

INTRO TO GREEK THEATER

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Characters

Professor:	In her 40s-60s
Serhan:	In his late teens
Nural:	In her twenties
Newly Arrived Student:	Any gender, in their twenties
Other Students:	A small class from late teens to late twenties

Epitaph

In authoritarian countries like Turkey, police typically raid campuses with permission from university administrations to suppress students' democratic rights to express their views on social injustices.

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SCENE

A theatre history class is in session in a small, ancient-looking classroom at a historic public university in Istanbul. Only a handful of students are present. The professor writes her name on the board. The classroom, which features benches instead of chairs, exudes an old-world charm. The students seem more distracted by the noises coming from outside than by the lecture on the board.

PROFESSOR

Hello, everyone. My name is _____. I am a full-time professor at another college. Your department chair, a great mentor to me, asked me to teach this course while your professor is on urgent medical leave. I hope he feels better soon and returns as quickly as possible. In the meantime, I'd like to review the Greek terminology that defines space, as I believe you have already covered some related topics in Ancient Greek dramaturgy. If at any point you don't understand a term or concept, please feel free to interrupt and ask questions. First, let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. I'd love to learn your names.

SERHAN

My name is Serhan. I am a sophomore, but this is my fourth year at the university.

The other students nervously giggle but are more distracted by what is happening outside. The professor doesn't understand the situation, but she doesn't want to try to comprehend it either. Her goal is to teach the class and leave, so she marks SERHAN as present and continues to encourage the students to introduce themselves.

PROFESSOR

And your name, please?!

NURAL

I would prefer not to!

PROFESSOR

Good Bartleby line. I like the humor.

The students look at the professor in confusion.

PROFESSOR (cont.)

I thought you were referring to "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." It's a short story by American writer Herman Melville. Have you ever heard of it?

The students nod as if saying no. They look more confused and distracted.

Then, can you please tell me why you don't want to tell me your name?

NURAL

I don't want to sound rude, but I don't think saying our names out loud is a good idea while all that is going on outside.

PROFESSOR

Would you mind...

A group of young people, evidently students, rush into a classroom. Their faces are flushed from running and fear. Surprised, the professor looks at the new arrivals while the other students—more aware of the situation than she is—quickly rearrange themselves so the newcomers can sit immediately. Confused about what is happening, the professor cautiously observes the interaction between her students and the newcomers.

Are you late?

She checks the attendance list.

I don't believe I have everyone's names on my attendance list. Have you just signed up for the class?

NURAL
(*interrupting*)

Can we skip the introductions and move to the terminology? We will introduce ourselves in more detail on Wednesday.

PROFESSOR
(*heading to the door*)

Is there anything I should be aware of outside? If something is going on, I can call campus security.

All the students simultaneously shake their heads in disagreement.

Alright...

SERHAN
(*interrupting*)

May I ask about a term we discussed during Professor Ataoglu's lecture on literary devices used in storytelling last week?

PROFESSOR

Absolutely! Feel free to ask me anything you would like to review again. Which term are you referring to, Serhan? Isn't it? It's easy to learn names when you only have to keep two in mind.

SERHAN

Dramatic irony! I have a basic understanding of the term, but could you provide an example? I find that examples help me understand a subject better.

SERHAN gestures toward the classroom door, pleading with the professor to stop asking more questions. The PROFESSOR is unsure how to respond, but she agrees to SERHAN's request.

PROFESSOR

Have you read *Antigone* by Sophocles? Can I use it to extract an example?

Every student in the classroom nods in agreement. PROFESSOR is surprised, but she continues.

The dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows more than a character in the play.

The students giggle nervously as PROFESSOR tries to assess the situation.

PROFESSOR (cont.)

I assume you all recalled a humorous example from the play. I can't think of any example that is...

NURAL
(*apologetically*)

We apologize for the misunderstanding. Our laughter was meant for our friends, who again forgot that they needed notebooks and pencils to take notes.

The students already in the class are tearing pages from their notebooks and passing them, along with pens and pencils, to friends to appear more ready to take notes.

I see. May I...

PROFESSOR

NURAL

Yes. Thank you for your understanding.

