Ajax Study Guide

Ajax by Sophocles

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Introduction

Ajax is the earliest of Sophocles' s surviving plays. It is thought that the play's first performance took place about 444 B.C., but the exact date is not certain and might have been a few years earlier or later.

The hero of the play, Ajax, illustrates the uncompromising nature of the noble warrior; yet at the same time, he also represents the failings of excess pride, or hubris. Ajax believes that he deserves the armor of Achilles, and he is unable to accept that another warrior has been chosen as more worthy. His pride will not permit him to see the strength of Odysseus, nor will it allow Ajax to recognize his own limitations.

Ajax is a great hero, but he is rigidly defined as the old-fashioned hero - uncompromising and unable to recognize his own weaknesses. It is his rejection of help from the goddess Athena that sets the stage for this tragedy. Athena's gloating punishment of Ajax also presents the gods in a less favorable way than earlier plays, such as Aeschylus's *Oresteia,* which portrays the gods as wise protectors rather than vengeful deities.

Sophocles's source was probably Homer, who depicted Ajax as obstinate to the point of stupidity in *The Iliad*. Both Ajax and Odysseus fought bravery with Achilles, and it took both warriors to retrieve Achilles's body after his death. Both men were honorable, but the Greek commanders voted that Achilles' s armor should be awarded to Odysseus. This act provides the impetus for Ajax's actions, which take place just prior to the opening of Sophocles's play.

Author Biography

Sophocles was born in Colonus Hippiu, now a part of Athens, c. 496 B.C. He was the son of Sophillus, an armor manufacturer. Little is known of his youth, except that he is thought to have received a traditional aristocratic education. Sophocles married and was elected to high military office, although he was not interested in the military life.

His dates of birth and death closely correspond to the beginning and end of the Golden Age of Athens (480-404 B.C.). This was a period in which the city reached political and cultural supremacy in the Greek world. In 468 B.C., he entered the drama competition at the Great Dionysia, a festival to celebrate the god Dionysus. As part of the festival, four plays were performed and judged. Sophocles defeated Aeschylus, then the preeminent dramatic poet in Greece, and won the competition; unfortunately, his winning play, *Triptolemos,* has since been lost. Sophocles later won the first prize more than twenty times and the second prize many more times. It is said that he never won less than second prize in any competition.

Sophocles lived to be ninety, and during his long life he is believed to have composed more than one hundred and twenty-three plays; unfortunately, only seven are known to have survived in their entirety. Of these seven, *Ajax* is the earliest composition, having been written in about 450 B.C.

Other surviving dramas include *Antigone* (c. 442 B.C.), *Ichneutai* (c. 440 B.C.), *Trakhiniai* (c. 440-430 B.C.), *Oedipus Rex* (c. 430-426 B.C.), *Electra* (c. 425-410 B.C.), *Philoctetes* (409 B.C.), and *Oedipus at Colonus* (c. 404 B.C.). This last play was presented posthumously in 401 B.C. by Sophocles's grandson.

Sophocles is responsible for several theatrical innovations that changed Greek drama. Among these modifications was the focus on individual characters and individual tragedy. In addition, he created a greater realism on stage by introducing scene paintings and more elaborate masks to the usually austere stage. The most important innovation was the addition of a third actor. Prior to Sophocles, two actors played all the roles, with the chorus to comment upon and fill in the missing pieces. The addition of a third actor permitted more complex dialogue and moved the focus from the chorus to the actors, thus changing the drama to a more character-driven format.

Sophocles was able to create exceptional and complex characters, heroes and heroines who were often afflicted with a fatal flaw. Rather than being ideal, his characters embodied a realistic humanity; they often struggled with their own weaknesses and limitations. Sophocles's impact on Greek drama and the literature that follows cannot be overestimated. He is considered to be one of the great figures in world literature.

Plot Summary

Scene I

The play opens with Athena telling Odysseus that Ajax slaughtered all the captured sheep and cows during the previous night because Odysseus was given the shield of Achilles, an honor Ajax felt he deserved instead. Athena explains that she cast a spell over Ajax so that he thought the animals were Greek warriors; Ajax thought he was killing his fellow soldiers. Meanwhile, Ajax has recovered his wits and is shocked and ashamed at his actions.

The Chorus enters and underscores how low this great warrior has been brought by fate and the actions of the gods. Tecmessa, Ajax's captive and the mother of his child, enters and relates the details surrounding Ajax's attack on the sheep. She also tells of his profound grief and pain when he realized what he had done.

In a lengthy monologue, Ajax bemoans his family honor. He contends that he deserved the honor of Achilles's arms. Instead, the prize unfairly went to Odysseus. Ajax's grief derives not from his homicidal impulse to kill Agamemnon or Odysseus, but that Athena fooled him into killing sheep. Worse, he believes that the other warriors are laughing at him.

Ajax speaks of suicide, and Tecmessa argues that he must not kill himself. She maintains that she needs him and so does his son. She also points to his mother's grief and his father's love, and Ajax responds by asking that his son be brought to him.

After Ajax and Tecmessa leave the stage, a soldier enters and describes the arrival of Ajax's brother, Teucer. He has entered the camp to the jeers and insults of soldiers who call him the brother of a madman. He was also warned by a prophet to keep Ajax inside all day, but he has arrived too late to prevent Ajax from leaving. The prophet has predicted that Athena's rage will be spent by nightfall, and that unless Ajax is kept inside for the day, he will die.

The prophet asserts that humans aim too high and that men should not look to be as great as the gods. This was Ajax's mistake, and this is why the gods are punishing him. The scene ends with Tecmessa asking that everyone go in search of Ajax and save him.

Scene II

Ajax enters, alone. He puts his sword in the sand, hilt first, and asks Zeus to send messengers to inform his brother of his death. Ajax is afraid that his enemies will learn of his death first and his body will be desecrated. Ajax also asks that his death be avenged, and after expressing concern for his mother and father, Ajax falls upon his sword and commits suicide.

The Chorus enters, looking for Ajax, but Tecmessa finds him and emits a loud wailing sound of grief. The Chorus and Tecmessa lament for Ajax's life, now lost. Teucer enters and he, too, is grief-stricken at his brother's death. Teucer orders that his nephew be brought so that he can be protected from Ajax's enemies, who might seek to harm the child. Teucer expresses concern that their father will blame him for having allowed Ajax to die in such a manner.

Menelaus enters and orders that Ajax's body be left to rot where it fell and that no honor be given to the warrior in death. Menelaus decrees that Ajax's rotting body will serve as a lesson to any soldier who thinks to raise a hand against him. The Chorus warns that there must be respect for the dead, but Teucer interrupts in anger and reminds Menelaus that he had no authority over Ajax when he was alive and certainly not when he is dead. Teucer will bury his brother because the law of the gods demands it.

The argument between Teucer and Menelaus continues, with both men calling each other names and insulting one another. The conflict ends when Menelaus and his men leave. In a few moments, Tecmessa and her child enter for a final farewell with Ajax. Teucer leaves to dig a grave, but hurries back accompanied by Agamemnon. Agamemnon is angry and insults Teucer and Ajax.

The Chorus calls for compromise, but Teucer reminds Agamemnon of the times that Ajax saved his life and fought beside him in terrific battles. Teucer also reminds Agamemnon of the honorable lineage of Ajax's family.

Odysseus enters, complaining that he could hear Menelaus and Agamemnon yelling across the camp. Acting as the voice of reason, Odysseus asserts that Ajax deserves the honor. Not to bury him would do serious dishonor to the gods. Agamemnon disagrees and argues with Odysseus that to bury Ajax would make Menelaus and Agamemnon appear weak.

Agamemnon finally agrees to a burial, but only out of friendship with Odysseus. Teucer thanks Odysseus for his help, but asks that the burial be left to family and Ajax's soldiers; Ajax would not have wanted Odysseus to touch his body. As the men begin to prepare the body for burial, the play ends.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

Odysseus stands outside Ajax's tent in the forest, trying to determine if Ajax is inside. Athena appears, compliments him on having found who he was looking for, and asks why he is there. Odysseus explains he has come to find out if Ajax is guilty of viciously and senselessly slaughtering a herd of cattle. Athena confirms Odysseus' suspicions. Athena further explains that Ajax originally planned to kill Menelaus and Agamemnon in retaliation for giving Achilles's armor to Odysseus rather than to him. Athena makes Ajax kill the cattle instead. Athena then offers to bring Ajax forth, so Odysseus can judge Ajax' state of mind. The always-cautious Odysseus wonders whether it is a good idea, but Athena reassures him saying she'll make Odysseus invisible before summoning Ajax.

