

URI ONLINE, Summer 2024

## **Classics 397**

Greek Myth and Tragedy

ONLINE

May 21, 2024 – June 20, 2024

**Instructor:**

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**Required texts:**

Joint Association of Classical Teachers, *The World of Athens* (Cambridge, 2008)

Aeschylus, *Aeschylus One: Oresteia, Agamemnon, the Libation Bearers, the Eumenides* (Chicago, 1969)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Aeschylus Two: Prometheus Bound, Seven Against Thebes, The Persians, The Suppliant Maidens* (Chicago, 1997)

Sophocles, *Complete Plays*, trans. Sir Richard Jebb (Bantam 1991)

Euripides, *Ten Plays*, trans. Moses Hadas (Bantam 1990)

(plus supplementary materials to be provided throughout the course)

**Course description:**

Relationship between Greek myth and classical tragedy, birth and evolution of tragedy (ancient, medieval, French, English, American), employment of the same myth for different dramatic and political purposes. Readings in English translation.

## **Introduction:**

The tales of Greek mythology are over twenty-seven hundred years old, surviving from their particular religious and socio-political cultures. This course will focus on what became one of the most dramatic and graphic means of relating Greek myth: the art of *stage tragedy*. As we read the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, we will set them in their ancient context in order to examine the prominent role then played by the tragic playwright, political and social as well as literary. We will explore the historical and cultural background of the city of Athens, where these tragedies were performed. Then we will lay especial emphasis on the *multiple usages* of the same myths by different authors, and demonstrate how those myths served those authors' purposes to experiment with the tragic genre, and convey their own particular messages, reflecting contemporary political and military trends, through their chosen myths and variations thereof.

The course is intended to be an introduction to Greek myth and tragedy. No prior background or reading is expected from the students. My teaching philosophy is to encourage the students to read the primary texts critically and to draw their own observations and conclusions. They are not expected to conduct rigorous scholarly research. Always my own presentation of the texts ought to be seen as one of many possible explanations; absolute knowledge in this field of study is usually not possible, nor even desirable.

The Greeks related their myths with a strikingly anthropocentric — man-centered — point of view; as Ken Dowden points out in *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (Routledge, 1992), p. 133: “Greek myth is more affected by dungeon-masters than by dragons.” This preconception with humanism in Greek myth has the important ramification of creating gods and heroes that are more *reflective* of human nature than removed from it. Humanism naturally begets imperfection and error, often fatal or incorrigible even when revealed. For our purpose in this course, the paramount consequence of this abiding humanism in myth is its predilection toward tragedy: the art of Greek drama, observable to us almost exclusively in its heyday of the religious festivals of fifth-century B.C. Athens, became the effective medium by which epic myths were transferred to the stage, unflinching in their bleakness. As the students read the textbook and the tragic plays, they will be asked repeatedly to observe how closely the myths mirror the real world of the people who told them, and to understand the moral lessons of which the Greek tragedians wanted to persuade their audience.

## **Goals of the Course:**

(a) To introduce the students to a selection of Greek tragedies that relate on stage popular stories from Greek mythology. To underscore the use of the *same myths* told in various ways by *different authors*. To relate tragic drama to the city of Athens in which tragic plays were produced.

(b) To allow the students to learn what questions to ask as they read works of literature or view works of art, and what methodology to use to go about answering their questions.

(c) To enable the students to read the textbook critically, to move beyond the textbook and draw their own observations from the ancient readings, and to present these ideas coherently in class.

### **Objectives for Students:**

(a) As the ancients did, to feel FEAR and PITY, and ultimately CATHARSIS (spiritual cleansing), as they read the tragedies. To comprehend the humanistic valence of Greek myth, and to realize that Greek gods and heroes are far more human than super-human. To appreciate the endurance of these works of literature that have survived through twenty-five centuries of war, unrest, and decay.

(b) To distinguish between primary (ancient) and secondary (modern scholarly) literature, and to read both critically. To perceive the different genres of myth through which the Greeks communicated their ideas and philosophical outlook on themselves and the cities and peoples around them.

(c) To address questions posed to them by making observations and drawing conclusions that are based on the *evidence of the primary texts*. To use their observations to determine the agenda of the tragic playwrights: was the play intended, for instance, to entertain, inform, educate, persuade, or inspire?

(d) To share their findings online, including giving feedback to other students' submissions, thereby working as a team to determine the messages which the Roman myths are designed to convey.

