and the coast of Asia Minor, occupying an area later known as Ionia. This expansion would lead to a gradual resurgence of Greek culture, with the help of the new Iron Age, which ushered in sturdier tools and weapons. Artistically, Greece entered the first of five eras based on changing pottery styles: the proto-Geometric Period (1050–875 BCE). Turning to Roman culture, its origins are more nebulous than Greek beginnings. A Bronze Age society developed in west-central Italy in the Apennine region, and archaeological evidence attests to one or more villages on the hills of Rome from 1000 BCE. Also Rome is known to have arisen on the fringes of the nearby Etruscan civilization, with which the Romans would later have to contend for independence and influence.

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 7*
c. 3000–1400 BCE	Bronze Age: Minoan civilization flourishes on island of Crete	
c. 1600–1100 BCE	Mycenaean Period: Ancient Greek city of Mycenae flourishes as the most powerful civilization on the Peloponnesian peninsula; Greeks of this period are sometimes called "Achaeans"	

Historical Events		Related Literary Works in *WLAUT 8*
c. 1500 BCE	Shaft graves, cut into rock to a depth of several meters, are built in Mycenae	
c. 1500–1200 BCE	Bronze Age Apennine culture exists in western central Italy; Apennine economy progresses from semi-nomadic pastoralism, to stock-raising, to settled agriculture	
c. 1400 BCE	Mycenaeans come into contact with Minoan culture, take over palace settlements on Crete	
c. 1300 BCE	Earliest Celtic culture emerges on Upper Danube River	
1100s BCE	Destruction of Mycenaean palaces in Greece, perhaps as a result of Dorian invasions, the Dorians being a Greek-speaking group from the north	
1184 BCE	Traditional date given by ancient scholars for destruction of Troy VIIa (Ilium), often considered the model for Homer's Troy	
c. 1150–750 BCE	Dark Age: The Mycenaean world collapses, leading to a period of decline for Greek civilization; poverty is widespread and writing is lost	
1050 BCE	Greeks renew contact with Cyprus	
1050–950 BCE	Greeks migrate to islands of the eastern Aegean Sea and west coast of Asia Minor, an area later known as Ionia	
c. 1000 BCE	Settlements are built on Roman hills	
950 BCE	Most of the weapons and tools in Greece are made of iron	
c. 900–600 BCE	Iron culture in western central Italy	

ANCIENT GREECE: FROM THE GEOMETRIC TO THE ARCHAIC PERIOD

In the eighth century BCE, Greece experienced an important cultural and political resurgence often called the Greek Renaissance. Historians attribute this resurgence to various causes: colonial expeditions throughout the Aegean Sea, contact with Near Eastern civilizations, adaptation of the Phoenician alphabet, and the invention of writing, which spread all over the Greek world and led to the transcription of Homer's and Hesiod's epic poems. Meanwhile, styles of Greek pottery passed through three more eras—the Geometric (875–750 BCE), Orientalizing (720–620 BCE), and Archaic (750–480 BCE) periods. In politics, the polis—a city-state with its own law code, army, and system of government—came to dominate the Greek heartland. Altogether there were several hundred poleis in Greece and its colonies. Though the systems of government varied, they generally included an assembly, a council and magistrates, and, aside from obeying the laws, their citizens had to perform military service. During the Archaic Period, control of the polis was commonly seized by a tyrant, an aristocrat who ruled with the aid of his cronies. While some tyrants—such as Peisistratos in Athens—provided a stabile regime that promoted growth, others were oppressive. Sixth-century BCE Athens saw the introduction of reforms (by Cleisthenes) that weakened the aristocracy and made government more representative. In the fifth century BCE, the Greek states clashed with an outside enemy—the Persian Empire. Two separate Persian expeditions were launched against Greece, and both ultimately met with defeat.

c. 900–725 BCE	Geometric Period: Named for the prevalence of geometric motifs on painted pottery, this era witnesses rise of the polis—or city-state—in Greece, as well as closer contact between Greek world and Near Eastern countries of Phoenicia and Syria	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
c. 800 BCE	Earliest evidence of writing in Greece; beginning of a resurgence of cultural activity (called the Greek Renaissance)	
c. 750–650 BCE	Greek alphabet is invented, spreads throughout Greek world; Homer and Hesiod compose Western world's first-known epic poems; Greek colonies are established in southern Italy and Sicily	*Iliad* by Homer; *Odyssey* by Homer; *Theogony* by Hesiod
c. 750–479 BCE	Archaic Period spans the era of Greek tyrannies; elimination of the Persian threat by Greeks brings greater stability and formality to the Greek world	
c. 744–612 BCE	Height of Assyrian Empire in the East	
c. 735–715 BCE	First Messenian War between Messenia and Sparta; Sparta wins	
c. 730 BCE	Colonization movement begins in Black Sea area	
c. 725–630 BCE	"Orientalizing" Period in Greek art: Near Eastern and Eastern motifs replace geometric designs	
c. 700 BCE	Introduction of hoplite warfare—the name refers to the equipment of the hoplites (infantrymen), including a breastplate, helmet, shield, and spear	
c. 700–600 BCE	Period in which Lycurgus is said to have established military and political institutions in Sparta; dawn of Greek lyric poetry— individual poets first distinguish themselves	Poems by Sappho
c. 680–620 BCE	Pheidon at Argos and Cypselus at Corinth become first to rule Greek states as tyrannies	
c. 669 BCE	Argives defeat Spartans at Hysiai	
c. 660 BCE	Second Messenian War ends with Spartans crushing revolt	
c. 657–570 BCE	Most Greek states ruled by tyrants	
c. 650 BCE	Formation of the Peloponnesian League, a network of alliances of Greek states under Sparta's leadership; Greeks found colonies on Iberian peninsula	
621–620 BCE	Dracon introduces new laws in Athens, becomes the first to put Athenian laws in writing; death is the penalty for most offenses, large or small	
595–586 BCE	First sacred war for control of Delphi	
594–593 BCE	Solon introduces economic and social reforms in Athens, repeals all of Dracon's laws except for those dealing with murder	
587 BCE	King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captures Jerusalem; Jewish Diaspora begins	
585 BCE	Greek philosopher and mathematician Thales of Miletus predicts eclipse of sun	
560–510 BCE	Tyranny of Peisistratos and his sons at Athens, which results in a lengthy period of stability for Athens and an increase in military power	
c. 550 BCE	Cyrus founds Persian Empire, which emerges as a threat to Greece	
546–545 BCE	Persians conquer Ionian Greeks	
543 BCE	First tragedy is performed at the City Dionysia in Athens	
c. 530 BCE	Greek philosopher Pythagoras settles in southern Italy, promotes reincarnation of souls and vegetarianism	
c. 525 BCE	Persians invade Egypt, annex neighboring African territories, including Ethiopia	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAT 8*
522–486 BCE	Reign of Darius I, king of Persia	
520–490 BCE	Reign of Cleomenes of Sparta	
c. 514 BCE	Darius of Persia conquers Thrace	
508 BCE	Cleisthenes introduces constitutional reforms in Athens, weakening the power of the aristocratic kin groups	
501–500 BCE	Institution of board of ten generals, or strategoi, at Athens as military commanders	
499–493 BCE	Ionian cities revolt against Persia	
490 BCE	First Persian expedition into Greece; Greeks defeat Persians at Marathon	
487 BCE	Athenian magistrates are henceforth chosen by lot; state provision of comedies at City Dionysia begins	
486 BCE	Death of Darius of Persia, accession of Xerxes	
482 BCE	Construction of Athenian fleet	
480–479 BCE	Xerxes launches Persian invasion of Greece, sacks city of Athens; Greeks defeat Persians at both Salamis and Plataea	
478–477 BCE	Formation of the Delian League; Athens leads alliance of Greek states against Persia	
c. 454 BCE	Treasury of Delian League is moved from the island of Delos to Athens, signifying development of the league into an Athenian Empire	

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD
FROM THE ATHENIAN GOLDEN AGE TO THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

In the wake of the second Persian retreat, many Greek states formed a confederacy under the leadership of Athens to protect themselves from further attacks. Headed by the statesman and general Pericles, Athens reigned as the dominant political, social, and artistic power, incurring the resentment of other city-states, especially Sparta and Corinth. The internal friction escalated, culminating in the Peloponnesian Wars. While the First Peloponnesian War concluded with a pact that called for 30 years of peace, only 15 years later relations between Athens and Sparta deteriorated so severely that the Second Peloponnesian War broke out. Ultimately Athens lost much of its power and empire in the struggle, surrendering to Sparta in 404 BCE. During the next century, the northern kingdom of Macedon emerged as a powerful force. Shrewdly exploiting the rivalries among the Greek city-states, King Philip II of Macedon gained control over mainland Greece. His son, Alexander the Great, further extended the borders of the Macedonian Empire into Persia, Egypt, and India before his sudden death. Meanwhile, artists and writers reached Greek cultural heights in what has since become known as the Classical Period, which stretched from the Greek defeat of the Persians (480–479 BCE) to Alexander's demise (323 BCE).

c. 488 BCE	Magistrate is given duty of providing comedy performances each year at City Dinoysia, annual festival in Athens to honor Dionysus, god of wine, theater, and impersonation	
479–431 BCE	Athenian Golden Age: Athens becomes increasingly populous and prosperous, emerging as dominant Greek city-state; genre of tragedy undergoes major developments	*Oresteia* by Aeschylus; *The Theban Plays* by Sophocles; *Medea* by Euripides

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
c. 467 BCE	The Athenian statesman and soldier Cimon defeats Persians at Eurymedon	
464 BCE	Sparta suffers an earthquake; brief Messenian revolt for independence from Sparta	
462–461 BCE	The Athenian statesman Ephialtes introduces democratic reforms, limiting power of the Areopagus, the aristocratic governing council	
460s–429 BCE	The statesman and general Pericles dominates politics in Athens; among other reforms, Pericles introduces payment for Athenian jurors	
460–446 BCE	First Peloponnesian War: Athens fights Corinth and Sparta; Thirty Years' Peace declared at war's end	
459–456 BCE	Athenian expedition into Egypt to aid in rebellion against Persians; a Persian force expels Athenians	
451 BCE	Athenian citizenship law forbids marriages between citizens and foreigners and does not recognize children of such relationships	
447–429 BCE	Pericles initiates extensive building program in Athens; construction of the Parthenon, a temple dedicated to Athena	
446–425 BCE	Tenuous peace between Sparta and Athens	
c. 440–430 BCE	Socrates raises provocative questions about nature and morality; other Greek philosophers gain notoriety, such as Plato, Democritus, Hippocrates, and Protagoras	
430–425 BCE	Herodotus becomes first Western writer to investigate past events (Persian Wars) and try to explain them rationally	*The Histories* by Herodotus
430–400 BCE	Sparta beats Athens in Second Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE); Thucydides writes an account of the conflict	*The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides
429 BCE	Pericles dies	
425 BCE	Initial performance of Aristophanes' Acharnians, the earliest Greek comedy to survive complete	
423	Tension between poetry and philosophy in Athens—comic poet Aristophanes ridicules Socrates, depicts philosophy as dangerous force	*Clouds* by Aristophanes
421 BCE	Peace of Nicias between Athens and Sparta achieves temporary truce in Peloponnesian War	
415–413 BCE	Athens embarks on ill-fated military expedition against Sicily	
413 BCE	Hostilities between Athens and Sparta resume	
412–411 BCE	Sparta enters into treaties with Persia	*Lysistrata* by Aristophanes
411 BCE	Coup of 400 at Athens	
405 BCE	Battle of Aegospotami: Spartans destroy Athenian fleet in a final naval defeat	
405–367 BCE	Dionysius I reigns as tyrant in Syracuse	
404 BCE	Athens, much of its power and empire lost, surrenders to Sparta after a siege	
404–403 BCE	Spartan-supported oligarchy, known as the Thirty Tyrants, rules Athens	
403 BCE	Restoration of democracy at Athens	
401–399 BCE	Cyrus the Younger and the Ten Thousand (Greek mercenary soldiers) lead an ill-fated expedition against the Persian king Artaxerxes II	*The Persian Expedition* by Xenophon

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAT 8*
late 300s–mid-200s BCE	New Comedy flourishes; Menander is recognized as its premiere playwright	
399 BCE	Trial and execution of Socrates, who commits suicide by drinking hemlock	*Apology* by Plato
395–386 BCE	Corinthian War: Persia, allied with Athens and other Greek states, fights Sparta and wins control over Greek Anatolia via the King's Peace	
387 BCE	Plato founds the Academy, develops philosophy of Platonism, theorizing that substantive reality is merely a reflection of a higher truth	*Republic* by Plato
387/386 BCE	Peace of Antalcidas ends Greek-Persian hostilities in Asia Minor and nearby islands	
386 BCE	Spartan hegemony in Greece	
382–379 BCE	Sparta seizes Thebes, then loses it in the popular uprising of 379 BCE	
378–377 BCE	Athens founds a second league of city-states, the Second Athenian Confederacy	
371 BCE	Battle of Leuctra: Thebes defeats Sparta, crushing its hopes for lasting power	
370 BCE	Assassination of Jason, tyrant of Pherae in Thessaly	
362 BCE	Battle of Mantinea: Thebes defeats Sparta but the Theban army weakens in the process	
359 BCE	Philip II becomes king of Macedon	
357–355 BCE	Athenian naval alliance dissolves because of internal conflicts	
356 BCE	Sacred War erupts between Macedonians and Phocians	
350 BCE	Oratory flourishes; Aristotle publishes Rhetoric, on theory, audience's state of mind, and style and metaphor in art of spoken argument	
348 BCE	Philip II captures Olynthos	
347–322 BCE	Political instability and flux within the Greek world challenges the survival of the polis, or city-state	*Politics* by Aristotle
346 BCE	Peace of Philocrates between Macedon and Athens	
338 BCE	Philip II of Macedon defeats Thebans and Athenians at Chaironeia, comes to dominate mainland Greek states	
337 BCE	Foundation of League of Corinth, which declares war on Persians	
336 BCE	Philip II is murdered; accession of Philip's son Alexander the Great	
335 BCE	Aristotle founds the Lyceum	
334–332 BCE	Alexander the Great crosses into Asia, defeats Persian king Darius III, occupies Phoenicia, Palestine, and Egypt	
331 BCE	Alexander defeats Persians again; city of Alexandria is founded in Egypt; Persia and Egypt pay tribute to Macedon	
330 BCE	Darius III is murdered; Alexander the Great claims right to rule Persian Empire; the Greek orator Demosthenes delivers his foremost speech, defends himself as a champion of Athenian independence	*On the Crown* by Demosthenes
323 BCE	Alexander the Great dies suddenly in Babylon	

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD
FROM THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER TO THE ROMAN CONQUEST

In the wake of Alexander the Great's unexpected demise, his heirs and generals tried separately to seize as much of his far-flung empire as possible. Ultimately three stable kingdoms emerged: the realms of Macedon, Egypt, and Syria, ruled respectively by the Antigonid, Ptolemy, and Seleucid dynasties. The Atigonids ruled Macedon for more than a century (c. 277–168 BCE), while the other two dynasties endured far longer. The Ptolemies, themselves of Macedonian Greek descent, ruled Egypt until its conquest by Rome (323–30 BCE). The Seleucids, also a Macedonian Greek dynasty, gained control of Syria in stages (beginning in 301 BCE), then lost it when Syria became a province of Rome in 64 BCE. The result of all this domination was a cultural blending, in which the ways of the Greeks, who called themselves "Hellenes" (hence the terms "Hellenized" and "Hellenistic") were adopted alongside local customs. Greek culture was disseminated throughout the realm, so the period featured states that were subject to the three dynasties and characterized by the adoption of Greek ways. The empire lasted 300 years (early fourth to early first century BCE), from shortly after Alexander's death to the domination of Greece and the Hellenized East by the Romans. From their small part of the Italian peninsula, the fierce Romans rose to challenge and ultimately subdue the Greek world. Macedon, Syria, and finally Egypt surrendered, yet their Greek ways of life retained pre-eminence. Even in defeat, the Greeks held cultural sway, their customs greatly affecting Roman religious, intellectual, social, and artistic thought. Politically the Roman Empire entirely supplanted the Hellenistic; culturally the Roman realm gave pre-eminence to a blend of Greek and Roman ways.

c. 323–281 BCE	Alexander's heirs divide his empire
323–30 BCE	Greek culture—poetry, drama, philosophy—spreads throughout Macedonian, Egyptian, and Syrian empires; Egypt is ruled by the Ptolemies, descended from one of Alexander's generals
322 BCE	Demosthenes commits suicide
c. 320–301 BCE	Macedonian general Antigonus I tries to found a kingdom in Greece, Macedon, and the Near East but is killed in battle at Ipsus in Anatolia
c. 310 BCE	Zeno founds Stoicism, a philosophy teaching that all happens according to divine reason and urging people to accept and live in harmony with nature, or divine reason
c. 307 BCE	Greek philosopher Epicurus founds school in Athens, which teaches that there is no providential god and promotes philosophical pleasure as life's main goal
c. 306–304 BCE	Alexander's successors declare themselves kings
303 BCE	Seleucus I cedes the eastern territory of his kingdom to Indian ruler Chandragupta
301 BCE	Seleucus I gains control of north Syria
300 BCE	King Ptolemy I (r. 323–283 BCE) establishes the Museum at Alexandria, which becomes the cultural center of the Hellenistic world

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAT 8*
285–246 BCE	Rule of Ptolemy II, who develops the Library at Alexandria; probably founded by Ptolemy I, it becomes the leading center of ancient texts, is said to include official copies of works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, along with Aristotle's library	
284–281 BCE	Achaean League is revived in southern Greece	
281 BCE	Seleucus gains control of Asia Minor; Achaean League of Greek cities is formed to resist Macedon, revives a league of the prior century	
c. 280 BCE	First contact between Greek and Roman civilization	
279 BCE	Gauls invade Macedon and Greece; Pyrrhus of Epirus wins costly victory over Romans at Battle of Asculum	
274–217 BCE	Four Syrian wars fought between Ptolemies and Seleucids	
263–241 BCE	Eumenes I establishes Attalid kingdom in Anatolia	
247 BCE–224 CE	Arsacids control Parthia	
239–130 BCE	Independent Greek kingdom established in Bactria (modern Afghanistan)	
238–227 BCE	Attalus I of the Attalid dynasty defeats Gauls and confines them to Galatia	
229 BCE	Piracy of Illyrian tribes, who live in an area that borders Macedonia, leads to Roman intervention in the east	
227 BCE	Reform of Spartan state by Cleomenes III	
214–205 BCE	Philip V of Macedon fights First Macedonian War against Rome, which leads to Roman involvement in Macedon, Greece, Egypt, and the Near East	
200 BCE	Antiochus II establishes Seleucid rule over south Syria, Phoenicia, and Judaea	
200–197 BCE	Second Macedonian War	
171–167 BCE	Third Macedonian War; Roman legions defeat Macedon, which leads to break-up and reorganization of the kingdom into four federal republics	
168–167 BCE	Maccabees lead revolt in Judaea against the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes	
168 BCE	Romans defeat Perseus of Macedon at Pydna on northeast coast of Greece; end of Macedonian monarchy	
149 BCE	Third war between Rome and Carthage	
146 BCE	Rome crushes Macedonian revolt; Greek cities of Carthage and Corinth are destroyed; Macedon becomes Roman province	
142 BCE	Jews expel Seleucids; rise of Hasmonean kingdom of Jewish rulers in Judaea (they will endure until 63 BCE)	
88 BCE	Sack of Delos by soldiers of Mithridates of Pontus; 20,000 inhabitants are killed	
86 BCE	Sack of Athens by the Roman general Sulla	
64 BCE	Syria becomes a Roman province	
51–30 BCE	Reign of Cleopatra VII of Egypt, the last pharaoh and the last Macedonian ruler of the Hellenistic period	
40 BCE	Parthians capture Jerusalem	

Historical Events		Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
37 BCE	Romans recapture Judaea and support Herod the Great as king; Hasmonean dynasty ends, Herod begins his 33-year reign (37–34 BCE)	
31 BCE	Octavian defeats Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Actium	
30 BCE	Double suicides of Antony and Cleopatra; Egypt becomes a Roman possession	

ANCIENT ROME
FROM THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY TO THE END OF REPUBLICAN ROME

Although archaeological evidence testifies to permanent settlements on the hills of Rome from about 1000 BCE, Rome has traditionally dated its origins at 753 BCE, when the legendary Romulus is said to have founded the city. Ancient sources recount the lives of Romulus and successive, possibly legendary kings over the next two centuries. According to these sources, in 509 BCE the people expelled their seventh king, Tarquinius Superbus, and established the Roman Republic, a government of the aristocratic populace. This early republic appears to have been led by two elected officials (called consuls) and a Senate of wealthy citizens who held office for life. In external affairs, Rome overwhelmed the Latin tribes in the region and defeated the native Etruscans, in whose shadow the Romans had long dwelt. Even the temporary capture of Rome in 390 BCE by Celtic tribes from Gaul could not halt the city's growth. During the fourth and third centuries BCE, Rome undertook a series of military and colonial expeditions that led to its occupation of all Italy south of the Po Valley as well as most of Spain and parts of Africa. Between 200 and 167 BCE the Romans brought much of the inhabited world under their control, including the once-mighty kingdoms of Macedon and Syria. Meanwhile, Roman society flourished, constructing roads and aqueducts and settling down to enjoy the fruits of successful military conquest. In art and literature, the Romans borrowed from and built on the Greek civilization they had subdued. In politics, individual statesmen gained distinction, among them, Pompey, Cicero, and, most remarkably, Julius Caesar, whose military prowess, intellect, and personal charisma contributed to his meteoric rise in Roman society. After winning a civil war, Caesar assumed supreme control of all Rome's political affairs. The Senate finally proclaimed him dictator for life, a status that would lead not only to his own assassination but also to the demise of the republican government and the rise of imperial rule in Rome.

c. 1000 BCE	One or more settlements exist on the hills of Rome, each formed by a few thatched huts
c. 753 BCE	Legendary founding of the city of Rome by Romulus, who descends from Aeneas, a survivor of the Trojan War
753–509 BCE	Seven kings (some of whom may be legendary) rule Rome, beginning with Romulus and ending with Tarquinius Superbus
c. 700–400 BCE	Etruscan culture influences life in central Italian peninsula; Etruscan alphabet leads to spread of writing
c. 600 BCE	Emergence of Latin states in central Italy
509 BCE	Superbus expelled and monarchy falls; the Roman Republic is established

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
c. 496 BCE	Rome defeats Latin League at Battle of Lake Regillus	
c. 450 BCE	Publication of the Twelve Tables, first codification of Roman law	
c. 445 BCE	Lex Canuleia permits marriages between plebeians (mass of Roman citizens) and patricians (aristocrats)	
396 BCE	Romans destroy Etruscan town of Veii after ten-year siege	
c. 390 BCE	Invasion of Celtic tribes from Gaul and sack of Rome	
367 BCE	Lex Licinia Sextia makes plebeians eligible for the office of consul, a right formerly enjoyed only by patricians	
c. 343–341 BCE	First Samnite War: Romans fight Samnites in central Apennine region of Italian peninsula	
341–338 BCE	Latin War, dissolution of Latin League	
c. 327–321 and 316–304 BCE	Second Samnite War	
c. 312 BCE	Work begins on Appian Way, Rome's main road to south Italy; Aqua Appia, the first Roman aqueduct, is constructed	
298–290 BCE	Third Samnite War	
287 BCE	Lex Hortensia affirms the resolutions of plebeian assemblies as law	
280–275 BCE	Greek general Pyrrhus invades Italy and defeats Romans but at a tremendous cost in Greek lives (experiences "Pyrrhic victories—wins that are offset by great loss of life)	
272 BCE	After capture of coastal city of Tarentum, Rome acquires control over southern Italy	
264–241 BCE	First Punic War between Rome and Carthage; Rome remedies weakness in cavalry and light-armed troops by hiring mercenaries; first gladiatorial games in Rome	
241 BCE	Sicily becomes first Roman province	
240 BCE	Livius Andronicus translates works by Homer into Latin	
218–201 BCE	Second Punic War between Rome and Carthage; Rome's use of mercenary soldiers grows	*The Braggart Soldier* by Plautus
218 BCE	Carthaginian general Hannibal crosses the Alps Mountains into Italy	
217–216 BCE	Hannibal defeats Romans at Lake Trasimene and village of Cannae; Romans suffer enormous losses	
215–205 BCE	First Macedonian War between Rome and Philip V of Macedon, an ally of Hannibal	
204 BCE	Roman general Scipio invades Africa; later he becomes known as Scipio Africanus in tribute to his success	
202 BCE	Scipio defeats Hannibal at Zama in North Africa	
200–196 BCE	Second Macedonian War ends with Battle of Cynoscephalae; Philip retains his kingdom	
192–188 BCE	Syrian War between Rome and Antiochus III of Syria ends with Syrian defeat	
191 BCE	Rome completes conquest of Cisalpine (Nearer) Gaul	
168 BCE	Battle of Pydna: Perseus, the king of Macedon is captured and his kingdom is divided	
160 BCE	Death of Aemilius Paullus, a Roman general given to extravagant ways, in contrast to conservative ways of the statesman Cato the Censor	*The Brothers* by Terence

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
155–133 BCE	Celtiberian War: Romans control most of Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal)	
146 BCE	Rome destroys Carthage (146 BCE), wins Third Punic War; later in year Rome sacks Greek city of Corinth, and crushes Macedonian revolt, Greece and Macedonia become provinces ruled by Rome	
144 BCE	Construction begins on the Aqua Marcia, Rome's first high-level aqueduct, to bring water to Capitoline Hill	
135–132 BCE	First Slave Wars in Sicily, led by Eunus and Cleon	
133 BCE	The tribune Tiberius Gracchus proposes land distribution to help poor, gets law passed by irregular means, leading to a riot that claims his life	
21 BCE	The tribune Gaius Gracchus, attempting to enfranchise Italians, is murdered	
112–106 BCE	War against Jugurtha of Numidia in North Africa	
104–103 BCE	Second Slave Wars in Sicily, led by Athenion and Tryphon	
104–100 BCE	Roman leader Gaius Marius serves as consul for five consecutive terms	
91–89 BCE	Social War between Roman Republic and other Italian cities; citizenship is extended to all Italian lands south of the Po River	
89–63 BCE	Series of wars between Rome and King Mithridates of Pontus, the region of Asia Minor south of the Black Sea	
88–82 BCE	Civil war between Roman generals Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla	
88 BCE	Sulla becomes consul, marches on Rome	
86 BCE	Death of Marius	
82–81 BCE	Dictatorship of Sulla, proscriptions against his enemies—they are listed as outlaws whose property is forfeit and who can be killed with impunity	
79 BCE	Sulla resigns dictatorship, dies the following year	
73–71 BCE	Spartacus leads slave revolt in southern Italy	
70 BCE	Consulships of Pompey and Crassus; Cicero delivers Verrine Orations against governor Gaius Verres, who has plundered province of Sicily for self-gain	
67 BCE	Pompey eliminates pirates from Mediterranean area	
66–62 BCE	Pompey conquers lands in the East, creates new provinces, returns to Rome in triumph	
63 BCE	Cicero serves as consul, denounces Catiline conspiracy against Rome; Pompey begins settlement of East	*Speeches* by Cicero
60 BCE	Formation of "First Triumvirate," misnomer for a coalition of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, a group that has no official power to rule	
c. 60–55 BCE	Lucretius promotes ideas of Greek philosopher Epicurus in Rome	*On the Nature of The Universe* by Lucretius
c. 50s BCE	"New Poets" create fresh style of lyric verse in Rome	*Carmina* by Catullus
59 BCE	Caesar serves as consul	
58–57 BCE	Exiled from Rome, Cicero flees to Greece but, with Pompey's support, is recalled	
58–52 BCE	Expansion of the Roman Empire; Caesar campaigns in Gaul and Britain, writes his own versions (commentaries) of his military victories	*Commentaries on the Gallic War* by Caesar; *The Republic* by Cicero

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAT 8*
55–54 BCE	Caesar's invasions of Britain	
53 BCE	Romans, ambushed by Parthians, suffer a serious defeat; Crassus and his eldest son are killed	
49 BCE	Caesar incites civil war, crosses the Rubicon, stream that serves as the boundary between his domain and the empire's Italian heartland	
48 BCE	Caesar defeats Pompey at Greek city of Pharsalus; Pompey flees to Egypt, is murdered upon his arrival	
48–47 BCE	Caesar invades and captures Alexandria, Egypt, has liaison with Cleopatra VII of Egypt, who gives birth to a son she names Caesarion ("little Caesar" in Greek)	
44 BCE	Roman Senate proclaims Caesar dictator of Rome for life	

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF IMPERIAL ROME

Julius Caesar's political ascendancy stirred grave concern on the part of certain Romans. To thwart the transformation of their republic into a dynasty-oriented monarchy, a band of conspirators assassinated Caesar on March 15, 44 BCE. Caesar's heir and grandnephew Octavian later seized the consulship, then pursued and defeated Brutus and Cassius, ringleaders of the assassination. For the next decade, Rome was ruled by the Second Triumvirate (Octavian, Mark Antony, and Marcus Lepidus), whose members divided the empire among themselves. Antony's involvement with Cleopatra VII led to the triumvirate's dissolution, the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE, and their suicides within the following year. Octavian assumed solitary control over the Roman state. Taking the name Augustus ("revered one") in 27 BCE, he restored the traditional offices of state and then ruled Rome until his death in 14 CE. During his tenure, Augustus oversaw Rome's final transition from Republic to Empire. His reign, which was peaceful and prosperous, boded well for the future of the Julio-Claudian dynasty he established. In the end, however, few of his heirs ruled so successfully. The turbulent dynasty ended with the suicide of Nero in 68 CE. A series of short-lived emperors followed before stability was restored under Vespasian, founder of the Flavian rulers. This second Roman dynasty ended with the assassination of the repressive emperor Domitian. There followed a generally peaceful, prosperous era under five successors known as the "Good Emperors." Then came a new set of civil wars, the rule of the Severan dynasty, and a chaotic era under the rule of soldier-emperors. Restoring order in 284, Emperor Diocletian set up separate governments for the eastern and the western halves of Rome's empire. Meanwhile, a new faith, Christianity, had begun taking hold in the imperial world. In 324 Constantine I became the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire.