Ajax tells Athena that he has slaughtered Menelaus and Agamemnon and captured Odysseus, whom he plans to torture. Athena sends him away, leading Odysseus to comment that he pities Ajax. Athena tells him that what he has seen can serve as a warning that even the greatest man can be completely humbled by the events of one day.

The Chorus of Sailors appears, speaking in unison of their belief that what they have heard about Ajax slaughtering the cattle is an envious, malicious rumor spread by Odysseus. They wonder if it was the will of another god, perhaps Artemis or Ares, that drove Ajax to do what he did, adding that Ajax never would have committed such an act himself. The Chorus urges Ajax to keep his comrades, from shame by staying in his tent. Finally, they speak of how the arrogance of Ajax' enemies, emboldened by the rumors of Ajax's madness, passes through the world without inhibition and brings them all to sorrow.

Part 1 Analysis

To some degree, understanding of this play is dependent upon an understanding of its mythical context. The play is set late in the Trojan War, which begins when the Greeks attack Troy to rescue Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. Helen is kidnapped by the Trojan prince, Paris. After Achilles, Ajax is the second greatest Greek warriors. Achilles is killed by Paris in revenge for his killing of Hector, Paris' brother. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, is one of the Greek generals, renowned for his intellect rather than his prowess in battle. None of this information is given in the play, but would have been known to Ancient Greek audiences - the story of the Trojan War is an essential element of their culture and mythology.

The situation and events preceding the beginning of the play are recounted in the conversation between Athena and Odysseus, serving as exposition or context setting.

Athena, who throughout the war acts to protect the Greeks, again shows her partiality as she steps in to defend the Greek leadership from Ajax' anger, which is a result of Ajax' wounded honor. The question of honor is at the core of the play's action, this theme, being developed in several ways. The first occurrence of this theme of honor is found in the comments of the Chorus, when its members urge Ajax not to dishonor them and to return to sanity. The question of whether Ajax deserves burial as an honorable man plays a key role in several confrontations later in the play.

The Chorus is a traditional element of Classical Greek theatre, and consists of a number of actors speaking with a single voice. Here that voice is Ajax' comrades in arms, upon whom Ajax' actions reflect. In general, Greek Choruses observe and comment on the action rather than directly participating in it. Very often, the Chorus' speeches also develop the play's themes and illuminate a character's actions. In this case, the function of the Chorus is as Ajax's cheering section. At first, the Chorus sees Ajax as a victim in a smear campaign carried out by the generals, and perhaps even by the gods. The chorus performs this function throughout the play, particularly in reaction to later attacks on Ajax' honor.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Ajax' wife Tecmessa appears, telling the Chorus of Sailors that the rumors are true - the night before, Ajax did indeed go mad and slaughter a herd of cattle. The Chorus suggests it is time for the Chorus members to flee, lest the leaders of the Greek army decide they participated in the slaughter and want to punish them also. Tecmessa says Ajax is regaining his sanity. The Chorus doubts Tecmessa, but she assures them that Ajax is filled with remorse. Tecmessa tells how Ajax collapsed in the midst of the carnage he had wrought and lamented his actions. Tecmessa expresses her fear that Ajax may do something even more dreadful, and then Ajax cries out in agony calling for his son and his brother. Tecmessa shows Ajax the Chorus, whom Ajax greets and then asks them to kill him to put him out of his misery. The Chorus unsuccessfully attempts to calm Ajax, but he continues to bemoan both what he has done and the injustice done to him by Agamemnon and Menelaus. Ajax pleads to be allowed to die, complaining that Athena is keeping him alive. Ajax feels shamed both that he is allowed to live despite killing the herd of cattle, and that someone else has been given Achilles' armor.

Ajax refuses to go home and face the humiliation he believes be forthcoming when he faces his father, refuses to face his fellow Greek warriors, and refuses to take refuge with the Trojans (his enemy). Ajax says his life is not worth living. After the Chorus again tries to calm him, Tecmessa asks Ajax to consider what would be HER shame if he died - being made a slave. Tecmessa urges Ajax to remember how his death would hurt his parents and deny his son a birthright. Ajax asks to see the son, but Tecmessa says she hid him while Ajax is in his madness. Ajax convinces Tecmessa to bring the son out of hiding, so she agrees.

Ajax' son, Eurysaces, appears in the company of two attendants. Ajax takes him in his arms, promising that he won't hurt Eurysaces and tells Eurysaces he must someday follow in his father's footsteps and become a great warrior. Until that day Eurysaces is given into the care of Ajax' brother, Teucer. Ajax gives his son his shield, adding that the rest of his armor will be buried with him, in order that no one fight over the armor and cause the sort of anger that Ajax feels about Archilles' armor. Ajax tells Tecmessa to take Eurysaces away, but Tecmessa remains, anxiously trying to get Ajax to tell her what he is contemplating. Ajax refuses, shutting himself inside his tent. Tecmessa leaves with Eurysaces.

The Chorus bemoans Ajax's troubles, fearing how his mother will grieve if he continues in this self-destructive fashion. They comment on how he is better off dwelling in the realms of the dead now that his mind is filled with such strange thoughts.

Part 2 Analysis

The play's focus on honor develops further in this section, specifically in Ajax's long and self-pitying speech in which he lists the many ways he believes his honor has been destroyed. He refers to this loss as having to live in shame, but it amounts to the same thing as living without honor. There are clear hints that Ajax believes the only honorable thing he can do is end his own life. These hints include his plea that he be allowed to die, Tecmessa's urgings that he remain alive, and Ajax assigning Teucer as guardian of Ajax' son. All these incidents foreshadow his suicide in part four. The Chorus' comment that Ajax would be better off dead rather than living in this condition also foreshadows Ajax' eventual death.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Ajax comes in carrying a sword. He speaks to the Chorus about how Tecmessa has awakened his pity, so he plans to purify himself of his guilt and free himself from Athena's influence by burying his sword, which he had taken from the Hector. Ajax then speaks about how the rules of nature must be obeyed, and so must the rules and judgments laid down by Menelaus and Agamemnon,. Ajax tells how he has learned that enemies can become friends. Ajax prays that his friends follow through on his instructions to have Eurysaces raised by Teucer, then prays that he finds peace, then finally leaves. After Ajax is gone, the Chorus rejoices in his repentance.

A Messenger appears with news that Teucer arrives at the Greek camphe is greeted by taunts that he is the brother of the insane Ajax. The messenger reveals that he has come to keep Ajax in his tent until Teucer arrives to speak with him, but the Chorus tells the messenger that Ajax has left. The Messenger refers to a prophecy by the seer Calchas, which foretells that if Ajax leaves his tent, Teucer would never see him alive again. The messenger tells the story the Seer told of Ajax's youth, in which Ajax arrogantly stands against the will of Athena and the other gods, determined to win victory alone. The Chorus calls for Tecmessa to come and listen to the Messenger. Tecmessa appears, the Messenger repeats his orders, and Tecmessa tells the Chorus to search for Ajax to bring him back to the tent, for Teucer to meet him there. As the Chorus and the Messenger go, Tecmessa also goes out in search of her husband.

Part 3 Analysis

Taking into account the fact that Ajax takes his own life in the following part four, it is clear that his speech to the Chorus at the beginning of this scene is a tactic to get them to leave him alone. By telling them that he is prepared to make peace with Agamemnon and Menelaus, he is allaying their suspicions, so they won't follow him and stop his suicide. The Chorus' joy at Ajax' lies is ironic in that they are rejoicing while Ajax has left to kill himself.

Like the Chorus, the Messenger is a common narrative device in Classical Greek theatre. Messengers are used in many plays to bring news of events taking place offstage. Many of the events are such things as suicides, battles or deaths which are difficult to stage. Here the messenger brings news that, while not as gory as news brought by other messengers in other plays, is nonetheless as chilling. This is because prophecies in Ancient Greece in general, and in Classical Greek theatre in particular, are perceived as infallible. If a prophecy is made, there is little doubt in anyone's mind that the predicted events contained would occur. will be viewed by both the ancient Greek audiences and the characters themselves, as futile. The characters are

struggling against fate, a common pastime in many Greek plays. This struggle often suggests that the characters are merely playthings of the gods.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

On an isolated beach, Ajax sits in front of his sword. He gives a soliloquy about how he has sharpened the sword, how he has planted the hilt in the ground, and how he plans to fall on it to end his life. He prays that Teucer is the one to find him, that Menelaus and Agamemnon are cursed by the Furies, the goddesses of vengeance, and that Apollo the Sun God carries news of Ajax' death to his parents. Ajax calls for death to claim him, falls on his sword, and dies.

