

THE PERFORMANCE AND POLITICS OF GREEK TRAGEDY: GENDER AND THE EMOTIONS

CLAS 180A
Brandeis University - Fall 2007

Instructor: Eirene Visvardi

Office Hours: Mon. 10:00am-12:00pm and by appointment; Rabb 359

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*** 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.**

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? 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 20th 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 politics and concepts of the emotions: Are emotions biological or cultural and do they change, like politics, in different historical periods and cultures? How might we approach emotions and politics within the theatrical framework of different cultures?

Required Texts

1. *Aeschylus, Oresteia* trans. by R. Fagles (Penguin)
2. *Euripides, Hecuba* trans. by R. Mitchell-Boyask (Focus Publishing)
3. *Euripides, Four Plays: Medea, Bacchae, Heracles, Hippolytus* trans. by S. Esposito (Focus Publishing)
4. *Sophocles, Philoctetes* trans. by S. Schein (Focus Publishing)
5. *Sophocles, Antigone* trans. by R. Blondell (Focus Publishing)
6. *Aristophanes, Four Comedies: Lysistrata, The Acharnians, The Congresswomen, The Frogs*, ed. by W. Arrowsmith (The Univ. of Michigan Press)
7. *Brecht B., Antigone* trans. by J. Malina (Applause Books)

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.
- _ We will watch 3 films (modern performances of ancient Greek tragedy and modern retellings). You will be expected to discuss these films in class and in exams.
- _ One 15-minute presentation on the assignments for the day. The student(s) responsible for presentations will also lead the discussion. Material covered in presentations will be on the exams.
- _ A 5-7page essay based on the readings in class.
- _ Mid-term and Final
- _ 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 the Presentation): 30%

Midterm: 15%

Final: 20%

Essay and Final Project: 35%

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. Sept. 3: **Labor Day - No Class**

Wed. Sept. 5: Introduction

Athens, myth, and the performance of tragedy; the festival of the Great Dionysia.
Aristotle on Tragedy and the Emotions.

Week 2

Mon. Sept. 10: **Class Cancelled**

Wed. Sept. 12: 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*

Week 3

Mon. Sept. 17: Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

Wed. Sept. 19: Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*

Week 4

Mon. Sept. 24: Assignment: Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*

Wed. Sept. 26: **Brandeis Thursday**

Week 5

Mon. Oct. 1: Pity and Politics: Gender and the Emotions in War

Women as the pitiful victims of war: the tradition of female lamentation; the legislation against lamentation in Athens; lament in Greek tragedy.

Assignment: Euripides’ *Hecuba*

Wed. Oct. 3: Assignment: Euripides’ *Hecuba*

Week 6

Mon. Oct. 8: Thucydides: Contextualizing the emotions and the politics of war.

Assignment: Bks. 2, 3, and 6 (excerpts to be distributed); Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*

Wed. Oct. 10: Assignment: Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*

First Essay Due

Week 7

Mon. Oct. 15: Different types of “War”

Fighting the disease of passion.

Assignment: Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* [copy available online]

Wed. Oct. 17: Midterm

Week 8

Mon. Oct. 22: Euripides’ *Hippolytus*

Wed. Oct. 24: Male vs. female, family vs. state, secular vs. divine.

Assignment: Sophocles, *Antigone*

Week 9

Mon. Oct. 29: Assignment: Sophocles, *Antigone*

Wed. Oct. 31: Friends vs. Enemies, Friends vs. Friends

Assignment: Euripides’ *Medea*

Week 10

Mon. Nov. 5: Fearing and Desiring the Apolitical
Meanadism and theater. The politics of the Dionysiac. Female *choreia* against the state.

Assignment: Euripides, *Bacchae*

Wed. Nov. 7: Assignment: Euripides' *Bacchae*

Week 11

Mon. Nov. 12: Tragedy in Europe During and After WW2

Assignment: Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone*

Wed. Nov. 14: Assignment: Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies* [copy available online]

Week 12

Mon. Nov. 19: Assignment: Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies*

Wed. Nov. 21: **Class Cancelled**

Week 13

Mon. Nov. 26: Antigone Among the Homeless

Assignment: Janusz Glowacki's *Antigone in New York* [copy available online]

Wed. Nov. 28: Assignment: Janusz Glowacki's *Antigone in New York*

Week 14

Mon. Dec. 3: The Didactic Politics of Tragedy

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

Assignment: Aristophanes, *Frogs*; Brecht's Theory of Alienation (excerpts to be distributed) - Wrap up.

Wed. Dec.7: Final Performances; Second Essay Due

*** Date and Place of Final Exam TBA**