

SCHOOL LECTURES DAY UCD 2011

GREEK DRAMA

OEDIPUS

The original myth is based on two sources Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus visits the underworld and tells the story of Oedipus, where the Gods "soon" make the nature of Oedipus' crime clear, Sophocles actually leaves Oedipus and Jocasta together until their children are teenagers. Also Oedipus is a good king in Sophocles' version. In Homer's version he stays on as King and doesn't blind himself.

The second source is Aeschylus' "Seven against Thebes", where Laius is told by the Oracle at Delphi not to have a son, if he wants to save his city. Laius ignores this and thereby commits a crime. This is contrary to the version in Sophocles where Laius is told "merely" that his son will kill him.

Oedipus' limp? Does he limp. In the world of Drama a physical imperfection is often an indication of a moral flaw. *Oedipus* means Swollen Foot.

Does Oedipus live at the end? He has cursed the murderer of Laius to exile at the start of the play, and he does plead with Creon to be exiled, and even suggested that he be destroyed. Creon bumbles and Oedipus is neither exiled nor killed. Why is that?

Sophocles is trying to avoid the idea that Oedipus is a scapegoat, that his exile will result in the lifting of the plague, hence the ending.

Character of Oedipus: when he addresses the people of Thebes and tells him that he pities them (good King), that they are sick but not as sick as him (eg of Sophocles irony, where meanings are different to different people), he is impatient that Creon is not back from the Oracle yet, he says that he will be a traitor if he doesn't act quickly showing him as a man of action.

Role of the Gods:

Apollo: prediction of course but did he do anything to bring the prophecy to fruition? Teresias said that Apollo would bring down Oedipus.

Oedipus was asked what enabled him to blind himself, and he replied that it was Apollo, but that it was Oedipus' own hand that did it.

Jocasta has been casting doubt on the prophecy and looking for a way to put Oedipus' mind at rest, then news arrives that Polybus' death from Corinth, and discovery that he was not Oedipus' father. Was this Sophocles suggesting that Apollo was responsible?

Typical of Sophocles to make the audience join in the dots.

MEDEA:

Medea was a foreigner and a witch according to DL Page and this explained her actions, also she was exhibiting behaviour typical to all scorned women

Other commentators suggested that her use of poison is more an indication of her femininity than her status as a witch.

This is a play that repeatedly relates to her as a woman: lines 407-9, 567-75, 1363-9

Many statements seem quite misogynistic, stating that women overreact and are overtly sensitive to injury.

Sophos = wise or clever, Medea is repeatedly referred to this way.

When Jason is telling her that he has done her a favour, by bringing her to Greece he tells her that he has made her famous, because of her skills and talents. There is some credence for this. Aegisthus the king of Athens comes to her he treats her like an equal and seeks her help.

What was the Greeks view of Medea? She was seen as a witch by the Greeks

The role of the Chorus:

Crucial that this is a chorus of women. this has two effects, the stage space in Oedipus is very public and official because they are old men. The chorus of women gives the world a domestic atmosphere. the men come in from outside, from somewhere else.

Also the chorus of the *Medea* go with the flow they don't seem concerned that she plans to kill the Royal Family, but that they are when she wants to kill her children. reflects the mood of the play

Finally, like all choruses, they all sing, they generalise, moralise and make statements that are sometimes very profound but seem to make sense

Deus et Machina (makeena)

To finish off the action and tells you what happens to the characters in the future. the Deus is usually where the gods are but in this case a woman takes the place of the gods. What is that saying about her?

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Dr Phillip Souza

Important ways of understanding how the story of Alexander has been arrived at. What are the important events that provoke discussion. We are dependent on the ancient sources that were put together long after Alexander's death.

For instance Arrian of Nicomedia was writing in the 2nd Century AD (500 years later)

Plutarch of Chaeronea wrote between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

Other histories include the incomplete Quintus Curtius in the 1st Century AD, as well as Diodorus Siculus who wrote the Library of History in the 1st Century BC.