44 BCE	Assassination of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March during a Senate meeting	
44–43 BCE	Civil war in Rome; Octavian (Augustus) seizes consulship; Octavian, Mark Antony, and Marcus Lepidus form Second Triumvirate; Cicero is killed in the proscriptions	
42 BCE	Battle of Philippi ends with the suicides of Brutus and Cassius	
41 BCE	Antony forms an alliance with Cleopatra VII of Egypt	
41–40 BCE	Octavian oversees confiscation of lands from Italian farmers to reward veteran soldiers; siege of city of Perusia by Octavian	*Eclogues* by Virgil
40 BCE	Second Triumvirate divides Roman provinces; Antony's wife Fulvia dies; Antony marries Octavian's sister, Octavia	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
40 and 36 BCE	Cleopatra gives birth to three of Antony's children: in 40 BCE, after he returns to Rome, where he marries Octavia, Cleopatra bears him twins (Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene); in 36 BCE, she bears Antony a third child (Ptolemy Philadelphus)	
37 BCE	Second Triumvirate renewed for another five years	
36 BCE	Lepidus is forced to retire from the Second Triumvirate	
32 BCE	Antony divorces Octavia	
31–30 BCE	Octavian defeats Antony and Cleopatra in naval battle at Actium, then triumphs over them at Alexandria; suicides of Antony and Cleopatra	
27 BCE–68 CE	Reign of first Roman dynasty, the Julio-Claudians, though existence of the Roman Empire is never openly proclaimed	
27 BCE–14 CE	Octavian takes the name Augustus ("revered one") and assumes complete control of Rome, oversees its transition from Roman Republic to Roman Empire; era of stability and peace known as the Pax Romana ensues	*From the Founding of the City* by Livy; Roman Elegy by Tibullus and Propertius
23 BCE	Augustus grows ill, recovers, assumes powers of a tribune; Marcellus, nephew of Augustus and likely heir, dies	*Odes* by Horace
20 BCE	Successful diplomatic negotiations with Parthia	
19 BCE	Virgil dies before finishing a Roman epic designed to be as lofty as Homer's Greek epics	*Aeneid* by Virgil
19–18 BCE	Augustus implements the Julian laws to encourage marriage and childbirth, and punish adultery as a public crime	
13–9 BCE	Expansion of Roman Empire up to the Danube Rive	
11 BCE	Tiberius (son of Augustus's wife Livia) is ordered to divorce first wife and marry Augustus's daughter Julia	
c. 5–6 BCE	Birth of Jesus of Nazareth in Judaea	
4 BCE	Death of Herod the Great	
2 BCE	Augustus banishes his daughter Julia from Rome on charges of adultery	*The Art of Love* by Ovid
8 CE	Augustus banishes Ovid from Rome for reasons that are never fully explained	*Metamorphoses* by Ovid
9	Three Roman legions are lost in Germany; Rhine-Danube riverway is ultimately established as northern frontier of Roman Empire	
14–37	Augustus dies, is deified; Tiberius reigns, continues most of Augustus's policies; conflicts erupt within imperial family; Tiberius's reign ends in period of terror	
26	Tiberius leaves Rome and governs the empire from isle of Capri until his death	
c. 30	Preacher and healer Jesus of Nazareth is active in Judaea, suffers death by crucifixion	
31	Trial and execution of Sejanus, commander of praetorian or household troops of Roman emperors and former friend of Tiberius	
37–41	Reign of Gaius Caesar, popularly known as Caligula; after serious illness, Caligula behaves cruelly and irrationally, is assassinated by his own palace guards	
c. 40s–60s	Paul of Tarsus, a follower of Jesus, travels through Roman Empire as missionary, preaching gospel of Christianity; Paul dies c. 62	
41–54	Reign of Emperor Claudius restores political stability; Seneca is recalled from exile to tutor Claudius's stepson, Nero	*Phaedra* by Seneca

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
43	Invasion of Britain by Rome	
44	Judaea becomes a Roman province, is ruled by a procurator, an employee of the Roman emperor	
54–68	Reign of Nero, whose court becomes notorious for its vice, corruption, and cruelty	*Satyricon* by Petronius; *Moral Letters to Lucilius* by Seneca
65	Conspirators against Nero are found and put to death; Seneca is ordered to commit suicide	
64	Great Fire of Rome	
66–67	First Jewish revolt against Roman rule; Vespasian, a general of the rising Flavian family, is sent to regain control	*The Jewish War* by Josephus
69–79	Reign of Emperor Vespasian restores political and economic stability to Roman state, creates a new dynasty (the Flavians)	
70	Vespasian's son Titus takes charge of siege in Judaea, destroys Jerusalem and temple	
74	Fall of Masada, a Judaean fort, ends first Jewish revolt	
79–81	Brief reign of Emperor Titus	
79	Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius destroys Pompeii; Pliny the Elder, admiral of Roman fleet and author of Natural History, dies in the disaster	
80	Completion and inauguration of the Colosseum, Rome's great amphitheater, in which spectators witnessed fights involving beasts and men	
81–96	Reign of Domitian, which grows increasingly repressive and harsh; Domitian is assassinated by members of his own household, soon after is satirized in verse	*Satires* by Juvenal
96–180	Rule of five "Good Emperors": Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius; Rome experiences peace and prosperity	
96–98	Reign of Roman emperor Nerva	
98–117	Reign of Roman emperor Trajan; rebirth of Roman literature after an era of censorship and tyranny	*Annals of Imperial Rome* by Tacitus
106	Arabia becomes a Roman province	
113	Building of Trajan's column, commemorating his military campaigns	
117–c. 122	Hadrian's early reign; his secretary Suetonius has access to imperial records; construction of Hadrian's Wall as boundary of Roman territory in Britain (c. 122)	*The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius
117–138	Hadrian enjoys lengthy reign, distinguishes self as an intellectual and a patron of arts, favors Greek culture	*Parallel Lives* by Plutarch
135	Suppression of Jewish revolt under Bar Kokhba in Palestine	
138–161	Reign of Roman emperor Antoninus Pius	
161–180	Reign of Marcus Aurelius, last of Rome's five "Good Emperors"; Greek culture continues to predominate in artistic life of Rome; Galen serves as court physician	*The Golden Ass* by Apuleius
167	Rome suffers outbreak of the plague	
168–175	War with Germany	
180–192	Reign of Roman emperor Commodus, who later shows signs of derangement and is finally strangled	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
193–211	Reign of Roman emperor Septimus Severus, who founds new dynasty	
244–255	Greek philosopher Plotinus settles in Rome, begins to write, develops Neoplatonism (dominant philosophy of pagan antiquity), shows how individual soul can reach God	
211–217	Reign of Roman emperor Caracalla	
212	All free inhabitants of Roman Empire gain citizenship, which allows them to be taxed	
218–222	Reign of Roman emperor Elagabulus	
222–235	Reign of Roman emperor Aurelius Severus Alexander	
226–641	Reign of Sasanid dynasty in Persia	
235–284	Period of instability; succession of short-lived military rulers; economic and cultural decline	
267	Herulian Goths sack Athens	
284–305	Period known as the Late Roman Empire begins with the reign of Diocletian	
293	Diocletian renews control of the Roman state through system known as tetrarchy— separate governments are set up for the empire's eastern and western halves	
300s	Eastern Germanic peoples challenge Roman rule; conquered areas of Persia and Ethiopia are relatively quiet	*An Ethiopian Story* by Heliodorus
303	"Great persecution" of Christians in East and West	
305	Abdication of Diocletian	
306–337	Reign of Constantine I	
312	Battle of Milvian Bridge, in which Constantine, who claims to have seen the sign of the cross emblazoned on the sun, defeats Maxentius for control of Rome	
312–324	Constantine controls the western empire; Licinius controls the eastern empire	
313	Edict of Milan legitimates Christianity	
324	Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity, rules as sole emperor	
330	Constantine moves capital of Roman Empire to Byzantium (present-day Istanbul in modern Turkey); city is renamed New Rome but called Constantinople by the people; Greeks enter artistic and historical period called the Byzantine Age (ends in 1453)	
354	Birth of St. Augustine of Hippo	
361–363	Reign of Roman emperor Julian the Apostate	
379–395	Theodosius the Great reigns; is last to control whole empire; leaves eastern part to his son Arcadius, western part to his son Honorius	
386	Augustine of Hippo converts to Christianity after studying Neoplatonism	*Confessions* by St. Augustine
393	Abolition of the Olympic games	
395	Christianity becomes state religion; Roman Empire divides into eastern and western empires, each with its own administration and line of emperors	

Historical Events		Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*

FALL OF THE EMPIRE AND THE CLASSICAL LEGACY

Now governed as two kingdoms, eastern and western, the Roman Empire proved increasingly vulnerable to foreign invaders during the fifth century CE. In 476 CE the Germanic general Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last Roman emperor of the West. The eastern half of the Roman Empire, centered in Byzantium (renamed Constantinople, then Istanbul) would endure for nearly a thousand more years. Meanwhile, the West suffered a millennium of repeated strife and upheaval. During the sixth century, the eastern emperor Justinian reclaimed some of the lost territories in the West, including Italy, northwest Africa, coastal Spain, and the Mediterranean. All the while, Byzantium, the heart of the surviving Roman Empire, remained Greek in culture, except for a few decades (1204–1261) during which the city was captured by the French and the Venetians. Ultimately the Eastern Roman Empire fell to the Turks (1453). But the legacy of the classical world endured, thanks to an already longstanding cultural pursuit. For more than a century, Italians had been rediscovering classical manuscripts, including ancient works from Rome (which had been preserved by Benedictine monks) and Greece (which had been preserved by Byzantine scholars). Together these works became the object of study and imitation by Renaissance humanists.

401	Alaric and the Visigoths invade Italy	
406	Germanic tribes invade Gaul	
407–408	Formation of new Gallic Empire	
410	Sack of Rome by Visigoths; Rome formally renounces Britain	
418	Roman treaty with Visigoths	
439	The Vandals, a Germanic people, conquer Carthage and Africa	
451–452	Romans and Visigoths defeat Attila the Hun; Pope Leo I persuades Attila not to enter Rome	
455	Rome is sacked by Vandals for two weeks	
476	Last Roman emperor in the West, Romulus Augustulus (r. 475–476) is deposed; Germanic general Odoacer becomes king of Italy, accepts eastern Roman emperor as his overlord	
493	Accession of Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king, to Italian throne	
c. 500s	Preservation of classical Latin texts by Benedictine monks	
524	Boethius, a high official under Theodoric and the classical world's last Latin-speaking scholar to master Greek, is imprisoned	*The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius
527–565	Justinian reigns as eastern Roman emperor; recovers former Roman territories in Africa (533/534), Spain (551), and Italian peninsula (561/562); arranges and systematizes Roman law	
527–1453	Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) preserves Greek literature, abridging and commenting on classics; develops new Greek writings in history and theology	
529	Justinian orders closure of the Academy at Athens	
533	Publication of *Justinian's Digest*, the result of effort to excerpt and codify works of classical jurists	
609	Pantheon, temple at Rome formerly consecrated to the pagan gods, is converted to a church	
846	Arabs sack Rome	

	Historical Events	Related Literary Works in *WLAIT 8*
1084	Normans sack Rome	
1204–1261	Rome falls to the French and Venetians, who capture it in the name of Christianity, during the Fourth Crusade	
c. 1335–1330s	Italian poet Petrarch begins recovery of classical texts, focuses first on Virgil, Livy, and Cicero; restores Livy's *History of Rome*; finds forgotten speech by Cicero— *Pro Archia* (*In Defense of Archias* [a Greek poet])	
1349	Earthquake in Rome	
1354	Petrarch receives manuscript of Homer's writing from Nicholas Sygeros, a Byzantine envoy to the papal court	
1360	In Florence, Byzantine scholar Pilato is hired to teach Greek, an unknown language in early 1300s Italy	
1453	Fall of Constantinople (Byzantium) to the Turks; end of Roman Empire in the East	
c. 1500	Renaissance humanism spreads northward through Europe, reigniting interest in classical studies	

Week One

Introduction

What is the Difference Between Classical and Classic Literature?

Some scholars and writers use the terms "classical" and "classic" interchangeably when it comes to literature, however, each term has a separate meaning. What confuses things further is that classical books are also classic! A work of classical literature refers only to ancient Greek and Roman works, while classics refer to great works of literature throughout the ages.

What Is Classical Literature?

Classical Literature refers to the great masterpieces of the Greek, Roman, and other similar ancient civilizations. The works of Homer, Ovid, and Sophocles are all examples of classical literature. The term is not just limited to novels; it can also include epic, lyric, tragedy, comedy, pastoral, and other forms of writing as well. The study of these texts was once considered to be an absolute necessity for students of the humanities. Ancient Greek and Roman authors were considered of the highest quality. The study of their work was once considered the mark of an elite education. While these books generally still find their way into high school and college English classes, they are not commonly studied with the same vigor that they once were. The expansion of the field of literature has offered readers and academics much more to choose from.

What Is Classic Literature?

Classic literature is a term most readers are probably familiar with. The term covers a much wider array of works than classical. Older books that retain their popularity are almost always considered to be among the classics. This means that the Ancient Greek and Roman authors of classical literature fall into this category as well. But it's not just age that makes a book a classic, though; the term is generally saved for books that have stood the test of time. Books that have a timeless quality are more likely to be considered in this category. While deciding if a book is well-written or not is a bit of a subjective endeavor, it's generally agreed that classics have high-quality prose.

What Makes a Book a Classic?

While most people are referring to literary fiction when they refer to the classics, each genre, and category of literature has its own classics as well. For example, the average reader might not consider Steven King's novel The Shining, the story of a haunted hotel, to be a classic, but those who study the horror genre would. Even within genres or literary movements books that are considered classic are those that are well written and/or of cultural importance. A book that may not have the best writing but was the first book in a genre to do something would make it a classic. For example, the first romance novel that took place in a historical setting would be culturally significant.

Classical Period: (1200 BC – 455 BC)

- **HOMERIC or HEROIC PERIOD** (1200-800 BCE)
- **CLASSICAL GREEK PERIOD** (800-200 BCE)
- **CLASSICAL ROMAN PERIOD** (200 BCE-455 CE)
- **PATRISTIC PERIOD** (70 CE-455 CE) (early Christian writers designated church fathers)

Famous Names of the Classical Period:

- Popularized styles that led to many current genres, lyrical poetry, pastorals, and dramatic representations of comedies.
- Major poets of the time were Sappho and Pindar.
- Major Playwrights were Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.
- Major Comedic plays were done by **Aristophanes**, and Menander

Philosophy of the Classical Period:

- Plato, Socrates and Aristotle wrote dialogues (written arguments), philosophy is the first attempts at explaining the world.
- These individuals opposed traditional thinking of the world.

Classical Period Drama:

- Most prominent genre coming out of the Classical Period was drama.
- Drama evolved from song and dance in ceremonies.
- Drama was objective and impersonal, stated authors opinions.

Prominent Greek Figures:

1. **Homer (900-800 B.C):**

- Greek philosopher and poet
- Author of Iliad and Odyssey, epics that explain ancient Greece which greatly impacted Western and a part of Eastern history and literature.
- The Iliad was written about the Trojan War.
- The Odyssey was a story about Odysseus, King of Ithaka.

2. **Plato (429–347 BC):**

- One of the earliest philosophers
- Classical Greek philosopher, mathematician, writer of philosophical dialogues, and founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western World.
- Plato helped to lay the foundations of natural philosophy, science, and Western philosophy.
- Plato's writings have been published in several fashions;
- Resulted in the naming and referencing of Plato's texts.
- 35 dialogues and 13 letters are known to be written by Plato
- Dialogues influence today's thoughts and writings

3. **Aristotle (384 - 322 BC):**

- A Greek philosopher, a student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great.
- His writings cover many subjects
- Physics, metaphysics, poetry, theater, music, logic,politics, government, ethics, biology, and zoology
- Aristotle wrote many elegant treatises and dialogues
- majority of his writings are now lost and only about one-third of the original works have survived

- Influenced literature:
  Writings and philosophical teachings
- Codifying and systematizing:
  Aristotelian principles
  Literary criticism:
- Guidelines to literature developed into rules

Prominent Roman Figure:

Julius Cesar (100 - 44 BC):

- He was made a dictator for life and was essentially above the law.
- He ruled the roman people for many years until he was murdered in March 15 44BC.
- This was a very religious time and a lot of literature was based on religion, so this would have a large influence.

The Patristic Period (c. 100-450):

The Patristic Period is a vital point in the history of Christianity since it contextualizes the early Christian information from the time of the death of the last Apostle (John) (which runs roughly about 100 A.D. to the Middle Ages (451 A.D. and the council of Chalcedon). It describes the cohesion between Judaism and Christianity and various theological points being sorted out. Most denominations find this period of church history vitally important on a similar scale. From Roman Catholicism to the Reformed Churches following Zwingli and Calvin, many basic Christian concepts are birthed during this age, which, for good reason, the church would continue to believe for all time as orthodox over and against all heretical sectaries.

Prominent Patristic Figure:

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165):

- He is one of the greatest Christian Apologists writing against paganism.
- He provided history with an early example of a theologian who attempted to relate the Gospel to the outlook of Greek philosophy.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-200):

- He is probably a native of Asia Minor, was elected bishop of the southern French city of Lyons around 178.
- He is chiefly noted for his major writing adversus hearses (Against the Heresies) that defended the Christian faith against Gnosticism.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215):

- He was a leading Alexandrian writer with a concern to explore the relationship between Christian thought and Greek philosophy.

Week Two and Three

Introduction to *The Odyssey*

The Odyssey (by Homer)

- The Odyssey is a sequel (the second book in a series).
- It is the second of Homer's two great epic poems.
- Part one is called The Iliad.

Key Ideas: The Odyssey:

- The Odyssey is an epic.
- An epic is a long narrative poem about the deeds of a hero.
- The epic hero often portrays the goals and values of the society.
- Epics are based in part on historical fact, blending legend with truth.

The Epic and Epic Hero:

- In literature, the epic is a long narrative poem about the deeds of a hero.
- The epic hero is a larger-than-life figure who undertakes great journeys and performs deed requiring remarkable strength and cunning.

Characteristics of an epic:

- The setting is vast, covering great nations, the world or the universe.
- The action consists of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage.
- Supernatural forces—gods, angels, demons — interest themselves in the action.

Characteristics of Epic Hero:

- A larger-than-life hero who embodies the values of a nation.
- An epic hero possesses superhuman strength, craftiness, and confidence.
- He is braver, stronger, smarter, and cleverer than an ordinary person is.
- The epic hero is on a quest for something of great value to him or his people.
- The villains that try to keep the hero from his quest are usually uglier, more evil, and more cunning than anyone we know in ordinary life.
- The epic hero is often of mixed divine and human birth and so possesses human weaknesses.
- The divine world (the gods) interferes with the human world.
- He is helped and harmed by interfering gods.
- He embodies ideals and values that a culture considers admirable.
- He emerges victorious from perilous situations.

Epic Themes

- **Courage**
- **A homecoming**
- **Beauty**
- **Loyalty**
- **Life and Death**
- **Respect for the Gods**:
  Respect for the gods is shown through the numerous descriptions of sacrifices and offerings. Disrespect for the Gods inevitably leads to disaster; the Gods do not forget disrespect and are not easily appeased. (Poseidon, Athena, Helios.)

- **The Importance of Lineage:**
  Almost every time we met someone significant the narration pauses, and we learn of the lineage.
  Many "things" we see also have a lineage or history that we are given - note Odysseus scar and his bow.

- **The fate of a nation:**
  Fate is preordained by a power beyond that of even the gods. Paradoxically, it does not seem "random." A character's fate is tied up with his "character."

The Greek Virtues:

All Greeks were challenged to live by the virtues set by their culture. Breaking one of the Greek virtues meant angering the gods. The virtues are:

- Loyalty
- Hospitality
- Respect for the gods and goddesses
- Respect for all forms of life
- Courage

Epic Conventions:

- Invocation of the Muse:
  A formal plea for help to the Muse Calliope. The gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece are important characters. They take sides in the war and help the human characters.
- Beginning in *medias res*:
  The epic plunges right into the action – it begins "in the middle of things." Flashbacks provide background information.
- Epic similes, use of extended similes:
  An Epic Poem or story is a larger than life story that contains many adventures or a long journey.
- Metrical Structure:
  Dactylic Hexameter, six stressed syllables per line. Closely resembles speech.
- Stock epithets:
  A descriptive phrase used in place of a noun or proper noun.
  "Grey-eyed Athena".

Homer:

- There are many theories about the blind poet Homer, who is credited with writing the Iliad and the Odyssey.
- Homer is said to have lived between 900 and 700 B.C.

Oral History:

- Homer's epics are all that remains of a series of poems that told the whole story of the Trojan War.
- In later centuries, the Iliad and the Odyssey were memorized by professional reciters, who performed them at religious festivals throughout Greece.

Why does the Trojan War begin?

- According to the myth, the war started this way:
- Paris was a prince in the city of Troy.
- Three goddesses asked him to judge the beauty contest to find who among them was the most beautiful.
- Aphrodite, the goddess of love, offered Paris a reward if he chose her.
- She said he could have Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world.
- However, Helen was married to Menelaus, the King of Sparta, a city in Greece.
- When Paris visited Sparta, Aphrodite made Helen fall in love with him.
- Helen ran away with Paris.

The Iliad

- *The Odyssey* is a sequel (the second book in a series). It is the second of Homer's two great epic poems. Part one is called *The Iliad.*
- *The Iliad* is the story of the Trojan War which might have taken place around 1250 B.C. This poem is a tale of myth and magic, not history. The

gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece are important characters. They take sides in the war and help the human characters.

- Menelaus and his brother, Agamemnon, led a Greek army against Troy to bring her back.
- The war that followed is called the Trojan War after the name Troy.
- The gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece are important characters.
- They take sides in the war and help the human characters.

The Odyssey:

- The Odyssey is named for Odysseus.
- Odysseus is the King of Ithaca, and island off the coast of Greece.
- According to the myth, Odysseus did not want to fight at Troy.
- He did not want to leave his wife, Penelope, and his baby son, Telemachus.
- The gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece are important characters.
- They take sides in the war and help the human characters.

Week Four

The Odyssey

Literal Meaning of Odyssey

Merriam Webster:

- **Odyssey**
- **noun**
- od·ys·sey | \ ˈä-də-sē \
- *plural* **odysseys**
- **Definition of *Odyssey***
- **1:** a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune his *odyssey* from rural South to urban North, from poverty to affluence, from Afro-American folk culture to a Eurocentric world of books—J. E. Wideman
- **2:** an intellectual or spiritual wandering or quest an *odyssey* of self-discovery a spiritual *odyssey* from disbelief to faith

Plot Overview:

Ten years have passed since the fall of Troy, and the Greek hero Odysseus still has not returned to his kingdom in Ithaca. A large and rowdy mob of suitors who have overrun Odysseus's palace and pillaged his land continue to court his wife, Penelope. She has remained faithful to Odysseus. Prince Telemachus, Odysseus's son, wants desperately to throw them out but does not have the confidence or experience to fight them. One of the suitors, Antinous, plans to assassinate the young prince, eliminating the only opposition to their dominion over the palace.

Unknown to the suitors, Odysseus is still alive. The beautiful nymph Calypso, possessed by love for him, has imprisoned him on her island, Ogygia. He longs to return to his wife and son, but he has no ship or crew to help him escape. While the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus debate Odysseus's future, Athena, Odysseus's strongest supporter among the gods, resolves to help Telemachus. Disguised as a friend of the prince's grandfather, Laertes, she convinces the prince to call a meeting of the assembly at which he reproaches

the suitors. Athena also prepares him for a great journey to Pylos and Sparta, where the kings Nestor and Menelaus, Odysseus's companions during the war, inform him that Odysseus is alive and trapped on Calypso's island. Telemachus makes plans to return home, while, back in Ithaca, Antinous and the other suitors prepare an ambush to kill him when he reaches port.

On Mount Olympus, Zeus sends Hermes to rescue Odysseus from Calypso. Hermes persuades Calypso to let Odysseus build a ship and leave. The homesick hero sets sail, but when Poseidon, god of the sea, finds him sailing home, he sends a storm to wreck Odysseus's ship. Poseidon has harbored a bitter grudge against Odysseus since the hero blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, earlier in his travels. Athena intervenes to save Odysseus from Poseidon's wrath, and the beleaguered king lands at Scheria, home of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, shows him to the royal palace, and Odysseus receives a warm welcome from the king and queen. When he identifies himself as Odysseus, his hosts, who have heard of his exploits at Troy, are stunned. They promise to give him safe passage to Ithaca, but first they beg to hear the story of his adventures.

Odysseus spends the night describing the fantastic chain of events leading up to his arrival on Calypso's island. He recounts his trip to the Land of the Lotus Eaters, his battle with Polyphemus the Cyclops, his love affair with the witch-goddess Circe, his temptation by the deadly Sirens, his journey into Hades to consult the prophet Tiresias, and his fight with the sea monster Scylla. When he finishes his story, the Phaeacians return Odysseus to Ithaca, where he seeks out the hut of his faithful swineherd, Eumaeus. Though Athena has disguised Odysseus as a beggar, Eumaeus warmly receives and nourishes him in the hut. He soon encounters Telemachus, who has returned from Pylos and Sparta despite the suitors' ambush and reveals to him his identity. Odysseus and Telemachus devise a plan to massacre the suitors and regain control of Ithaca.

When Odysseus arrives at the palace the next day, still disguised as a beggar, he endures abuse and insults from the suitors. The only person who recognizes him is his old nurse, Eurycleia, but she swears not to disclose his secret. Penelope takes an interest in this strange beggar, suspecting that he might be her long-lost husband. Quite crafty herself, Penelope organizes an archery contest the following day and promises to marry any man who can string Odysseus's great bow and fire an arrow through a row of twelve axes—a feat that only Odysseus

has ever been able to accomplish. At the contest, each suitor tries to string the bow and fails. Odysseus steps up to the bow and, with little effort, fires an arrow through all twelve axes. He then turns the bow on the suitors. He and Telemachus, assisted by a few faithful servants, kill every suitor.

Odysseus reveals himself to the entire palace and reunites with his loving Penelope. He travels to the outskirts of Ithaca to see his aging father, Laertes. They come under attack from the vengeful family members of the dead suitors, but Laertes, reinvigorated by his son's return, successfully kills Antinous's father and puts a stop to the attack. Zeus dispatches Athena to restore peace. With his power secure and his family reunited, Odysseus's long ordeal comes to an end.

Plot Analysis:

The Odyssey tells the story of a heroic but far from perfect protagonist who battles many antagonists, including his own inability to heed the gods' warnings, on his arduous journey home from war. Along the way the poem explores ideas about fate, retribution, and the forces of civilization versus savagery. While the Odyssey is not told chronologically or from a single perspective, the poem is organized around a single goal: Odysseus's return to his homeland of Ithaca, where he will defeat the rude suitors camped in his palace and reunite with his loyal wife, Penelope. Odysseus is motivated chiefly by his nostos, or desire for homecoming, a notion in heroic culture that encouraged bravery in war by reminding warriors of the people and institutions they were fighting for back home. Odysseus's return represents the transition from life as a warrior on the battlefield back to life as a husband, father, and head of a household. Therefore, Odysseus is ultimately motivated by a desire to reclaim these elements of his identity and once again become the person he was before he left for the Trojan War so many years earlier.

The chief conflict in the poem is between Odysseus's desire to reach home and the forces that keep him from his goal, a conflict that the narrator of the Odyssey spells out in the opening lines. This introductory section, called a proem, appeals to the Muse to inspire the story to follow. Here, the narrator names the subject of the poem—Odysseus—and his objective throughout the poem: "to save his life and bring his comrades home." The narrator identifies the causes of Odysseus's struggle to return home, naming both the sun god, Helios, and Odysseus's fellow sailors themselves as responsible: "The

recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all, the blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the sun and the sun god blotted out the day of their return." The narrator next identifies Poseidon as one of Odysseus's main antagonists, as all the gods took pity on Odysseus except Poseidon, who "raged on, seething against the great Odysseus until he reached his native land." Finally, the proem tells us that the Odyssey will be the story of Odysseus's successful journey home: "the exile must return!"