(e) To apply their greater understanding of Greek myth and tragedy to the broader context of the Greek world at large and to the Western world down to our own time.

### **Mythology \*LINKS\*:**

- (a) Univ. of Vermont, Hope Greenberg: Ovid Project  
(<http://www.uvm.edu/~hag/ovid/index.html>)
- (b) Encyclopedia Mythica  
(<http://www.pantheon.org>)
- (c) Myths and Legends  
(<http://pubpages.unh.edu/~cbsiren/myth2.html>)
- (d) MYTHMEDIA — Mythology in Western Art  
([http://lib.haifa.ac.il/www/art/MYTHOLOGY\\_WESTART.HTML](http://lib.haifa.ac.il/www/art/MYTHOLOGY_WESTART.HTML))
- (e) Internet Sacred Text Archive  
(<http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm>)
- (f) BookRags  
(<http://www.bookrags.com>)
- (g) PERSEUS (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>)

**Format:**

1. The format for each class session (Tuesday through Thursday each week) is that students will get online at least once each week. By the time they get online, they should have read the assigned readings, and if they have questions about them, they should contact me online or by phone, text, or e-mail **IN ADVANCE** of the day itself so that they will be able to complete each online assignment with enough understanding of the text. This includes being able to **CITE SPECIFIC PASSAGES FROM ANCIENT TEXTS** when requested to be able to support their views – an indispensable skill for writing Essays on the Midterm and Final Exam deserving of high grades.
2. The daily procedure online is as follows:

Each student logs on each day class is in session (Tuesday through Thursday).

- a. The students go through the outline in the Calendar and watch all videos under You-Tube Video Links for that day. In addition, they must complete in writing answers to **ONE** of any Discussion Questions assigned that day and submit their answers in direct print (not attached) on the Brightspace Forum. Each student may choose whichever question he/she wishes to answer. For instance, on Wednesday 5/22/2024, the student will answer one question from Discussion Questions Week 1a. (TIP: Even if you choose not to write out an outline from Question #1, you should still make an outline for yourself to be sure you know each play's plot.)
- b. **IMPORTANT:** After completing his/her own work, the student is **REQUIRED** to **ENTER A RESPONSE** to **AT LEAST ONE** other student's entry (preferably multiple such) for that class session. (You may also use that opportunity to add responses to prior sessions, and these can be used to catch up if you were unable to complete this commitment any prior session.) This class is meant to encourage far more dialogue among you the students than between you and me the instructor. For that reason, I will keep my own intervention in the conversations to a relative minimum. Students' responses will be tabulated on the Gradebook on Brightspace.

**The students' responses to other students' entries count as attendance in class for that session. Failure to provide a student response any session counts as an unexcused absence for that session. Entering ZERO student responses through the course will disqualify the student from receiving a Course Grade and the student will automatically receive NW or F.**

(Dialogue among students is expected to maintain decorum and mutual respect at all times, with use of appropriate language. Any violation

thereof, including but not limited to use of foul, abusive, or insulting language, will be grounds for disciplining the offending student, to the extent of expulsion from the class if that is called for.)

- c. On days on which **EXAMS** are due, the students complete Exams at their own pace, but are expected to complete the Exams if possible in a **SINGLE SITTING**. Once finished, the students must submit Exams as **SINGLE COMPLETE DOCUMENTS** in their Dropboxes by the end of each **DAY OF THE EXAM** to avoid getting Late Deductions (these are assessed, at the Professor's discretion, as 10 points off for each day late). Exams preferably should be in Word or PDF document format.
- d. On days on which **\*\*\* PRESENTATIONS \*\*\*** are due (Characters or the Debate/Trial about Medea), the students may complete their compositions in advance and submit them online on the Brightspace Forum in direct print (not attached). These are due in by their **DAYS** listed on the Calendar below and specified in their descriptions (the file under Assignments).
- e. **IMPORTANT:** As an alternative to written-out answers, students are **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED** to submit answers in video format on the Forums. Additionally students are encouraged to reach out to me and arrange time with me in person (preferably at URI Providence) or by online chat session to deliver his/her answers or other discussion about the class content. Students who wish to arrange this should reach out to me to schedule mutually convenient times.