A very useful source is that of Ptolemy, who was a companion of Alexander, a general and ruler of Egypt from 323-282BC

Aristobulus Macedonian officer who wrote after 301 BC.

Callisthenes was Aristotle's nephew and was essentially the court historian until his execution in 327 BC

Red sources no longer exist.

Key issues in the reign of Alexander that are open to interpretation.

Arrian

1 Arrian's version of the battle of Issus suggests that everything in the battle went exactly as Alexander expected. Was he really that good? Were these accounts embellished/spun to make him seem more heroic. Some commentators have suggested that Alexander was lucky that he was facing a mediocre commander in Darius, and he would have struggled against a more competent commander like Memnon of Rhodes.

2 Arrian gives a general appraisal of Alexander where he stated that the King was abstemious and always picked the right course of action decisively. Also that he was a magnificent leader of men and that he led from the front. Do the events of his life back this up.

3 The killing of Cleitus: Arrian blamed Cleitus, and said that Alexander was overcome because of drunkenness and rage. Afterward he was remorseful and had to be stopped from killing himself. It is probable that he was a heavy drinker, as the Macedonian court/society generally was.

4 Arrian suggests that Alexander's Fusion Policy was intended to bring together the two disparate elements of his empire. Bosworth argues that rather than fusion Alexander actually embraced a policy of divide and conquer

Overall view:

tragic view that he strove all his life to reach a level of absolute power, and once he had done so he had reached a position where he had no friends only potential enemies. His success alienated him. He had a huge level of individual autocratic power, which further alienated him from his roots. Some

historians claim that he actually failed. he didn't look

after his original kingdom, he didn't leave an heir, and he died young. Also he couldn't delegate. He was irresponsible as well, as he died he was planning an expedition to Arabia even though he hadn't really imposed his authority. In the end his empire didn't last long after his death.

QUESTIONS

Alexander and Sieges:

wasn't patient enough or well resourced enough for a series of long sieges, so he looked for a swift resolution to an attack on a city, like the attack on the city of the Malli. He did conduct a siege with great success against Tyre.

Alexander and Thebes

Much explanation from the sources why the Thebans deserved what they got because of the fact that they stood up to Alexander and they had helped the Persians before. Really it was a means of frightening the other Greek States into submission.

Might is Right

Yes in some respects but this idea had existed for a long time anyway. See Book 5 of Thucydides History of the Peloponnesian war

Importance of Hephastion

Right hand man but no evidence of him having any independence, delegated responsibility, or influence over the King. Impossible to tell.

GREEK ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Dr. Christina Haywood

which buildings were built in a monumental way:
temples, not public buildings or private houses. Time effort and funding was invested in temples rather than other buildings.

Private houses were often built around a courtyard, often of wood, usually single storied. the most decorated room was the andron the mens dining room the decoration in the other rooms was sparse,

Doric Order: the most common style, (not just reserved for Dorian people, Athenians were Ionian but used Doric)
in the doric order the columns sit directly on the stylobate 6 on the narrow side sculpture on the pediments

Ionic Order: developed in parallel with the Doric. Fluted columns with a base, volutes at the capital. Pediment and metopes as the Doric.

Corinthian Order: later development more in common with Ionic, capitals inspired by Floral motif. The Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens.

Some temples were a mixture of the doric and ionic usually exceptional like the Parthenon.

Temples were built in conspicuous locations determined by the god to which it was dedicated, often temples to Poseidon were built beside the sea. Often built in a visually arresting location at the top of a hill etc.

Building a temple was an enormously expensive exercise 30 talents for a small temple and 400 tallents for the Parthenon. The annual income of Athens was 470 talents proceeds of the Delian League.

the biggest expense was the quarrying of the stone to be used in the temple. not all temples were made of marble , sandstone and limestone was used. Many temples were built to look like they were made of marble. A white wash was used to make it look like marble.