The inciting action of the story begins with the arrival of Athena in Ithaca, where Odysseus's son, Telemachus, and wife, Penelope, are frantic about the suitors eating all their food and drinking all their wine. Athena, disguised as a sailor, tells Telemachus that his father is still alive, and he should set out on a journey to find out what happened him to after the Trojan Wars. Doubtful that Athena is telling the truth, Telemachus nevertheless sets sail, after warning the suitors to leave his mother in peace. We see Telemachus as doubtful of himself as a leader, but emboldened to take on responsibility and follow in his father's footsteps as king. The next several books detail Telemachus learning that his father is being held captive on Calypso's island, and hearing about his father's bravery during the war as well as the incredible losses he suffered in battle. As Telemachus was just a baby when his father left, this is the first time he learns anything about his father. He also experiences Greek hospitality as his hosts bathe him in oil, prepare feasts in his honor, and pile him with gifts when it's time for him to depart.

The rising action of the poem concerns Odysseus, who, after being freed from Calypso's island by Athena, sets out for home, but is shipwrecked by Poseidon, still angry that Odysseus blinded his son the Cyclops. Odysseus washes up in Phaeacia, where he tells his hosts the story of his long and arduous journey after leaving Troy. In this speech we see Odysseus's character as bold, curious, and confident. Everywhere he goes he is eager to find out what the locals are like, wanting to know whether they are "men like us who eat bread," who will offer Odysseus and his crew the hospitality they prize. He lingers in the Cyclops' cave out of curiosity, and makes his men tie him to his mast, rather than plug his ears, because he wants to hear the song of the sirens. He repeatedly ignores Athena's warnings and angers the gods, and they vow retribution but stop short of killing him, instead promising that they will make his journey home as difficult as possible.

The climax of the poem happens after Odysseus has left Phaeacia and at last returns to Ithaca, where his story merges with Telemachus's and father and son are reunited to face one final obstacle. They go to the castle with Odysseus disguised as a beggar, echoing his actions during the Trojan Wars and enabling them to test the loyalty and values of their countrymen. The suitors abuse Odysseus rather than extending hospitality, essentially sealing their doom and reinforcing the importance of the host-guest relationship in the poem. After several suitors fail Penelope's challenge to shoot an arrow through twelve axe handles, Odysseus strings his bow and accomplishes the feat with ease, proving not only that he is the rightful husband of Penelope, but that he still has his warrior-like strength and agility. Odysseus and Telemachus kill the suitors and the servants, reconciling Odysseus's former warrior persona with his current role as husband, father, and king, and confirming Telemachus's evolution into a brave and decisive leader. In the poem's falling action Odysseus is reunited with his wife and father, and the poem concludes with Athena erasing the suitors' parents' memory of the battle, restoring peace to Ithaca.

Character List:

Odysseus: The protagonist of the Odyssey. Odysseus fought among the other Greek heroes at Troy and now struggles to return to his kingdom in Ithaca. Odysseus is the husband of Queen Penelope and the father of Prince Telemachus. Though a strong and courageous warrior, he is most renowned for his cunning. He is a favorite of the goddess Athena, who often sends him divine aid, but a bitter enemy of Poseidon, who frustrates his journey at every turn.

Telemachus: Odysseus's son. An infant when Odysseus left for Troy, Telemachus is about twenty at the beginning of the story. He is a natural obstacle to the suitors desperately courting his mother, but despite his courage and good heart, he initially lacks the poise and confidence to oppose them. His maturation, especially during his trip to Pylos and Sparta in Books 3 and 4, provides a subplot to the epic. Athena often assists him.

Penelope: Wife of Odysseus and mother of Telemachus. Penelope spends her days in the palace pining for the husband who left for Troy twenty years earlier and never returned. Homer portrays her as sometimes flighty and excitable but also clever and steadfastly true to her husband.

Athena: Daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, purposeful battle, and the womanly arts. Athena assists Odysseus and Telemachus with divine powers

throughout the epic, and she speaks up for them in the councils of the gods on Mount Olympus. She often appears in disguise as Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus.

Poseidon: God of the sea. As the suitors are Odysseus's mortal antagonists, Poseidon is his divine antagonist. He despises Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and constantly hampers his journey home. Ironically, Poseidon is the patron of the seafaring Phaeacians, who ultimately help to return Odysseus to Ithaca.

Zeus: King of gods and men, who mediates the disputes of the gods on Mount Olympus. Zeus is occasionally depicted as weighing men's fates in his scales. He sometimes helps Odysseus or permits Athena to do the same.

Antinous: The most arrogant of Penelope's suitors. Antinous leads the campaign to have Telemachus killed. Unlike the other suitors, he is never portrayed sympathetically, and he is the first to die when Odysseus returns.

Helen: Wife of Menelaus and queen of Sparta. Helen's abduction from Sparta by the Trojans sparked the Trojan War. Her beauty is without parallel, but she is criticized for giving in to her Trojan captors and thereby costing many Greek men their lives. She offers Telemachus assistance in his quest to find his father.

Agamemnon: Former king of Mycenae, brother of Menelaus, and commander of the Achaean forces at Troy. Odysseus encounters Agamemnon's spirit in Hades. Agamemnon was murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, upon his return from the war. He was later avenged by his son Orestes. Their story is constantly repeated in the Odyssey to offer an inverted image of the fortunes of Odysseus and Telemachus.

Eurymachus: A manipulative, deceitful suitor. Eurymachus's charisma and duplicity allow him to exert some influence over the other suitors.

Amphinomus: Among the dozens of suitors, the only decent man seeking Penelope's hand in marriage. Amphinomus sometimes speaks up for Odysseus and Telemachus, but he is killed like the rest of the suitors in the final fight.

Eumaeus: The loyal shepherd who, along with the cowherd Philoetius, helps Odysseus reclaim his throne after his return to Ithaca. Even though he does not know that the vagabond who appears at his hut is Odysseus, Eumaeus gives the man food and shelter.

Eurycleia: The aged and loyal servant who nursed Odysseus and Telemachus when they were babies. Eurycleia is well informed about palace intrigues and serves as confidante to her masters. She keeps Telemachus's journey secret from Penelope, and she later keeps Odysseus's identity a secret after she recognizes a scar on his leg.

Melanthius: The brother of Melantho. Melanthius is a treacherous and opportunistic goatherd who supports the suitors, especially Eurymachus, and abuses the beggar who appears in Odysseus's palace, not realizing that the man is Odysseus himself.

Melantho: Sister of Melanthius and maidservant in Odysseus's palace. Like her brother, Melantho abuses the beggar in the palace, not knowing that the man is Odysseus. She is having an affair with Eurymachus.

Calypso: The beautiful nymph who falls in love with Odysseus when he lands on her island-home of Ogygia. Calypso holds him prisoner there for seven years until Hermes, the messenger god, persuades her to let him go.

Polyphemus: One of the Cyclopes (uncivilized one-eyed giants) whose island Odysseus comes to soon after leaving Troy. Polyphemus imprisons Odysseus and his crew and tries to eat them, but Odysseus blinds him through a clever ruse and manages to escape. In doing so, however, Odysseus angers Polyphemus's father, Poseidon.

Circe: The beautiful witch-goddess who transforms Odysseus's crew into swine when he lands on her island. With Hermes' help, Odysseus resists Circe's powers and then becomes her lover, living in luxury at her side for a year.

Laertes - Odysseus's aging father, who resides on a farm in Ithaca. In despair and physical decline, Laertes regains his spirit when Odysseus returns and eventually kills Antinous's father.

Tiresias: A Theban prophet who inhabits the underworld. Tiresias meets Odysseus when Odysseus journeys to the underworld in Book 11. He shows Odysseus how to get back to Ithaca and allows Odysseus to communicate with the other souls in Hades.

Nestor: King of Pylos and a former warrior in the Trojan War. Like Odysseus, Nestor is known as a clever speaker. Telemachus visits him in Book 3 to ask about his father, but Nestor knows little of Odysseus's whereabouts.

Menelaus: King of Sparta, brother of Agamemnon, and husband of Helen, he helped lead the Greeks in the Trojan War. He offers Telemachus assistance in his quest to find Odysseus when Telemachus visits him in Book 4.

Nausicaa: The beautiful daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa discovers Odysseus on the beach at Scheria and, out of budding affection for him, ensures his warm reception at her parents' palace.

Alcinous: King of the Phaeacians, who offers Odysseus hospitality in his island kingdom of Scheria. Alcinous hears the story of Odysseus's wanderings and provides him with safe passage back to Ithaca.

Arete: Queen of the Phaeacians, wife of Alcinous, and mother of Nausicaa. Arete is intelligent and influential. Nausicaa tells Odysseus to make his appeal for assistance to Arete.

Themes:

The Power of Cunning over Strength

If the Iliad is about strength, the Odyssey is about cunning, a difference that becomes apparent in the very first lines of the epics. Whereas the Iliad tells the story of the rage of Achilles, the strongest hero in the Greek army, the Odyssey focuses on a "man of twists and turns" (1.1). Odysseus does have extraordinary strength, as he demonstrates in Book 21 by being the only man who can string the bow. But he relies much more on mind than muscle, a tendency that his encounters showcase. He knows that he cannot overpower Polyphemus, for example, and that, even if he were able to do so, he wouldn't be able to budge the boulder from the door. He thus schemes around his disadvantage in strength by exploiting Polyphemus's stupidity. Though he does use violence to put out Polyphemus's single eye, this display of strength is part of a larger plan to deceive the brute.

Similarly, Odysseus knows that he is no match for the host of strapping young suitors in his palace, so he makes the most of his other strength—his wits. Step by step, through disguises and deceptions, he arranges a situation in which he alone is armed and the suitors are locked in a room with him. With this setup, Achilles' superb talents as a warrior would enable him to accomplish what Odysseus does, but only Odysseus's strategic planning can bring about such a

sure victory. Some of the tests in Odysseus's long, wandering ordeal seem to mock reliance on strength alone. No one can resist the Sirens' song, for example, but Odysseus gets an earful of the lovely melody by having his crew tie him up. Scylla and Charybdis cannot be beaten, but Odysseus can minimize his losses with prudent decision-making and careful navigation. Odysseus's encounter with Achilles in the underworld is a reminder: Achilles won great kleos, or glory, during his life, but that life was brief and ended violently. Odysseus, on the other hand, by his wits, will live to a ripe old age and is destined to die in peace.

The Pitfalls of Temptation:

The initial act that frustrated so many Achaeans' homecoming was the work of an Achaean himself: Ajax (the "Lesser" Ajax, a relatively unimportant figure not to be confused with the "Greater" Ajax, whom Odysseus meets in Hades) raped the Trojan priestess Cassandra in a temple while the Greeks were plundering the fallen city. That act of impulse, impiety, and stupidity brought the wrath of Athena upon the Achaean fleet and set in motion the chain of events that turned Odysseus's homecoming into a long nightmare. It is fit that the Odyssey is motivated by such an event, for many of the pitfalls that Odysseus and his men face are likewise obstacles that arise out of mortal weakness and the inability to control it. The submission to temptation or recklessness either angers the gods or distracts Odysseus and the members of his crew from their journey: they yield to hunger and slaughter the Sun's flocks, and they eat the fruit of the lotus and forget about their homes.

Even Odysseus's hunger for kleos is a kind of temptation. He submits to it when he reveals his name to Polyphemus, bringing Poseidon's wrath upon him and his men. In the case of the Sirens, the theme is revisited simply for its own interest. With their ears plugged, the crew members sail safely by the Sirens' island, while Odysseus, longing to hear the Sirens' sweet song, is saved from folly only by his foresighted command to his crew to keep him bound to the ship's mast. Homer is fascinated with depicting his protagonist tormented by temptation: in general, Odysseus and his men want very desperately to complete their nostos, or homecoming, but this desire is constantly at odds with the other pleasures that the world offers.

Food:

Although throwing a feast for a guest is a common part of hospitality, hunger and the consumption of food often have negative associations in the Odyssey. They represent lack of discipline or submission to temptation, as when Odysseus tarries in the cave of the Cyclops, when his men slaughter the Sun's flocks, or when they eat the fruit of the lotus. The suitors, moreover, are constantly eating. Whenever Telemachus and Penelope complain about their uninvited guests, they mention how the suitors slaughter the palace's livestock. Odysseus kills the suitors just as they are starting their dinner, and Homer graphically describes them falling over tables and spilling their food. In almost all cases, the monsters of the Odyssey owe their monstrosity at least in part to their diets or the way that they eat. Scylla swallows six of Odysseus's men, one for each head. The Cyclops eats humans, but not sheep apparently, and is gluttonous nonetheless: when he gets drunk, he vomits up wine mixed with pieces of human flesh. The Laestrygonians seem like nice people—until their queen, who is described as "huge as a mountain crag," tries to eat Odysseus and his men (10.124). In these cases, excessive eating represents not just lack of self-control, but also the total absence of humanity and civility.

The Wedding Bed:

The wedding bed in Book 23 symbolizes the constancy of Penelope and Odysseus's marriage. Only a single maidservant has ever seen the bed, and it is where the happy couple spends its first night in each other's arms since Odysseus's departure for Troy twenty years earlier. The symbolism is heightened by the trick that Penelope uses to test Odysseus, which revolves around the immovability of their bed—a metaphor for the unshakable foundation of their love.

Genre:
Epic Poem:

Epic poems typically begin in the middle of an extended action, or to use the Latin term, in medias res, which enables the audience (who originally listened to the poem, rather than reading it) to become immediately engaged in the plot without sitting through a lot of backstory. The poem uses different methods to explain previous events in the timeline of the plot, often via recollections from characters or explanations from the gods. The Odyssey begins in a moment of crisis in Odysseus's hometown of Ithaca, where suitors are running amok in

Odysseus's house and pestering his wife, Penelope, to remarry. As Odysseus's son, Telemachus, learns what happened to his father during the Trojan War, the poem's audience hears about events that are not directly relevant to the story of Odysseus. While outside of the main action of the poem, these interludes fill in the details of the story that come before the beginning of the poem, allowing Homer to tell a much broader story in a plot that spans a relatively short period of time.

The protagonists of epic poems exemplify values important to the poet's culture, expanding the poems from a simple adventure story to a reinforcement of cultural ideals. For the Greeks of Homer's time, hospitality was a chief virtue. Their most powerful god, Zeus, is described by Odysseus as the god of strangers, who "guards all guests and suppliants." Odysseus judges the various communities that he encounters at sea by whether they are "violent, savage, lawless? Or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?" Over the course of his journey Odysseus receives hospitality in the form of food, shelter, and gifts from the Phaeacians, and he erroneously assumes Cyclops will extend him the same goodwill when he eats all of Cyclops's cheese. (He's wrong.) Meanwhile, back at Ithaca, the suitors exploit Odysseus's hospitality by slaughtering his livestock and drinking all his wine. In this way, the poem reinforces the cultural importance of being both a good guest and a good host. Ancient Greeks also prized intelligence and physical ability. Odysseus uses a combination of wit and strength to overcome the obstacles thrown in his path. In this way, through Odysseus's adventures, Homer describes the heroic values of hospitality, cunning, and bravery prized by the Greek society that was the original audience of the poem.

Point of View:

The Odyssey is narrated from a third-person point of view by a narrator who has invoked the divine authority of the Muse, which allows the narrator to know everything and understand all the characters' thoughts and feelings. The poem begins "Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns…" establishing a point of view that is all-seeing, all-knowing, and close to the divine. The poem shifts between narrative passages and direct speech, sometimes quoting one character within another character's speech, such as when Menelaus includes several direct quotes from other characters in his lengthy speech to Telemachus in Book 4. The narrator describes characters'

feelings and attitudes with brief descriptive phrases, such as "Telemachus, sitting among the suitors, heart obsessed with grief," but more often the characters describe their own emotional states in direct speech, such as when Odysseus says "Man of misery, what next? I this the end? … I'm bone-weary, about to breathe my last…"

The point of view shifts entirely to Odysseus during books 9-12, when he tells about his adventures at sea before landing on Calypso's island, making the poem feel like a first-person account for a lengthy stretch of narrative. In these sections the narrator interrupts Odysseus a few times to remind the audience where they are and who is talking, but mostly Odysseus's narrative is continuous and first-person. This portion of the poem functions as a story-within-a-story as Odysseus gives a detailed and vivid description of his adventures since leaving Troy on what he hoped would be a quick journey home. As most of the action of the poem has already taken place by the time we first see Odysseus on Calypso's island, this shift to the first person makes those events more gripping and immediate than if they were told in the third person by the narrator. The audience has the sense of experiencing Odysseus' perilous struggles with the Cyclops, Circe, Scylla, and Charybdis as they happen, further investing us in Odysseus's fate.

The various perspectives through which the poem is narrated provide different voices for the moral issues at the heart of The Odyssey. Odysseus encounters many "hosts" on his journeys, and most of them do not act in accordance with the customs of Greek hospitality. Because we witness much of the action through Odysseus's point of view, we understand the contrast between his expectations of hospitality versus the reality of his experiences. The gods offer another perspective on the expectations of hospitality. Athena, for example, fights alongside Odysseus and Telemachus to slaughter the suitors as punishment for their abuse of the guest-host relationship. While the gods are rarely the focus of scenes within the poem, we understand their point of view on the importance of Greek values through their speech.

What makes Odysseus "the man of twists and turns"?

In the proem of Book 1, Homer describes Odysseus as "the man of twists and turns," an epithet that sets our expectations of the protagonist for the rest of the poem. As "the man of twists and turns," Odysseus's shape-shifting allows him

to escape death multiple times, but it also defines his identity as a cunning trickster and a storyteller. Most literally, we can understand "twists and turns" as a description of Odysseus's physical movement across the sea. His miserable experiences at sea are both a punishment devised by Poseidon and a trial that he willingly endures to return home. When we first meet Odysseus in Book 5, we find him at his furthest remove from Ithaca and his former life as a husband, father, warrior. In a literal "twist of fate," he can no longer be any of these things, and must play the passive role of Calypso's consort, separated from his true wife and his son. He longs to correct the turns of fate that landed him in this situation, so he willingly braves the open sea and the anger of Poseidon on a makeshift raft for the chance of rejoining society and regaining his identity as head of his household.

Odysseus can also be called "the man of twists and turns" because of the twists and turns of his mind, a trait that frequently gets him out of dangerous situations. For example, in Book 9 Odysseus tells of his encounter with the Cyclops, a one-eyed monster who transgresses all Greek social norms by murdering nearly all of Odysseus's men. To get out of this situation, Odysseus craftily lies to the Cyclops about his identity, saying his name is "Nobody," and only revealing his true identity once he's escaped the Cyclops's cave. He also lies about who he is to Athena, the swineherd Eumaeus, Telemachus, and Penelope, claiming to be a shipwrecked man from Crete who fought in the Trojan War and spent years in Egypt. These deceitful stories allow Odysseus to work his way back into his household and test the suitors and servants' hospitality. Disguises also let Odysseus test his friends' and family's loyalty. As the man from Crete he claims to have met Odysseus in his travels abroad, and by bringing Odysseus up with Eumaeus and Penelope he learns what these characters truly think about him.

Odysseus's "twists and turns" reflect the motif of storytelling that reappears multiple times in the poem, most notably during Odysseus's own retelling of his experiences at sea. In Books 9–12 Odysseus himself narrates his adventures to his hosts and audience, the Phaeacians, giving him the epithet "the great teller of tales." Like the poem itself, the shape of Odysseus's narrative is not straightforward, but has many twists and turns, starting in the middle and doubling back on itself. This reinforces the idea that a "twisty" story is more interesting and entertaining than one told straight through, and also enables Odysseus to reference important events more than once. When he finishes his

story, he says, "It goes against my grain to repeat a tale told once, and told so clearly." As well as being a narrative device for Homer to fill in earlier details of the story, the act of storytelling is important for Odysseus to process his experiences before returning home. For this reason, Scheria acts as a midway point between the fabulous world of the hero's travels and the real world of his country with all its political and familial conflicts. Through storytelling, Odysseus both confirms and constructs his own identity as father and husband and as tactician and survivor.

THE ODYSSEY QUOTES

Homecoming

1.
"Ah how fine it is, when a man is brought down,
to leave a son behind! Orestes took revenge,
he killed that cunning, murderous Aegisthus,
who'd killed his famous father."

Home and family motivate Odysseus and drive the narrative toward its goal. The first four books focus on the disintegration of the hero's house through the eyes of his son, Telemachus. He goes to seek information about his missing father and encounters Nestor, who tells him the story of Agamemnon, who was murdered by his wife and her paramour upon returning from Troy. Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, subsequently avenged his father's death by killing Aegisthus. The story has a clear lesson for Telemachus, who must play his part in preserving his home and family.

2.
"But about your destiny, Menelaus, dear to Zeus,
it's not for you to die
and meet your fate in the stallion-land of Argos,
no, the deathless ones will sweep you off to the world's end,
the Elysian Fields, where gold-haired Rhadamanthys waits
where life glides on in immortal ease for mortal men."

In his travels, Telemachus meets Menelaus and Helen in Sparta. Menelaus tells him what he learned of Odysseus from the prophetic ocean god, Proteus, in Egypt. The reader also learns that Menelaus will not die but will live on eternally with his

wife, Helen, in Elysion. In Book 4, however, we see that Menelaus and Helen are not happily married but live uncomfortably in the wake of her infidelity against him. Immortality thus seems more like a punishment than a reward. Odysseus, we will see, rejects eternal life with Calypso to return to his beloved—but mortal—wife, Penelope.

3.

"Nevertheless, I long—I pine, all my days—
to travel home and see the dawn of my return.
And if a god will wreck me yet again on the wine-dark sea,
I can bear that too, with a spirit tempered to endure.
Much have I suffered, labored long and hard by now
in the waves and wars. Add this to the total—
bring the trial on!"

We first find Odysseus in a kind of sexual captivity to the goddess Calypso, who rescued him five years earlier and nursed him back to health after being shipwrecked. Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso's island, located in the far west, to order her to send Odysseus home. She begrudgingly agrees, but she has neither a ship nor crew to escort Odysseus on his journey. In this quote, Odysseus expresses his willingness to face enormous dangers and risks to gain his homecoming.

4.

"Then she mixed them a potion—cheese, barley
and pale honey mulled in Pramnian wine—
but into the brew she stirred her wicked drugs
to wipe from their memories any thought of home."

Several times Odysseus and his men face the temptation to give up their efforts to return home to their families and country. For instance, in the land of the lotus eaters, some of his men taste the lotus plant, which contains a powerful drug that destroys one's motivations and sense of responsibility. Odysseus has to physically convey his men back onto their ship to continue the voyage. Here Odysseus describes how the sorceress Circe drugs the food she served his companions, which not only destroyed their will but turned them into swine. This episode suggests that the desire for homecoming is part of being human and that to live without home and family makes one less than human.

5

"As a father, brimming with love, welcomes home
his darling only son in a warm embrace—
what pain he's borne for him and him alone!—
home now, in the tenth year from far abroad,
so the loyal swineherd hugged the beaming prince,
he clung for dear life, covering him with kisses, yes,
like one escaped from death."

In Book 16, Telemachus returns home from Sparta and finds a strange beggar at the hut of the swineherd, Eumaeus. This simile describes the joy of Eumaeus, a faithful slave of the family, at seeing Telemachus safely back from his travels. Since Odysseus must remain disguised for the time being, he cannot express the powerful emotions he feels at seeing his grown son, whom he left as an infant twenty years ago. The simile allows the narrator to hint at these emotions indirectly.

Week Five

Roman Epic

The Aeneid

By **Virgil**

Introduction:

- Author: Virgil
- Culture: Roman
- Time: 70-19 BC
- Genre: epic poetry
- Names to Know: Aeneas, Dido, Venus, Juno, Jupiter
- Themes: wandering hero, piety, devotion to duty, stoicism

Virgil:

Publius Vergilius Maro was a classical Roman poet, best known for three major works—the Bucolics (or Eclogues), the Georgics, and the Aeneid—although several minor poems are also attributed to him. The son of a farmer in northern Italy, Virgil came to be regarded as one of Rome's greatest poets; his Aeneid as Rome's national epic.

Narrative Structure:

- **Books 1-6: The Odyssean part**
- Aeneas as a wandering hero like Odysseus. His god-sent mission is to find a new city. Essentially, once the Greeks sack Troy, Aeneas and some Trojan ships escape to find a new Troy.

- **Books 7-12: The Iliadic part**
- Aeneas and the Trojans at war with the Italians & their allies.

The Roman Hero:

- **Aeneas' epithet: pious**
- **Roman heroism: is on behalf of the community, not the individual. [self-sacrifice]**
- **Stoicism: Aeneas subsumes his personal desires for the good of the community [unlike Greek heroes who are very individualistic].**

Book 1: Aeneas in Carthage:

- In lines 13-49, we learn why Aeneas suffers - the wrath of Juno.
- **Two reasons:**
  1. Troy (Judgment of Paris, a past event: Paris did not pick Juno/Hera as the loveliest goddess, he chose Venus)
  2. Carthage (she knew Rome would conquer this, her favorite city, a future event)

The Wrath of Juno:

- Angry, Juno asks Aeolus [master of wind] to drive the Trojan ships off course, shipwreck them if possible.
- The bribe: she offers Aeolus the lovely nymph Deiopeia
- Result: one shipwreck before Neptune calms the sea.

Arrival in Libya:

- Aeneas puts into shore with only 7 ships from his fleet.
- He gives a pep talk to his men, recalling the horrors they have already survived (Scylla, land of the Cyclopes, etc.)

Venus' Appeal & Jupiter's Prophecy:

- While the Trojans recover onshore, Aeneas' mother Venus approaches her father Jupiter on behalf of her son
- Jupiter had promised that Aeneas would successfully found a new city [Rome].

- Jupiter's promise: "For these I set no limits, world or time, but make the gift of empire without end. Lords of the world, the toga-wearing Romans"

Dido and the Carthaginians:

- Jupiter sends Mercury down to make Dido and her people receptive to the Trojans.
- Meanwhile, Aeneas encounters his disguised mother, who tells him Dido's history [Dido has sworn never to love or marry since the death of her husband].
- Venus also makes Aeneas very attractive to Dido.

Aeneas comments on himself:

Book 1.500-505

- "I am Aeneas, duty-bound (translation of the Latin 'pius'), and known above high air of heaven by my fame, carrying with me in my ships our gods of hearth and home, saved from the enemy. I look for Italy to be my fatherland, and my descent is from all-highest Jove. . . I followed the given fates."

The Temple of Juno:

- Hidden in a cloud, Aeneas goes into Carthage. He sees the temple of Juno, its walls painted with scenes from the Trojan War.
- We know from this that the Carthaginians are civilized; the Carthaginians are very sympathetic to the events his city Troy suffered.

Dido Assaulted by Eros:

- While Venus & Cupid infect Dido with Eros for Aeneas, Aeneas tells the Carthaginians about the Fall of Troy and his wanderings.
- Book 2: The Fall of Troy from the Trojan
  Point of view.
- Book 3: Aeneas' wanderings, from Thrace, Crete, Sicily, to Carthage.

Why write the Aeneid?

- The emperor Augustus told Vergil to write a national epic as part of his propaganda program, to celebrate the new golden age of peace that Augustus' reign ushered in.
- Background: Rome's many civil wars and the death of the Republic.

Two Mythic Traditions:

- Greek: The Trojan War in 1250 BCE explains the founding of Rome.
- Roman: Romulus and Remus, suckled by the she-wolf, are the founders of Rome in 753 BCE.

Plot Overview:

On the Mediterranean Sea, Aeneas and his fellow Trojans flee from their home city of Troy, which has been destroyed by the Greeks. They sail for Italy, where Aeneas is destined to found Rome. As they near their destination, a fierce storm throws them off course and lands them in Carthage. Dido, Carthage's founder and queen, welcomes them. Aeneas relates to Dido the long and painful story of his group's travels thus far.

Aeneas tells of the sack of Troy that ended the Trojan War after ten years of Greek siege. In the final campaign, the Trojans were tricked when they accepted into their city walls a wooden horse that, unbeknownst to them, harbored several Greek soldiers in its hollow belly. He tells how he escaped the burning city with his father, Anchises; his son, Ascanius; and the hearth gods that represent their fallen city. Assured by the gods that a glorious future awaited him in Italy, he set sail with a fleet containing the surviving citizens of Troy. Aeneas relates the ordeals they faced on their journey. Twice they attempted to build a new city, only to be driven away by bad omens and plagues. Harpies, creatures that are part woman and part bird, cursed them, but they also encountered friendly countrymen unexpectedly. Finally, after the loss of Anchises and a bout of terrible weather, they made their way to Carthage.

Impressed by Aeneas's exploits and sympathetic to his suffering, Dido, a Phoenician princess who fled her home and founded Carthage after her brother murdered her husband, falls in love with Aeneas. They live together as lovers for a period, until the gods remind Aeneas of his duty to find a new city. He determines to set sail once again. Dido is devastated by his departure and kills herself by ordering a huge pyre to be built with Aeneas's castaway possessions, climbing upon it, and stabbing herself with the sword Aeneas leaves behind.

As the Trojans make for Italy, bad weather blows them to Sicily, where they hold funeral games for the dead Anchises. The women, tired of the voyage, begin to burn the ships, but a downpour puts the fires out. Some of the travel-weary stay behind, while Aeneas, reinvigorated after his father visits him in a dream, takes the rest on toward Italy. Once there, Aeneas descends into the underworld, guided by

the Sibyl of Cumae, to visit his father. He is shown a pageant of the future history and heroes of Rome, which helps him to understand the importance of his mission. Aeneas returns from the underworld, and the Trojans continue up the coast to the region of Latium.

