

Antigone: Background Notes

Mr. Pogreba, Helena High

Sophocles

- Sophocles lived from 496 B.C.E. to 406 B.C.E., during what is considered to have been the Golden Age of Athens, when art and philosophy flourished and Athens was the preeminent city-state of Greece.
- Sophocles wrote 123 plays in his life, and won 18 first prizes for his work at the drama competitions at the Festival of Dionysus. Only 7 complete plays have survived, including the Theban Plays—his trilogy that examines the lives of Oedipus and his family.
- Sophocles is considered to be a student of Homer—not in a literal sense, but as the Greek writer who best continued his work.
- Many literary critics, including Aristotle, believe that the plays of Sophocles are the pinnacle of the art form.
- He was known as the “Attic Bee” because of the sweetness of his plays.
- Quotations Attributed to Sophocles:
 - “Miracles in the world are many. There is no greater miracle than man.”
 - “One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life; that word is love.”

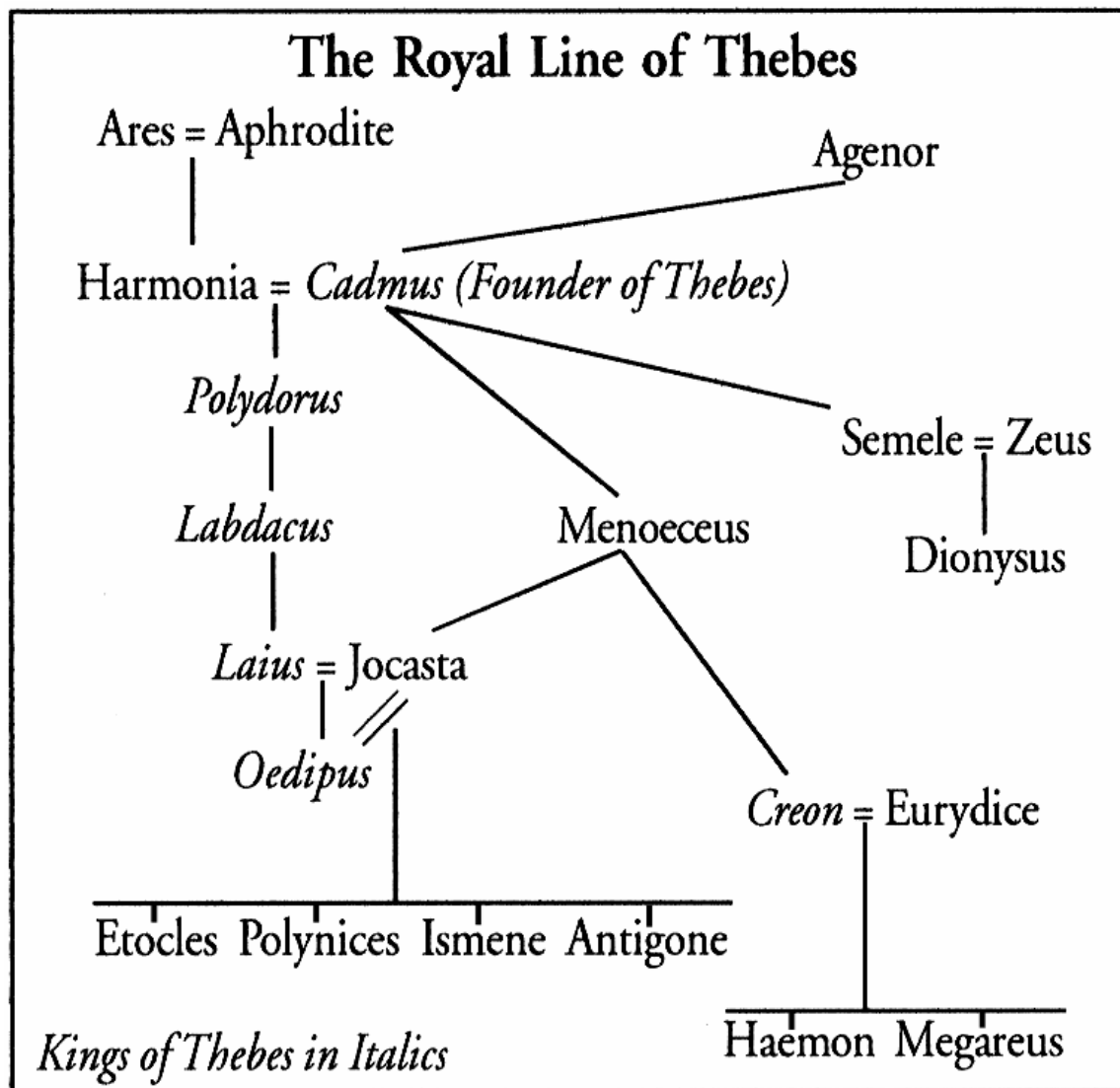
The Story Thus Far

- The Oedipus Myth
 - One of the enduring stories of Greek culture alluded to in the Iliad.
 - The oracle at Delphi warns King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes that their son will kill his father. Trying to avoid his fate, Laius pierces the baby’s feet, and leaves him to die in the mountains. A herdsman takes pity on the child, and presents him to the childless King and Queen of Corinth, who raise the child, Oedipus.
 - Oedipus learns the prophecy of his fate, that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Horrified, he determines to avoid his terrible destiny by never returning home.
 - On the road, Oedipus meets an old man and confronts him. After an argument, Oedipus kills the man, his real father, Laius, without knowing who he is.
 - Continuing to Thebes, Oedipus saves the city by defeating the Sphinx, who has been terrorizing the countryside. Proclaimed a hero by the people of Thebes, Oedipus is married to Jocasta, his own mother, fulfilling the prophecy.
 - In the play, Oedipus learns that he is married to his mother. Jocasta kills herself. Oedipus takes the pins from her gown and blinds himself. Oedipus’s two sons, **Eteocles** and **Polynices**, are intended to rule, each for one year at a time. After one year, Eteocles refuses to give up the throne, and war begins.
 - Creon becomes the new ruler of Thebes.

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*Theban Genealogy*¹



¹ American Repertory Theatre Web Page. <http://www.amrep.org/past/antigone/antigone6.html>, Nov 14 2000.