

Quick Theatre History



Creative Writing 12
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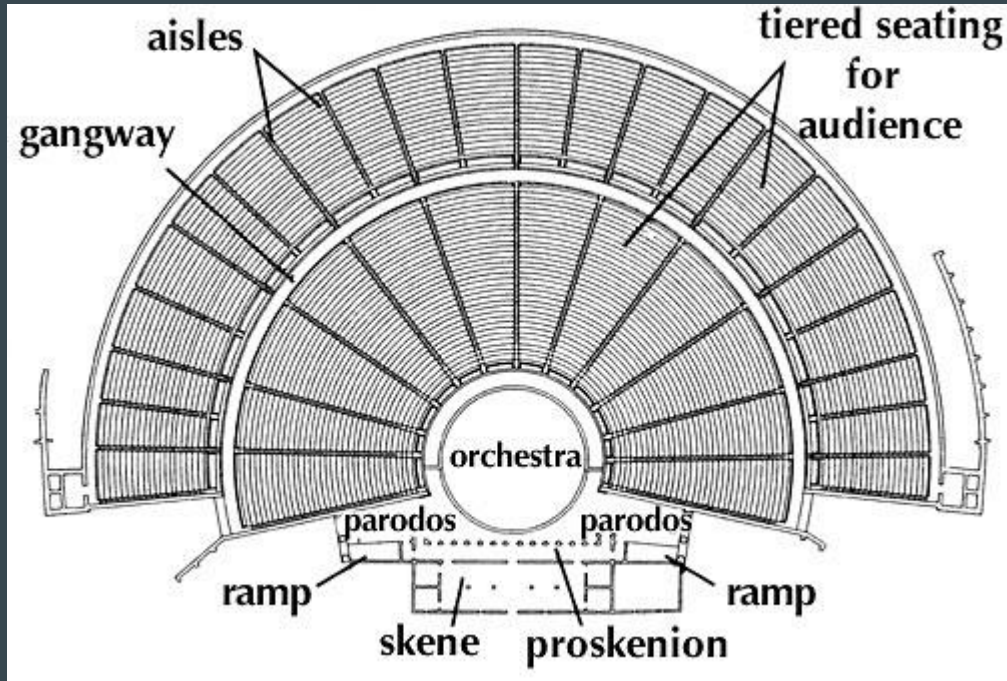
The Greeks!

- Theatre was a significant aspect of Greek (Athenian specifically) cultural identity.
- There were four theatre festivals a year in the City of Dionysia.
- Plays would be performed in sets of three Tragedies, followed by a Comedy or Satyr play.
 - Ex. Aeschylus' Oresteia
- Tragedy: Vehicle for the audience to experience Pity and Fear.
- Comedy/Satyr play: Comedic relief.
- There are only three (or so) actors and the chorus.

The Classical Unities

- **unity of action:** a play should have one action that it follows, with minimal subplots.
- **unity of time:** the action in a play should occur over a period of no more than a day.
- **unity of place:** a play should exist in a single physical space.

Greek Theatre



- Skene: Scene or Backdrop
- Parados: Entrance
- Proskenion: Raised platform that the actors perform on.

Greek Theatre



The Romans! (AKA Greek Lite)

- Roman Comedy is basically a rewriting of late Greek Comedy.
 - BUT, characters were much more complex as a result of “double plots”
- Roman Tragedy, that we have, is written by an unknown author and Seneca.
 - Senecan Tragedies are mostly monologues that describe the action of a battle to the audience.

The Middle Ages

- Early Middle Ages:
 - Not enough evidence to suggest there were actually plays.
 - EXCEPT Liturgical drama: Religious plays that were performed/sung in church.
- Later Middle Ages:
 - Still wandering play groups, but guilds began forming.
 - Feast of Fools influenced comedy!
 - Kings started adopting theatre groups.
 - Theatre started becoming more secular.
- Major religious themes.
 - Everyone's fate is subjected to outside forces.
 - ROTA FORTUNA/DE CASIBUS TRAGEDY: The rise and fall of prominent figures.

Early Modern Period

- Began with theatre troupes being outlawed (almost).
- But, theatre troupes were soon adopted by prominent households.
- Public theatre became prominent and acceptable under Elizabeth I
- Shakespeare was the playwright for Elizabeth I's company of players
- Worked under James I of England when he inherited the throne.

**THE PURITANS HAPPENED.
NO PUBLIC THEATRE FOR 18 YEARS!!**

Thanks Cromwell!

Restoration Theatre

- Very crude and sexual.
- Very concerned with being a “wit”
- First credited female playwright: Aphra Behn
- Women were allowed on stage, but could only play female roles
- Later comedies more marriage-based

Neoclassical Theatre

- Gone are the days of sexual farces!
We now do political satire!
- Grandiose and elaborate scenes and costuming
- Melodrama and grand gestures
- Had to be as realistic as possible
- Return to the Classical Unities

19th Century Theatre

- Blossoming of genres:
 - Melodrama and Romanticism
 - Realism: greater fidelity of real life
 - Naturalism: a perfect illusion of reality
 - Burlesques
 - Pantomimes
 - Translations of French Farces
 - MUSICALS
- We now have Gilbert and Sullivan
 - Specifically, *The Mikado*, and *H.M.S. Pinafore*
- “Theatre of the Absurd” and more dynamic characters
 - Lead to the rise of Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and others

20th Century Theatre

- Modernism happened and along with it so did...
 - Dadaism: Rejection of reason and logic; embraces nonsense.
 - Expressionism: Struggles against Bourgeois values and established authority.
 - Surrealism: Resolve contradictory states between reality and dream states.
 - Postmodernism: World is in a state of perpetual incompleteness and permanent unresolve.
- Stream of Consciousness as a writing

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: Lucky's Speech



Conclusions

- All theatre (and by extension movies) is formed by its cultural climate.
- Theatre, historically, is political.
- You cannot avoid including cultural and personal politics in your work.
- Even if you are rejecting and subverting cultural norms, you are still working with them in some way!