The arrival of the Trojans in Italy begins peacefully. King Latinus, the Italian ruler, extends his hospitality, hoping that Aeneas will prove to be the foreigner whom, according to a prophecy, his daughter Lavinia is supposed to marry. But Latinus's wife, Amata, has other ideas. She means for Lavinia to marry Turnus, a local suitor. Amata and Turnus cultivate enmity toward the newly arrived Trojans. Meanwhile, Ascanius hunts a stag that was a pet of the local herdsmen. A fight breaks out, and several people are killed. Turnus, riding this current of anger, begins a war.

Aeneas, at the suggestion of the river god Tiberinus, sails north up the Tiber to seek military support among the neighboring tribes. During this voyage, his mother, Venus, descends to give him a new set of weapons, wrought by Vulcan. While the Trojan leader is away, Turnus attacks. Aeneas returns to find his countrymen embroiled in battle. Pallas, the son of Aeneas's new ally Evander, is killed by Turnus. Aeneas flies into a violent fury, and many more are slain by the day's end.

The two sides agree to a truce so that they can bury the dead, and the Latin leaders discuss whether to continue the battle. They decide to spare any further unnecessary carnage by proposing a hand-to-hand duel between Aeneas and Turnus. When the two leaders face off, however, the other men begin to quarrel, and full-scale battle resumes. Aeneas is wounded in the thigh, but eventually the Trojans threaten the enemy city. Turnus rushes out to meet Aeneas, who wounds Turnus badly. Aeneas nearly spares Turnus but, remembering the slain Pallas, slays him instead.

Character List

Mortals

Aeneas - The protagonist of the Aeneid. Aeneas is a survivor of the siege of Troy, a city on the coast of Asia Minor. His defining characteristic is piety, a respect for the will of the gods. He is a fearsome warrior and a leader able to motivate his men in the face of adversity, but also a man capable of great compassion and sorrow. His destiny is to found the Roman race in Italy and he subordinates all other concerns to this mission. The Aeneid is about his journey from Troy to Italy, which enables him to fulfill his fate.

Dido - The queen of Carthage, a city in northern Africa, in what is now Tunisia, and lover of Aeneas. Dido left the land of Tyre when her husband was murdered by Pygmalion, her brother. She and her city are strong, but she becomes an unfortunate pawn of the gods in their struggle for Aeneas's destiny. Her love for Aeneas proves to be her downfall. After he abandons her, she constructs a funeral pyre and stabs herself upon it with Aeneas's sword.

Turnus - The ruler of the Rutulians in Italy. Turnus is Aeneas's major antagonist among mortals. He is Lavinia's leading suitor until Aeneas arrives. This rivalry incites him to wage war against the Trojans, despite Latinus's willingness to allow the Trojans to settle in Latium and Turnus's understanding that he cannot successfully defy fate. He is brash and fearless, a capable soldier who values his honor over his life.

Gods and Goddesses:

Juno - The queen of the gods, the wife and sister of Jupiter, and the daughter of Saturn. Juno (Hera in Greek mythology) hates the Trojans because of the Trojan Paris's judgment against her in a beauty contest. She is also a patron of Carthage and knows that Aeneas's Roman descendants are destined to destroy Carthage. She takes out her anger on Aeneas throughout the epic, and in her wrath acts as his primary divine antagonist.

Venus - The goddess of love and the mother of Aeneas. Venus (Aphrodite in Greek mythology) is a benefactor of the Trojans. She helps her son whenever Juno tries to hurt him, causing conflict among the gods. She is also referred to as Cytherea, after Cythera, the island where she was born and where her shrine is located.

Jupiter - The king of the gods, and the son of Saturn. While the gods often struggle against one another in battles of will, Jupiter's will reigns supreme and

becomes identified with the more impersonal force of fate. Therefore, Jupiter (also known as Jove, and called Zeus in Greek mythology) directs the general progress of Aeneas's destiny, ensuring that Aeneas is never permanently thrown off his course toward Italy. Jupiter's demeanor is controlled and levelheaded compared to the volatility of Juno and Venus.

Neptune - God of the sea, and generally an ally of Venus and Aeneas. Neptune (Poseidon in Greek mythology) calms the storm that opens the epic and conducts Aeneas safely on the last leg of his voyage.

Mercury - The messenger god. The other gods often send Mercury (Hermes in Greek mythology) on errands to Aeneas.

Aeolus - The god of the winds, enlisted to aid Juno in creating bad weather for the Trojans in Book I.

Cupid - A son of Venus and the god of erotic desire. In Book I, Cupid (Eros in Greek mythology) disguises himself as Ascanius, Aeneas's son, and causes Dido to fall in love with Aeneas.

Allecto - One of the Furies, or deities who avenge sins, sent by Juno in Book VII to incite the Latin people to war against the Trojans.

Vulcan - God of fire and the forge, and husband of Venus. Venus urges Vulcan (Hephaestus in Greek mythology) to craft a superior set of arms for Aeneas, and the gift serves Aeneas well in his battle with Turnus.

Tiberinus - The river god associated with the Tiber River, where Rome will eventually be built. At Tiberinus's suggestion, Aeneas travels upriver to make allies of the Arcadians.

Saturn - The father of the gods. Saturn (Chronos in Greek mythology) was king of Olympus until his son Jupiter overthrew him.

Minerva - The goddess who protects the Greeks during the Trojan War and helps them conquer Troy. Like Juno, Minerva (Pallas Athena in Greek mythology) is motivated against the Trojans by the Trojan Paris's judgment that Venus was the most beautiful among goddesses.

Apollo - A son of Jupiter and god of the sun. Apollo was born at Delos and helps the Trojans in their voyage when they stop there. Because he is often portrayed as an archer, many characters invoke his name before they fire a shaft in battle.

Characters from Homer's Iliad Relevant to the Aeneid

Ulysses - The hero of Homer's Odyssey, and one of the captains of the Greek army that takes Troy. Ulysses (Odysseus in Greek lore), like Aeneas, must make a long and treacherous voyage before he finds home again, and references to his whereabouts in the Aeneid help situate Aeneas's wanderings in relation to Ulysses'.

Achilles - The greatest of the Greek warriors. Achilles slew the Trojan hero Hector during the war and is the tragic hero of the Iliad.

Hector - The greatest of the Trojan warriors, killed at Troy. Hector is in some ways a parallel figure to Turnus, who also defends his native city to the death.

Andromachë - Hector's wife, who survives the siege of Troy. Andromachë meets Aeneas in his wanderings, tells him her story, and advises his course to Italy.

Paris - A Trojan prince, son of Priam and Hecuba, and brother of Hector. The handsomest of men, Paris is asked to judge which goddess is most beautiful: Venus, Juno, or Minerva. Venus promises him Helen as his wife in exchange for his judgment, so Paris selects Venus. This selection inspires the permanent wrath of Juno against the Trojans. Stealing Helen from her Greek husband, Menelaus, Paris provokes the Trojan War.

Helen - The most beautiful of mortal women and wife of Menelaus. Helen's abduction to Troy by Paris sparks the Trojan War.

Menelaus - A Greek king who wed Helen and made a pact with her other suitors to fight anyone who tried to steal her. When Paris took Helen, the pact was invoked and the Trojan War began.

Agamemnon - The leader of the Greek army at Troy, and the king of Argos, a city in Greece. Upon his return from the war, Agamemnon is killed by his adulterous wife, Clytemnestra.

Priam - The king of Troy. Priam is slain before Aeneas's eyes during the Greeks' sacking of Troy.

Pyrrhus - The son of Achilles. Pyrrhus, also called Neoptolemus, appears in Aeneas's account of the siege of Troy as the brutal murderer of Priam and Priam's sons.

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Primacy of Fate

The direction and destination of Aeneas's course are preordained, and his various sufferings and glories in battle and at sea over the course of the epic merely postpone this unchangeable destiny. The power of fate stands above the power of the gods in the hierarchy of supernatural forces. Often it is associated with the will of Jupiter, the most powerful of the Olympians. Because Jupiter's will trumps the wills of all others, the interference in Aeneas's life by the lesser gods, who strive to advance their personal interests as much as they can within the contours of the larger destiny, do not really affect the overall outcome of events.

The development of individual characters in the epic is apparent in the readiness and resistance with which they meet the directives of fate. Juno and Turnus both fight destiny every step of the way, and so the epic's final resolution involves a transformation in each of them, because of which they resign themselves to fate and allow the story, at last, to arrive at its destined end. Dido desires Aeneas, whom fate denies her, and her desire consumes her. Aeneas preserves his sanity, as well as his own life and those of his men, by subordinating his own anxieties and desires to the demands of fate and the rules of piety. Fate, to Virgil's Roman audience, is a divine, religious principle that determines the course of history and has culminated in the Roman Empire.

The Sufferings of Wanderers

The first half of the Aeneid tells the story of the Trojans' wanderings as they make their way from Troy to Italy. Ancient culture was oriented toward familial loyalty and geographic origin and stressed the idea that a homeland is one's source of identity. Because homelessness implies instability of both situation and identity, it is a form of suffering in and of itself. But Virgil adds to the sufferings of the wandering Trojans by putting them at the mercy of forces larger than themselves.

On the sea, their fleet buffeted by frequent storms, the Trojans must repeatedly decide on a course of action in an uncertain world. The Trojans also feel disoriented each time they land on an unknown shore or learn where they are without knowing whether it is the place where they belong. As an experience that, from the point of view of the Trojans, is uncertain in every way, the long wanderings at sea serve as a metaphor for the kind of wandering that is characteristic of life in general. We and Virgil's Roman audience know what fate has in store for the Trojans, but the wandering characters themselves do not. Because these individual human beings are not always privy to the larger picture of destiny, they are still vulnerable to fears, surprises, desires, and unforeseen triumphs.

The Glory of Rome

Virgil wrote the Aeneid during what is known as the Golden Age of the Roman Empire, under the auspices of Rome's first emperor, Caesar Augustus. Virgil's purpose was to write a myth of Rome's origins that would emphasize the grandeur and legitimize the success of an empire that had conquered most of the known world. The Aeneid steadily points toward this already realized cultural pinnacle; Aeneas even justifies his settlement in Latium in the same manner that the empire justified its settlement in numerous other foreign territories. Virgil works backward, connecting the political and social situation of his own day with the inherited tradition of the Greek gods and heroes, to show the former as historically derived from the latter. Order and good government triumph emphatically over the Italian peoples, whose world prior to the Trojans' arrival is characterized as a primitive existence of war, chaos, and emotional irrationality. By contrast, the empire under Augustus was generally a world of peace, order, and emotional stability.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Flames

Fire symbolizes both destruction and erotic desire or love. With images of flames, Virgil connects the two. Paris's desire for Helen eventually leads to the fires of the siege of Troy. When Dido confesses her love for Aeneas to Anna, her

sister, she begins, "I recognize / the signs of the old flame, of old desire" (IV.31–32). Dido also recalls her previous marriage in "the thought of the torch and the bridal bed" (IV.25). Torches limit the power of flames by controlling them, but the new love ignited in Dido's heart is never regulated by the institution of marriage, "the bridal bed." The flames she feels do not keep her warm but rather consume her mind. Virgil describes the way she dies in the synonymous terms "enflamed and driven mad" (IV.965).

The Golden Bough

According to the Sibyl, the priestess of Apollo, the golden bough is the symbol Aeneas must carry to gain access to the underworld. It is unusual for mortals to be allowed to visit the realm of the dead and then return to life. The golden bough is therefore the sign of Aeneas's special privilege.

The Gates of War

The opening of these gates indicates a declaration of war in a tradition that was still recognized even in Virgil's own day. That it is Juno rather than a king or even Turnus who opens the gates emphasizes the way immortal beings use mortals to settle scores. The Gates of War thus symbolize the chaos of a world in which divine force, often antagonistic to the health and welfare of mortals, overpowers human will and desire.

The Trojan Hearth Gods

The hearth gods of Troy, or penates as they are called in Latin, are mentioned repeatedly throughout the epic. They are symbols of locality and ancestry, tribal gods associated specifically with the city of Troy, who reside in the household hearth. Aeneas gathers them up along with his family when he departs from his devastated home, and they symbolize the continuity of Troy as it is transplanted to a new physical location.

Weather

The gods use weather as a force to express their will. The storm that Juno sends at the beginning of the epic symbolizes her rage. Venus, on the other hand, shows her affection for the Trojans by bidding the sea god, Neptune, to protect them. In Book IV, Venus and Juno conspire to isolate Dido and Aeneas in a cave by sending a storm to disrupt their hunting trip, symbolizing the rupture of normal

social codes as well. Greek and Roman mythology has a tendency to make its symbols literal in this way—to connect the seen (a storm, for example) with the unseen (divine will) causally and dramatically.

Important Quotations Explained

1.

I sing of warfare and a man at war.

From the sea-coast of Troy in early days

He came to Italy by destiny,

To our Lavinian western shore,

A fugitive, this captain, buffeted

. . .

Till he could found a city and bring home

His gods to Laetium, land of the Latin race,

The Alban lords, and the high walls of Rome.

Tell me the causes now, O Muse, how galled

. . .

From her old wound, the queen of gods compelled him—

. . .

To undergo so many perilous days

And enter on so many trials. Can anger

Black as this prey on the minds of heaven?

(I.1–19)

With these opening lines of the Aeneid, Virgil enters the epic tradition in the shadow of Homer, author of the Iliad, an epic of the Trojan War, and the Odyssey, an epic of the Greek hero Ulysses' wanderings homeward from Troy. By naming

his subjects as "warfare and a man," Virgil establishes himself as an heir to the themes of both Homeric epics. The man, Aeneas, spends the first half of the epic wandering in search of a new home and the second half at war fighting to establish this homeland. Lines 2 through 4 summarize Aeneas's first mission in the epic, to emigrate from Troy to Italy, as a fate already accomplished. We know from Virgil's use of the past tense that what he presents is history, that the end is certain, and that the epic will be an exercise in poetic description of historical events. In the phrase "our Lavinian . . . shore," Virgil connects his audience, his Roman contemporaries, to Aeneas, the hero of "early days."

Even though we do not learn Aeneas's name in these lines, we learn much about him. The fact that Aeneas's name is withheld for so long—until line 131—emphasizes Aeneas's lack of importance as an individual; his contribution to the future defines him. He is a "fugitive" and a "captain" and therefore a leader of men. That he bears responsibility to "bring home / His gods" introduces the concept of Aeneas's piety through his duty to the hearth gods of Troy. Most important, we learn that Aeneas is "a man apart, devoted to his mission." Aeneas's detachment from temporal and emotional concerns and his focus on the mission of founding Rome, to which Virgil alludes in the image of walls in line 12, increase as the epic progresses.

In this opening passage, Virgil mentions the divine obstacle that will plague Aeneas throughout his quest: the "sleepless rage" of the "queen of gods," Juno. Aeneas will suffer in the face of storms at sea and, later, a war on land, and Virgil attributes both these impediments to Juno's cruelty. In line 13, the poet asks the muse to explain the causes of Juno's ire. The invocation of a muse is the traditional opening line to an epic in the classical tradition beginning with Homer. Virgil delays his invocation of the muse by a dozen lines, first summarizing what might be considered a matter of mortal history, and then inquiring the muse of the matter's divine causes.

Virgil's question, "Can anger / Black as this prey on the minds of heaven?" brings up the ancients' relationship to the gods. Within their polytheistic religious system, the Greeks and Romans reckoned the will of the gods to be the cause of all events on Earth. Instead of attributing forces of good and evil to the gods, as later religions did, the Greeks and Romans believed the gods to be motivated by

emotions recognizable to humans—jealousy, vanity, pride, generosity, and loyalty, for example. The primary conflict in the Aeneid is Juno's vindictive anger against the forces of fate, which have ordained Aeneas's mission to bring Troy to Italy, enabling the foundation of Rome.

2.

Did you suppose, my father,
That I could tear myself away and leave you?
Unthinkable; how could a father say it?
Now if it pleases the powers about that nothing
Stand of this great city; if your heart
Is set on adding your own death and ours
To that of Troy, the door's wide open for it.
(II.857–863)

In this passage from Book II, which precedes Aeneas's flight from burning Troy with his father upon his back, Virgil distinguishes Aeneas for his piety. This sense of duty has two components. The first is a filial component: Aeneas is a dutiful son to Anchises, and he wants to escape with him to safety. Aeneas makes it plain that his strong sense of family loyalty will not allow him to abandon Anchises. The second is a social component: Anchises, Aeneas argues, cannot choose to stay and die at Troy without affecting many others. Anchises is a patriarch, and were he to resign himself to death, he would effectively choose death for them all. These words of Aeneas's lift Anchises out of the self-indulgence of despair and remind him of the leadership role that his seniority and status demand. In the ensuing episodes, even after his death, Anchises serves as a wise counselor to his son as Aeneas makes his way toward Italy.

Week Six

Metamorphoses

By Ovid

Poet as Hero

Ovid: 43 BC – 17 AD

- Highly regarded by the emperor Augustus, until he was Exiled from Rome by Augustus under mysterious circumstances in 8 A.D.
  Ovid: 43 BC – 17 AD
- Possibly because he felt Ovid's work was not conforming to conservative views in Rome at that time [tales of love and sexuality too racy]
- Also felt that Ovid mocked the ideal of Rome.
- Educated, sophisticated, witty
- Extensive references to both Greek and Latin poets
- A favorite theme: erotic love
- Contrast Virgil

Narrative Connections:

- Ovid claims to write one continuous epic, not an anthology of myths. Unlike the Odyssey, however, there is no central hero, thus no simple Aristotelian unity to the work.
- However, he does do these three things to tie the stories together
- Metamorphosis
- Apparent Chronological Progression
- Occasionally will follow a hero like Hercules through several tales
- Epic poem, 15 books
- Ambitious: the history of the world from creation to Augustan Rome (chaos to order)

- Unifying theme: changing forms
- Special focus on myths of metamorphosis
- Narrative structure reflects theme
- An important source for later writers and artists (e.g. Shakespeare)

Pattern of the Metamorphoses:

- "Divine Comedy" or Gods in Love: Books 1-2
- "Avenging Gods": Books 3-6
- "Pathos of Love": the rest of Book 6-11
- "History of Rome & the Deified Caesar": Books 12-15
- Following this outline, we see a general movement from gods acting like humans (sect I), to humans suffering at the hands of gods (II), to humans suffering at the hands of humans (III), to humans becoming gods (IV).

Highlights:

- Creation and the Four Ages (962-965)
- Compare Hesiod
- Lycaon (evil) and the flood (965-969)
- Compare Gilgamesh
- Deucalion and Pyrrha (virtue) (969-972; review)
- Apollo and Daphne (972-975; review)
- Perseus (980-984; review)
- Orpheus and Eurydice (984-989)
- Apotheosis of Caesar (989-992)

BOOK ONE: Prologue
Creation

- Ovid presents a philosophical rather than mythological creation account, avoiding the popular myth of Earth mating with Sky (as in Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek myths).
- Chaos is merely raw material from which the Demiurge (Plato's name for the divine artisan) shapes the cosmos.
- From the beginning we see change and conflict as an inherent quality of nature, warring elements (earth, air, water, fire) in collision. Note that the god brings order to chaos.

- By separating and delineating elements, the creator god imposes rational design on unruly matter, but this order does not remain fixed for long.
- As the multiple metamorphoses begin to occur, change is once again the rule.
- Chaos, a shapeless confusion
- Order: separation and boundaries
- Animals
- Humans can look up to heaven

Creation of Man:

In this first book, Ovid gives three accounts of human origins.

- The first version is the most positive, saying we were "made in God's image," literally "from divine seeds" (a Stoic idea). Ovid slips from philosophy to mythology as he refers to the first named god in the work, Prometheus, as the creator of humanity. Socrates taught that man's erect posture indicated his superiority over the other animals.
- The second connects man's beginnings with the source of evil, as he sprung up from the giants' blood after their defeat by the gods.
- In the third, humanity is re-created after the flood out of stones.

Four Ages:

- Golden (Saturn)
- Peace, abundance, spring
- Silver (Jupiter)
- Seasons, houses, agriculture
- Bronze
- War
- Iron
- Evil, violence, greed, mining, impiety, injustice, assaults on Heaven

Lycaon (966-968):

- Assembly of gods, Jupiter's tale
- Lycaon an example of evil, hybris
- Resists worship serves flesh of his guest
- Lightning and metamorphosis

- Plan to eradicate human race

Flood (968-969):

- Inversion of natural order
- Deucalion and Pyrrha alone survive
- Repopulation of earth
- Metamorphosis: stones into humans

Apollo and Daphne (972-975):

- Cupid vs Apollo
- Apollo cannot heal his wound
- Metamorphosis into laurel tree

The Final Book:

Events of contemporary Rome:

- The death of Caesar is seen from the gods' perspective, elevating its significance to heavenly status. Note Augustus' act of deifying Caesar only brings more honor to himself.
- Is Ovid being facetious, comparing Julius and Augustus to mythical heroes whom he clearly does not believe in?
- Difference in Greek and Roman mythology: whereas Greek myth with the aftermath of the Trojan War, Roman myth becomes "history" (Aeneas, Romulus), bringing the story into the present age. Everything that has occurred before was destined to produce this new Golden Age of Augustus
- (an idea which Ovid mocks).

Orpheus and Eurydice:

- What is Orpheus' "heroic" quality?
- Reason for katabasis?
- Compare with:
  Aeneid

Odyssey
Bacchae
Homeric Hymn to Demeter

Deification of Julius Caesar:

- How is Julius Caesar deified?
- What has he done to deserve apotheosis?
- How does Ovid incorporate Virgil and Greek myth into this story?
- For what accomplishments is Augustus praised?

Epilogue (992):

- **What is the place of the poet in the order of the universe?**

METAMORPHOSES
CONTEXT

Ovid, one of Rome's greatest poets, predicted that his fame would live on forever. So far, his prediction has proven accurate. Ovid was born Publius Ovidius Naso on March 20, 43 b.c., a year after the death of Julius Caesar. He was born in Sulmo, to a wealthy family. When Ovid was twelve years old, the battle of Actium put an end to a civil war that had been raging between Anthony and Octavian. Octavian, the victor, became emperor. (He was later known as Augustus.) Because he lived in a time of calm and prosperity, and because of his family's wealth, Ovid was able to write in peace. Ovid's work draws on the great literary traditions of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures. His writing owes a debt to the works of Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Theocritus, Callimachus, Virgil, Tibullus, Horace, and Propertius. Some critics view Ovid's opus as the culmination of ancient poetry.

After Ovid's early education in Sulmo, his father sent him to Rome to study rhetoric in preparation for a life in politics. However, Ovid claimed that whenever he tried to write prose, only poetry came out. After a short stint in government, he decided to pursue poetry. His father disapproved of Ovid's choice and incessantly reminded him of the fate of Homer, who died a poor man. Ovid's father was wrong to worry, however. Ovid found immediate success. Around 20 b.c., he published the Amores, or Loves, which consisted of three books on the theme of love. Ovid's next work, the Heroides, or Heroines, took him into uncharted territory. In this novel work, comprising fourteen letters written by legendary women to their husbands or lovers, Ovid puts the narrative in the hands of historically voiceless,

mistreated, or overlooked women. Around this time, Ovid also wrote a tragedy about Medea, a popular figure of power, magic, and revenge. This work has not survived, but there is good evidence that Ovid's contemporaries judged it a success. Quintilian, a Roman critic of literature, and Tacitus, a Roman historian, comment favorably on it.

Ovid continued to experiment. In the next stage of his career, he moved into the realm of didactic ("how to") poetry. Rather than explore traditional didactic topics such as farming (as Virgil does in Georgics) or science (as Lucretius does in On the Nature of Things), Ovid wrote on the art of seduction and the art of falling out of love. Around 1 b.c.. or a.d. 2, he wrote the Ars Amatoria (Art of Love), Medicamina Faciei Femineae (Makeup for a Women's Face), and the Remedia Amoris (Remedies of Love). In these works, Ovid consciously played off other, familiar didactic works, particularly Virgil's Georgics. He subverted what had been an essentially serious genre and said ridiculous, comedic things about love. With a straight face, he posited that young men and women should spend time learning how to commit adultery and seduce each other. While working on the Metamorphoses, Ovid was also writing another piece, the Fasti, a poem describing the Roman religious calendar. It seems he never finished this work, although it is valuable for the many fascinating antiquarian details it contains.

Ovid is most famous for the Metamorphoses, a single poem of fifteen books, which was probably completed around a.d. 8. By writing the Metamorphoses in dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic, Ovid intentionally invited comparisons with the greatest Roman poet of his age, Virgil, who had written the epic the Aeneid. In form, rhythm, and size, the Metamorphoses falls squarely in the category of epic. In content, however, the Metamorphoses has little in common with such epics as the Aeneid, which are characterized by a single story line and one main protagonist. In fact, Ovid explicitly pokes fun of the epic genre. The Metamorphoses more closely resembles the work of Hesiod and the Alexandrian poets, who favored a collection of independent stories connected by a theme. The Metamorphoses' roughly 250 stories are linked only by their common theme of metamorphosis.

Shortly after the publication of these two poems, Ovid found himself in great peril. In a.d. 8, Augustus exiled Ovid and banned his books from the libraries of Rome. The reason for Ovid's exile is not entirely clear, but one can surmise that Augustus

took offense at Ovid's lecherous poetry. Poems on the art of seduction would have hardly pleased Augustus, who sought to institute moral reform. Moreover, Augustus must have been especially incensed when he exiled his own daughter, Julia, for adultery. All Ovid writes concerning his exile is that a "poem and a mistake" caused his downfall. In exile, Ovid penned his last works at Tomis, a colony by the Black Sea. His final three works are the Tristia, or Sadness,Ibis, and the Epistulae ex Ponto, or Letters from Pontus. These works largely concern his hardships in a foreign land and his desire to dwell in Rome again. However, despite all his pleas to Augustus and later to Tiberius, he would never see Rome again. Ovid died in a.d. 16 or 17.

Plot Overview:

The Metamorphoses consists of fifteen books. They can be divided into six sections. **First**, the narrator prays to the gods for inspiration, lays out his theme (metamorphosis), and states his intention to write a single continuous poem that stretches from the origins of the world to his own day. **Second**, the narrator describes the creation of the world. Primordial chaos is transformed into an orderly creation, and human life is formed. Almost immediately, humans start behaving badly. In response to the general immorality, Jupiter and his brother, Neptune, drown humanity. The only survivors are Deucalion and Pyrrha, pious people. Eventually, a new breed of humanity emerges.

The **third** section spans five books. In this section, Ovid focuses on the gods and their interactions with mortals. He begins with the theme of divine rape. In Book I, Apollo attempts to rape the nymph Daphne, who escapes at the last moment when her father transforms her into a laurel tree. Jupiter rapes Io, Callisto, and Europa. In Book II, the narrator recounts the story of Phaethon's fatal chariot ride, which nearly destroys the world. In Book III, the narrator tells several stories connected to Cadmus's founding of Thebes. He writes about the death of Actaeon and Semele, the birth of Bacchus, and Pentheus's refusal to worship Bacchus. In Books IV and V, Ovid tells of Perseus's victory over Atlas, his rescue of and marriage to Andromeda, and his battle with Phineus. This section ends with a song contest between the Muses and Pierides and a weaving contest between Minerva and Arachne. The Muses turn Pierides into magpies, and Minerva turns Arachne into a spider.

In the **fourth** section, Ovid moves into the realm of heroes and heroines. The narrator recounts the exploits of Jason, who stole the fleece from the serpent, and

tells several stories about the power and magic of Medea. He explains Minos's preparations to attack Athens, and his siege of the city of Alcathous, where Scylla falls in love with him. The narrator also tells the story of the Myrmidons' miraculous appearance, and the sad tale of Cephalus and Procris. He describes the Calydonian boar hunt, and the sad death of Meleager at his mother's hand. The section concludes with an extended account of Orpheus's life and tragic death. Orpheus sings in Books X and XI about the tales of Pygmalion, Myrrha, Hippomenes, and Atalanta.

The **fifth** section moves us closer to the Trojan War. In Book XII, the narrator recounts Achilles' battle with Cycnus, whom he chokes to death. Nestor tells of the battle between Caeneus and numerous centaurs. We also hear of Ceyx's and Alcyone's love, and Ajax's verbal contest with Ulysses over the armor of Achilles. Ulysses defeats Ajax. Ajax commits suicide, and his blood produces a hyacinth flower. Aeneas seeks to establish his own land and defeats Turnus in battle. Ovid brings Roman history up through the successive kings of Alba and the preaching of Pythagoras, who speaks against consuming flesh and forecasts the rise of Rome. The narrator mentions Caesar and the rise of Augustus. In the sixth section, which comprises the epilogue, Ovid prophesies a glorious Roman future and the immortality of his work.