PROFESSOR

The first example of dramatic irony in *Antigone* occurs in the first scene. In this scene, Creon orders Polyneices' body not to be buried. However, the audience already knows that Antigone has buried her brother. This situation creates tension as the audience anticipates when Creon will uncover the truth. The audience has more knowledge than Creon. Is it clearer?

SERHAN

Yes. And is there more than one dramatic irony in *Antigone*?

PROFESSOR turns to the class to see if they are, in fact, listening.

PROFESSOR

Absolutely. *Antigone* is full of them. The dramatic ironies become more complex and nuanced as the play progresses. They start revealing characters' traits, for example. During Creon's conversation with the messenger, Creon assumes that someone was bribed to bury Polyneices. The audience, however, knows that Antigone performed the burial. This situation highlights Creon's ignorance and foreshadows his potential conflict between personal loyalty and adherence to the law.

The noises suddenly stop, causing everyone except PROFESSOR to become tense. NURAL nudges one of the newly arrived students, prompting them to raise their hand to ask a question. Meanwhile, the NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT glances anxiously at the professor and the door.

NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT

I don't understand how this dramatic...

NURAL

Irony...

NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT

Dramatic irony! Thank you. How does it foreshadow Creon's internal conflict?

PROFESSOR

(tapping board marker to the board in excitement)

That is an excellent question from someone who has never read the play.

All the students are confused, but they all laugh, including the new student who asked the question. One can start hearing the noises coming from outside again.

SERHAN

(whispering to NURAL)

How did she figure that out?

PROFESSOR

That your friend hasn't read the play, or that none of you have read it either?

SERHAN and NURAL look at each other.

If you've finished impressing me with your wide reading range, I'd like to share an example from today to help clarify things. For instance, you all have some thoughts about the noises coming from outside, but I'm not sure what they are. I can investigate myself...

The professor tried to approach the door, but the students shook their heads in unison to signal her to stop.

PROFESSOR (cont.)

No one wants me to know what is happening out there, and I don't understand the reasons behind it. I sense that you're trying to avoid the topic, so I won't bring it up either. I feel left in the dark. You possess information that I don't have. If I were a character in a play and you, as the audience, knew more than I did, this situation would be called dramatic irony.

The students nod, trying to prevent the teacher from discussing the topic further.

I will continue with the next topic in the syllabus, which is, as I have already mentioned, spaces in Ancient Greek theater.

SERHAN

(loudly whispering to Nural so that PROFESSOR and the rest of the class can hear)

She is good! Really good! I like her a lot.

PROFESSOR

I appreciate your quick sympathy, Serhan! Please start copying the terms I am writing on the board.

She writes "theatron," "skene," "proskēnion," "paradoi," "periaktoi," "mechane," "pinakes," "thyromata," and "ekkyklema." Some students begin taking out their iPads and laptops to take notes. Others start taking notes on notebooks and papers.

I prefer that everyone takes notes using paper, pens, and pencils.

NURAL

Our professor allows us to take notes in any way we prefer.

PROFESSOR

Of course! But I also noticed you handing out papers and pencils to your newly arrived friends. You must still be believing in the power of pencils.

NURAL

I only distributed them because I noticed that my friends were unprepared.

PROFESSOR

Thank you for considering your classmates.

(turning to class)

But I still believe in the power of neural communication that happens when we write on a page and how it connects to our brain's gray matter. Handwriting enhances our ability to remember information. Not only does it improve our learning, but it also contributes to our overall intelligence.

NURAL

(whispering to the class)

The professor might be Ancient Greek, too.

PROFESSOR

Writing will persist, Mrs. Nural.

NURAL and the rest of the class put their laptops and iPads back into their cases. The overall gloom caused by the events outside the classroom has dissipated. The professor's handwriting resembles a doctor's, so they struggle to read it. Some students copy the terms from the board onto their papers, while others, including SERHAN and NURAL, stare at the professor.

SERHAN

I can't read the word, professor. How do you spell "eke"?

PROFESSOR

It is spelled “ekk,” and there are two “k's” in it.

SERHAN

It already sounds really cool! What does it mean?

PROFESSOR

Once everyone has finished taking notes, we will review each of those terms as a class. We can start with "ekkyklema" if that seems the “coolest.”