The Chorus, divided into two sections, appear. Each part complains about how hard and unsuccessful their searches for Ajax have been, and then they join together to speak about how frustrating it is to have been unable to find Ajax.

Tecmessa , having discovered Ajax's body bewails his death. The Chorus attempts to see Ajax, but Tecmessa refuses to let them. She shrouds Ajax' body in a robe. As Tecmessa cries out for Teucer, the Chorus recalls the seer's omen, condemning Athena, Menelaus, and Agamemnon for their roles in Ajax's destruction. Tecmessa comments that Menelaus and Agamemnon will soon regret contributing to the death of such a great warrior.

Teucer appears, having heard of Ajax death. The Chorus confirms that he is indeed dead. Teucer tells Tecmessa to bring Ajax' body to Teucer. As Tecmessa leaves to do so, the Chorus tells Teucer that Ajax's last wish was for him to raise his son. Tecmessa brings the body and removes the robe. Teucer cries out in grief, speaking at length about how their father's sudden and painfully angry grief will be vented against those who betrayed Ajax. He comments on how Ajax kills himself with Hector's sword, suggesting that Hector has had his revenge. The Chorus urges Teucer to plan Ajax' funeral, and then to think about what he will say to Menelaus, who is now approaching.

Part 4 Analysis

A soliloquy, such as that spoken by Ajax at the beginning of the scene, is a term used to describe a speech given by a character alone on stage, perhaps addressed to the audience, but often inwardly directed. Soliloquies generally enable a character to explore his/her emotions, dilemmas, or thought processes. The soliloquy here functions to define Ajax's state of mind at the moment of his death, which can be defined as relatively peaceful, considering everything that has passed. It is possible that in Ajax' mind he is about to reclaim his lost honor.

Teucer's comments about Hector reveal a secondary theme, that of revenge. Taking revenge on another human being is a common theme, but considered foolish. It is a frequent theme in Greek plays because it is a powerful vehicle for exploring and illustrating humanity's passionate and impulsive nature. However, it is considered foolish

because to act out of a desire for revenge is to act out of emotion rather than thought. In Greek drama, taking revenge always perpetuates further revenge. Killing and humiliation brought more killing and humiliation, a cycle generally broken only by the intervention of the gods.

In this play, the cycle of revenge and destruction is apparent. Menelaus and Agamemnon give Achilles' armor to Odysseus in revenge for Ajax's arrogance. Ajax intends to slaughter Menelaus and Agamemnon in revenge for their decision. Menelaus and Agamemnon argue that Ajax should go unburied (Part 5) in revenge for his acting dishonorably and shaming the Greek army by his rampage. The cycle could conceivably continue. Tecmessa seems to want that to happen, and it is very possible that Teucer, or perhaps even Eurysaces (it wasn't unknown for children to take revenge on those who humiliated their parents), could one day seek revenge on Agamemnon and Menelaus. If was not for Odysseus' clever intervention in the following part five, such action may be inevitable. As it stands, however, Odysseus' sense of honor prevents most of the play's characters from continuing the cycle of DIS-honor.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

Menelaus tells Teucer to leave Ajax's body where it is, explaining that Ajax betrayed the Greek army by plotting against Menelaus and Agamemnon; therefore, has Ajax has earned the dishonor of not being buried. Menelaus comments at length upon how rules and order must be obeyed, warning Teucer that if he disobeys, he too will need a grave. Teucer speaks at length about how much Ajax did for the Greek army, reminding Menelaus that Ajax joined the war against Troy to honor Ajax' oath of loyalty to Agamemnon, not because he owed anything to Menelaus. Teucer then vows to give Ajax an appropriate burial, which leads to an argument with Menelaus that concludes with each man quoting prophecies supporting his position. Menelaus leaves, saying he doesn't have to argue when he has the right to command.

The Chorus urges Teucer to quickly prepare a grave before Menelaus returns. At that moment Tecmessa and Eurysaces appear. Teucer places Eurysaces near Ajax's body, telling him to stay there no matter what. Teucer then tells Tecmessa to defend her husband's body as if she is a man, and then Teucer leaves.

The Chorus laments the amount of time they and the rest of the Greeks have spent fighting the Trojan War, saying that Ajax,their commander, was their defense against fear and boredom, but now that he is gone, there is no prospect of joy or hope in their situation.

Teucer returns, followed by Agamemnon, who angrily denounces Teucer for being the child of a slave. Agamemnon adds that Teucer has the right to criticize neither Agamemnon nor Menelaus, who are warriors and kings. Agamemnon comments on how the order of things is disrupted by bringing "the rearmost to the front," i.e., setting up the low born as figures of authority. The Chorus suggests that Agamemnon moderate his judgment, and Teucer reminds Agamemnon that Agamemnon's grandfather is a barbarian, that his father, Atreus, did monstrous deeds, and that his mother was found by his father with a lover and was thrown into the sea. Teucer recounts how his own mother is a princess, which he says gives him as much status as Agamemnon, and vows that if Ajax' body is cast out, then Teucer, Tecmessa's and Eurysaces' bodies will also have to be cast out.

Odysseus arrives, having overheard the arguments and is determined to mediate. He tells Agamemnon to leave Teucer alone, saying even though Odysseus believes Ajax was a potentially lethal enemy, there is none who fought better for the Greek cause, except perhaps for Achilles. Odysseus adds that to dishonor Ajax is to dishonor heaven. Agamemnon reacts with disbelief; he and Odysseus argue, and finally Agamemnon gives up. Agamemnon storms out, telling Odysseus he can do whatever he wants with the body.

The Chorus congratulates Odysseus on his wisdom. Odysseus offers friendship to Teucer, adding that he will help bury Ajax. Teucer thanks him for his respect for Ajax and praises his graciousness and wisdom. Teucer compares Agamemnon's actions as similar to Ajax's craziness. Teucer believes it is not wise to allow Odysseus to help in the burial, because to do so might displease the dead, i.e., Ajax Odysseus accepts the decision and leaves.

Teucer orders the Chorus to dig the grave, prepare the funeral service, and collect Ajax's armor from his tent. He asks Eurysaces to help lift the body, calling for "each one here who owns the name of friend [to] haste ... in service to this man of perfect prowess ... never yet was service rendered to a nobler among men." As it departs, the Chorus comments that "no man may read the future, or his fate."

Part 5 Analysis

The key to understanding this scene lies in an important element of Greek culture. To leave a body unburied is the height of dishonor. To leave the body of a warrior such as Ajax unburied, no matter what the reason, is treasonous. The argument of both Menelaus and Agamemnon is that what Ajax did was treasonous, but Odysseus and Teucer argue that Ajax has an impressive history as a warrior that cancels out his one act of dishonorable behavior. Odysseus and Teucer also point out that Ajax never actually follows through on his anger - he kills cows, not commanders. Odysseus and Teucer's victory in getting Ajax buried is victory of honor. As such, the two embody the play's theme - honor is, and should be, the most important and noble of human values, particularly during war.

One may wonder why Odysseus supports Teucer's desire to bury Ajax. One possible answer lies in Odysseus' larger history as a character outside this play. In every story in which Odysseus appears (including *The Iliad*, the story of the Trojan War, and *The Odyssey*, the story of his voyage home), he is portrayed as having a perspective and vision beyond that of his associates. Odysseus is considerably smarter and wiser than Agamemnon, Menelaus, Ajax and Achilles combined.

As such, it is no surprise that he is able to see past the immediate situation and react with awareness of a deeper truth. Another possible explanation can be found in his conversation with Athena at the beginning of the play. When Athena refers to the way that even great men can be undone by just one event, she is saying that human beings should have compassion for the mistakes and misfortunes of another. In taking Athena's point into account, Odysseus is again displaying a breath of perspective and understanding the others lack. Athena's comment, by the way, is reflected in the closing comments of the Chorus, who essentially say the same thing - no man can predict how his behavior, or that of others, will transform his life.

There is one final example of a character acting out of honor - Teucer's gracious rejection of Odysseus' help to bury Ajax. By doing so, Teucer is honoring his brother's last feelings, as deranged as they may have been. Teucer acts as he has throughout

the play, with the kind of respect and compassion that lies at the core of anyone who honors another. His final exhortation to the Chorus, that they honor Ajax as a friend would, demonstrates that respect and compassion lie at the core of friendship. To the Ancient Greeks, friendship is perhaps the most important relationship to exist. Herein lies a possible explanation for Ajax's anger in the first place - perhaps he felt his friendship with Achilles betrayed by the actions of Menelaus and Agamemnon.