Themes

The Pervasiveness of Metamorphoses

As its title suggests, Metamorphoses is an exploration of transformations of all kinds, from the pedestrian and obvious to the literary and oblique. Some of the metamorphoses are straightforwardly literal: Diana turns Actaeon into a deer, for example, or Juno changes Callisto into a bear. Others are more metaphorical and subtle. Many metamorphoses clarify and highlight an essential quality of the transformed person. When Jupiter turns Lycaon into a wolf, he is responding to Lycaon's bloodthirsty, wolfish character. Other metamorphoses are still subtler. Pentheus's transformation, for example, is figurative. His mother and aunt hunt him down not because he is actually an animal but because they perceive him as one. The worship of Bacchus morphs the women's mindsets, rather than Pentheus's body. Ovid suggests that subtle or figurative transformations can be just

as dangerous as literal ones. Pentheus may not have transformed, but he is torn to shreds nonetheless.

The Power of Art

Ovid suggests that only art enables people to transcend suffering. He condemns those characters who do not appreciate or cannot create art and praises those who do. Phaeton, for example, is a philistine who does not appreciate the splendid art that decorates the Sun's palace doors. The same immaturity and poor judgment that blind Phaeton to the beauty of art prevent him from comprehending the danger of his flight. His flight not only destroys him, but it also nearly destroys the whole world, which suggests that lack of artistry can damage others, not just one's self. Most of the key characters in the Metamorphoses display the kind of artistic merit that Phaeton lacks. Daedalus escapes his prison in Crete by creating wings. Philomela escapes her literal prison and the metaphorical prison of her speechlessness by embroidering a message. Pygmalion creates an ivory statue so lovely and accurate that it comes to life. Ulysses defeats Ajax's brawn by deploying the art of rhetoric. Ovid puts himself in the same class as his artistic characters. In the last lines of the poem, he states that he will escape the misery of death by living on forever in his artistic creation, the Metamorphoses.

The Sadness of Love

In Ovid's work, love almost never leads to a happy ending. Male gods usually express their love for female mortals by raping them. Io, Callisto, and Semele, among many others, suffer from the gods' violent expressions of love. Male mortals treat the objects of their affection in a similarly brutal way, abducting, raping, and mutilating them. Pelias ties up Thetis to rape her. Tereus repeatedly rapes Philomela and then cuts out her tongue. When women love men, their passion often causes them to betray their fathers, families, and cities. Medea's love for Jason leads her to turn against her father and her home. Scylla's love for Minos inspires her to scalp her father and betray her people to a foreign army. Women's incestuous love for their male relatives, such as Byblis's love for her brother, Caunus, or Myrrha's love for her father, Cinyras, reliably ends in disaster. Socially acceptable love, such as the love between Pyramus and Thisbe, is no guarantee of happiness. Pyramus and Thisbe wind up as a double suicide. Ovid emphasizes the disastrous quality of all romances by showing that even the goddess of love, Venus, is powerless to find lasting happiness.

Character List

Juno

Simply because she is Jupiter's wife, Juno is a key figure in the Metamorphoses. Unlike Jupiter, however, she does not make world-changing decisions or seek out extramarital relationships. Her less powerful role means that she does not drive the plot, as Jupiter does. Still, the brutal punishments she metes out are what give the poem much of its spice. She constantly catches her husband sleeping with other women. His exploits enrage her, and she vents her wrath on Jupiter's lovers, revenging herself on Io, Callisto, Europa, and Semele, among others. She also torments the offspring, such as Ino, that these women have by Jupiter. Even those who impede Juno's efforts to catch Jupiter, such as Echo, feel her wrath. Juno never takes revenge in a foolhardy or thoughtless way. She is always cunning and calculating. She may not be as powerful as her husband is, but Juno is an intelligent, fearsome goddess.

Apollo

Ovid characterizes Apollo as a god of foolish and ineffectual passions. The son of Jupiter and the god of the sun, Apollo is a hothead. His strong emotions often get the best of him, making him look and act foolish. In Book I, his lust for Daphne leads him to caress and kiss her—even after she has been turned into a tree. In Book II, he allows his son, Phaeton, to ride his chariot, which almost destroys the whole world. In the same book, he kills his lover, Coronis, in a fit of fury. He ultimately regrets this murderous act. Apollo is not only tempestuous but also inept. Although he is the god of healing he is not able to help anyone. He fails in his attempt to heal Hyacinthus, his boy lover, and he does nothing to drive away the plague in Rome.

Jupiter

If the Metamorphoses can be said to have a protagonist, Jupiter, the king of heaven, is that protagonist. He is the first god on the scene in Book I as he encounters the impious Lycaon, and he is present at the end of the poem in the Book XV at the deification of Julius Caesar. Jupiter's frequent presence in the poem does not, however, mean that he is a character worthy of respect. In most instances, Ovid portrays Jupiter as foolish, rash, and lustful. Jupiter destroys the

world out of anger at one man, he rapes countless women (Io, Europa, Callisto, and Semele, to name a few), and he constantly deceives his wife, Juno, whom he fears. When Jupiter does attempt to do good deeds, he bungles them. When he tries to defend Dis, for example, he tells Ceres that at least her daughter, Proserpina, was raped by a god with good lineage. Ovid's portrayal of Jupiter is sometimes comic and nearly always dark.

Orpheus

Although Orpheus appears in only two Books (X and XI), his presence resonates throughout the work. He is an artist, and the Metamorphoses is a poem preoccupied with the problems of art. Ovid portrays Orpheus as a being who transcends his limitations through art. Orpheus is a flawed man; in a matter of seventy lines, he loses his wife, Eurydice, twice. But when he starts singing, his shortcomings fade in importance. His songs comprise some of the most memorable and beautiful lines in the Metamorphoses. By the end of his song, we can no longer doubt his skill. Ovid creates a metamorphosis in our perception of Orpheus, transforming our pity into appreciation.

The Narrator

No single character dominates the Metamorphoses'250 stories from Greek and Roman mythology, legend, and history. Only the narrator, a version of Ovid, unites and controls the narrative. He makes his presence known with attention-getting literary techniques. Often, there is no logical or structural reason why one story precedes or follows another. Rather, the narrator arranges them according to more subtle principles. The unobvious, often surprising structure draws attention to itself, and to its author. We are never allowed to forget that a literary mind has constructed the poem. The narrator also draws the focus to himself by breaking into the narrative and, in the first person, offering his perspective and insights.

Important Quotations Explained

1.

"But as always, you must wait to see the end of a person, and no one ought to be called blessed until he dies, and his funeral is over."

This quotation, from III.135–138, comes after Cadmus's victory over the serpent and his miraculous founding of Thebes. It expresses a dark sentiment, and its inclusion in the midst of Cadmus's successes reminds us that happiness,

prosperity, and good fortune may not last. Present blessings do not guarantee future prosperity. Ovid packs two meanings into this quotation. First, he suggests that we should wait until people have died to assess their lives, since disasters might befall them at the last minute. But the phrase "no one ought to be called blessed until he dies" has another, bleaker meaning. It suggests that we are better off dead and, in our graves, than alive and subject to the gods' whims. This certainly proves true in Cadmus's case. In Books III and IV, horrors are rained down on Cadmus's family. Actaeon turns into a deer and is savagely torn apart by his own dogs; Semele is killed by Jupiter in the act of copulation; Pentheus is ripped to pieces by his own mother and aunt; Athamas bashes his grandson's head into a rock and chases his last daughter, Ino, and her son over a cliff; and Cadmus and his wife are turned into snakes. Neither is Cadmus's life exceptionally dreadful. The extent of the devastation is unusual, but most of the mortals in the poem suffer similar fates.

2.

"As he began to speak and grabbed her right hand and asked her for help and promised to marry her, Medea replied with tears rolling down her face, "I know what I am about to do; ignorance of truth will not deceive me, but love."

These words, from VII.89–93, are from the first and most sophisticated soliloquy in the poem. In that eloquent, clear soliloquy, Medea analyzes her feelings and considers the ramifications of her actions. She concludes that she has two options: She can be faithful to her father and unfaithful to Jason, or she can help Jason and betray her father. Therefore, her decision to help Jason is also a deliberate and intentional betrayal of her father. She weeps because she fully understands what she is about to do. Because of her wisdom and self-knowledge, Medea seems far more sophisticated even than the gods, who lack insight into their feelings. Medea is the most formidable mortal woman in the poem, but Ovid portrays many women as remarkably intelligent and clear thinking. His mortal female characters are psychologically complex in ways that his male characters and his gods are not. In the next three books, four more women face similar conflicts between duty and love and discuss those conflicts in soliloquies (Scylla in VIII.44–80, Byblis in IX.487–516, Myrrha in X.320–355, and Atalanta in X.611–635). In a poem peopled with one-dimensional characters, these soliloquies offer rare insight into human psychology.

Week Seven
Oedipus Rex
By Sophocles

Sophocles: (496 – 406 B. C.)

- He is a playwright who lived a long, comfortable, happy life
- He grew up in a wealthy family in ATHENS, GREECE
- His dramatic work portrayed misery and tragedy
- He also became a distinguished public official
- He produced 123 plays (only seven survive today)
- The age of Sophocles in Greece was a time when anything seemed possible through human effort and reason
- Toward the end of Sophocles' life, Athens raged a war against Sparta, their bitter rivals
- There also was a great plague in 430 B. C.
- Sophocles' surviving plays (written after 440 B.C.) are deeply troubling
- These plays depict characters caught up in unsolvable dilemmas that test their faith in divine and human justice

OEDIPUS REX

INTRODUCTION

- Oedipus Rex is one of the world's greatest tragedies.
- A tragedy is a serious drama featuring a main character who strives to achieve something and is ultimately defeated.

- The main character's downfall is often due to an inborn character flaw or weakness – the tragic flaw.

OEDIPUS REX – Background:

- During the early years of the Peloponnesian War, when Oedipus Rex was produced, Athens suffered from political instability and devastating plague.

- Sophocles opens his play with a situation that the people of Athens could identify with: a plague with no end in sight!

OEDIPUS REX-Prologue:

- The city of Thebes is ravaged by plague.
- Citizens beg King Oedipus for help.
- Oedipus sends his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi.
- Creon returns and announces that the plague will end when the Thebans punish the murderer of their previous king, Laius.
- Oedipus tries to take the role of savior and vows to do everything in his power to apprehend the murderer and save his people
- Oedipus does not realize that his vow will relentlessly lead him to an encounter with himself, his past, and his darkest secrets!!!

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Teiresias:

- blind prophet and servant of Apollo
- reveals the reasons for the devastation and plague in Thebes
- one of the most powerful characters in the play
- tells Oedipus he will become blind and poor

Jocasta:

- the wife and mother of Oedipus
- she tells Oedipus not to trust in the oracles
- she tries to protect Oedipus from the awful truth

- she alternately condemns and upholds the authority of the oracles as best suits the direction of the argument at the moment

Oedipus:

- protagonist
- his name means "swollen-foot"
- he inspires both pity and fear
- a hereditary curse has been placed on his family, and he unknowingly has fulfilled the terms of the prophecy that he would kill his father (Laius) and marry his own mother (Jocasta)
- when he curses the murderer of Laius he is cursing himself and predicting his own exile and consequent life of "wretchedness."
- he is wise, revered by his subjects, and dedicated to the discovery of truth
- he wants to rid Thebes of the plague, but fate and the gods have other things in store for him

Chorus of Theban Elders:

- men of Thebes who honor and respect the king and the gods
- their odes reveal both a strong attachment to the king as well as grounding in religious culture

Creon:

- brother of Laius
- Oedipus feels threatened by Creon and believes that he covets the throne
- Creon defends himself saying he has no desire to be king and that Oedipus harms himself in making such accusations

Messenger:

- tells Oedipus that King Polybos of Corinth is dead
- Oedipus learns from the messenger that Polybos was not his father
- the messenger had been given Oedipus as an infant by one of Laius' men

Shepherd of Laius:

- reveals his information only after Oedipus threatens his life

- admits to receiving the infant (he gave to Polybos' messenger) from Laius and Jocasta
- Oedipus eventually realizes his own identity and his crimes of patricide and incest after hearing the shepherd's story

Second Messenger:

- announces and describes Jocasta's suicide
- predicts future sorrows for a people whose kings descend from this polluted line
- choral odes bring an additional viewpoint to the play
- offer a broader and more socio-religious perspective than those offered by individual characters

THEMES:

- quest for identity and truth
- nature of innocence and guilt
- nature of moral responsibility

Imagery:

references to light and darkness to predict the future

Example of Imagery:

- The priest says at the beginning: "All the house of Kadmos is laid waste; all emptied, and all darkened"
- Oedipus promises Creon: "Then once more I must bring what is dark to light."

Example of Foreshadowing:

- Teiresias tells Oedipus that it is he who is blind
- "But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind. You cannot see the wretchedness of your life"

SUMMARY:

- Oedipus Rex is the story of a king of Thebes upon whom a hereditary curse is placed and who therefore has to suffer the tragic consequences of fate.

- During the time of plague, fires, and other forms of decimation, Oedipus decides to act to restore life and prosperity to his kingdom.
- Oedipus discovers, through his quest for truth, that his identity is not what he thought.
- He learns he has killed his father, married his mother, and had children with her.
- Oedipus' wife/mother – Jocasta – kills herself and Oedipus blinds himself and goes into exile
- Creon becomes King of Thebes

Plot Overview

A plague has stricken Thebes. The citizens gather outside the palace of their king, Oedipus, asking him to act. Oedipus replies that he already sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle at Delphi to learn how to help the city. Creon returns with a message from the oracle: the plague will end when the murderer of Laius, former king of Thebes, is caught and expelled; the murderer is within the city. Oedipus questions Creon about the murder of Laius, who was killed by thieves on his way to consult an oracle. Only one of his fellow travelers escaped alive. Oedipus promises to solve the mystery of Laius's death, vowing to curse and drive out the murderer.

Oedipus sends for Tiresias, the blind prophet, and asks him what he knows about the murder. Tiresias responds cryptically, lamenting his ability to see the truth when the truth brings nothing but pain. At first, he refuses to tell Oedipus what he knows. Oedipus curses and insults the old man, going so far as to accuse him of the murder. These taunts provoke Tiresias into revealing that Oedipus himself is the murderer. Oedipus naturally refuses to believe Tiresias's accusation. He accuses Creon and Tiresias of conspiring against his life, and charges Tiresias with insanity. He asks why Tiresias did nothing when Thebes suffered under a plague once before. At that time, a Sphinx held the city captive and refused to leave until someone answered her riddle. Oedipus brags that he alone was able to

solve the puzzle. Tiresias defends his skills as a prophet, noting that Oedipus's parents found him trustworthy. At this mention of his parents, Oedipus, who grew up in the distant city of Corinth, asks how Tiresias knew his parents. But Tiresias answers enigmatically. Then, before leaving the stage, Tiresias puts forth one last riddle, saying that the murderer of Laius will turn out to be both father and brother to his own children, and the son of his own wife.

After Tiresias leaves, Oedipus threatens Creon with death or exile for conspiring with the prophet. Oedipus's wife, Jocasta (also the widow of King Laius), enters and asks why the men shout at one another. Oedipus explains to Jocasta that the prophet has charged him with Laius's murder, and Jocasta replies that all prophecies are false. As proof, she notes that the Delphic oracle once told Laius he would be murdered by his son, when in fact his son was cast out of Thebes as a baby, and Laius was murdered by a band of thieves. Her description of Laius's murder, however, sounds familiar to Oedipus, and he asks further questions. Jocasta tells him that Laius was killed at a three-way crossroads, just before Oedipus arrived in Thebes. Oedipus, stunned, tells his wife that he may be the one who murdered Laius. He tells Jocasta that, long ago, when he was the prince of Corinth, he overheard someone mention at a banquet that he was not really the son of the king and queen. He therefore traveled to the oracle of Delphi, who did not answer him but did tell him he would murder his father and sleep with his mother. Hearing this, Oedipus fled his home, never to return. It was then, on the journey that would take him to Thebes, that Oedipus was confronted and harassed by a group of travelers, whom he killed in self-defense. This skirmish occurred at the very crossroads where Laius was killed.

Oedipus sends for the man who survived the attack, a shepherd, in the hope that he will not be identified as the murderer. Outside the palace, a messenger approaches Jocasta and tells her that he has come from Corinth to inform Oedipus that his father, Polybus, is dead, and that Corinth has asked Oedipus to come and rule there in his place. Jocasta rejoices, convinced that Polybus's death from natural causes has disproved the prophecy that Oedipus would murder his father. At Jocasta's summons, Oedipus comes outside, hears the news, and rejoices with her. He now feels much more inclined to agree with the queen in deeming prophecies worthless and viewing chance as the principle governing the world. But while Oedipus finds great comfort in the fact that one-half of the prophecy has been disproved, he still fears the other half—the half that claimed he would sleep with his mother.

The messenger remarks that Oedipus need not worry, because Polybus and his wife, Merope, are not Oedipus's biological parents. The messenger, a shepherd by profession, knows firsthand that Oedipus came to Corinth as an orphan. One day long ago, he was tending his sheep when another shepherd approached him carrying a baby, its ankles pinned together. The messenger took the baby to the royal family of Corinth, and they raised him as their own. That baby was Oedipus. Oedipus asks who the other shepherd was, and the messenger answers that he was a servant of Laius.

Oedipus asks that this shepherd be brought forth to testify, but Jocasta, beginning to suspect the truth, begs her husband not to seek more information. She runs back into the palace. The shepherd then enters. Oedipus interrogates him, asking who gave him the baby. The shepherd refuses to disclose anything, and Oedipus threatens him with torture. Finally, he answers that the child came from the house of Laius. Questioned further, he answers that the baby was in fact the child of Laius himself, and that it was Jocasta who gave him the infant, ordering him to kill it, as it had been prophesied that the child would kill his parents. But the shepherd pitied the child and decided that the prophecy could be avoided just as well if the child were to grow up in a foreign city, far from his true parents. The shepherd therefore passed the boy on to the shepherd in Corinth.

Realizing who he is and who his parents are, Oedipus screams that he sees the truth and flees back into the palace. The shepherd and the messenger slowly exit the stage. A second messenger enters and describes scenes of suffering. Jocasta has hanged herself, and Oedipus, finding her dead, has pulled the pins from her robe and stabbed out his own eyes. Oedipus now emerges from the palace, bleeding and begging to be exiled. He asks Creon to send him away from Thebes and to look after his daughters, Antigone and Ismene. Creon, covetous of royal power, is all too happy to oblige.

Oedipus at Colonus

After years of wandering in exile from Thebes, Oedipus arrives in a grove outside Athens. Blind and frail, he walks with the help of his daughter, Antigone. Oedipus and Antigone learn from a citizen that they are standing on holy ground, reserved for the Eumenides, goddesses of fate. Oedipus sends the citizen to fetch Theseus, the king of Athens and its surroundings. Oedipus tells Antigone that, earlier in his life, when Apollo prophesied his doom, the god promised Oedipus that he would come to rest on this ground.

After an interlude in which Oedipus tells the Chorus who he is, Oedipus's second daughter, Ismene, enters, having gone to learn news from Apollo's oracle at Delphi. She tells him that, back in Thebes, Oedipus's younger son, Eteocles, has overthrown Polynices, the elder, and that Polynices is now amassing troops in Argos for an attack on his brother and on Creon, who rules along with Eteocles. The oracle has predicted that the burial place of Oedipus will bring good fortune to the city in which it is located, and both sons, as well as Creon, know of this prophecy. Both Polynices and Creon are currently en route to try to take Oedipus into custody and thus claim the right to bury him in their kingdoms. Oedipus swears he will never give his support to either of his sons, for they did nothing to prevent his exile years ago.

King Theseus arrives and says that he pities Oedipus for the fate that has befallen him, and he asks how he can help Oedipus. Oedipus asks Theseus to harbor him in Athens until his death, but warns that by doing him this favor, Theseus will incur the wrath of Thebes. Despite the warning, Theseus agrees to help Oedipus.

Creon appears to abduct Oedipus, but, proving unsuccessful, he kidnaps Antigone and Ismene instead. Theseus promises Oedipus that he will get his daughters back. Theseus does in fact return with Oedipus's daughters shortly.

Soon after, Polynices arrives, seeking his father's favor in order to gain custody of his eventual burial site. Oedipus asks Theseus to drive Polynices away, but Antigone convinces her father to listen to his son. Polynices tells Oedipus that he never condoned his exile, and that Eteocles is the bad son, having bribed the men of Thebes to turn against Polynices. Oedipus responds with a terrible curse, upbraiding his son for letting him be sent into exile, and predicting that Eteocles and Polynices will die at one another's hands. Polynices, realizing he will never win his father's support, turns to his sisters. He asks that they provide him with a proper burial should he die in battle. Antigone embraces Polynices, saying that he is condemning himself to death, but he resolutely says that his life remains in the hands of the gods. He prays for the safety of his sisters and then leaves for Thebes.

Terrible thunder sounds, and the Chorus cries out in horror. Oedipus says that his time of death has come. Sending for Theseus, he tells the king he must

carry out certain rites on his body, and that by doing so he may assure divine protection to his city. Theseus says that he believes Oedipus and asks what to do. Oedipus answers that he will lead the king to the place where he will die, and that Theseus must never reveal that spot, but pass it on to his son at his own death, who in turn must pass it on to his own son. In this way Theseus and his heirs may always rule over a safe city. Oedipus then strides off with a sudden strength, taking his daughters and Theseus to his grave.

A messenger enters to narrate the mysterious death of Oedipus: his death seemed a disappearance of sorts, "the lightless depths of Earth bursting open in kindness to receive him" (1886–1887). Just as the messenger finishes his story, Antigone and Ismene come onstage, chanting a dirge. Antigone wails that they will cry for Oedipus for as long as they live. Not knowing where to go now, Antigone says they will have to wander forever alone. Theseus returns to the stage, asking the daughters to stop their weeping. They plead to see their father's tomb, but Theseus insists that Oedipus has forbidden it. They give up their pleas but ask for safe passage back to Thebes, so that they may prevent a war between their brothers. Theseus grants them this, and the Chorus tells the girls to stop their weeping, for all rests in the hands of the gods. Theseus and the Chorus exit toward Athens; Antigone and Ismene head for Thebes.

Character List:

Oedipus - The protagonist of Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus. Oedipus becomes king of Thebes before the action of Oedipus the King begins. He is renowned for his intelligence and his ability to solve riddles—he saved the city of Thebes and was made its king by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, the supernatural being that had held the city captive. Yet Oedipus is stubbornly blind to the truth about himself. His name's literal meaning ("swollen foot") is the clue to his identity—he was taken from the house of Laius as a baby and left in the mountains with his feet bound together. On his way to Thebes, he killed his biological father, not knowing who he was, and proceeded to marry Jocasta, his biological mother.

The Chorus

The Chorus reacts to events as they happen, generally in a predictable, though not consistent, way. It generally expresses a longing for calm and stability. For example, in Oedipus the King, it asks Oedipus not to banish Creon (725–733); fearing a curse, it attempts to send Oedipus out of Colonus in Oedipus at Colonus

(242–251); and it questions the wisdom of Antigone's actions in Antigone (909–962). In moments like these, the Chorus seeks to maintain the status quo, which is generally seen to be the wrong thing. The Chorus is not cowardly so much as nervous and complacent—above all, it hopes to prevent upheaval.

The Chorus is given the last word in each of the three Theban plays, and perhaps the best way of understanding the different ways in which the Chorus can work is to look at each of these three speeches briefly. At the end of Oedipus the King, the Chorus conflates the people of "Thebes" with the audience in the theater. The message of the play, delivered directly to that audience, is one of complete despair: "count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last" (1684). Because the Chorus, and not one of the individual characters, delivers this message, the play ends by giving the audience a false sense of closure. That is, the Chorus makes it sound like Oedipus is dead, and their final line suggests there might be some relief. But the audience must immediately realize, of course, that Oedipus is not dead. He wanders, blind and miserable, somewhere outside of Thebes. The audience, like Oedipus, does not know what the future holds in store. The play's ability to universalize, to make the audience feel implicated in the emotions of the Chorus as well as those of the protagonist, is what makes it a particularly harrowing tragedy, an archetypal story in Western culture.

The Chorus at the end of Oedipus at Colonus seems genuinely to express the thought that there is nothing left to say, because everything rests in the hands of the gods. As with Oedipus's death, the Chorus expresses no great struggle here, only a willing resignation that makes the play seem hopeful—if ambivalently so—rather than despairing. Oedipus's wandering has, it seems, done some good. The final chorus of Antigone, on the other hand, seems on the surface much more hopeful than either of the other two but is actually much more ominous and ambivalent. Antigone ends with a hope for knowledge—specifically the knowledge that comes out of suffering. This ending is quite different from the endings of the other two plays, from a mere truism about death or the fact that fate lies outside human control. The audience can agree with and believe in a statement like "Wisdom is by far the greatest part of joy," and perhaps feel that Creon has learned from his suffering, like Antigone seemingly did at the beginning of the play.

While the Chorus may believe that people learn through suffering, Sophocles may have felt differently. Antigone represents the last events in a series begun by Oedipus the King, but it was written before either of the other two

Oedipus plays. And in the two subsequent plays, we see very little evidence in Antigone that suffering teaches anyone anything except how to perpetuate it.

Creon

Creon spends more time onstage in these three plays than any other character except the Chorus. His presence is so constant and his words so crucial to many parts of the plays that he cannot be dismissed as simply the bureaucratic fool he sometimes seems to be. Rather, he represents the very real power of human law and of the human need for an orderly, stable society. When we first see Creon in Oedipus the King, Creon is shown to be separate from the citizens of Thebes. He tells Oedipus that he has brought news from the oracle and suggests that Oedipus hear it inside. Creon has the secretive, businesslike air of a politician, which stands in sharp contrast to Oedipus, who tells him to speak out in front of everybody. While Oedipus insists on hearing Creon's news in public and builds his power as a political leader by espousing a rhetoric of openness, Creon is a master of manipulation. While Oedipus is intent on saying what he means and on hearing the truth—even when Jocasta begs and pleads with him not to—Creon is happy to dissemble and equivocate.

At lines 651–690, Creon argues that he has no desire to usurp Oedipus as king because he, Jocasta, and Oedipus rule the kingdom with equal power—Oedipus is merely the king in name. This argument may seem convincing, partly because at this moment in the play we are disposed to be sympathetic toward Creon, since Oedipus has just ordered Creon's banishment. In response to Oedipus's hotheaded foolishness, Creon sounds like the voice of reason. Only in the final scene of Oedipus the King, when Creon's short lines demonstrate his eagerness to exile Oedipus and separate him from his children, do we see that the title of king is what Creon desires above all.

Creon is at his most dissembling in Oedipus at Colonus, where he once again needs something from Oedipus. His honey-tongued speeches to Oedipus and Theseus are made all the more ugly by his cowardly attempt to kidnap Antigone and Ismene. In Antigone, we at last see Creon comfortable in the place of power. Eteocles and Polynices, like their father, are dead, and Creon holds the same unquestioned supremacy that Oedipus once held. Of course, once Creon achieves the stability and power that he sought and Oedipus possessed, he begins to echo Oedipus's mistakes. Creon denounces Tiresias, for example (1144–1180), obviously echoing Oedipus's denunciation in Oedipus the King (366–507). And, of

course, Creon's penitent wailings in the final lines of Antigone echo those of Oedipus at the end of Oedipus the King. What can perhaps most be said most in favor of Creon is that in his final lines he also begins to sound like Antigone, waiting for whatever new disaster fate will bring him. He cries out that he is "nothing," "no one," but it is his suffering that makes him seem human in the end.

Themes:

The Power of Unwritten Law

After defeating Polynices and taking the throne of Thebes, Creon commands that Polynices be left to rot unburied, his flesh eaten by dogs and birds, creating an "obscenity" for everyone to see (Antigone, 231). Creon thinks that he is justified in his treatment of Polynices because the latter was a traitor, an enemy of the state, and the security of the state makes all of human life—including family life and religion—possible. Therefore, to Creon's way of thinking, the good of the state comes before all other duties and values. However, the subsequent events of the play demonstrate that some duties are more fundamental than the state and its laws. The duty to bury the dead is part of what it means to be human, not part of what it means to be a citizen. That is why Polynices' rotting body is an "obscenity" rather than a crime. Moral duties—such as the duties owed to the dead—make up the body of unwritten law and tradition, the law to which Antigone appeals.

The Willingness to Ignore the Truth

When Oedipus and Jocasta begin to get close to the truth about Laius's murder, in Oedipus the King, Oedipus fastens onto a detail in the hope of exonerating himself. Jocasta says that she was told that Laius was killed by "strangers," whereas Oedipus knows that he acted alone when he killed a man in similar circumstances. This is an extraordinary moment because it calls into question the entire truth-seeking process Oedipus believes himself to be undertaking. Both Oedipus and Jocasta act as though the servant's story, once spoken, is irrefutable history. Neither can face the possibility of what it would mean if the servant were wrong. This is perhaps why Jocasta feels she can tell Oedipus of the prophecy that her son would kill his father, and Oedipus can tell her about the similar prophecy given him by an oracle (867–875), and neither feels compelled to remark on the coincidence; or why Oedipus can hear the story of Jocasta binding her child's ankles (780–781) and not think of his own swollen feet. While the information in these speeches is largely intended to make the audience painfully aware of the tragic irony, it also emphasizes just how desperately

Oedipus and Jocasta do not want to speak the obvious truth: they look at the circumstances and details of everyday life and pretend not to see them.