Metal tools were used to shape the slabs many different kinds of chisels. the end of slba had recesses and protuberances to enable them to fit together. Holes were made in the slabs to enable ropes to be put through them so that they could be hoisted by cranes.

Transport was generally done by horse on land and boats for long distances. Slave labour was also used.

It was an enormous task so that there are few enough temples built.

Temples were built from the outside in and often without plans. That's why most temples differ. the temple had to fit the area picked for it/ orientation chosen not the other way around. Wooden poles were used to mark out the initial rectangle, the the building was designed around the site. The solid walls were built after the stylobate and peristyle had been completed.

Entrance always to the east and exit to the west.

Pedimental sculpture did not have a unified narrative at the start. they tended to put the biggest figure in the middle and then put related subjects flanking it, with the corners filled in with often unrelated items.

That all changed as techniques improved with the introduction of kneeling and reclining figures. The statues were usually painted in bright colours, as were the pediments and triglyphs.

Temples were placed in sacred precincts with other temples and altars. the interiors of the temples allowed the worshippers to see straight into the temple from the outside at the entrance only. that meant that the place where the statue of the god was placed was kept in the dark or at least semi light lit by lamps. the altar was usually directly opposite the entrance so that you had an altar then entrance then statue in a straight line from one to the other. Animal sacrifice was a big thing and a bull was the most prestigious offering.

ANCIENT EPIC

The two poems work with and against each other, they share many of the same characters, they both share the same myth cycle that of the Battle of Troy. They obviously share the same Homeric Ring narrative

The Travels of the two heroes and the style in which their wanderings are depicted;

Both take place at the exact same mythic time, both traveling in the Mediterranean, yet they never met. Virgil is more subtle than that, he meets a member of Odysseus' crew. This bolsters the tragedy of the wandering of Aeneas, as well as stating the connection between the two poems about how they share similar themes.

As the maps show there is not a huge distance between Troy and Ithaca. He was blown off course for nine days to North Africa(3) Odysseus is blown off course by the Gods, Poseidon conspires against him.

From here Odysseus seems to cross over into a mystical and magical realm, populated by Monsters Points 3-12.

4 is sicily the land of the cyclops. then 5 the island of Aeolas, Circe's land is next 6, 9 is Scylla and Carybdis, Malta at 11 is the home of Calypso. Then when he comes back to the land of the Phaeacians and meets Nausicca, he re-enters the land of the ordinary.

Aeneas' journey is much easier to map. We get a detailed and precise itinerary for Aeneas. he tried to set up a new city in Thrace but is told to move on by the Gods. Next step is Delos, where Apollo acts as the Patron God of prophecy. This is a reflection of the dramatic construction of the poem, the use of prophecy is the means by which the action is moved along. The further along the story goes the more information is revealed about what Aeneas is supposed to do. Aeneas is operating with the favour of the Gods, whereas Odysseus is the opposite. From here his wanderings match those of Odysseus but Virgil ensures that Aeneas stays within the boundaries of the real world. The most memorable scene is the trip to Carthage, where Aeneas nearly stayed.

The Trip to the Underworld: a comparison of the treatment of this episode in each poem.

For Homer the Underworld is as far removed from the real world as is possible. Virgil's underworld is Cumae, but that is to show the power of the Roman State, they rule the world and the Underworld, they don't fear death. The Odyssey is about fantasy and the people that he meets are the stuff of legends. Odysseus meets Ajax, who committed suicide after defeat by Odysseus.

The episode ends with the punishments, like that of Sisyphus of those who have stood up to the Gods and evoked their wrath- simple message to Odysseus.

Aeneas is also met by some people from his past, principally Dido. But after that he starts to meet the more human and prophesied future rulers of Rome who will be the descendants of Aeneas. Of course Aeneas is in the Underworld at the behest of the Gods and Odysseus is not.