The conclusion of the play displays several types of honor being satisfied - warriors honoring warriors, brothers honoring brothers, allies honoring allies, sons burying fathers. The only one left out in the cold is the woman, Tecmessa. Her honor, like that of most women in classical literature, lies in ruins. No one, not Teucer, not Odysseus, certainly not Ajax, acts to preserve it. This, perhaps, is the dark side of the play's theme about honor- the idea that there may be, in fact, no such thing as an act that results in honor for all concerned.

Characters

Agamemnon

Agamemnon is a great Greek warrior. He appears after Ajax's suicide to support Menelaus's decree that Ajax not be buried. He and Teucer argue bitterly, and he also argues with Odysseus. Finally out of friendship with Odysseus, Agamemnon permits Ajax to be buried.

Ajax

A courageous Greek warrior, Ajax feels that he has been disrespected when he is passed over for the shield of Achilles. In his grief and disappointment he tries to sneak into the tents of the other Greek warriors and slay them. Casting a spell, Athena causes him to think that he has captured Odysseus and that he will torture him, but in reality he has killed sheep and cattle. When the spell wears off and he recovers his wits, Ajax is deeply shamed and kills himself to save face and family honor.

It becomes clear that the gods are punishing Ajax because he has rejected their help. When Athena attempted to help Ajax during battle, he rebuffed her, stating that the gods should help lesser men.

Athena

The daughter of the god Zeus, Athena is the goddess of war. It is she who creates the illusion that Ajax is killing Agamemnon and Menelaus; in reality, he is slaying sheep and cattle. She is punishing Ajax for his rejection of her help.

Chorus

The Chorus sings sections of the play. Their purpose is to explain events or actions and to provide commentary on the events that are occurring. During their first appearance they blame the gods for having brought such a great warrior Ajax so low.

Comprised of Ajax's soldiers, the Chorus laments his death and sympathizes with Tecmessa's grief. When Menelaus and Agamemnon refuse Ajax's burial, the Chorus reminds them of the gods' insistence on observing the proper burial rights. They also provide the voice of reason and compromise.

Eurysaces

The son of Ajax and Tecmessa, Eurysaces is a small child. He is taken to Ajax in an emotional farewell scene and again to help prepare his father's body for burial.

Menelaus

Another great Athenian warrior, Menelaus appears after Ajax dies and refuses permission to have him buried. He argues with Teucer until he finally leaves to get Agamemnon's help.

Odysseus

Odysseus is a great warrior. He is given the arms of Achilles, much to Ajax's chagrin. When Ajax's murder of the sheep is revealed, Odysseus is initially angry; yet when he learns that Ajax has lost his mind, he feels great pity for him.

When Agamemnon refuses to allow Ajax's burial, Odysseus is the calm voice of reason who reminds those present that Ajax was a great warrior and that he deserves to be honored with a proper burial. Odysseus emerges as a strong, thoughtful leader.

Soldier

The unnamed soldier brings news of Teucer's arrival as well as the prophet's warning.

Tecmessa

Tecmessa is Ajax's Phrygian captive and the mother of his son. She loves him very much and grieves at the madness that has overtaken him. It is Tecmessa who describes to the Chorus and the listening audience the details of Ajax's madness during the night. She begs Ajax not to kill himself, pointing out that her future will be at great risk. After his suicide, she is the one who finds Ajax's body.

Teucer

Teucer is Ajax's brother. As he rides into camp he is insulted and attacked by soldiers who call his brother a madman. He learns from a prophet that if Ajax remains inside until nightfall, Athena's rage will end and Ajax will live; in a panic, he sends a soldier ahead to warn Ajax in an attempt to save his brother's life.

Teucer grieves for his brother and is concerned that his father will blame him for his brother's death. He also risks his own career in arguing with Menelaus and Agamemnon over the burial of Ajax. Teucer proves himself brave and honorable. When Odysseus

agrees with his argument, Teucer is appreciative and thanks Odysseus for his help. He prepares his brother's body for honorable burial.

Themes

Anger and Hatred

The action of the play is driven by Ajax's vengeful anger as he turns on Odysseus, Menelaus, and Agamemnon after Odysseus is voted Achilles's armor. The hatred once meant for his enemies is now directed on these three warriors, and Ajax sets out to murder them in their sleep. The interference of Athena spares their lives, but his intended victims learn of how near they came to death and turn their fury on Ajax.

After Ajax's suicide, Menelaus and Agamemnon are so filled with hate that they would willingly offend the gods and leave Ajax's body to rot in the open. Only Odysseus's levelheaded calm prevents anger from ruining more lives.

Choice and Fate

Ajax believes that he is in control of his destiny. He thinks that his strength and reputation as a warrior should govern his fate, but he is really a pawn in the hands of the gods. When Ajax rejects Athena's help, declaring that he needs no assistance from the gods, he seals his doom. It is the gods who determine if Ajax is honored, and while men may vote on the disposition of Achilles's armor, Athena leaves little doubt that she had a hand in that decision.

When Ajax would take revenge upon Odysseus, Menelaus, and Agamemnon, it is Athena who saves their lives. Ajax believes he is murdering his former colleagues, but Athena has cast a spell so that he is really murdering a herd of sheep.

Although Ajax is unaware of Athena's interference, it is she who leads him toward suicide. As the prophet foretold, if Ajax remains inside for this day, Athena's anger would dissipate and he would survive. Yet she makes sure that he recovers his senses and leaves his dwelling to view his shame; thus, she sets into motion Ajax's final scene, his death.

Gods and Man

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God is a forgiving and beneficent creator. Man views his relationship with God in a cause-and-effect manner, in which good deeds and faith are rewarded with God's grace.

The Greeks had a different relationship with their gods. For instance, instead of one all-powerful god, there were many gods; man's relationship with these deities was marked by the arbitrary nature of each god. Whether or not a man was good, honest, or brave had no bearing on how the gods treated him. Instead, it depended on the whims of the

gods themselves. If the gods were warring amongst themselves, they would quite likely inflict some revenge upon men, rather than on the offending deity.

This very arbitrary nature of the gods meant that men could not determine their own fates, nor could they even assume responsibility for their own behavior. There were no rules to live by, because the gods behaved on impulse. Moreover, the gods often had favorites and scapegoats amongst the mortal population, and they didn't hesitate to punish those that displeased them. Obviously this created a very precarious and dangerous world.

The effects of the capricious behavior of the gods are clearly seen when Ajax is destroyed because he rejects Athena's help. Ajax has too much confidence in his own ability and not enough respect for Athena's strength, and this means that he is doomed. He has no warning of her anger and no way of placating it.

Pride

Excessive pride□also known as hubris□leads to Ajax's downfall. His first mistake is in rejecting the help of the gods. According to Greek life, his life, his destiny, and his successes are all determined by the gods; when he rejects Athena's help, her pride is offended, and she decides that Ajax's boast that he needs no help from any god means he must be destroyed. When Achilles's armor is given to Odysseus, Ajax's pride is what leads him to seek revenge.

Unfortunately, he is so blinded by his pride that he is unable to see that Odysseus is as strong and deserving as he is. Odysseus has qualities that Ajax lacks, such as the ability to solve conflict without weapons. However, Ajax's arrogance does not permit him to accept that he is deficient in the qualities that make Odysseus a great leader.

Finally, it is pride that leads Ajax to kill himself. He is shamed before the other Greek warriors and cannot live with that shame. He perceives his only recourse as suicide.

Strength and Weakness

Ajax is a strong and brave warrior. In fact, he is known as Ajax the Great because of his excellence. Yet the problem is he views himself as perfect. Ajax believes that he exemplifies the best of heroic man, but he forgets that heroism is more than just exhibiting bravery. It also involves making good choices, compromise, and the ability to recognize and compensate for his weaknesses.

Ajax is lacking in these areas. The very strengths that he exhibits in battle□leadership of men, physical strength, and prowess with his weapons□are incomplete without these other abilities. A hero needs modesty and the strength to compromise; he also needs to realize that accepting another man's competence does not diminish his own.

Style

Chorus

In ancient Greek drama, a chorus consists of a group of actors who interpret and comment on the play's action and themes, most often singing or chanting their lines. Initially the chorus had an important role in drama, as it does in *Ajax,* but eventually its role diminished. As a result, the chorus became little more than commentary between acts. Modern theater rarely uses a chorus.