The Limits of Free Will

Prophecy is a central part of Oedipus the King. The play begins with Creon's return from the oracle at Delphi, where he has learned that the plague will be lifted if Thebes banishes the man who killed Laius. Tiresias prophesies the capture of one who is both father and brother to his own children. Oedipus tells Jocasta of a prophecy he heard as a youth, that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother, and Jocasta tells Oedipus of a similar prophecy given to Laius, that her son would grow up to kill his father. Oedipus and Jocasta debate the extent to which prophecies should be trusted at all, and when all of the prophecies come true, it appears that one of Sophocles' aims is to justify the powers of the gods and prophets, which had recently come under attack in fifth-century b.c. Athens.

Sophocles' audience would, of course, have known the story of Oedipus, which only increases the sense of complete inevitability about how the play would end. It is difficult to say how justly one can accuse Oedipus of being "blind" or foolish when he seems to have no choice about fulfilling the prophecy: he is sent away from Thebes as a baby and by a remarkable coincidence saved and raised as a prince in Corinth. Hearing that he is fated to kill his father, he flees Corinth and, by a still more remarkable coincidence, ends up back in Thebes, now king and husband in his actual father's place. Oedipus seems only to desire to flee his fate, but his fate continually catches up with him. Many people have tried to argue that Oedipus brings about his catastrophe because of a "tragic flaw," but nobody has managed to create a consensus about what Oedipus's flaw actually is. Perhaps his story is meant to show that error and disaster can happen to anyone, that human beings are relatively powerless before fate or the gods, and that a cautious humility is the best attitude toward life.

Important Quotations Explained

1.

"Fear? What should a man fear? It's all chance, chance rules our lives. Not a man on earth can see a day ahead, groping through the dark. Better to live at random, best we can. And as for this marriage with your mother—have no fear. Many a man before you, in his dreams, has shared his mother's bed. Take such

things for shadows, nothing at all— Live, Oedipus, as if there's no tomorrow!" (Oedipus the King, 1068–1078)

The audience, familiar with the Oedipus story, almost does not want to listen to these self-assured lines, spoken by Jocasta, wherein she treats incest with a startling lightness that will come back to haunt her. What makes these lines tragic is that Jocasta has no reason to know that what she says is foolish, ironic, or, simply, wrong. The audience's sense of the work of "fate" in this play has almost entirely to do with the fact that the Oedipus story was an ancient myth even in fifth-century B.C. Athens. The audience's position is thus most like that of Tiresias—full of the knowledge that continues to bring it, and others, pain.

At the same time, it is important to note that at least part of the irony of the passage does depend on the play, and the audience, faulting Jocasta for her blindness. Her claim that "chance rules our lives" and that Oedipus should live "as if there's no tomorrow" seems to fly in the face of the beliefs of everyone in the play, including Jocasta herself. Oedipus would not have sent Creon to the oracle if he believed events were determined randomly. Nor would he have fled Corinth after hearing the prophecy of the oracle that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother; nor would Jocasta have bound her baby's ankles and abandoned him in the mountains. Again, and again this play, and the other Theban plays, returns to the fact that prophecies do come true and that the words of the gods must be obeyed. What we see in Jocasta is a willingness to believe oracles only as it suits her: the oracle prophesied that her son would kill Laius and so she abandoned her son in the mountains; when Laius was not, as she thinks, killed by his son, she claims to find the words of the oracle worthless. Now she sees Oedipus heading for some potentially horrible revelation and seeks to curb his fear by claiming that everything a person does is random.

Week 8

Midterm exam

Week 9

Antigone

By Sophocles

Background: Sophocles

- 496-406 B.C.
- Wealthy Athenian family
- Well-educated and well-connected
- Politically astute (remember that democracy is a relatively new concept at this time!)
- Beat established playwright Aeschylus in a drama competition in 468 B.C. and won either 1st or 2nd place in the same competition for 55 competitions over a span of 62 years
- Regarded as the greatest ancient Greek playwright
- Wrote about 123 plays, of which only 7 have survived
- Themes include religious apathy, dangers of hubris

- Sophocles was born in Athens, Greece, in 496 BCE and was the best-known of the ancient Greek playwrights.
- Although he was a member of the ruling class, Sophocles was aware of the social inequalities in Athenian society.

- His plays include repeated attempts to warn his fellow Greeks of the divine retribution that would come to them because of their prejudices and injustice to the poor

Aristotelian Tragedy:

- Aristotle's definition of tragedy as recorded in the Poetics:
- Tragic hero has noble stature & greatness (socially and morally), BUT
- Tragic hero is not perfect
- Tragic hero's downfall at least partially his own fault (generally hubris)
- Punishment exceeds crime
- Fall is not wholly a loss—there is awareness for the hero
- Catharsis: purging of pity and fear

Dramatic structure of a tragedy

- Exposition
- Exciting or inciting force
- Rising action
- Climax
- Falling action
- Moment of final suspense
- Catastrophe

Background: Oedipus

- King Laius of Thebes & Queen Jocasta
- Oracle says son will murder father & marry mother
- Oedipus sent away to be killed . . . but instead gets adopted as the crown prince of Corinth
- Oedipus learns of his fate from the Oracle and flees Corinth to escape it
- Kills Laius at a crossroads en route to Thebes
- Answers the Sphinx's riddle, saves Thebans from Sphinx & gets the kingdom . . . and his mom. They have 4 kids.
- Discovers the truth and gouges out eyes (would you?), Jocasta kills herself, and sons get the kingdom. BUT . . .
- Eteocles and Polynices are supposed to take turns ruling the kingdom, but Eteocles won't give up the throne at the end of a year
- War ensues; brothers kill each other

- Creon, Jocasta's brother, takes the throne and declares Polynices a traitor
- . . . AND NOW . . .
- All Antigone wants to do is to bury Polynices, but Creon won't let her
- **CONFLICT**: DIVINE LAW VS. LAW OF MAN

Cultural notes:

- Burial rites fell to women, who washed, dressed & adorned the body
- Only close relatives participated in burial rites
- Taken very seriously in Greek culture
- But traitors and temple robbers do not deserve burial in Athens.
- **PROBLEM**: Only a properly buried soul can proceed to the Underworld.

Themes:

- The role of the citizen
- Civil disobedience
- Family obligation
- Divine law vs. state law

Athens 5th Century:

- Social and Political-Athens 5th century BCE:
- The Athenian government was an "exclusionary democracy," run by elected officials in the form of an open assembly.
- Only about ten percent of the population was eligible to participate. Women, slaves, and other "non-citizens" were excluded.
- Women were given authority in matters of burial.

Religious Ideas

- The Greek pantheon consisted of hundreds of deities in a complex hierarchy. The most familiar "Olympian" gods were a relatively small part of the overall scheme.

- The gods were not all-powerful in the sense of our modern concept of God. They were subject to fate and to each other's will. They were bound to enforce a body of laws and traditions so ancient that their origins lay beyond even the oldest myths. Among those laws and traditions were laws governing the treatment of blood relations.

Conflict: Human Law vs. Divine

- The entire conflict in Antigone stems from the "unnatural" occurrence of two brothers waging war against one another and killing one another. This conflict is further compounded by another blood relation's-their uncle Creon's-refusal to grant one proper funeral rites.
- Antigone's point against Creon is that his prohibition of a funeral for Polynices is a human law, and she must obey the older, stronger divine law.

Fate vs. Free Will:

- The Greeks believed, to a limited extent, in free will, always accepting that a person would eventually have to face the human and cosmic consequences of his or her own actions and decisions. Still, free will was not more powerful than Destiny.
- While Oedipus Rex is an example of an individual's inability to avoid his destiny, Antigone portrays the suffering that comes as a consequence of a person's own actions. Still, as Antigone's life and death are so clearly shaped by the curses visited upon her family, destiny cannot be completely dismissed either.

Origins of Greek Drama:

- Sixth Century BCE- According to legend, Thespis essentially invented acting by stepping in front of the chorus and reciting a monologue. The word "thespian," derived from Thespis' name, has come to mean "actor."
- Fifth Century BCE- Athens made tremendous advances in philosophy, rhetoric, literature, science, architecture, and the visual arts. Tragedies were performed in an annual competition as a part of the Great Dionysia, one of Athens' chief religious festivals.

The Great Dionysia:

- Performed in honor of the god Dionysus.
- Each playwright produced three tragedies and a satyr-play (a kind of farce intended to provide comic relief after the tragedies); all four plays were performed in a single day
- Sophocles won twenty competitions (Aeschylus thirteen, and Euripides four).

Sophocles' Works:

- Sophocles' "Theban plays," Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone, while they are often anthologized together and in "chronological order," are not a trilogy.
- In fact, Antigone was written first and Oedipus at Colonus last-about forty years later. Each play, therefore, should be considered a separate work, not merely episodes in a serial.

Conventions of Greek Drama:

- Use of dramatic irony- Since the audience was already familiar with the stories, taken from well-known myths, they always had more information about the action than the characters on stage did.
- The suspense, then, was in how the well-known events would transpire and, in the audience's, actually watching the events unfold before their eyes in "real time."
- The plays were acted in the daytime, with minimal sets and props.

Conventions of Drama:

- Actors were all male. They wore masks, wigs, and high-heeled boots, which increased their visibility to the audience and added to the formality of the experience
- Due to the religious intent and dignified style, no violence was shown on stage. A messenger ran on stage and spoke to the audience of any deaths or killings.

Structure of a Tragedy:

I. **Prologue:** Spoken by one or two characters before the chorus appears. The prologue usually gives the background information needed to understand the events of the play.

II. **Parodos:** the song sung by the chorus as it makes its entrance

III. **Episodes:** the main action of the play

IV. **Stasimons (Odes):** a song (and often dance) that reflects on the events of the episodes, and weaves the plot into a cohesive whole

A. **Choragos**: the leader of the chorus who often interacts with the characters in the scenes

B. **Chorus**: the singers/dancers who remark on the action

C. **Kommos**: when the main character laments with the chorus

1. strophe: the movement of the chorus from right to left across the stage

2. antistrophe: the reaction to the strophe, which moves across the stage from left to right.

3. epode: the third part of the choral ode, completing the Chorus's movement while combined in the center.

V. Paean: a prayer of thanksgiving to Dionysus in whose honor the Greek plays were performed

VI. Exodos: sung by the chorus as it makes its final exit, which usually offers words of wisdom related to the actions and outcome of the play

Aristotle's Unities:

To increase dramatic intensity, the plays observed three unities described by Aristotle:

1. unity of time- all the action of the play took place within twenty-four hours, in continuous time; dialogue and the Chorus provided background information

2. unity of place- all the action was limited to a single setting

3. unity of subject- one single main plot focused on the main character. There were no sub-plots.

The Greek Chorus:

- A Chorus was used to present exposition and to provide commentary on the action and characters:
- 15 to 20 men represented the citizens.
- They were always on stage, and they frequently sang and danced.
- They always had a leader who carried on a dialogue with the main characters or with the rest of the Chorus.

The Function of the Chorus was to:

- set the tone/ give background information
- recall events of the past
- interpret and summarize events
- ask questions and offer opinions
- give advice, if asked
- stay objective, in the sense that it did not disagree with the leading character
- act like a jury of elders or wise men who listened to the evidence in the play and
- reach a moralistic conclusion at the end.

Chorus Movements:

- A highly formal and stylized back-and-forth movement that heightened the emotion of their performance:
- **strophe**- the first part of a choral ode, during which the Chorus moves from left to right, or east to west, across the stage.
- **antistrophe**- follows the strophe and during which the Chorus performs its return steps from right to left or west to east.
- **epode**- the third part, following the strophe and antistrophe and completing the Chorus's movement.
- At the emotional height of the play, a character will engage in dialogue with the Chorus, called the **kommos**.

Tragedy:

- Greek tragedy focuses on the reversal of fortune (**peripeteia**) and downfall of the tragic hero and the events leading to that downfall.
- ln Antigone, the title character experiences no **peripeteia**, When the play opens, she is weighted down with her family's curse and mourning the deaths of her brothers, and she never experiences a moment of good fortune or favor with the king.

Peripeteia:

Creon, however, has become sole ruler of Thebes at the deaths of his nephews. Due to his stubborn insistence that his law, be obeyed and his blindness to see that his law is in direct opposition to moral law, he loses his only surviving son and his wife and ends a broken man. This downfall is the peripeteia of the tragedy.

Catharsis:

- As Antigone refuses to compromise her moral duty to save her life, and Creon accepts the consequences of his errors, the audience learns some truth about life.
- The audience experiences a heightening of emotions, as they watch the hero suffer, and they identify with his problems.
- In the end, the audience has a **catharsis**, feeling purged or drained of their emotions, and better able to understand life.

Hamartia:

The tragic hero's condition is often the result of his hamartia. Often, the hamartia is defined simply as the tragic flaw the character trait (like wrath or pride) that leads to the tragic hero's downfall.

More accurately, however, the hamartia is an error in judgment or perception; the hero's inability to see his flaw or to accurately foresee the consequences of his decisions or actions. Often, the misperception is the result of a character flaw: the hero is blinded by his anger to who his friends really are; the hero's pride will not allow him to back down and avoid a fatal fight.

Hubris (Or Hybris):

Hubris, or hybris, is exaggerated self pride or self-confidence, which often results in fatal retribution.

One extremely well-known example of hubris is Achilles' dragging Hector's corpse around the wall of Troy in Homer's lliad.

Of course, the most pertinent example is Creon, who first imposes a law contrary to the laws of nature and then insists on absolute and total obedience. When warned by his niece, the Chorus, and the blind prophet, Creon still refuses to yield to divine authority until it is too late.

Hubris against the gods is often the character flaw of the heroes in Greek tragedy and the cause of their destruction.

The Tragic Hero:

- In his section on Tragedy in Poetics,Aristotle pays a good deal attention to the Tragic Hero. Aristotle's assertions formed the basis of literary thought and criticism for thousands of years afterwards, affecting how even playwrights like Shakespeare and Arthur Miller would be read.
- The following is a summary of Aristotle's basic ideas about the tragic hero:

Criteria:

1. The tragic hero is a character of noble status and greatness of character. Usually a man, the hero occupies a position of wealth, status, and power in his society, AND he must exemplify the traits of nobility and virtue as part of his innate character.

2. Though the tragic hero is great, he is not perfect. The audience must be able to sympathize with the tragic hero as a person like them, although elevated to a higher position in society.

3. The hero's downfall is partially his own fault, the result of free will. The downfall is not simply the result of accident, unfortunate fate, or another's villainy. Rather, the tragedy is triggered by some error in judgment or character flaw that is

integral to the hero's imperfection. This error in judgment or character flaw is known as hamartia. Often the character's hamartia involves hubris.

4. The hero's misfortunate is not wholly deserved. The punishment exceeds the crime.

5. The hero's fall, however, is not pure loss. There is some **increase in awareness**, some gain in self-knowledge, some discovery on the part of the tragic hero (anagnorisis).

6. Though it arouses solemn emotion, tragedy **does not leave its audience emotionally devastated**. According to Aristotle, one function of tragedy is to evoke pity and fear in the audience and, through a catharsis (which comes from watching the tragic hero's utter destruction), purge the audience of those emotions.

Oedipus's Legacy:

- Sophocles' audience would most likely already have known the events leading to the curse of Laius and his descendants that resulted in the tragedies of the Oedipus plays; and the playwright's intent was clearly to illustrate the conflict between fate and free will and natural and human law rather than chronicle the family saga, so he does not share the backstory.
- Antigone's parents were the infamous and ill-fated Oedipus and Jocasta. Oedipus' birth father (and, thus, Antigone's grandfather) was Laius.

Oedipus Backstory:

- Laius was the son of Labdacus, the King of Thebes. When Labdacus died, Laius was raised by his mother, who ruled Thebes as his regent. Two cousins (Amphion and Zethus) usurped the throne and plotted to kill youirg Laius, so he was smuggled out of Thebes and given to Pelops, King of Pisa, to raise.
- Laius became the tutor of Pelops' favorite son, Chrysippus, whom he abducted and took back to Thebes. Amphion and Zethus having died, Laius claimed his throne and kept Chrysippus captive. Pelops raised an army to

demand the return of his son, but it was discovered that Chrysippus was already dead.

- Because of his poor treatment of his host and his host's son, Laius and his house were cursed.
- When he married Jocasta, he was warned not to have children by her because his son would one day kill him. One night, while drunk, Laius imprudently disregarded the prophecy-some sources say Jocasta intentionally got Laius drunk-and Oedipus was conceived.
- Despite all attempts to avoid the prophecy's coming true, Oedipus did eventually kill his father.

Oedipus:

- He then married the widowed queen of Thebes and had several children by her. She, Oedipus, and her brother Creon ruled Thebes as a triumvirate. No one knew that Oedipus was the queen's son until a famine plagued Thebes, and Oedipus sought advice from the Oracle.
- Thus, begins the play Oedipus Rex.

Antigone Prequel:

- When Oedipus learned that he had indeed killed his father and married his mother, he put out his own eyes, and Jocasta killed herself. Polynices and Eteocles agreed to alternate as king.
- Eteocles, however, refused to give up power at the end of his year, so Polynices raised an army in the city of Argos and attacked Thebes. The Thebans successfully defended themselves against the invading forces, but the two brothers killed each other.
- Eteocles was remembered as the defender of the city while Polynices was remembered as the attacker-the traitor. Antigone begins shortly after this battle. Ismene even comments early in the play that the Argive army has just retreated.
- Creon, because he is Jocasta's brother, is the uncle of Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, and Polynices.
- With his brother-in-law, sister, and nephews all dead, he is left to rule Thebes alone.

Symbols:

- Storm-tossed ship
- Polynices' rotting body
- Antigone's tomb
- Haemon's body
- Shrieking birds

Motifs:

- Violence and suicide
- The reversal of the natural order
- Oedipus's curse
- Bridal imagery
- Greed, money, and profit
- Personification of love and death
- Prophecies and omens
- Pollution (miasma)

Themes:

- Any excess, even an excessive devotion to state or religion, is a fault and leads to misfortune
- Pride and stubbornness give rise to tyranny; these character flaws cause suffering and inevitably tragedy
- In any conflict between divine and moral law, divine law takes precedence
- One is personally responsible for one's own suffering, but suffering produces wisdom.

Plot Overview

Antigone

Antigone and Ismene, the daughters of Oedipus, discuss the disaster that has just befallen them. Their brothers Polynices and Eteocles have killed one another in a battle for control over Thebes. Creon now rules the city, and he has ordered that Polynices, who brought a foreign army against Thebes, not be allowed proper burial rites. Creon threatens to kill anyone who tries to bury Polynices and stations sentries over his body. Antigone, in spite of Creon's edict and without the help of

her sister Ismene, resolves to give their brother a proper burial. Soon, a nervous sentry arrives at the palace to tell Creon that, while the sentries slept, someone gave Polynices burial rites. Creon says that he thinks some of the dissidents of the city bribed the sentry to perform the rites, and he vows to execute the sentry if no other suspect is found.

The sentry soon exonerates himself by catching Antigone in the act of attempting to rebury her brother, the sentries having disinterred him. Antigone freely confesses her act to Creon and says that he himself defies the will of the gods by refusing Polynices burial. Creon condemns both Antigone and Ismene to death. Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's betrothed, enters the stage. Creon asks him his opinion on the issue. Haemon seems at first to side with his father, but gradually admits his opposition to Creon's stubbornness and petty vindictiveness. Creon curses him and threatens to slay Antigone before his very eyes. Haemon storms out. Creon decides to pardon Ismene, but vows to kill Antigone by walling her up alive in a tomb.

The blind prophet Tiresias arrives, and Creon promises to take whatever advice he gives. Tiresias advises that Creon allow Polynices to be buried, but Creon refuses. Tiresias predicts that the gods will bring down curses upon the city. The words of Tiresias strike fear into the hearts of Creon and the people of Thebes, and Creon reluctantly goes to free Antigone from the tomb where she has been imprisoned. But his change of heart comes too late. A messenger enters and recounts the tragic events: Creon and his entourage first gave proper burial to Polynices, then heard what sounded like Haemon's voice wailing from Antigone's tomb. They went in and saw Antigone hanging from a noose, and Haemon raving. Creon's son then took a sword and thrust it at his father. Missing, he turned the sword against himself and died embracing Antigone's body. Creon's wife, Eurydice, hears this terrible news and rushes away into the palace. Creon enters, carrying Haemon's body and wailing against his own tyranny, which he knows has caused his son's death. The messenger tells Creon that he has another reason to grieve: Eurydice has stabbed herself, and, as she died, she called down curses on her husband for the misery his pride had caused. Creon kneels and prays that he, too, might die. His guards lead him back into the palace.

Oedipus the King

A plague has stricken Thebes. The citizens gather outside the palace of their king, Oedipus, asking him to take action. Oedipus replies that he already sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle at Delphi to learn how to help the city. Creon returns with a message from the oracle: the plague will end when the murderer of Laius, former king of Thebes, is caught and expelled; the murderer is within the city. Oedipus questions Creon about the murder of Laius, who was killed by thieves on his way to consult an oracle. Only one of his fellow travelers escaped alive. Oedipus promises to solve the mystery of Laius's death, vowing to curse and drive out the murderer.

Oedipus sends for Tiresias, the blind prophet, and asks him what he knows about the murder. Tiresias responds cryptically, lamenting his ability to see the truth when the truth brings nothing but pain. At first he refuses to tell Oedipus what he knows. Oedipus curses and insults the old man, going so far as to accuse him of the murder. These taunts provoke Tiresias into revealing that Oedipus himself is the murderer. Oedipus naturally refuses to believe Tiresias's accusation. He accuses Creon and Tiresias of conspiring against his life, and charges Tiresias with insanity. He asks why Tiresias did nothing when Thebes suffered under a plague once before. At that time, a Sphinx held the city captive and refused to leave until someone answered her riddle. Oedipus brags that he alone was able to solve the puzzle. Tiresias defends his skills as a prophet, noting that Oedipus's parents found him trustworthy. At this mention of his parents, Oedipus, who grew up in the distant city of Corinth, asks how Tiresias knew his parents. But Tiresias answers enigmatically. Then, before leaving the stage, Tiresias puts forth one last riddle, saying that the murderer of Laius will turn out to be both father and brother to his own children, and the son of his own wife.

After Tiresias leaves, Oedipus threatens Creon with death or exile for conspiring with the prophet. Oedipus's wife, Jocasta (also the widow of King Laius), enters and asks why the men shout at one another. Oedipus explains to Jocasta that the prophet has charged him with Laius's murder, and Jocasta replies that all prophecies are false. As proof, she notes that the Delphic oracle once told Laius he would be murdered by his son, when in fact his son was cast out of Thebes as a baby, and Laius was murdered by a band of thieves. Her description of Laius's murder, however, sounds familiar to Oedipus, and he asks further questions.

Jocasta tells him that Laius was killed at a three-way crossroads, just before Oedipus arrived in Thebes. Oedipus, stunned, tells his wife that he may be the one who murdered Laius. He tells Jocasta that, long ago, when he was the prince of Corinth, he overheard someone mention at a banquet that he was not really the son of the king and queen. He therefore traveled to the oracle of Delphi, who did not answer him but did tell him he would murder his father and sleep with his mother. Hearing this, Oedipus fled his home, never to return. It was then, on the journey that would take him to Thebes, that Oedipus was confronted and harassed by a group of travelers, whom he killed in self-defense. This skirmish occurred at the very crossroads where Laius was killed.

Oedipus sends for the man who survived the attack, a shepherd, in the hope that he will not be identified as the murderer. Outside the palace, a messenger approaches Jocasta and tells her that he has come from Corinth to inform Oedipus that his father, Polybus, is dead, and that Corinth has asked Oedipus to come and rule there in his place. Jocasta rejoices, convinced that Polybus's death from natural causes has disproved the prophecy that Oedipus would murder his father. At Jocasta's summons, Oedipus comes outside, hears the news, and rejoices with her. He now feels much more inclined to agree with the queen in deeming prophecies worthless and viewing chance as the principle governing the world. But while Oedipus finds great comfort in the fact that one-half of the prophecy has been disproved, he still fears the other half—the half that claimed he would sleep with his mother.

The messenger remarks that Oedipus need not worry, because Polybus and his wife, Merope, are not Oedipus's biological parents. The messenger, a shepherd by profession, knows firsthand that Oedipus came to Corinth as an orphan. One day long ago, he was tending his sheep when another shepherd approached him carrying a baby, its ankles pinned together. The messenger took the baby to the royal family of Corinth, and they raised him as their own. That baby was Oedipus. Oedipus asks who the other shepherd was, and the messenger answers that he was a servant of Laius.

Oedipus asks that this shepherd be brought forth to testify, but Jocasta, beginning to suspect the truth, begs her husband not to seek more information. She runs back

into the palace. The shepherd then enters. Oedipus interrogates him, asking who gave him the baby. The shepherd refuses to disclose anything, and Oedipus threatens him with torture. Finally, he answers that the child came from the house of Laius. Questioned further, he answers that the baby was in fact the child of Laius himself, and that it was Jocasta who gave him the infant, ordering him to kill it, as it had been prophesied that the child would kill his parents. But the shepherd pitied the child, and decided that the prophecy could be avoided just as well if the child were to grow up in a foreign city, far from his true parents. The shepherd therefore passed the boy on to the shepherd in Corinth.

Realizing who he is and who his parents are, Oedipus screams that he sees the truth and flees back into the palace. The shepherd and the messenger slowly exit the stage. A second messenger enters and describes scenes of suffering. Jocasta has hanged herself, and Oedipus, finding her dead, has pulled the pins from her robe and stabbed out his own eyes. Oedipus now emerges from the palace, bleeding and begging to be exiled. He asks Creon to send him away from Thebes and to look after his daughters, Antigone and Ismene. Creon, covetous of royal power, is all too happy to oblige.

Oedipus at Colonus

After years of wandering in exile from Thebes, Oedipus arrives in a grove outside Athens. Blind and frail, he walks with the help of his daughter, Antigone. Oedipus and Antigone learn from a citizen that they are standing on holy ground, reserved for the Eumenides, goddesses of fate. Oedipus sends the citizen to fetch Theseus, the king of Athens and its surroundings. Oedipus tells Antigone that, earlier in his life, when Apollo prophesied his doom, the god promised Oedipus that he would come to rest on this ground.

After an interlude in which Oedipus tells the Chorus who he is, Oedipus's second daughter, Ismene, enters, having gone to learn news from Apollo's oracle at Delphi. She tells him that, back in Thebes, Oedipus's younger son, Eteocles, has overthrown Polynices, the elder, and that Polynices is now amassing troops in Argos for an attack on his brother and on Creon, who rules along with Eteocles. The oracle has predicted that the burial place of Oedipus will bring good fortune to the city in which it is located, and both sons, as well as Creon, know of this

prophecy. Both Polynices and Creon are currently en route to try to take Oedipus into custody and thus claim the right to bury him in their kingdoms. Oedipus swears he will never give his support to either of his sons, for they did nothing to prevent his exile years ago.

King Theseus arrives and says that he pities Oedipus for the fate that has befallen him, and he asks how he can help Oedipus. Oedipus asks Theseus to harbor him in Athens until his death, but warns that by doing him this favor, Theseus will incur the wrath of Thebes. Despite the warning, Theseus agrees to help Oedipus.

Creon appears in order to abduct Oedipus, but, proving unsuccessful, he kidnaps Antigone and Ismene instead. Theseus promises Oedipus that he will get his daughters back. Theseus does in fact return with Oedipus's daughters shortly.

Soon after, Polynices arrives, seeking his father's favor in order to gain custody of his eventual burial site. Oedipus asks Theseus to drive Polynices away, but Antigone convinces her father to listen to his son. Polynices tells Oedipus that he never condoned his exile, and that Eteocles is the bad son, having bribed the men of Thebes to turn against Polynices. Oedipus responds with a terrible curse, upbraiding his son for letting him be sent into exile, and predicting that Eteocles and Polynices will die at one another's hands. Polynices, realizing he will never win his father's support, turns to his sisters. He asks that they provide him with a proper burial should he die in battle. Antigone embraces Polynices, saying that he is condemning himself to death, but he resolutely says that his life remains in the hands of the gods. He prays for the safety of his sisters and then leaves for Thebes.

Terrible thunder sounds, and the Chorus cries out in horror. Oedipus says that his time of death has come. Sending for Theseus, he tells the king he must carry out certain rites on his body, and that by doing so he may assure divine protection to his city. Theseus says that he believes Oedipus and asks what to do. Oedipus answers that he will lead the king to the place where he will die, and that Theseus must never reveal that spot, but pass it on to his son at his own death, who in turn must pass it on to his own son. In this way Theseus and his heirs may always rule

over a safe city. Oedipus then strides off with a sudden strength, taking his daughters and Theseus to his grave.

A messenger enters to narrate the mysterious death of Oedipus: his death seemed a disappearance of sorts, "the lightless depths of Earth bursting open in kindness to receive him" (1886–1887). Just as the messenger finishes his story, Antigone and Ismene come onstage, chanting a dirge. Antigone wails that they will cry for Oedipus for as long as they live. Not knowing where to go now, Antigone says they will have to wander forever alone. Theseus returns to the stage, asking the daughters to stop their weeping. They plead to see their father's tomb, but Theseus insists that Oedipus has forbidden it. They give up their pleas but ask for safe passage back to Thebes, so that they may prevent a war between their brothers. Theseus grants them this, and the Chorus tells the girls to stop their weeping, for all rests in the hands of the gods. Theseus and the Chorus exit toward Athens; Antigone and Ismene head for Thebes.

