Characteristics of Sophoclean Tragedy and the Role of the Chorus

Characteristics of Sophoclean Tragedy

A tragedy of Sophocles has the following characteristics:

- It is based on events that already took place and with which the audience is familiar.
- The protagonist is a person of noble birth and stature.
- The protagonist has a weakness and, because of it, becomes isolated and suffers a downfall.
- Because the protagonist's fall is not entirely his or her own fault, the audience may end up pitying him or her.
- The fallen protagonist gains self-knowledge. He has a deeper insight into himself and understands his weakness.
- The audience undergoes catharsis, a purging of emotions, after experiencing pity, fear, shock and other strong feelings. The people go away feeling better.
- The drama usually unfolds in one place in a short period of time, usually about a day.

Role of the Chorus

The chorus generally had the following roles in the plays of Sophocles:

- To explain the action
- To interpret the action in relation to the law of the state and the law of the Olympian gods
- To foreshadow the future
- To serve as an actor in the play
- To sing and/or dance
- To present the author's views.

In some ways, the chorus is like the narrator of a modern film or like the background music accompanying the action of the film. In addition, it is like text on the film screen that provides background information or identifies the time and place of the action.