Drama

A drama is often defined as any work designed to be presented on the stage. It consists of a story, action, and actors portraying characters. Historically, drama can also consist of tragedy, comedy, religious pageant, and spectacle. In modern times, drama explores serious topics and themes but does not achieve the same level as tragedy. *Ajax* is traditional Greek drama, and as such, provides important lessons for men about their relationship with the gods.

Genre

Genres are a way of categorizing literature. Genre is a French term that means "kind" or "type." Genre can refer to both the category of literature such as tragedy, comedy, epic, poetry, or pastoral. It can also include modern forms of literature such as drama, novels, or short stories. This term can also refer to types of literature such as mystery, science fiction, comedy, or romance. Ajax is a Greek tragedy.

Plot

Plot refers to the pattern of events. Generally plots should have a beginning, middle, and conclusion□but they may also sometimes be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. Thus the plot of *Ajax* is what happens to Ajax after he chooses to seek revenge upon Odysseus, Menelaus, and Agamemnon. The theme of the play is how excessive pride and vanity can lead to a man's destruction.

Scene

Traditionally, a scene is a subdivision of an act and consists of continuous action of a time and place. However, Sophocles is not using acts, and so two scenes divide the action, which is separated by only a few hours at most.

Setting

The time and place of the play is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The primary location for *Ajax* is the battle for Troy, with the initial setting outside Ajax's tent. In the second scene, the setting moves to a nearby beach and the action spans a day.

Tragic Flaw

In tragedy, this is the mechanism that brings about the destruction of the hero. While Ajax is brave, strong, and heroic, he also suffers from excessive pride. This flaw angers Athena and provokes her revenge upon Ajax.

Historical Context

In the fifth century B.C., life in Greece was characterized by warfare and epic battles. For many years Greece struggled to expand its empire, and it was inevitable that conflict would result. Athens enjoyed her first great military triumph at the Battle of Marathon in 491 B.C., when legend has it, some 20,000 Greeks defeated the 100,000 man Persian army. The numbers were probably much lower, but the odds were definitely against the Greeks, who proved that superior discipline and courage were stronger than sheer numbers.

This was the first major defeat for the Persian army, whose strength and reputation actually scared and intimidated many Greek soldiers. This victory would inspire the story of a courier who ran to Athens with news of the victory but then fell dead of exhaustion upon his arrival, thus inspiring the idea of 26-mile marathon races, which endures to modern times.

Within ten years, the tables would turn. The Persian army□then more than two million men□ would score a huge victory, pushing the Greek army into retreat. The Persians sacked Athens, but within a month, the Greeks once again got the upper hand, and in a decisive naval victory, more than 1000 Persian ships were sunk. Within a year, the Persian invasions stopped completely, and Greece once again entered a peaceful period known as the Golden Age of Greece.

These are the battles that form a backdrop to Sophocles's childhood. These historical events are filled with heroic men and great leaders, tremendous odds and great victories, and function as the source material for much of Greek theater.

Greek drama needed these larger-than-life heroes, since real life did not seem to provide material for heroic drama. Historically, there are many complaints about Greek tradesmen, who were well known for short-changing their customers and lying about their goods. Many politicians were also thought to be dishonest, and bribery was a common way of transacting government. Therefore, heroic warriors and brave leaders offered the role models and excitement many Greek citizens needed for their entertainment.

For many Greek citizens, life revolved around not offending the gods; unfortunately, there were no hard, set rules for this. Therefore, much controversy arose from what was offensive to the gods. The Greeks used oracles and dreams to figure this out, and eventually there were certain behaviors that were established as necessary, such as extending hospitality to a traveler or not violating an oath. Generally, gods were not interested in petty thievery, primarily because Greek political life involved bribery, corruption, and lying. Moreover, gods were also not interested in more serious crimes, except for murder.

The disposal of dead bodies was deemed important. Corpses were thought to cast a bad aura upon both victim and murderer; besides, it was a public health concern. It was

especially important to deal with corpses in a correct and ritualized manner, regardless of the cause of death. Not to do so could result in serious divine punishment, hence Odysseus's reminders to Agamemnon that Ajax's body must be given proper burial.

The precarious relationship between gods and humans is the basis for a number of plays during that time. Plays were performed once a year at the festival of Dionysus. Three playwrights were chosen to present four plays, three tragedies and one comedy. These plays were performed during daylight, in outdoor theaters that often held as many as 14,000 spectators. All actors were men, and until Sophocles, there were only two actors and the chorus. Sophocles introduced the third actor, which permitted more complex plays to be presented. Although there was little scenery□in fact, often none□the actors wore elaborate masks.

In addition to the competition between playwrights, the lead actors also competed for Playwrights probably did not receive much compensation for the writing, staging, and directorial duties that occupied them, and all of the best known playwrights, including Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides also held military or political posts. These plays fulfilled an important function, since they illustrated moral issues important to early Greeks. Ajax's situation would have provided an important lesson to the audience.

Critical Overview

There is almost no information regarding the reaction of fifth-century Greek audiences to *Ajax*. Sophocles was a popular playwright, and his plays would undoubtedly have been eagerly awaited. The fact that he was awarded a prize also signals the play's reception.

There are many reasons why the plays of Sophocles were so popular and why their popularity continues. One reason was his deft ability to reinterpret the ancient myths through exploration of the individual. In this, the earliest of his surviving plays, Ajax is presented as a flawed, yet heroic figure. His suffering is compelling and functions as the focus of the play.

Ajax is also unique because Ajax dies on stage. Traditionally in Greek tragedy, the action occurs offstage. Battles are fought and deaths do occur, but the audience learns of these events through the chorus, whose role it is to relate to the audience these offstage incidents.

Without the kind of action that modern audiences have come to expect, Greek audiences relied upon the power of language to create drama. Even before the development of drama, Greeks relied upon oral epics to provide much of their entertainment. The very stories that Sophocles drew upon for source material were rich in characters, battles, and spectacle, and their progression from oral tales to stage productions brought much excitement into the lives of the Greeks.

These stage productions were eagerly anticipated and drew huge crowds of upward to 14,000 people. Audiences were accustomed to sitting all day on hard stone benches, but even so, these plays had to be capable of holding the audience's attention. The grandeur of ancient myths, with their exciting heroes and battles, provided an important escape from the routine nature of Greek life. They also served to inspire Greeks by reminding them of the greatness of heroic leaders. This was especially important in the years following the great Persian-Greek wars.

Ajax is still performed occasionally, as it was during the fall 1997 State Theatre of Northern Greece season. The American National Theatre also staged a production in June and July of 1986. In this latter production, Sophocles' s play was moved into modern dress and staged as an American drama.

The setting of this production was sometime in the near future after America has just won a great victory in Latin America. The director, Peter Sellers, uses a courtroom and a trial as the means to explore this Greek tragedy. Ajax uses sign language, translated by a member of the chorus, to tell his story. He is covered in blood and communicates in "slashing, spattering signs," and according to the reviewer, W. D. King, the effect is that of "estrangement." The cast is clothed in military uniforms, and they hold rank as according to modern military custom.

King is more of an observer than a reviewer, and he relates the actions on stage as a witness, mostly without critical analysis of the action. Ajax emerges as pathetic, as he does in the original play on which this modern adaptation is based. But by using the setting of a courtroom, *Ajax* becomes more centered on questions of responsibility.

With Athena as judge, her role in this tragedy seems amplified. As King observes, "She seats herself at the judge's table, and at once the feeling that there is a higher force in the world, beyond human understanding, and of ambiguous moral substance, takes hold." This modern production of Sophocles's tragedy illustrates that these dramas still have a place in modern theater. Critics agree that there is a timeless quality in Ajax's emotional breakdown that transcends time and resonates with modern audiences.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Metzger is a Ph.D., specializing in literature and drama at the University of New Mexico. In this essay, she discusses how Renaissance humanism and the heroic nature of the epic form sustains the modern appeal of Sophocles' s drama.

No doubt students might think that there is little reason to read Sophocles, or plays such as *Ajax*. In fact, students might consider the mythic warriors of Greek epic and drama outdated or even unimportant as the twentieth century nears its end. This was how many people viewed Greek drama for hundreds of years following the end of the Golden Age of Greece. Yet in thirteenth century Italy, a new movement that came to be called humanism resurrected classical Greek texts, including drama, and found that there was a place for these ancient heroes in educating young men.