Main Characters:

Antigone

Antigone is very much her father's daughter, and she begins her play with the same swift decisiveness with which Oedipus began his. Within the first fifty lines, she is planning to defy Creon's order and bury Polynices. Unlike her father, however, Antigone possesses a remarkable ability to remember the past. Whereas Oedipus defies Tiresias, the prophet who has helped him so many times, and whereas he seems almost to have forgotten his encounter with Laius at the three-way crossroads, Antigone begins her play by talking about the many griefs that her father handed down to his children. Because of her acute awareness of her own history, Antigone is much more dangerous than Oedipus, especially to Creon. Aware of the kind of fate her family has been allotted, Antigone feels she has nothing to lose. The thought of death at Creon's hands that so terrifies Ismene does not even faze Antigone, who looks forward to the glory of dying for her brother. Yet even in her expression of this noble sentiment, we see the way in which Antigone continues to be haunted by the perversion that has destroyed her family. Speaking about being killed for burying Polynices, she says that she will lie with the one she loves, loved by him, and it is difficult not to hear at least the hint of

sexual overtones, as though the self-destructive impulses of the Oedipus family always tend toward the incestuous.

Antigone draws attention to the difference between divine law and human law. More than any other character in the three plays, she casts serious doubt on Creon's authority. When she points out that his edicts cannot override the will of the gods or the unshakable traditions of men, she places Creon's edict against Polynices' burial in a perspective that makes it seem shameful and ridiculous. Creon sees her words as merely a passionate, wild outburst, but he will ultimately be swayed by the words of Tiresias, which echo those of Antigone. It is important to note, however, that Antigone's motivation for burying Polynices is more complicated than simply reverence for the dead or for tradition. She says that she would never have taken upon herself the responsibility of defying the edict for the sake of a husband or children, for husbands and children can be replaced; brothers, once the parents are dead, cannot. In Antigone we see a woman so in need of familial connection that she is desperate to maintain the connections she has even in death.

Creon

Antigone's uncle, the powerfully built King Creon is a weary, wrinkled man suffering the burdens of rule. Before the deaths of Oedipus and his sons, he dedicated himself to art patronage but has now surrendered himself entirely to the throne. A practical man, he firmly distances himself from the tragic aspirations of Oedipus and his line. As he tells Antigone, his only interest is in political and social order. Creon is bound to ideas of good sense, simplicity, and the banal happiness of everyday life. To Creon, life is but the happiness one makes, the happiness that inheres in a grasped tool, a garden bench, a child playing at one's feet. Uninterested in playing the villain in his niece's tragedy, Creon has no desire to sentence Antigone to death. Antigone is far more useful to Thebes as mother to its heir than as its martyr, and he orders her crime covered-up. Though fond of Antigone, Creon will have no choice but to but to execute her. As the recalcitrant Antigone makes clear, by saying "yes" to state power, Creon has committed himself to acts he finds loathsome if the order of the state demands it. Antigone's insistence on her desire in face of state power brings ruin into Thebes and to Creon specifically. With the death of his family, Creon is left utterly alone in the palace.

His throne even robs him of his mourning, the king and his pace sadly shuttling off to a cabinet meeting after the announcement of the family's deaths.

The Chorus

In Greek tragedy, the Chorus consisted of a group of approximately ten people, playing the role of death messenger, dancing, singing, and commenting throughout from the margins of the action. Anouilh reduces the Chorus to a single figure who retains his collective function nevertheless. The Chorus represents an indeterminate group, be it the inhabitants of Thebes or the moved spectators. It also appears as narrator. The Chorus frames the play with a prologue and epilogue, introducing the action and characters under the sign of fatality. We see this fatalism most clearly perhaps its characteristic gesture of demonstration, prefacing many of its remarks with "Et voilà" in the original script. In presenting the tragedy, the Chorus would instruct the audience on proper spectatorship, reappearing at the tragedy's pivotal moments to comment on the action or the nature of tragedy itself. Along with playing narrator, the Chorus also attempts to intercede throughout the play, whether on the behalf of the Theban people or the horrified spectators.

The Guards

The three Guardsmen are interpolations into the Antigone legend, doubles for the rank-and-file fascist collaborators or collabos of Anouilh's day. The card-playing trio, made more mindless and indistinguishable in being grouped in three, emerges from a long stage tradition of the dull-witted police officer. As the Chorus notes, they smell of garlic and beer, concern themselves with the mundane, and are in general not bad people. Serving as a spokesman of sorts, the First Guard gives voice to their thoughts: they follow orders, and they cover for themselves when things go wrong. They are eternally indifferent, innocent, and ready to serve whatever powers that be. In other words, they have no particular loyalty to Creon. As the Chorus indicates, they would arrest him if need be. This indifference makes them brutal and dangerous. Some critics have taken Anouilh's guards, which stand in contrast to the royal heroes of tragedy, as the clearest manifestation of his "aristocratic pessimism."

Themes:

The Power of Unwritten Law

After defeating Polynices and taking the throne of Thebes, Creon commands that Polynices be left to rot unburied, his flesh eaten by dogs and birds, creating an "obscenity" for everyone to see (Antigone, 231). Creon thinks that he is justified in his treatment of Polynices because the latter was a traitor, an enemy of the state, and the security of the state makes all human life—including family life and religion—possible. Therefore, to Creon's way of thinking, the good of the state comes before all other duties and values. However, the subsequent events of the play demonstrate that some duties are more fundamental than the state and its laws. The duty to bury the dead is part of what it means to be human, not part of what it means to be a citizen. That is why Polynices' rotting body is an "obscenity" rather than a crime. Moral duties—such as the duties owed to the dead—make up the body of unwritten law and tradition, the law to which Antigone appeals.

The Willingness to Ignore the Truth

When Oedipus and Jocasta begin to get close to the truth about Laius's murder, in Oedipus the King, Oedipus fastens onto a detail in the hope of exonerating himself. Jocasta says that she was told that Laius was killed by "strangers," whereas Oedipus knows that he acted alone when he killed a man in similar circumstances. This is an extraordinary moment because it calls into question the entire truth-seeking process Oedipus believes himself to be undertaking. Both Oedipus and Jocasta act as though the servant's story, once spoken, is irrefutable history. Neither can face the possibility of what it would mean if the servant were wrong. This is perhaps why Jocasta feels she can tell Oedipus of the prophecy that her son would kill his father, and Oedipus can tell her about the similar prophecy given him by an oracle (867–875), and neither feels compelled to remark on the coincidence; or why Oedipus can hear the story of Jocasta binding her child's ankles (780–781) and not think of his own swollen feet. While the information in these speeches is largely intended to make the audience painfully aware of the tragic irony, it also emphasizes just how desperately Oedipus and Jocasta do not want to speak the obvious truth: they look at the circumstances and details of everyday life and pretend not to see them.

The Limits of Free Will

Prophecy is a central part of Oedipus the King. The play begins with Creon's return from the oracle at Delphi, where he has learned that the plague will be lifted if Thebes banishes the man who killed Laius. Tiresias prophesies the capture of one who is both father and brother to his own children. Oedipus tells Jocasta of a prophecy he heard as a youth, that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother, and Jocasta tells Oedipus of a similar prophecy given to Laius, that her son would grow up to kill his father. Oedipus and Jocasta debate the extent to which prophecies should be trusted at all, and when all the prophecies come true, it appears that one of Sophocles' aims is to justify the powers of the gods and prophets, which had recently come under attack in fifth-century b.c. Athens.

Sophocles' audience would, of course, have known the story of Oedipus, which only increases the sense of complete inevitability about how the play would end. It is difficult to say how justly one can accuse Oedipus of being "blind" or foolish when he seems to have no choice about fulfilling the prophecy: he is sent away from Thebes as a baby and by a remarkable coincidence saved and raised as a prince in Corinth. Hearing that he is fated to kill his father, he flees Corinth and, by a still more remarkable coincidence, ends up back in Thebes, now king and husband in his actual father's place. Oedipus seems only to desire to flee his fate, but his fate continually catches up with him. Many people have tried to argue that Oedipus brings about his catastrophe because of a "tragic flaw," but nobody has managed to create a consensus about what Oedipus's flaw actually is. Perhaps his story is meant to show that error and disaster can happen to anyone, that human beings are relatively powerless before fate or the gods, and that a cautious humility is the best attitude toward life.

Important Quotations Explained:

1.

"My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene, how many griefs our father Oedipus handed down! Do you know one, I ask you, one grief that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us while we still live and breathe? There's nothing, no pain—our lives are pain—no private shame, no public disgrace, nothing I haven't seen in your grief and mine." (Antigone, 1–8)

Antigone's first words in Antigone, "My own flesh and blood," vividly emphasize the play's concern with familial relationships. Antigone is a play about the legacy

of incest and about a sister's love for her brother. Flesh and blood have been destined to couple unnaturally—in sex, violence, or both—since Oedipus's rash and unwitting slaying of his father. Antigone says that griefs are "handed down" in Oedipus's family, implicitly comparing grief to a family heirloom.

In her first speech, Antigone seems a dangerous woman, well on her way to going over the edge. She knows she has nothing to lose, telling Ismene, "Do you know one, I ask you, one grief / that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us / while we still live and breathe?" Before we even have time to imagine what the next grief might be, Antigone reveals it: Creon will not allow her brother Polynices to be buried. Ismene, on the other hand, like the audience, is one step behind. From the outset, Antigone is the only one who sees what is really going on, the only one willing to speak up and point out the truth.

2.

"Anarchy—show me a greater crime in all the earth! She, she destroys cities, rips up houses, breaks the ranks of spearmen into headlong rout. But the ones who last it out, the great mass of them owe their lives to discipline. Therefore, we must defend the men who live by law, never let some woman triumph over us. Better to fall from power, if fall we must, at the hands of a man—never be rated inferior to a woman, never." (Antigone, 751–761)

This is one of Creon's speeches to the Chorus. The word "anarchy" (in Greek, anarchia) literally means "without a leader." The Greek word is feminine and can be represented by a feminine pronoun, which is why Creon, speaking of anarchy, says, "She, she destroys cities, rips up houses. . . ." Because Creon uses the feminine pronoun, he sounds as if he might be talking about Antigone, and maintaining order is certainly connected, in his mind, with keeping women in their place. Creon sees anarchy as the inevitable consequence when disobedience of the law is left unpunished. For Creon, the law, on whatever scale, must be absolute. His insistence on the gender of the city's ruler ("the man") is significant, since masculine political authority is opposed to uncontrolled feminine disobedience. Creon sees this feminine disobedience as something that upsets the order of civilization on every possible level—the political ("destroys cities"), the domestic ("rips up houses"), and the military ("breaks the ranks of spearmen"). The only way to fight this disorder is through discipline; therefore, says Creon, "we must defend the men who live by law, [we must] never let some woman triumph over us" (758).

Week 10

The Republic

By Plato

Plato:

- 427(?) - 348 BCE
- Lived about 200 years after Pythagoras.
- "Plato" means "the broad" – possibly his nickname.
- Son of a wealthy Athens family.
- Served in the Athens army during the Peloponnesian War.

Plato and Socrates:

- Plato was Socrates' student.

- Almost all we know about Socrates is from Plato's writings.
- After Socrates' execution for corrupting the young and neglecting the gods, Plato left Athens in disgust and travelled widely.
- In Italy, Plato met the Pythagoreans.

The Academy:

- In (ca.) 387 BCE, Plato returned to Athens and established a school for philosophy, built in a grove dedicated to the famous hero Academos.
- The Academy continued until it was closed in 529 CE, over 900 years.

Pre-eminence of Mathematics:

- Though planned as a school for future statesmen, Plato had become convinced that the road to knowledge lay in exact reasoning, as in mathematics.
- The famous inscription over the entrance read:
  "Let no one who does not know geometry enter here."

Plato's Dialogues:

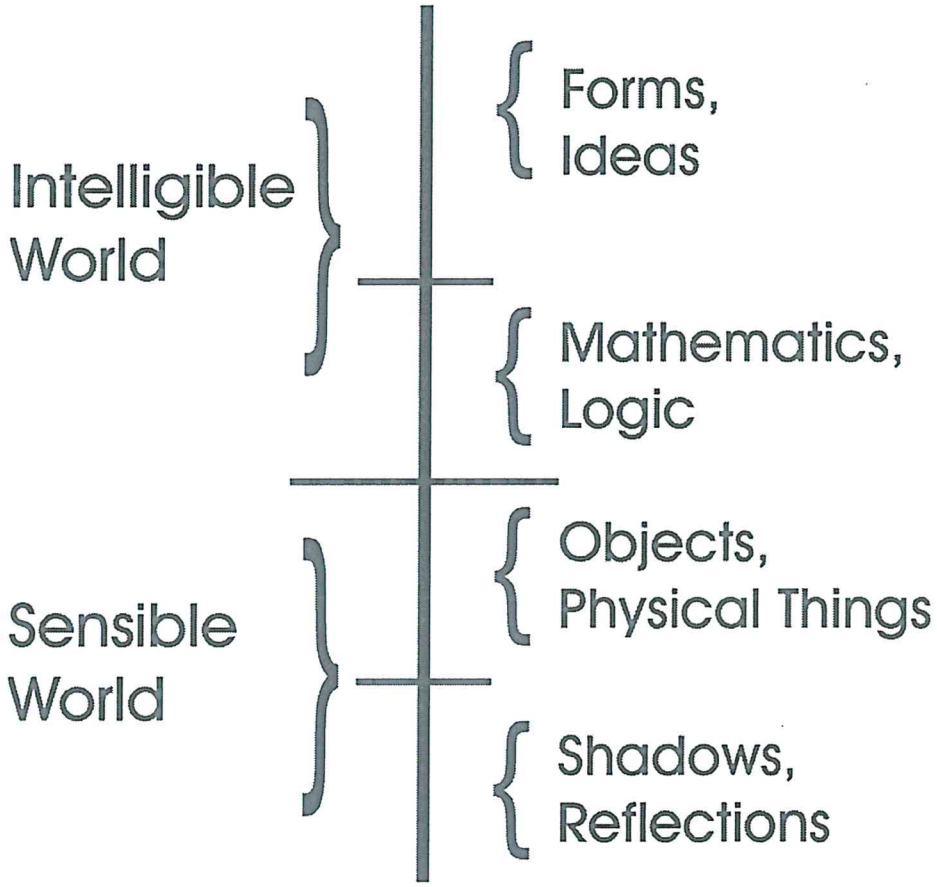
- Plato's works span approximately 30 "dialogues" – dramatic conversations with statesmen, citizens, and other recognizable names from Plato's time and earlier.
- Socrates is the main interlocutor.
- It is hard to tell what Socrates' own views are just and what is just Plato's voice.

Plato on Reality:

- Most of Plato's writings are not about nature, but his concepts of reality and knowledge have had a profound impact.
- These are characterized by two well-known passages from his dialogue, The Republic.

The Divided Line:

Think of everything that is, placed on single line, extending from the lowest to the highest sense of reality.

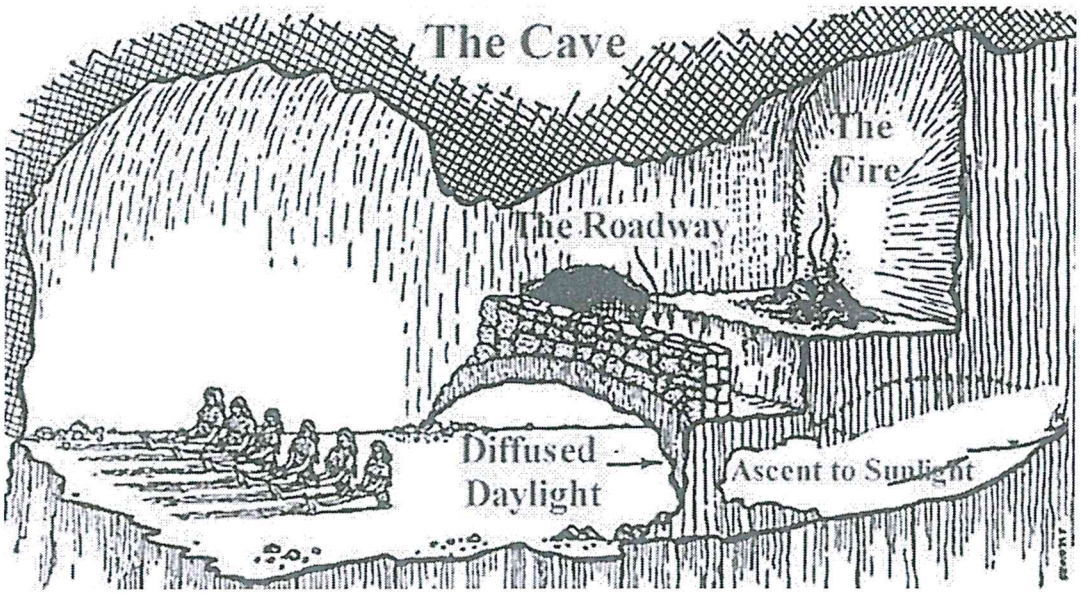


- There are two main sections of the line, representing those things apprehended by the senses and those things only apprehended by the mind.
- Each section can also be divided into two subsections.
- At the bottom the division is between objects and mere appearances.
- In the upper section, the lower part represents matters understood by deductive reasoning
- Deduction implies valid arguments from an assumed starting place.
- At the very top is the purest form of reality, the forms.

- Understanding the forms is the highest goal of philosophy.
- Knowledge is possible only of what lies in the Intelligible World.
- Opinion is all that is possible for the Sensible World.

- Therefore, true knowledge depends entirely on the mind.

The Allegory of the Cave:



Also, in The Republic, Plato explains the route to knowledge and the responsibilities of philosophers through an allegory about prisoners in a cave.

Imagine a cave in which prisoners are chained and seated so that they all face one way, toward a wall.

The prisoners have been there all their lives and know nothing of the outside world.

All that the prisoners see are the shadows cast on the wall before them.

This is the lowest segment of the Divided Line.

Behind the prisoners is a fire, which they cannot see, that casts the shadows on the wall before them.

Between the fire and the prisoners is a parapet, or walkway, where people are crossing back and forth with strange objects held above their heads.

Everything the prisoners see or hear is bounced off the wall. They therefore think of that as the true reality.

Now, suppose one of the prisoners is unshackled and led away, up out of the cave and into the world outside.

The prisoner will probably object and when outside, will be blinded by the light.

But in time the released prisoner will realize that it is the world outside that is real and the world in the cave only one of illusion.

If then the prisoner is led back down into the cave and placed in his original position, the other prisoners would mock him if he told them of the world outside and think him a fool. And they would object to anyone else being led away.

From *The Republic*:

"...the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and ... the journey upwards [is] the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world...."

The prisoner who is released and attains a full understanding of what is real (the philosopher), has a responsibility to return to the cave and instruct others in what is real, so that they too may escape into the world of truth.

The Duty of the Philosopher:

- For Plato, the philosopher has a duty to enlighten the uneducated.
- Compare this to the Pythagoreans, who sought to prevent any special knowledge they had from escaping from their cult.

The Republic: Overview

Why do men behave justly? Is it because they fear societal punishment? Are they trembling before notions of divine retribution? Do the stronger elements of society scare the weak into submission in the name of law? Or do men behave justly because it is good for them to do so? Is justice, regardless of its rewards and punishments, a good thing in and of itself? How do we define justice? Plato sets out to answer these questions in The Republic. He wants to define justice, and to define it in such a way as to show that justice is worthwhile in and of itself. He meets these two challenges with a single solution: a definition of justice that appeals to human psychology, rather than to perceived behavior.

Plato's strategy in *The Republic* is to first explicate the primary notion of societal, or political, justice, and then to derive an analogous concept of individual justice. In Books II, III, and IV, Plato identifies political justice as harmony in a structured political body. An ideal society consists of three main classes of people—producers (craftsmen, farmers, artisans, etc.), auxiliaries (warriors), and guardians (rulers); a society is just when relations between these three classes are right. Each group must perform its appropriate function, and only that function, and each must be in the right position of power in relation to the others. Rulers must rule, auxiliaries must uphold rulers' convictions, and producers must limit themselves to exercising whatever skills nature granted them (farming, blacksmithing, painting, etc.) Justice is a principle of specialization: a principle that requires that each person fulfill the societal role to which nature fitted him and not interfere in any other business.

At the end of Book IV, Plato tries to show that individual justice mirrors political justice. He claims that the soul of every individual has a three-part structure analogous to the three classes of a society. There is a rational part of the soul, which seeks after truth and is responsible for our philosophical inclinations; a spirited part of the soul, which desires honor and is responsible for our feelings of anger and indignation; and an appetitive part of the soul, which lusts after all sorts of things, but money most of all (since money must be used to fulfill any other base desire). The just individual can be defined in analogy with the just society; the three parts of his soul achieve the requisite relationships of power and influence regarding one another. In a just individual, the rational part of the soul rules, the spirited part of the soul supports this rule, and the appetitive part of the soul submits and follows wherever reason leads. Put more plainly: in a just individual, the entire soul aims at fulfilling the desires of the rational part, much as in the just society the entire community aims at fulfilling whatever the rulers will.

The parallels between the just society and the just individual run deep. Each of the three classes of society, in fact, is dominated by one of the three parts of the soul. Producers are dominated by their appetites—their urges for money, luxury, and pleasure. Warriors are dominated by their spirits, which make them courageous. Rulers are dominated by their rational faculties and strive for wisdom. Books V through VII focus on the rulers as the philosopher kings.

In a series of three analogies—the allegories of the sun, the line, and the cave—Plato explains who these individuals are while hammering out his theory of

the Forms. Plato explains that the world is divided into two realms, the visible (which we grasp with our senses) and the intelligible (which we only grasp with our mind). The visible world is the universe we see around us. The intelligible world is comprised of the Forms—abstract, changeless absolutes such as Goodness, Beauty, Redness, and Sweetness that exist in permanent relation to the visible realm and make it possible. (An apple is red and sweet, the theory goes, because it participates in the Forms of Redness and Sweetness.) Only the Forms are objects of knowledge, because only they possess the eternal unchanging truth that the mind—not the senses—must apprehend.

Only those whose minds are trained to grasp the Forms—the philosophers—can know anything at all. What the philosophers must know in order to become able rulers is the Form of the Good—the source of all other Forms, and of knowledge, truth, and beauty. Plato cannot describe this Form directly, but he claims that it is to the intelligible realm what the sun is to the visible realm. Using the allegory of the cave, Plato paints an evocative portrait of the philosopher's soul moving through various stages of cognition (represented by the line) through the visible realm into the intelligible, and finally grasping the Form of the Good. The aim of education is not to put knowledge into the soul, but to put the right desires into the soul—to fill the soul with a lust for truth, so that it desires to move past the visible world, into the intelligible, ultimately to the Form of the Good.

Philosophers form the only class of men to possess knowledge and are also the most just men. Their souls, more than others, aim to fulfil the desires of the rational part. After comparing the philosopher king to the most unjust type of man—represented by the tyrant, who is ruled entirely by his non-rational appetites—Plato claims that justice is worthwhile for its own sake. In Book IX he presents three arguments for the conclusion that it is desirable to be just. By sketching a psychological portrait of the tyrant, he attempts to prove that injustice tortures a man's psyche, whereas a just soul is a healthy, happy one, untroubled and calm. Next, he argues that, though each of the three main character types—money-loving, honor-loving, and truth-loving—have their own conceptions of pleasure and of the corresponding good life—each choosing his own life as the most pleasant—only the philosopher can judge because only he has experienced all three types of pleasure. The others should accept the philosopher's judgement and conclude that the pleasures associated with the philosophical are most pleasant and thus that the just life is also most pleasant. He tries to demonstrate that only

philosophical pleasure is really pleasure at all; all other pleasure is nothing more than cessation of pain.

One might notice that none of these arguments actually prove that justice is desirable apart from its consequences—instead, they establish that justice is always accompanied by true pleasure. Probably, none of these is actually supposed to serve as the main reason why justice is desirable. Instead, the desirability of justice is likely connected to the intimate relationship between the just life and the Forms. The just life is good in and of itself because it involves grasping these ultimate goods, and imitating their order and harmony, thus incorporating them into one's own life. Justice is good, in other words, because it is connected to the greatest good, the Form of the Good.

Plato ends The Republic on a surprising note. Having defined justice and established it as the greatest good, he banishes poets from his city. Poets, he claims, appeal to the basest part of the soul by imitating unjust inclinations. By encouraging us to indulge ignoble emotions in sympathy with the characters we hear about, poetry encourages us to indulge these emotions in life. Poetry, in sum, makes us unjust. In closing, Plato relates the myth of Er, which describes the trajectory of a soul after death. Just souls are rewarded for one thousand years, while unjust ones are punished for the same amount of time. Each soul then must choose its next life.

Philosophical Themes, Arguments & Ideas

Justice as the Advantage of the Stronger

In Book I of *The Republic*, Thrasymachus sets up a challenge to justice. Thrasymachus is a Sophist, one of the teachers-for-hire who preached a creed of subjective morality to the wealthy sons of Athens. The Sophists did not believe in objective truth, including objective moral truth. They did not think, in other words, that anything was absolutely "right" or "wrong"; instead they viewed all actions as

either advantageous or disadvantageous to the person performing them. If an action was advantageous then they thought you should engage in it, and if it was disadvantageous then they thought that you should refrain. Taking this belief to its logical conclusion, some of them went so far as to claim that law and morality are nothing but mere convention, and that one ought to try to get away with injustice and illegality whenever such action would be to one's advantage. Plato meant to combat this attitude in *The Republic*.

Thrasymachus introduces the Sophist challenge by remarking that justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger. He does not mean to define justice with this statement, but to debunk it. His claim proceeds from the basic Sophistic moral notion: that the norms considered just are nothing more than conventions which hamper those who adhere to them, and benefit those who flout them. Those who behave unjustly naturally gain power and become the rulers, the strong people in society. Justice is the advantage of the stronger because when stupid, weak people behave in accordance with justice, they are disadvantaged, and the strong (those who behave unjustly) are advantaged.

An alternate reading of Thrasymachus's bold statement makes his claim seem slightly more subtle. According to this reading (put forward by C.D.C. Reeve), Thrasymachus is not merely making the usual assertion that the norms of justice are conventions; he claims further that these mores and norms are conventions that were put in place by the rulers (the "stronger") for the purpose of promoting their own interests. Conceptions of justice, in this reading, are the products of propaganda and tools of oppressors.

Regardless of the interpretation we give to Thrasymachus' statement, the challenge to Socrates is the same: he must prove that justice is something good and desirable, that it is more than convention, that it is connected to objective standards of morality, and that it is in our interest to adhere to it. His attempt to meet this challenge occupies the rest of The Republic.

The Principle of Specialization

Before he can prove that justice is a good thing, Plato must first state what justice is. Instead of defining justice as a set of behavioral norms (as the traditional Greek thinkers did) Plato identifies justice as structural: political justice resides in the structure of the city; individual justice resides in the structure of the soul. The just structure of the city is summed up by the principle of specialization: each member of society must play the role for which his nature best suits him and not

meddle in any other business. A man whose nature suits him to farming must farm and do nothing else; a man whose nature best suits him to building objects out of wood must be a carpenter and not bother with any other sort of work. Plato believes that this is the only way to ensure that each job is done as well as possible.

The principle of specialization keeps the farmer from carpentering, and the carpenter from farming. More important, it keeps both the farmer and the carpenter from becoming warriors and rulers. The principle of specialization separates society into three classes: the class of producers (including farmers, craftsmen, doctors, etc.), the class of warriors, and the class of rulers. Specialization ensures that these classes remain in a fixed relations of power and influence. Rulers control the city, establishing its laws and objectives. Warriors carry out the commands of rulers. Producers stay out of political affairs, only worrying themselves about the business of ruling insofar as they need to obey what the rulers say and the warriors enforce. A city set up in this way, Plato contends, is a just city.

The Tripartite Soul

Just as political justice consists in the structural relations among classes of society, Plato believes, individual justice consists in correct structural relations among parts of the soul. Paralleling the producers, warriors, and rulers in the city, Plato claims that each individual soul has three separate seats of desire and motivation: the appetitive part of our soul lusts after food, drink, sex, and so on (and after money most of all, since money is the means of satisfying the rest of these desires); the spirited part of the soul yearns for honor; the rational part of the soul desires truth and knowledge. In a just soul, these three parts stand in the correct power relations. The rational part must rule, the spirited part must enforce the rational part's convictions, and the appetitive part must obey.

In the just soul, the desires of the rational, truth-loving part dictate the overall aims of the human being. All appetites and considerations of honor are put at the disposal of truth-loving goals. The just soul strives wholly toward truth. Plato identifies the philosopher (literally "truth lover") as the most just individual and sets him up as ruler of the just city.

The Sun, the Line, the Cave

Explaining his idea of a philosopher-king, Plato appeals to three successive analogies to spell out the metaphysical and epistemological theories that account for the philosopher's irreplaceable role in politics. The analogy of the sun

illuminates the notion of the Form of the Good, the philosopher-king's ultimate object of desire. The line illustrates the four different grades of cognitive activity of which a human being is capable, the highest of which only the philosopher-kings ever reach. The allegory of the cave demonstrates the effects of education on the human soul, demonstrating how we move from one grade of cognitive activity to the next.

