

An interpretation of greek theatre essay

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Ancient Greece is known for their beautiful artistry ranging from frescoes to sculptures, and their architectural innovations, most of which were dedicated to their gods.

The Theater of Dionysus was a major theatre in ancient Greece, built at the foot of the Athenian Acropolis (Wikipedia 1). Dedicated to Dionysus, the god of plays and wine the theater could seat as many as 17, 000 people, making it an ideal location for ancient Athens' biggest theatrical celebration, the Dionysia (Wikipedia 1). It was the first stone theater ever built - cut into the southern cliff face of the Acropolis - and the birthplace of Greek tragedy (Wikipedia). Early tradition holds that drama and comedy evolved from the dithyramb, the songs, folk tales and dances offered to Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility and wine (Wikipedia 1). Flickinger (66) notes the "Greek theater seats were originally made of wood;" it took nearly two centuries for theaters to be made of stone.

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Flickinger (66) notes the " Greek theater seats were originally made of wood;" it took nearly two centuries for theaters to be made of stone. Every Greek theater consisted normally of three parts: orchestra, auditorium, and scene building (Allen 1). By the 5th century BC, theatre had become formalized and was a major part of Athenian culture and civic pride, and this century is normally regarded as the Golden Age of Greek drama (Wikipedia 3). With the size of the theater it would be hard to believe that the audience was able to hear the actors. Mathematics played a large role in the construction of these theaters, as their designers had to be able to create acoustics in them such that the actors' voices could be heard throughout the theater, including the very top row of seats (Wikipedia 4). The plays had a chorus of up to 50 people, who performed the plays in verse accompanied by music (Wikipedia 4). The performance space was a simple circular space, or orchestra, where the chorus danced and sang (Wikipedia 4). There are not many remnants left behind of Greek theaters, plays, and of actors' costumes and masks.

Although there were many playwrights in this era, only the work of four playwrights has survived in the form of complete plays (Wikipedia 3). These playwrights are the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the comic writer Aristophanes (Wikipedia 3). Their plays, along with some secondary sources such as Aristotle, are the basis of what is known about

Greek theatre (Wikipedia 3). Many ideas of what the Greek theater consisted of and how it was maintained comes from the works of these play writers and artwork; therefore little is known of the Greek theaters. Greeks are known for illustrating the differences between men and women in their artwork and also in their plays, by the use of costumes and masks. No women appeared on stage, female roles were played by men (Wikipedia 3).

In order to play female roles, actors wore a "prosterneda" (a wooden structure in front of the chest, to imitate female breasts) and "progastreda" in front of the belly. (Wikipedia 5). According to Wiles (189), "the males wore chitons, women wore full length chitons, and older women wore cloaks over their chitons. The shift from a narrative to a dramatic mode was made by Thespis through his introduction of the mask (Wise 61). The distinguishing features correlate with this system of thought (Wiles 152).

The woman always has a whitish face; old men in our monuments are distinguished from young men principally by the fact that they have beards (Wiles 152). Wiles note the differences between "men and women mask with complexion, hair, mouth, and eyes as critical features. The first actor often emerges with a single character; the Second Actor has one-to-several major roles, while the third actor amasses a long list of minor characters (Ashby 131). A Greek actor, required to play an assortment of ages and genders, needed a more extensive vocal range than his modern counterpart (Ashby, 133). The actors have to convey to audience that they have become the actors, and as the plot thickens the help of different mask and costumes,

actors were probably able to interest the audience. Figure 1. after Berber, 91
Figure 2. after Berber, 85.

Figure 1 depicts two very different masks. Her brows are arched around wide dark eyes; her mouth is rounded in an expression of surprise. Yet, it is not the pleasant surprise that she seems to have encountered.

Her facial look indicates a small level of fear. Her face is framed by dark hair, with two braids on each side. Atop her head, is an innocent reddish colored bow. It is as if the craftsman intended to convey a level of simplicity to the audience. The male mask is a horrid character with wide, heavy cheeks.

His expression intends to convey a liking for tragedy and confusion. Wrapped around his head, is a string of leaves. His nose curves comfortably around his lips; each side sets slightly upon his cheeks. The position of his nose reminds one of a witch and the position that a long nose takes upon the face when a witch smiles. According to Berber (91) this is the mask of a slave. Figure 2 this man, with his well-defined nose, rounded eyes, mouth, and beard, conveys an expression of fear and also of age. He wears a terrified expression, with wrinkled brows and a wide mouth.

One can imagine that his lips, if they moved, would tremble much as a child's does before he bursts into tears. The mask conveys so much emotion, that by observing this piece it looks as though he maybe sad, in a state of shock. As centuries passed, the theaters built by the Greeks evolved into splendid marvels of stone built into hillsides. The Theater of Dionysus exemplifies the Greeks great ability in architecture. The openness of the

theater and the arrangement of the audience with the actors and the chorus show the Greeks' relationship with nature. The use of costumes and masks to help set the mood, whether it was for comedy or for tragedy they helped personify the characters and their emotions.