At that time, it was the goal of every young man of aristocratic birth to serve his country. The idea behind humanism was to prepare a young man for his new role in civic life, and ethics was an important feature of this new emphasis on education. Classical Latin and Greek became crucial elements of a gentleman's education, while each country's vernacular language became the language of the peasant class. Within two hundred years, knowledge of classical Greek would become an essential attribute of an educated man.

With the adoption of these languages, the literature soon followed, and this included Greek drama. Greek drama taught important lessons about loyalty, heroism, and religion. From these plays young men learned about leadership and responsibility. Young gentlemen also learned that heroism was more than bravery on the battlefield. They learned from Ajax that heroism coupled with excessive pride would lead to disaster. Heroism brought with it responsibility and the need for compromise.

Young men also learned that great heroes like Odysseus were heroic not just because they were brave and won many battles, but because they did what was expected of them. Odysseus was heroic because he could put aside his anger at Ajax and do what he knew to be the right thing. Odysseus also knew that Ajax had offended the gods, and that he too would offend the gods if Ajax were to be denied burial. From Odysseus, young men learned about the correct relationship between man and god. These models for gentlemanly behavior became an important reason to study classical literature.

Humanism also emphasized intellectual autonomy and individual expression. Sophocles's plays focused on these attributes. He created heroes whose need to express their individuality became the centerpiece of drama. In his book on Greek drama, J. Michael Walton contends that Sophocles created a "world of unusual personal detail, a world in which a small object or a human gesture can define a man's estate." The world portrayed on stage ceased to be huge, with mythic heroes who were larger than life.

In *Ajax,* the audience perceives a protagonist in profound pain. Walton maintains that the audience sees is not the "stoicism of mankind but the pain to which he is heir." The audience cannot help but react to this individual suffering.

Clearly, as Walton notes, Sophocles is able to engage the audience's sympathy for the individual. This became increasingly important as the world grew larger and more complex, and was as true of the fledgling scientific world of the Renaissance as it is today.

The Renaissance humanist was willing to accept the responsibility of governing that accompanied intellectual autonomy. Here, too, the Greek model proved important. Greek heroes exemplified responsibility to their gods and to the men who fought beside them. Ajax's tragedy was in betraying those with whom he fought: Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus. His shame is twofold□deriving from the mistaken slaughter of animals and his madness that turned such terrible anger on his allies.

In her discussion on the use of debate and conflict in Sophoclean tragedy, Jacqueline de Romilly states that there is a contrast in *Ajax* between "an aristocratic ethic based on honor and a more humane ethic based on obligations to individuals." This obligation to the individual is seen in Odysseus's championing of Ajax's burial rights. Odysseus clearly understands the god's directive that bodies must be buried, but his reasons go beyond that. Although he abhors Ajax's actions, Odysseus acknowledges that Ajax was a great warrior who fought bravely for their causes:

"Deny him burial and trample justice! I loathed him, more than any other Greek in camp. I detested all he was□and still I say he was the bravest man I ever saw, except for Achilles, the best and bravest who ever came to Troy. Admit it! Justice demands! If you shame him you smear God's law. Hate him or love him, he was an honorable man; you owe him honor."

In the ensuing argument with Agamemnon, Odysseus contends that Ajax deserves respect. In the end, as both Agamemnon and Odysseus agree, this is fulfilling obligations and providing the honors rightfully bestowed upon an honorable man. Doing what was right, what benefited the individual man, was a crucial part of Odysseus's decision.

Honesty and the search for truth were also important elements of the humanist movement, and they were important to defining the strengths of the individual. Ajax chooses to die alone, separate from family and the men who still follow him. He commits suicide. This is not the expected death for a great hero□Ajax is in great pain and thinks that he can redeem his honor only through taking his own life. In her essay on the feminine in Greek drama, Froma I. Zeitlin argues that Ajax's suicide is a woman's way of dying but that Ajax appropriates a woman's death and makes it masculine:

"Suicide is a solution in tragedy normally reserved only for women□and what we are given to witness is this convention borrowed for a man's version of it. He [Ajax] dies a

heroic death, then, in the women's way, a whetted will penetrated by a whetted weapon, befitting ... the curious ambiguities of this most masculine hero."

Zeitlin asserts that although Ajax briefly considers Tecmessa's pleas, to continue living would feminize his will and deepen his shame. Ajax is embracing the only recourse left to an honorable man, hoping to restore his family's honor. He deceives his family and the chorus, convincing them that he is recovering and the danger has passed.

There is a temptation to label Ajax's words as lies, heaping more dishonor on a man already dishonored. But Ajax is a complex man, and as Zeitlin suggests, Ajax "seems to have arrived at the kind of tragic knowledge we recognize as intrinsically true to the genre." This is because, as Zeitlin argues, although "deceit and intrigue are condemned in women, they are also seen as natural to her sphere of operations and the dictates of her nature."

Thus, since Ajax has chosen to die in the manner of women, that he first deceives those around him means that he is employing, as Zeitlin notes, a "feminine strategy enlisted in the service of restoring an unequivocal manliness he can only achieve ... by dying the manly death ... in the woman's way." The audience is left with the knowledge that Ajax took the only choice still left to him, the choice to die. For Ajax, truth lies in his acceptance of his actions.

Medieval Christianity taught that obedience was more important than individualism, but humanism stressed just the opposite. If individualism was identified with arrogance, the study of classical Greek pointed to individualism as the mark of the strong, virtuous man□one who saw good deeds, not as the way to get into heaven, but as the way to create a better world.

This individualism is not with problems, as the complexity of Ajax illustrates. The opening ceremonies of the festival in which Sophocles presented his plays included honoring the children of Greece's war victims. Simon Goldhill states that this ceremony affirms the connection between these young men and the city that has been responsible for their education. It was a moment of civic pride, and combined with the remainder of the ceremonies, it provided an important civic occasion.

Yet as these ceremonies affirm the importance of the city, the tragedies themselves affirm the importance of the individual. This tension, this ambiguity in the hero, provides for a realistic depiction. This is not a remote hero without fault; this is a hero who is capable of mistakes.

As Goldhill observes, "the negative example of Ajax is touched with a certain glory. It is an essential dynamic of Sophocles's tragedy that Ajax should seem both an outstanding hero and also unacceptable in society. The hero does not simply *reverse* the norms of what it means to fit into society but *makes a problem* ofsuch integration."

Ajax is almost setting a precedent for the twentieth-century anti-hero. The modern hero is prepared to do the right thing, to rebel against a controlling government when it is wrong. Athena's role as god is not unlike the authority of modern government. She

establishes laws and expects exact obedience, and she does not expect to be challenged. Ajax does challenge authority; but as Goldhill points out, Ajax, although managing to transgress what is expected of him, "achieves his greatness, his superhuman status, precisely by such transgression."

Ajax is first and foremost an individual. He wants to be in control of his destiny, and although not flawless, he proves that he is heroic in coming to terms with those faults. The Greek tragic hero was an important model for the autonomy and individual expression that humanists embraced, and it became an important element in creating the Renaissance man who would build the foundation of the modern world. Humanism's resurrection of Greek drama created a profound change in the way Renaissance men approached society and religion, and this has carried over into the twentieth century.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Walton provides an overview of Sophocles's play, identifying the major characters and plot motivations.

After the death of Achilles in the war against Troy, the Greek hero's arms were awarded to Odysseus rather than to Ajax who believed he had deserved them. Intent on revenge for the slight, Ajax is diverted from his purpose by the goddess Athena who drives him mad so that he kills and tortures sheep and cattle, seeing them as his Greek enemies. When he returns to sanity, shame at what he has done impels him to commit suicide. Odysseus pleads with Agamemnon and Menelaus for Ajax to be treated with the respect due to a hero and eventually wins his point.

Ajax is the only Sophocles play, with the arguable exception of *Philoctetes,* in which a god or goddess appears. Traditionally a devout man. Sophocles proposes a theological standpoint which is more complex than it is sometimes painted. Ajax may have been planning a dire revenge against his former friends, when he believes himself cheated of his due, but the way in which the goddess Athena gloats over the state to which she has reduced him looks forward to the savage Dionysus of Euripides' *Bacchae* rather than back to the wise patron-goddess of Athens who solves the problems in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

Applying modern standards to a Greek attitude towards friends and enemies is, of course, risky. Turning the other cheek would have seemed as contrary to the nature of the Greek hero as turning his back. Nevertheless, there is in *Ajax* a sense of moral argument which suggests that man is progressing beyond the simple rules of programmed response. Odysseus is not only the soldier who defeated Ajax in the award of arms but is also traditionally a crafty and untrustworthy man whose eye is always to the main chance. So he appears in Sophocles's later play *Philoctetes,* where his machinations to persuade the eponymous hero to go to Troy are so Machiavellian as to be self-defeating. In *Ajax* this is the sort of man Athena is expecting when she invites Odysseus to witness Ajax' humiliation. Instead of pleasure at the downfall of an enemy, Odysseus shows himself instinctively compassionate.