In the allegory of the cave, Plato asks us to imagine the following scenario: A group of people have lived in a deep cave since birth, never seeing any daylight at all. These people are bound in such a way that they cannot look to either side or behind them, but only straight ahead. Behind them is a fire, and behind the fire is a partial wall. On top of the wall are various statues, which are manipulated by another group of people, laying out of sight. Because of the fire, the statues cast shadows on the wall that the prisoners are facing. The prisoners watch the stories that these shadows play out, and because this is all they can ever see, they believe that these shadows are the most real things in the world. When they talk to one another about "men," "women," "trees," "horses," and so on, they refer only to these shadows.

Now he asks us to imagine that one of these prisoners is freed from his bonds and can look at the fire and at the statues themselves. After initial pain and disbelief, he eventually realizes that all these things are more real than the shadows he has always believed to be the most real things; he grasps how the fire and the statues together caused the shadows, which are copies of the real things. He now takes the statues and fire as the most real things in the world.

Next this prisoner is dragged out of the cave into the world above. At first, he is so dazzled by the light in the open that he can only look at shadows, then he is able to look at reflections, then finally at the real objects—real trees, flowers, houses, and other physical objects. He sees that these are even more real than the statues were, and that those objects were only copies of these.

Finally, when the prisoner's eyes have fully adjusted to the brightness, he lifts his sights toward the heavens and looks at the sun. He understands that the sun is the cause of everything he sees around him—of the light, of his capacity for sight, of the existence of flowers, trees, and all other objects.

The stages the prisoner passes through in the allegory of the cave correspond to the various levels on the line. The line, first of all, is broken into two equal halves: the visible realm (which we can grasp with our senses) and the intelligible realm (which we can only grasp with the mind). When the prisoner is in the cave he is in the visible realm. When he ascends into the daylight, he enters the intelligible.

The lowest rung on the cognitive line is imagination. In the cave, this is represented as the prisoner whose feet and head are bound, so that he can only see shadows. What he takes to be the most real things are not real at all; they are shadows, mere images. These shadows are meant to represent images from art. A man who is stuck in the imagination stage of development takes his truths from epic poetry and theater, or other fictions. He derives his conception of himself and his world from these art forms rather than from looking at the real world.

When the prisoner frees himself and looks at the statues he reaches the next stage in the line: belief. The statues are meant to correspond to the real objects of our sensation—real people, trees, flowers, and so on. The man in the cognitive stage of belief mistakenly takes these sensible particulars as the most real things.

When he ascends into the world above, though, he sees that there is something even more real: The Forms, of which the sensible particulars are imperfect copies. He is now at the stage of thought in his cognition. He can reason about Forms, but not in a purely abstract way. He uses images and unproven assumptions as crutches.

Finally, he turns his sights to the sun, which represents the ultimate Form, the Form of the Good. The Form of the Good is the cause of all other Forms, and is the source of all goodness, truth, and beauty in the world. It is the ultimate object of knowledge. Once the prisoner has grasped the Form of the Good, he has reached the highest stage of cognition: understanding. He no longer has any need for images or unproven assumptions to aid in his reasoning. By reaching the Form of the Good, he hits on the first principle of philosophy which explains everything without the need of any assumptions or images. He can now use this understanding derived from comprehending the Form of the Good to transform all his previous thought into understanding—he can understand all the Forms. Only the philosopher can reach this stage, and that is why only he is fit to rule.

Plato is unable to provide direct detail about the Form of the Good, and instead illustrates his idea by comparing it to the sun. The Form of the Good is to

the intelligible realm, he claims, as the sun is the visible realm. (In the metaphor, the fire in the cave represents the sun.) First of all, just as the sun provides light and visibility in the visible realm, the Form of the Good is the source of intelligibility. The sun makes sight possible, and, similarly, the Form of the Good is responsible for our capacity for knowledge. The sun causes things to come to be in the visible world; it regulates the seasons, makes flowers bloom, influences animals to give birth and so on. The Form of the Good is responsible for the existence of Forms, for their coming to be in the intelligible world.

Why It Pays to Be Just

One of Plato's objectives in The Republic was to show that justice is worthwhile—that just action is a good in itself, and that one ought to engage in just activity even when it doesn't seem to confer immediate advantage. Once he has completed his portrait of the most just man—the philosopher-king—he is in a position to fulfill this aim. In Book IX, Plato presents three arguments for the claim that it pays to be just. First, by sketching a psychological portrait of the tyrant, he attempts to prove that injustice takes such a wretched toll on a man's psyche that it could not possibly be worth it (whereas a just soul is untroubled and calm). Next, he argues that, though each of the three main character types (money-loving, honor-loving, and truth-loving) have their own conceptions of pleasure and of the corresponding good life (each choosing his own life as the most pleasant sort), only the philosopher is in the position to judge since only he is capable of experiencing all three types of pleasure. Finally, he tries to demonstrate that only philosophical pleasure is really pleasure at all; all other pleasure is only cessation from pain.

Likely, Plato did not consider any of these to be the primary source of justice's worth. Plato's goal was to prove that justice is worthwhile independent of the advantages it confers, so for him to argue that the worth of justice lies in the enormous pleasure it produces is beside his point. To say that we should be just because it will make our life more pleasant, after all, is just to say that we should be just because it is to our advantage to do so. Instead, we should expect to find him arguing that the worth of justice lies in some other source, preferably having something to do with objective goodness. This is why many philosophers, from Plato's student Aristotle down to modern scholar Richard Kraut, believe that Plato's real argument for the worth of justice takes place long before Book IX. They think, plausibly, that Plato locates the worth of justice in justice's connection

to the Forms, which he holds to be the most good things in the world. Justice is worthwhile, on this interpretation, not because of any advantage it confers, but because it involves grasping the Form of the Good and imitating it. The just man tries to imitate the Forms by making his own soul as orderly and harmonious as the Forms themselves.

Important Quotations Explained

1.

The result, then, is that more plentiful and better-quality goods are more easily produced if each person does one thing for which he is naturally suited, does it at the right time, and is released from having to do any of the others.

In Book II, Socrates introduces the principle of specialization. According to Plato, political justice boils down to this guiding rule—that everyone do that to which their nature best suits them, and not meddle in any other business. Producers must produce according to their natures (e.g., the farmer farms, the carpenter builds wooden objects, the artist paints, and the doctor heals); warriors must fight; and the philosophers must rule.

2.

What about someone who believes in beautiful things but doesn't believe in the beautiful itself and isn't able to follow anyone who could lead him to the knowledge of it? Don't you think he is living in a dream rather than a wakened state? Isn't this dreaming: whether asleep or awake, to think that a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like?

In Book V, Socrates explains what distinguishes the lover of sights and sounds, the pseudo-intellectual, from the true philosopher. The lover of sights and sounds takes the sensible objects around him for the most real things, not recognizing that there is a higher level of reality in the intelligible realm. In particular, he goes around talking about beauty, billing himself as an expert on beauty, and yet he does not even realize that there is such a thing as the Form of the Beautiful, which is the cause of all sensible beauty.

Week 11

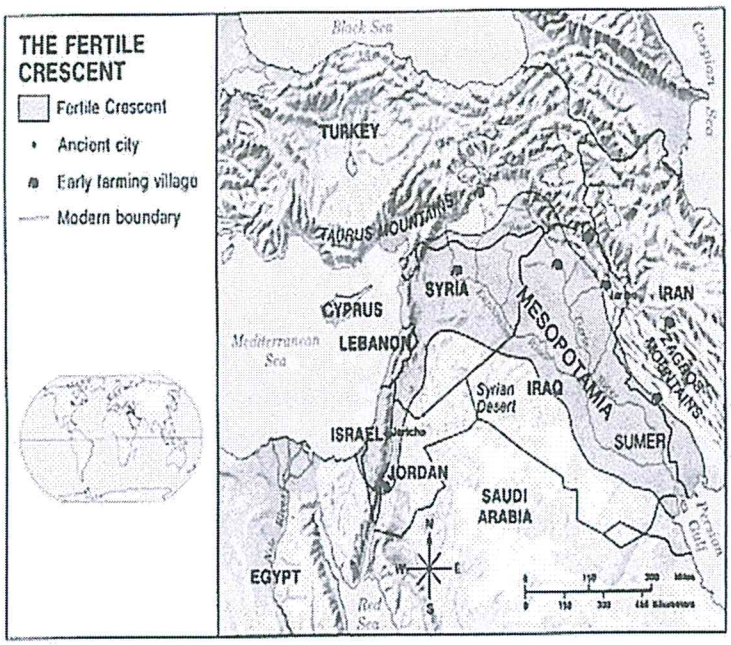
The Epic of Gilgamesh

Anonymous Writer

The history and culture behind the world's oldest recorded story – *Epic of Gilgamesh*

Mesopotamia– Geography (circa 4000 BC):

- Mesopotamia means "the land between the rivers."
- It is located in an agriculturally rich region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (also known as the "Fertile Crescent" or "cradle of civilizations".
- It was located in the region known today as Iraq as well as parts of Iran.



Mesopotamia's Ruling Societies from 5000 BCE – 600 BCE:

- Sumerian was the first civilization in the region.

- Later, the Akkadians, Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans take over their cities and adopt their culture.
-
- They all adapt their own version of the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Sumerians (5000-2100 BC):

The Sumerians were the first group of people known to have dominated this region

1. **Economy**

    - Sumerians made their living by growing crops and raising livestock. They were also known as successful merchants and traders throughout the Gulf region.

2. Government and Society

- Sumerians lived in city-states. These cities were walled (fortified) for protection and surrounded by vast, open land.
-
- The largest city-states were Ur, Uruk, and Lagash. The Sumerians never developed a central, unifying government between the three, leaving them vulnerable to attack.
-
- Sumerian society developed a three-level class system (nobles, middle class, peasants).

3. Religious Beliefs

- The Sumerians (and later the Babylonian people) worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses, meaning they were polytheistic.
- Regardless of one's actions in life, they did not believe in life after death. They believed that after one dies there is only emptiness.

Anu – father of gods and god of the sky (like Zeus)

Enlil – god of the air

Utu – sun god; lord of truth and justice

4. Cultural Achievements

- Sophisticated technology – terraced temples (ziggurats), wheeled vehicles, sail boats, animal-drawn plows.
- Developments in math and science – A precise 12-month calendar, the concept of zero, "Pythagorean theorem"
- World's first writing system – cuneiform. Formed by reed markings on wet clay tablets.
- The Epic of Gilgamesh, the first work of fiction ever recorded, was etched on stone tablets in cuneiform.

History of Epic of Gilgamesh:

- While there is no evidence that the events in the epic happened, there was a Gilgamesh who ruled the Sumerian dynasty of Uruk in 2,700 BCE.
- The Epic of Gilgamesh, the first work of fiction ever recorded, was etched on over 40,000 clay tablets in cuneiform in 2,000 BCE.
- The legend itself was adapted by a few different cultures following the decline of the Sumerian empire.
- We can still learn much about Sumerian culture and values through the story of Gilgamesh – the world's first epic hero.

- Akkadians (2100 - 2000 BC)
- Hittites (2000 - 1700 BC)
- Babylonians (1700-700 BC)
- Assyrians (700-600 BC)

Story of Gilgamesh:

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the story of King Gilgamesh of Uruk. Gilgamesh is a ruthless and oppressive leader, and the gods punish his prideful behavior by killing his best friend (Enkidu). Horrified by Enkidu's death and the prospect of his own demise, Gilgamesh undertakes a quest for immortality, which brings him to the home of Utnapishtim, and the only mortal saved from the Great Flood and granted immortality. There he finds the truth about life and death.

Importance of Gilgamesh:

1. Earliest known literary work.

2. Contains an account of the Great Flood and the story of a virtuous man named Utnapishtim who survived

3. Expresses values of ancient civilization – such as the belief in divine retribution for transgressions such as violence, pride, the oppression of others, and the destruction of the natural world.

4. Gilgamesh serves as an early model of the archetypal hero.

5. Studied by Joseph Campbell as a primary example of the monomyth (or hero's journey story).

6. Large number of parallels to The Odyssey and other Greek epics.

Archetypal Traits of the Hero/Heroine:

1. Unique birth – the hero's literal birth or familial origin is uncommon

2. Origin is mysterious – the nature of how the hero became a hero is shrouded in mystery.

3. Extraordinary powers – these do not have to be super powers. These are any ability that makes them extraordinary.

4. Tragic flaw or weakness – every hero has limitations or something that makes them vulnerable. This may be a physical object, a principle, or a disposition.

5. Rite of passage – every hero goes through tests and training to prove themselves.

6. Has a nemesis – every hero has a main enemy. This villain is often a darker reflection of the hero.

7. Achieves his/her destiny – the archetypal hero always finds success in the long run. The hero always wins in the end.

8. Stands for good – the hero is a morally and principally good character. S/he never embodies evil qualities beyond momentary weakness.

Plot Overview:

The epic's prelude offers a general introduction to Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, who was two-thirds god and one-third man. He built magnificent ziggurats, or temple towers, surrounded his city with high walls, and laid out its orchards and fields. He was physically beautiful, immensely strong, and very wise. Although Gilgamesh was godlike in body and mind, he began his kingship as a cruel despot. He lorded over his subjects, raping any woman who struck his fancy, whether she was the wife of one of his warriors or the daughter of a nobleman. He accomplished his building projects with forced labor, and his exhausted subjects groaned under his oppression. The gods heard his subjects' pleas and decided to keep Gilgamesh in check by creating a wild man named Enkidu, who was as magnificent as Gilgamesh. Enkidu became Gilgamesh's great friend, and Gilgamesh's heart was shattered when Enkidu died of an illness inflicted by the gods. Gilgamesh then traveled to the edge of the world and learned about the days before the deluge and other secrets of the gods, and he recorded them on stone tablets.

The epic begins with Enkidu. He lives with the animals, suckling at their breasts, grazing in the meadows, and drinking at their watering places. A hunter discovers him and sends a temple prostitute into the wilderness to tame him. In that time, people considered women and sex calming forces that could domesticate wild men like Enkidu and bring them into the civilized world. When Enkidu sleeps with the woman, the animals reject him since he is no longer one of them. Now, he is part of the human world. Then the harlot teaches him everything he needs to know to be a man. Enkidu is outraged by what he hears about Gilgamesh's excesses, so he travels to Uruk to challenge him. When he arrives, Gilgamesh is about to force his way into a bride's wedding chamber. Enkidu steps into the

doorway and blocks his passage. The two men wrestle fiercely for a long time, and Gilgamesh finally prevails. After that, they become friends and set about looking for an adventure to share.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu decide to steal trees from a distant cedar forest forbidden to mortals. A terrifying demon named Humbaba, the devoted servant of Enlil, the god of earth, wind, and air, guards it. The two heroes make the perilous journey to the forest, and, standing side by side, fight with the monster. With assistance from Shamash the sun god, they kill him. Then they cut down the forbidden trees, fashion the tallest into an enormous gate, make the rest into a raft, and float on it back to Uruk. Upon their return, Ishtar, the goddess of love, is overcome with lust for Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh spurns her. Enraged, the goddess asks her father, Anu, the god of the sky, to send the Bull of Heaven to punish him. The bull comes down from the sky, bringing with him seven years of famine. Gilgamesh and Enkidu wrestle with the bull and kill it. The gods meet in council and agree that one of the two friends must be punished for their transgression, and they decide Enkidu is going to die. He takes ill, suffers immensely, and shares his visions of the underworld with Gilgamesh. When he finally dies, Gilgamesh is heartbroken.

Gilgamesh can't stop grieving for Enkidu, and he can't stop brooding about the prospect of his own death. Exchanging his kingly garments for animal skins as a way of mourning Enkidu, he sets off into the wilderness, determined to find Utnapishtim, the Mesopotamian Noah. After the flood, the gods had granted Utnapishtim eternal life, and Gilgamesh hopes that Utnapishtim can tell him how he might avoid death too. Gilgamesh's journey takes him to the twin-peaked mountain called Mashu, where the sun sets into one side of the mountain at night and rises out of the other side in the morning. Utnapishtim lives beyond the mountain, but the two scorpion monsters that guard its entrance refuse to allow Gilgamesh into the tunnel that passes through it. Gilgamesh pleads with them, and they relent.

After a harrowing passage through total darkness, Gilgamesh emerges into a beautiful garden by the sea. There he meets Siduri, a veiled tavern keeper, and tells her about his quest. She warns him that seeking immortality is futile and that he should be satisfied with the pleasures of this world. However, when she can't turn him away from his purpose, she directs him to Urshanabi, the ferryman. Urshanabi takes Gilgamesh on the boat journey across the sea and through the Waters of

Death to Utnapishtim. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh the story of the flood—how the gods met in council and decided to destroy humankind. Ea, the god of wisdom, warned Utnapishtim about the gods' plans and told him how to fashion a gigantic boat in which his family and the seed of every living creature might escape. When the waters finally receded, the gods regretted what they'd done and agreed that they would never try to destroy humankind again. Utnapishtim was rewarded with eternal life. Men would die, but humankind would continue.

When Gilgamesh insists that he be allowed to live forever, Utnapishtim gives him a test. If you think you can stay alive for eternity, he says, surely you can stay awake for a week. Gilgamesh tries and immediately fails. So Utnapishtim orders him to clean himself up, put on his royal garments again, and return to Uruk where he belongs. Just as Gilgamesh is departing, however, Utnapishtim's wife convinces him to tell Gilgamesh about a miraculous plant that restores youth. Gilgamesh finds the plant and takes it with him, planning to share it with the elders of Uruk. But a snake steals the plant one night while they are camping. As the serpent slithers away, it sheds its skin and becomes young again.

When Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, he is empty-handed but reconciled at last to his mortality. He knows that he can't live forever but that humankind will. Now he sees that the city he had repudiated in his grief and terror is a magnificent, enduring achievement—the closest thing to immortality to which a mortal can aspire.

Themes:

- **Love as a Motivating Force**

Love, both erotic and platonic, motivates change in Gilgamesh. Enkidu changes from a wild man into a noble one because of Gilgamesh, and their friendship changes Gilgamesh from a bully and a tyrant into an exemplary king and hero. Because they are evenly matched, Enkidu puts a check on Gilgamesh's restless, powerful energies, and Gilgamesh pulls Enkidu out of his self-centeredness. Gilgamesh's connection to Enkidu makes it possible for Gilgamesh to identify with his people's interests. The love the friends have for each other makes Gilgamesh a better man in the first half of the epic, and when Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh's grief and terror impel him onto a futile quest for immortality.

The epic may lack a female love interest, but erotic love still plays an important role. Enkidu's education as a man begins with his sexual initiation by the temple

harlot, and the two heroes' troubles begin with their repudiation of Ishtar, the goddess of love. Humanity renews itself through the female life force, which includes sex, fertility, domesticity, and nurturance, not through an arbitrary gift of the gods. When Gilgamesh finally sees that his place is here on Earth and returns to Uruk to resume his kingship, Ishtar returns to her place of honor.

- **The Inevitability of Death**

Death is an inevitable and inescapable fact of human life, which is the greatest lesson Gilgamesh learns. Gilgamesh is bitter that only the gods can live forever and says as much when Enkidu warns him away from their fight with Humbaba. Life is short, the two warriors tell each other on their way to the deadly confrontation in the Cedar Forest, and the only thing that lasts is fame. But when Enkidu is cursed with an inglorious, painful death, their bravado rings hollow. Shamash, the sun god, consoles Enkidu by reminding him how rich his life has been, but though Enkidu finally resigns himself to his fate, Gilgamesh is terrified by the thought of his own. Mesopotamian theology offers a vision of an afterlife, but it gives scant comfort—the dead spend their time being dead. If Gilgamesh's quest to the Cedar Forest was in spite of death, his second quest, to Utnapishtim, is for a way to escape it. Utnapishtim's account of the flood reveals how ludicrous such a goal is, since death is inextricably woven into the fabric of creation. But life is woven in as well, and even though humans die, humanity continues to live. The lesson that Gilgamesh brings back from his quest isn't ultimately about death—it's about life.

- **The Gods Are Dangerous**

Gilgamesh and Enkidu learn all too well that the gods are dangerous for mortals. Gods live by their own laws and frequently behave as emotionally and irrationally as children. Piety is important to the gods, and they expect obedience and flattery whenever possible. They can often be helpful, but angering them is sheer madness—and a character's reverence for the gods is no guarantee of safety. Thus, the world of The Epic of Gilgamesh differs markedly from that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which God is both a partner in a covenant and a stern but loving parent to his people. The covenant promises that people will receive an earthly or heavenly inheritance if they behave well. The Judeo-Christian God represents not just what is most powerful but what is morally best—humans should aspire to imitate him. These differences are noteworthy because Gilgamesh also shares certain common elements with the Judeo-Christian Bible. Both Gilgamesh

and parts of the Bible are written in similar languages: Hebrew is related to Akkadian, the Babylonian language that the author used in composing the late versions of Gilgamesh. The Bible comes from the same region as Gilgamesh and shares some of its motifs and stories, such as the serpent as the enemy who deprives humans of eternal life and, most important, the flood. In both the Bible and Gilgamesh, disobedience to a god or gods brings dire consequences.

Although we never learn exactly why the gods unleashed the great flood in Gilgamesh, we know why Ea rescues Utnapishtim and through him all the creatures and people of the world. As the god of wisdom and crafts, Ea is responsible for human attributes including cleverness, inventiveness, and creativity, which enable people to survive independently. Ishtar, too, while a fickle friend, presides over sexual desire, fertility, nurturance, agriculture, and domesticity, which ensure humankind's future. For the Mesopotamians, piety and respect for the gods are not true moral obligations. Rather, piety and respect suggest a practical acknowledgment of nature's power and serve to remind humans of their place in the larger scheme of things.

Character List

Gilgamesh - King of Uruk, the strongest of men, and the personification of all human virtues. A brave warrior, fair judge, and ambitious builder, Gilgamesh surrounds the city of Uruk with magnificent walls and erects its glorious ziggurats, or temple towers. Two-thirds god and one-third mortal, Gilgameshis undone by grief when his beloved companion Enkidu dies, and by despair at the prospect of his own extinction. He travels to the ends of the Earth in search of answers to the mysteries of life and death.

An unstable compound of two parts god and one-part man, Gilgamesh suffers most from immoderation. He is the greatest of all men, and both his virtues and his flaws are outsized. He is the fiercest of warriors and the most ambitious of builders. Yet until Enkidu, his near equal, arrives to serve as a counterweight to Gilgamesh's restless energies, he exhausts his subjects with ceaseless battle, forced labor, and arbitrary exercises of power. Beautiful to behold, Gilgamesh selfishly indulges his appetites, raping whatever woman he desires, whether she is the wife of a warrior or the daughter of a noble—or a bride on her wedding night. Enkidu's friendship calms and focuses him. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh grieves deeply and is horrified by the prospect of his own death. Abruptly abandoning glory, wealth, and power, all of which are worldly aspirations that he as king had once epitomized, he

begins a quest to learn the secret of eternal life. What he finds instead is the wisdom to strike harmony with his divine and mortal attributes. Reconciled at last to his mortality, Gilgamesh resumes his proper place in the world and becomes a better king.

Enkidu

Hairy-chested and brawny, Enkidu begins his literary life as Gilgamesh's faithful sidekick. In the most ancient of the stories that compose The Epic of Gilgamesh,he is a helper to Gilgamesh. As those legends evolved into chapters of a great epic poem, Enkidu's role changed profoundly. Much more than a sidekick or a servant, he is Gilgamesh's soul mate, brother, and equal, even his conscience. In the later stories the gods bring Enkidu into the world to provide a counterpoint to Gilgamesh. Unlike Gilgamesh, who is two-thirds god, Enkidu is fashioned entirely from clay. He begins his life as a wild man, raised by animals, and, crude and unrefined, he remains to a certain extent a sojourner in the civilized world. For example, when Gilgamesh spurns Ishtar, the goddess of love, with flowery, allusive insults, Enkidu merely hurls a piece of meat in her face. However, Enkidu is also instinctively chivalrous. He takes up arms to protect the shepherds who first give him food, and he travels to Uruk to champion its oppressed people and protect its virgin brides from their uncontrollable king. Ironically, that king is Gilgamesh. Enkidu overcomes him with friendship rather than force and transforms him into the perfect leader. Perhaps Enkidu feels Uruk's injustices so keenly because he is such a latecomer to civilization. Though Enkidu is bolder than most men, he is also less pious than he should be. He pays dearly for the disrespect he shows to Enlil, the god of earth, wind, and air, when he urges Gilgamesh to slay Enlil's servant Humbaba, and he incurs the wrath of Ishtar. Like all men, Enkidu bitterly regrets having to die, and he clings fiercely to life.

Siduri

Siduri is the tavern keeper who at first bars her door to Gilgamesh and then shares her sensuous, worldly wisdom with him, advising him to cherish the pleasures of this world. Though she tries to dissuade him from his quest, she tells him how to find Urshanabi the boatman, without whose help he'd surely fail. The goddess of wine-making and brewing, Siduri is only one of several sexually ripe, nurturing women who appear in this most explicitly homoerotic tale. The male characters may take these females for granted, but they nevertheless play an essential role. The temple prostitute Shamhat domesticates Enkidu. Utnapishtim's unnamed wife

softens her husband toward Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh's mother Ninsun adopts Enkidu as her son, not only endorsing his friendship to Gilgamesh but also making him Gilgamesh's brother. Ishtar herself, fickle and dangerously mercurial as she is as the goddess of war and love, nevertheless weeps bitterly to see how the deluge that she had helped to bring about ravaged her human children. As loudly as it celebrates male bonding and the masculine virtues of physical prowess, The Epic of Gilgamesh doesn't forget to pay its respects to feminine qualities.

Utnapishtim

Utnapishtim's name means "He Who Saw Life," though "He Who Saw Death" would be just as appropriate, since he witnessed the destruction of the entire world. The former king and priest of Shurrupak, Utnapishtim was the fortunate recipient of the god Ea's favor. His disdain for Gilgamesh's desperate quest for eternal life might seem ungenerous, since he himself is immortal, but Utnapishtim must carry a heavy load of survivor's guilt. He doesn't know why, of all the people in the world, Ea chose him to live, but he does know that he tricked hundreds of his doomed neighbors into laboring day and night to build the boat that would carry him and his family to safety while he abandoned them to their fates. What Utnapishtim gained by his trickery was a great boon for humankind, however. He received a promise from the gods that henceforth only individuals would be subject to death and that humankind as a whole would endure. When Utnapishtim tested Gilgamesh by asking him to stay awake for a week, he knew that he would fail, just as he knew that Gilgamesh wouldn't profit from the magical plant that had the power to make him young again. Gilgamesh is one-third man, which is enough to seal his fate—all men are mortal, and all mortals die. Yet since Utnapishtim "sees life," he knows that life extends beyond the individual—that families, cities, and cultures endure.

Important Quotations Explained:

1.

Humbaba's mouth is fire; his roar the floodwater;

his breath is death. Enlil made him guardian

of the Cedar Forest, to frighten off the mortal

who would venture there. But who would venture

there? Humbaba's mouth is fire; his roar

is the floodwater; he breathes and there is death.

He hears the slightest sound somewhere in the Forest.

Enlil made him terrifying guardian,

Whose mouth is fire, whose roar the floodwater.

—Tablet II

Enkidu speaks these lines in Tablet II, as he and Gilgamesh prepare to invade the forbidden Cedar Forest and fight the demon Humbaba. One of the most remarkable literary techniques in this epic is the artful repetition within the verses, though generalizing about literary style is difficult, since every English translation renders the poem so differently, and the ancient versions differ so vastly. Some of these repetitions relate to formal structure, which means that at one time they might have provided mnemonic assistance to help storytellers, who had no written versions, remember the tale. But the effect of these repetitions can also be powerfully incantatory, in English translation as well as in Gilgamesh's original languages. These lines convey not only Humbaba's awesome presence but also the paralyzing fear that he inspires in his challengers. Their hypnotic, driving quality suggests Enkidu and Gilgamesh's agitated psychological state: they must quell the obsessive, chattering voices of dread in their minds before they can stand up to Humbaba.

2.

What could I offer

the queen of love in return, who lacks nothing at all?

Balm for the body? The food and drink of the gods

I have nothing to give to her who lacks nothing at all.

You are the door through which the cold gets in.

You are the fire that goes out. You are the pitch

that sticks to the hands of the one who carries the bucket.

You are the house that falls down. You are the shoe

that pinches the foot of the wearer. The ill-made wall

that buckles when time has gone by. The leaky

water skin soaking the water skin carrier.

—Tablet VI

On Tablet VI, when Gilgamesh returns from the Cedar Forest with the head of Humbaba, the goddess Ishtar is overcome with lust. Gilgamesh rejects her proposition scornfully. The poetry of Gilgamesh often requires scholarly explication to fill in the blanks of the story, explain the complex origins of Mesopotamian gods, and reconcile the inconsistencies in a narrative that stitches together two millennia's worth of stories. When Gilgamesh spurns Ishtar, however, his insults are clear, pointed, and hilarious. The setup is familiar—the proud, handsome young man, and the rich, jaded, older woman who wants to make him her plaything. As obscure as Gilgamesh might be in its details, its broad outlines are timeless and universal. The epic contains a lot of angst and brooding about death, but it also evinces a tremendous relish for the sensuous pleasures of life.

Classic Literature

Week 12

Birds

By Aristophanes

Week 13

Frogs

By Aristophanes

Week 14

Review

Week 15

Final Exam

Good Luck

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