

**Lovers, Tyrants, and Other Enemies: Greek Tragedy from Aeschylus to Brecht**  
**CLAS 180A**  
**Brandeis University - Fall 2008**

Instructor: Eirene Visvardi

Office Hours: Mon. 10:30-11:30am and by appointment; Rabb 359

Office Phone: 736-2186

**\* Disabilities**

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me at the first meeting of the class.

**\*\* Academic Dishonesty**

Academic Dishonesty will result in failure of the course and will be reported to the Department of Student Development and Conduct. Students are responsible to inform themselves about what constitutes academic integrity. For relevant information, visit: [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/rr/html/rr\\_section4.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/rr/html/rr_section4.html)

**Course Description**

This course aims to familiarize students with the performance of Greek tragedy in ancient and modern times. We will discuss tragedy both as a literary genre that uses and recreates particular conventions of composition and performance and as a public medium in the religious and political context of classical Athens. We will read a number of Greek plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and address issues regarding the form, performance, and politics of the genre. We will address the following questions: How are plays constructed? By whom and for whom was tragedy performed? What kind of (personal, social, political) relationships do different plays explore and problematize? How did the performances shape the perception of gender and the emotions? Is there a politics of Greek tragedy in classical Athens? Is there a politics of tragedy in reperformances and adaptations of the surviving plays in Europe and America of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Why did playwrights like Eugene O'Neil, Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertolt Brecht, and Janusz Glowacki turn to ancient Greek tragedy for their inspiration? Special focus will be given on the interconnection between dramatic performance, emotional involvement, and the shaping of moral and political values.

**Required Texts**

1. Aeschylus, *Oresteia* trans. by A. Shapiro and P. Burian (Oxford University Press)
2. Aristophanes, *Frogs* trans. by J. Johnston (Richer Resources Publications)
3. Euripides, *Hecuba* trans. by R. Mitchell-Boyask (Focus Publishing)
4. Euripides, *Four Plays: Medea, Bacchae, Heracles, Hippolytus* trans. by S. Esposito (Focus Publishing)

5. Sophocles, *Philoctetes* trans. by S. Schein (Focus Publishing)
6. Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* trans. by R. Fagles (Penguin Classics)
7. Brecht B., *Antigone* trans. by J. Malina (Applause Books)
8. Glowacki, J. *Antigone in New York* trans. by J. Glowacki and J. Torres (Samuel French Inc.)

### **Recommended Texts**

1. Sartre, J.-P., *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (Vintage International)
2. Willett, J. (1964) *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (Methuen Publishing Ltd.)

### **Requirements**

- Preparation of all the readings – both the plays and secondary material – and active participation in discussion.
- Attendance is required. All absences have to be excused and missing more than 3 classes will have a negative effect on your grade.
- A 5-7page essay based on the readings in class.
- Mid-term
- A final Project. This may include: a longer 10-12page essay (examination of a play and at least two secondary readings or comparison of an ancient play and one or more of its modern adaptations); a group performance (of a play or sections of a play or students' rewriting of a play); a staging of a chorus; a 30-minute film made by students. We will discuss the details for project alternatives in class. We will use the last day of classes and perhaps one meeting outside our regular schedule (depending on the size of the class) for the final performance projects.

**\*Late Essays will not be accepted without documentation of a medical or family emergency**

### **Grading**

Preparation and Participation (including pop quizzes, and brief written responses): 30%

Midterm: 20%

Short Essay: 20%

Final Project: 30%

### **Schedule**

In addition to the readings below, students will occasionally be assigned scholarly articles on the plays under discussion. Additional material will be either distributed in class or available online. All assignments are subject to examination.

#### Week 1

Mon. Sep. 1: No Class - Labor Day

Wed. Sept. 3: Introduction: Athens, myth, and the performance of tragedy; the festival of the Great Dionysia.

Week 2

Mon. Sep. 8: From the Law of Revenge to the Law of the Court: The *Oresteia*

Women as avenging “men”, lamenters, and protectors of the polis; the rationalization of fear in the democratic city-state. The chorus in Greek tragedy.

Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

Wed. Sep. 10: Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

Week 3

Mon. Sept. 15: Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*

Wed. Sept. 17: Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*

Week 4

Mon. Sep. 22: Enemies during War: Pity and Politics

Assignment: Euripides’ *Hecuba*

Wed. Sep. 24: Assignment: Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*

Week 5

Mon. Sep. 29: No Class - Brandeis Tuesday

Wed. Oct. 1: Assignment: Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*.

Week 6

Mon. Oct. 6: Different Types of War: Lovers turned Enemies

Assignment: Euripides’ *Hippolytus*

Wed. Oct. 8: Assignment: Euripides’ *Medea*

Week 7

Mon. Oct. 13: Assignment: Euripides’ *Medea*

Wed. Oct. 15: Tyrants vs. Women; Secular vs. Divine.

Assignment: Sophocles’ *Antigone*

Week 8

Mon. Oct. 20: Friends vs. Enemies, Friends vs. Friends

Assignment: Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Wed. Oct. 22: Assignment: Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Week 9

Mon. Oct. 27: Midterm

Wed. Oct. 29: Fearing and Desiring the Apolitical: Female *choreia* against the state

Assignment: Euripides’ *Bacchae*

Week 10

Mon. Nov. 3: Assignment: Euripides’ *Bacchae*

Wed. Nov. 5: Tragedy in Europe During and After WW2

Assignment: An existentialism retelling of the *Oresteia*: Sartre's *Flies*

Week 11

Mon. Nov. 10: Assignment: Sartre's *Flies*

Wed. Nov. 12: Antigone Among the Homeless

Assignment: Janusz Glowacki's *Antigone in New York*

Week 12

Mon. Nov. 17: Assignment: Brecht's *Antigone*

Wed. Nov. 19: The Didactic Politics of Tragedy

Assignment: Brecht's Theory of Alienation (excerpts to be distributed)

Week 13

Mon. Nov. 24: Aristophanes vs. Brecht: literary form, political advise, civic education.

Assignment: Aristophanes' *Frogs*

Wed. Nov. 26: Regulating Desire and Ideology through Theater and Dance

Assignment: Plato's *Laws*, Bk. II

Week 14

Mon. Dec. 1: Assignment: Plato's *Laws*, II

Wed. Dec. 3: Aristotle on the Tragic Emotions and Catharsis (excerpts to be distributed)

Week 15

Mon. Dec 8: Wrap up

**Final Exam: TBA**