The tone of the play is established in the first scene. All the later characters to appear reveal predictable attitudes. Ajax' half-brother, Teucer, defends him as best he may, but he is only half-hero as well as half-brother. Tecmessa, mother of Ajax' son Eurysaces, is loyal and loving but utterly without influence in such a male world. Agamemnon and Menelaus, respectively commander-in-chief of the Greek forces at Troy, and husband of Helen, the cause of the war, are angry savages for whom the only response to what Ajax has done is the ultimate insult: deprivation of burial. Odysseus stands up to them and wins for Ajax the honour due to what the man was when he was a friend, not what he became when thwarted and deranged. If the play's moral dimension is its paramount feature, there is little sense of *Ajax* degenerating into a tract. The appearance of Athena in the prologue is literally above the action where Odysseus cannot see her. Such an

awareness of stage space, a principal factor of Sophocles' stagecraft in all his surviving plays, is given an unusual twist in the handling of both location and chorus.

Changes of scene are rare in surviving Greek tragedy and appear to have become more so, with tragedy moving towards realism at the same time as comedy, in the hands of Aristophanes, moves to a world of fantasy where anything can happen anywhere. The initial setting of *Ajax* is outside Ajax's tent, over which Athena appears (presumably, in the original production, with the help of the stage-crane). After Athena has departed and Ajax has returned to sanity, his sailors, who form the chorus, and Tecmessa with his baby attempt to save him from despair at the carnage he has perpetrated. For a time it seems that they have been successful. Ajax emerges from his tent calm and apparently reconciled to what he has done. He departs for the beach to cleanse himself.

News arrives that this is to prove a crucial day in Ajax's fortunes and the chorus and Tecmessa leave the scene to look for him. Ajax now appears at the sea-shore and carefully prepares his own death, before falling on the sword given to him in battle by the Trojan Hector. The sense of isolation is emphasised both by the place where the action is now unfolding and by the absence of the chorus who habitually accompany on-stage action, from their first entrance through to a play's conclusion. Physical use of the resources of the Athenian theatre and the expectations of the audience are consciously manipulated by Sophocles to draw attention to the man's loneliness and to the unusual sight on the Greek stage of someone committing suicide.

Ajax is a touching play and a heartening one for ending on a note of hope, if not reconciliation. Life may present atrocities and heroes may perpetrate them, but a case can be made for human decency which allows some rules and some rights for even the major sinner.

Source: J. Michael Walton. "Ajax" in *The International Dictionary of Theatre,* Volume 1: *Plays,* edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St. James Press, 1992, pp. 7-8.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Brown compares and contrasts the tangential subject matter in the writings of Sophocles and Homer.

Modern critics have proposed a number of interpretations of the nature of the tragedy in Sophocles' *Ajax,* without perhaps completely exhausting the subject. The present paper is no more than an attempt to add slightly to this material by focusing attention on what seems to be an overlooked element in the drama, that is, the implicit contrast between the title character and the Homeric Hector.

Without attempting to go more fully into the question, I shall say at the outset that in general it seems to me that the *Ajax,* in its "diptych" structure, is preeminently a study in contrasts, as has been usually recognized, and that the contrast between the enemies Ajax and Odysseus is the most important and striking of these. This contrast is first and most drastically shown in the prologue, which juxtaposes the savage vengefulness of Ajax with Odysseus' canny moderation and pity for the misfortunes even of an enemy. This contrast is carried through the play in the ironic disparity between the distorted image of Odysseus held by Ajax and shared by Tecmessa and the chorus, and the magnanimous reality, as it appears in the prologue and the final episode. Subsidiary contrasts are those between Teucer, a lesser Ajax, and the contemptible Atridae, and between the human characters of Odyssesus and Ajax and the ruthless divinity Athena.

Another contrast, however, is implicit, I believe, in the characterization of Ajax in his relations with his wife and his infant son. It is impossible, I think, to read Tecmessa's speech of expostulation to Ajax bent on suicide, without being immediately reminded of the colloquy between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6.407-65: there is the same plea that the rest of the wife's family being dead, the husband is all in all; the same vivid picture of the wife's captivity in a hostile land; the same imagined taunt□"this was the wife of a hero who was once the mightiest, and see how she has fallen"; the same pleading to the warrior not to leave his son a helpless orphan. Is this a mere chance echo, Sophocles' homage to the poet who had exhausted the pathetic possibilities in the fate of a dead warrior's family? If there were no other evidence, this might be. But is it chance that the sword with which Ajax kills himself is Hector's sword? He says of it bitterly in his speech of deception to the chorus: "For ever since I received this in my hand from Hector, the gift of my worst enemy, I have never yet had anything good from the Achaeans. True is that proverb of mortals, that an enemy's gifts are no gifts, and the reverse of helpful." And in his last soliloquy, Ajax addresses the sword as it stands braced in the Trojan ground to be his killer, as "the gift of Hector, that man who of all my guest-friends was most hated by me, the most detested to look upon." And finally, when Teucer uncovers his brother's body and recognizes the sword, he calls attention to the fatality of the gift exchange between Ajax and Hector *(Iliad* 7.303-5): "You see how it was destined that in time Hector, though dead, should destroy you? Consider, in God's name, the chances of two mortals: Hector, bound to the chariot rail by the belt he received from this man, was torn continually until he breathed out his life; and this man,

with the gift he received from the other, has perished in a leap of death." It is hard to pass over the persistent appearance of the Hector theme as a chance irrelevance.

But if there is an intentional coupling here of Ajax and his dead enemy, what does Sophocles mean by it? Without explicitly pointing out the contrast, he seems to be letting the hearer form his own conclusions on two sorts of heroic conduct. Granting that Odysseus, the cool calculator who reasons out his pity for his mad enemy by saying "I think as much of my own fate as of his," is no warrior, and that the contrast here is one between the "exceptional" and the "ordinary" man, it is necessary to the full appreciation of Ajax's tragedy that he also be contrasted with a warrior of unquestioned stature. This contrast is afforded by the omnipresent figure of Hector. The soldier who received with gentleness and pity his wife's tearful pleas to spare his life and not make her a widow and his son an orphan, and the comfort that "no man shall send me to Hades against my fate," stands ghostlike in the background as Ajax with callous brutality brushes aside his wife and child and prepares to compass his own death. And when that consummation of his desires has been accomplished, and Teucer moralizes over the silver-studded sword and purple belt which had been the instruments of both men's fates, the audience cannot but remember that Hector had died bravely in battle, fighting an unequal fight in defense of wife and child and parents and city, while Ajax had deliberately deceived his friends and destroyed himself as a useless sacrifice to his concept of honor.

The tragedy of Ajax cannot properly be explained by applying the classical *hybris* formula. This, formula implies that there is a norm of conduct valid for all men, deviation from which brings down the wrath of the gods upon the offender. It may be appropriate to explain some of Aeschylus' tragedies by the concept of *hybris,* but not those of Sophocles. The tragedy of *Ajax,* as of *The Trachinian Women,* lies precisely in the fact that certain individuals, like Ajax and Heracles, are, by the very nature with which they have been endowed, at variance with the standards of conduct that apply to normal men. Neither a religious nor a moral consideration is involved here. Certain conduct is inevitable in the "exceptional man," his nature being what it is; and this conduct inevitably also results in destruction for himself and misery for his loved ones. The very fact of being such an exceptional man is therefore tragic, but the tragedy is not the punishment of heaven for overstepping the bounds. The gods of Sophocles are merely conventional names for the sum of "the way things are."

The figure of Athena in the *Ajax* and the enmity of the goddess for the hero cannot be taken, I believe, in any personal sense, nor is undue importance to be attached to the "guilt" of Ajax in the words of Calchas as reported by the messenger.... In the first of these passages a statement is made which perhaps most clearly formulates the tragedy of Ajax, if correctly interpreted: "For, said the seer, exceptional and profitless beings fall at the gods' hands into grievous misfortunes□all who, being engendered after the fashion of men, have thoughts that are not of human pattern." This seems to be no more than a mere statement of fact, without moral implications. . . .