SERHAN laughs, but the other students remain silent. The noises from outside momentarily cease. SERHAN turns around and gestures for the class to join, encouraging everyone to laugh. PROFESSOR interrupts this laughter by tapping the marker on the board twice and loudly explaining the term's meaning.

PROFESSOR

"Ekkyklema" is a set device used in Ancient Greek theater to bring interior scenes out into the audience's sight. The Greeks didn't like showing extremes, such as acts of violence, on stage. Does anyone remember what these acts of violence were...

NURAL

Matricide, patricide, self-mutilation, incest, you name it.

The class laughs again.

PROFESSOR

Very good.

NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT

Why wouldn't they?

NURAL

Because they weren't Romans.

The class laughs again.

PROFESSOR

A sarcastic but appropriate reasoning!

This time SERHAN laughs by himself.
Everyone listens to his laughter, and it is
even more fun.

Can you elaborate on that, Nural?

NURAL

They weren't as bloodthirsty.

The class laughs again.

PROFESSOR

Not necessarily. However, the Greeks believed in the power of the audience's imagination. They thought it was more impactful to have the audience imagine the horrors of violence through descriptions rather than directly depicting it. In other words, the power of imagination can do far more than any stage gore.

Everyone in the class, including the
professor, turned toward the door.

PROFESSOR (cont.)

Is this always the case at this university? Can anyone explain what's happening?

SERHAN and NURAL exchange
uncertain glances, unsure what to say to
the professor. There is a brief pause.

Should I be concerned?

SERHAN

It may sound more threatening than it is.

NURAL

Some extremists are targeting students who may be protesting issues they disagree with. The rector decides to send campus security after the students instead of confronting the extremists.

PROFESSOR

What do you want me to do?

SERHAN & NURAL

Don't open the door!

PROFESSOR

OK. Let's get back to the terminology. I, for example, have been thinking about all sorts of things happening outside this classroom, much like anyone else would. That's just how the mind operates. It comes up with the worst possible scenarios. The Greeks knew it and let the mind do its job.

The students look at the professor to understand what the professor is trying to get at.

But, as I look at all of you, I notice that none of you seems as panicked as I feel about what's happening outside. This makes me think that perhaps there's nothing to worry about.

NURAL

This is a typical day at this university. You need to adapt to teach here beyond a subbing position.

PROFESSOR

I will see how I feel about it after today.

SERHAN

It's not for everyone.

PROFESSOR

Neither is the Greek theater. I hope you all see how the Greeks' understanding of the mind remains relevant today.

NURAL

I must admit that I appreciate how you make the class more relevant to us, but I still prefer Professor Ataoglu's class because there is less dramatic tension.

The class laughs again.

PROFESSOR

I wouldn't expect anything less from you. Professor Ataoglu is an exceptional professor. I know him very well.

The noises outside the class wane again.

NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT

Oh my! I just had an epiphany!

Everyone looks at the NEWLY
ARRIVED
STUDENT.

I believe that "dramatic irony" and "ekkyklema" are closely related. Knowledge is an incredible dramatic tool for both.

PROFESSOR

Can you please elaborate, M...

NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT

The more the playwright keeps Creon ignorant or ignorant, the stronger his anger or vengeance is. The dramatic irony helps one think of the horrors one is about to face. We are dreading what will happen to—what's her name...

PROFESSOR

Antigone.

NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENT

Yes, it's about her. The "Ekkyklema" is a vehicle that brings the unknown into the known.

NURAL and SERHAN are looking at their friend in amazement.

PROFESSOR

Incredible comment! I have been teaching this course for many years at another institution, but I have never seen anyone understand it and express it as clearly. Congratulations, ...

SERHAN

It is Hasan, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Congratulations to Hasan. If you submit your handwritten notes as proof of your attendance and hard work in today's class, I can pass them on to Mr. Ataoglu. Remember to write your names on your papers. Capitalized!

As the students start doing what the PROFESSOR asks, NURAL raises up. PROFESSOR collects the last paper

SERHAN

What if you quiz us on them next class?

NURAL

We handwrote them, remember?! They are in our gray matter.

As the class is laughing again,
PROFESSOR taps on the board three
times. The door opens. All the students
start looking at the door in panic as the
security enters.

PROFESSOR

Here is a list of their names and handwriting, Sir. I hope this helps you identify
the author of those signs.

End of Play.

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