But Hector too was a warrior, as valiant and devoted to duty as Ajax. The difference lay in Hector's... acceptance of the limitations of human power and the obligation of human

living, which his enemy rejected. The contrast is glaringly apparent in the scene with Tecmessa in which Ajax contemptuously brushes aside the claims of family as against those of honor; it is apparent also in the words which Ajax addresses to his infant son: "Child, may you be more fortunate than your father, but in other respects like him; so you will prove no coward." Hector prays for the babe Astyanax: "Zeus and you other gods, grant that this child of mine may be distinguished among the Trojans, as am I, and as great in strength, and may he reign with power over Ilion. And some day may one say of him: 'He is far braver than his father'" *(Iliad* 6.476-9). The one prays that his son may be better than he, the other that he may be his equal in everything but luck□a difference that speaks volumes of Ajax's unbridled egotism. And yet the comparison between Hector and Ajax is made explicit in Sophocles' play only in Teucer' s contrast of the gifts exchanged□and these were the cause of death for the one as for the other. Hector, who goes to his last battle with the prayer that he may lie under mounded earth before he hears the cry of Andromache being dragged to captivity, and Ajax, who invokes the vengeance of the Furies upon the Atridae and their whole army for the death that he is about to inflict on himself, are alike in this□death is the end for both.

Does this mean that Sophocles views the careers of both men as moral equivalents□ "the paths of glory lead but to the grave"? If this is so, then it is indeed futile to look for any meaning□or indeed any tragedy□in the play. It is inconceivable, however, that all a great poet could say on such a theme should be reducible to such banal and irrelevant pessimism. Nor would it ever occur to one of Sophocles' contemporaries to imagine that this was so. The hero who dies at his own hand because of a nature that cannot bend itself to conform to human norms is tragic; but not the hero who dies, as a soldier should, in defending his city and his people. Such a man's fate is happy in Greek eyes; Solon's anecdote of Tellus the Athenian (Herodotus 1.30) is evidence enough without citing Tyrtaeus, alien in time and place; and Hector's fate for the fifth-century Athenian must have had much the same aura as the dead whom Pericles eulogizes (Thucydides 2.42), who "endured the brunt of battle with their bodies, and in the briefest moment of time, at the summit of their fortune, were taken not out of fear, but away from fame."

But the dead, however different in the mode of their death, must be buried. The ending of the *Ajax* often been criticized, as destructive of the play's unity, as blatantly anticlimactic, even as mere padding. These criticisms are, I believe, absurdly unjust, and possible only as long as the mistaken notion is held that the play is "about Ajax," and nothing more. It is "about" human life, and Ajax and Odysseus and Teucer and the Atridae□and I believe Hector□are all symbols through whom the poet may voice his thoughts on this subject. It is sometimes said that Ajax is "rehabilitated" in the second half of the play; so he is□as a human being. The whole importance of the contrast so pointedly made between Odysseus' magnanimity and the vindictiveness of the Atridae lies in this. When Agamemnon queries: "You urge me then to permit the burial of this corpse?" Odysseus replies simply: "I do; for I myself shall come to this." Whatever its conduct in life, this "profitless body" had been a human being, and resentment may not humanly be carried beyond death.

And here we have the last implied comparison with Hector: his body too his enemy had outraged and left unburied, until with appeals to their common humanity his old father

had persuaded the vengeful Achilles to relinquish the corpse and let it be given to the fire. Odysseus plays the part of Priam here, with none of his pathos and grandeur, to be sure, but with basically the same argument: we are all mortal. The play ends with the parallelism between Ajax and Hector complete, the contrast sharply drawn between the hero and his two enemies: Odysseus, his polar opposite, the man of craft and intellect and cold blood; and Hector, the warrior so strangely like him, whose "human mindedness" as surely as Ajax's "inhuman mindedness" terminates in the grave that is the common lot of all humans.

Source: W. Edward Brown. "Sophocles's Ajax and Homer's Hector" in *Classical Journal,* Vol. 61, no. 3, December, 1965, pp. 118-21.

Topics for Further Study

Discuss the relationship between man and the gods as portrayed in *Ajax*.

What do the speeches in *Ajax* suggest about the heroic ideal?

Research fifth century Greek society. What is the role of women in this society? Is Tecmessa correct in being concerned about her future?

Both *Ajax* and *Antigone* deal with the issue of the proper burial of dead bodies, but in *Ajax,* Odysseus is able to modify Agamemnon's anger and peace is restored. Consider how Creon reacts to similar advice in *Antigone* and compare the way these two plays deal with a similar problem.

Research the role of early Greek drama in Greek life. What lessons would fifth-century Greek men learn from this play?

Compare and Contrast

c. 445 B.C.: Architecture and art make Athens preeminent in the world and lead to the designation of the Golden Age of Greece.

Today: Greece remains a favorite tourist destination, as thousands of people journey each year to visit the Temple of Poseidon, Delphi, and the Parthenon, which was rebuilt after the Persians sacked Athens.

c. 445 B.C.: 25-35% of the population of Greece are slaves, many of whom work in the silver mines.

Today: Slavery has long since ended, but Greece is now dealing with severe poverty and a shrinking economic base.

c. 445 B.C.: The Greeks triumph over the Persians and stave off the invasion of their country.

Today: Greek politics has been preoccupied with military coups and conflict with neighboring Turkey since the end of World War II.

c. 445 B.C.: The Greek historian, Herodotus, provides some of the earliest and most thorough histories of Greece. He will later be known as the "father of history."

Today: History now unfolds on television and in newspapers everyday. The future role of historians will have to accommodate the overwhelming proliferation of material now available.

c. 445 B.C.: Destroyed by the Persians, the rebuilding of the Acropolis begins. It will take fifteen years to finish the job.

Today: The Parthenon, situated on the Acropolis and overlooking Athens, is still a favorite destination for tourists.

c. 445 B.C.: Festival games, a tradition of competitiveness begun nearly three hundred years earlier, continue in Greece. By the 5th century, their ritual meaning□they were originally held at funerals□has been lost.

Today: The Olympic Games, a reminder of the former competitiveness of the Greeks, were revived in the late 19th century. Today, they are often imbued with political agendas that detract from the spectacle and celebration.

What Do I Read Next?

Oedipus Rex, a drama written by Sophocles (c. 430-426 B.C.), is the story of one man's attempts to escape his fate. It is the dramatist's best-known play.

Antigone, also by Sophocles (c. 441 B.C.), focuses on the problems of excessive pride and stubbornness. Like *Ajax,* this play emphasizes the importance of the ritualized practice of burial of the dead.

Sophocles' s *Electra* (c. 425-410 B.C.) examines the family tragedy that surrounds the death of Agamemnon.

Prometheus Bound, by Aeschylus (c. 490 B.C.), is the story of how Prometheus is punished for disobeying Zeus.

Further Study

Ashby, Clifford. *Classical Greek Theatre: New Views of an Old Subject,* University of Iowa Press, 1999.

An examination of Greek theater based on architectural evidence. The author has traveled extensively and examined many of the remaining sites in Greece, Southern Italy, and the Balkans.

Gressler, Thomas H. *Greek Theatre in the 1980s,* McFarland & Company, 1989.

A study of modern Greek theater in which the author focuses on social and cultural influences of drama, discusses the history of theater, and provides a look at productions and the restoration of theaters.

The Theatre of Apollo: Divine Justice and Sophocles's Oedipus the King, McGill Queens University Press, 1996.

This is a reinterpretation of Sophocles's play that explores Apollo's role in bringing about this tragedy. It also attempts to recreate the play's original staging.

Rehm, Rush. *Greek Tragic Theatre,* Routledge, 1994. Discusses performances of several plays and encourages readers to consider the context in which the plays were performed.

Walton, J. Michael. *Living Greek Theatre,* Greenwood, 1987. Focuses on the staging and performance of Greek drama.

The author attempts to integrate classical and modern theater, while providing a great deal of information about a number of the most important plays from this period.

Wise, Jennifer. *Dionynsus Writes: The Invention of Theatre in Ancient Greece,* Cornell University Press, 1998.

Discusses the relationship between literature and drama by examining the influences of a newly emerging literary world on drama.

Zelenak, Michael X. *Gender and Politics in Greek Tragedy,* Peter Lang, 1998.

This book offers some insight into the status of women in Greek culture and provides interesting analysis of many women characters from Greek drama.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
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Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535