### 3. BE ADVISED!

- a. Grade deductions will be taken for unexcused absences (which occur if a student fails to enter at least one response to another student's entry any session) and for Forum Assignments entered late on the Forums (after the Friday due date listed on each Forum) or missed altogether. The **MIDTERM EXAM**, if missed, may be made up only at my individual discretion, and only with a 10-point deduction taken off the **MIDTERM EXAM** grade for each session late.
- b. **MIDTERM** and **FINAL EXAMS** are to be submitted to me by e-mail. The students **MUST** get the Exams in to me by the end of the day on the due dates, or start incurring 10-point deductions for late submission. Each Exam will be accessible to students under Resources on Brightspace after its Review date.
- c. Both the **MIDTERM EXAM** and the **FINAL EXAM** include an **OPEN-BOOK** essay, which counts 60% of the grade and usually runs 5-6 typed pages (1.5 or 2-line space, 12 or 14 font). You may use whatever materials you wish – books, notes, etc. – to prepare the essay. However, you must give proper credit for any source you use – aside from class texts – with a

footnote or endnote and bibliography at the end. Additionally, on the first day of class every student must initial the Oath of Academic Honesty stored in the Brightspace Forum. Failure to observe Closed-Book protocol constitutes cheating, and failure to provide proper credit for sources used constitutes PLAGIARISM, and....

d. Suspected PLAGIARISM is grounds for failing an Exam.

e. On the more positive side, there are opportunities for EXTRA CREDIT, including (but not limited to) submitting written essays on agreed-upon topics, or doing other online projects. In addition, at my discretion, a student may be allowed one time to retake an unsatisfactory **MIDTERM EXAM**, with a new improved grade supplanting the older grade completely. Students interested in either of these may contact me. All Extra Credit projects (and make-up projects if permitted) are due in by the last session of the course before the **FINAL EXAM**, and will NOT be accepted at any time thereafter.

f. HELPFUL SUMMER HINT: For the purposes of grading this summer Course, the student is not required to pass in any assignments for the week until the Friday at the end of that week. If they pass all the week's assignments by that Friday, the assignments will be accepted without any Late Penalty.

g. Students with documented disabilities should contact me privately about any necessary accommodations.

4. Near the end of the course students will choose a video to watch online or on their own: possibly *Black Orpheus*, *Trojan Women*, *300*, or *Immortals* (other suggestions are welcome).

Grading: 20% performance in class (including attendance by student response, plus the general impression the student has made on me through the class; however, SEE IMPORTANT NOTES BELOW)  
40% **MIDTERM EXAM**  
40% **FINAL EXAM**  
(Bonus Points are added to the total # of course points before the average is taken.)

**IMPORTANT:** If a student fails to turn in a COMPLETE Midterm, OR makes zero responses to other students' entries, by the last day of the course before the Final Exam, the student may automatically receive an NW or F grade. This also applies if the student fails to turn in a COMPLETE Final Exam before grades are due in to the University. The instructor reserves the right to enforce this policy strictly or to mitigate it based on extenuating circumstances.

**IMPORTANT:** The instructor also reserves the right, after calculating a Course Grade mathematically, to shift the result up or down based on his own personal judgement of what the student really deserves, or if there are unusual circumstances warranting the shift.

*Eutychoiete, O mathetai!* (Good luck, students!)

## Syllabus of Assignments

Read *The World of Athens* in its entirety  
in advance of the **MIDTERM EXAM**.

### Week 1

Tues. May 21 Introduction

Wed. May 22 *The World of Athens*, Chapters 1 & 2  
*Aeschylus Persians*  
BRIGHTSPACE: Map of Ancient Greece  
Athenian Empire 431 B.C.  
Handout #1 (Aeschylus)  
Discussion Questions, Week #1a  
ATHENS DAY, Weeks #2 & 4

Thurs. May 23 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 3  
*Aeschylus Seven Against Thebes*  
BRIGHTSPACE: Discussion Questions, Week #1b  
Presentations, Weeks #3 & 5

### Week 2

Tues. May 28 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 4  
*Aeschylus Oresteia*  
\*\*\* ATHENS DAY #1 \*\*\*

Wed. May 29 Sophocles *Electra*  
BRIGHTSPACE: Handout #2 (Sophocles)  
Discussion Questions, Week #2

Thurs. May 30 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 5  
Sophocles *Antigone; Oedipus Tyrannus*  
\*\*\* ATHENS DAY #2 \*\*\*

### Week 3

Tues. June 4 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 6  
Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus*  
\*\*\* PRESENTATIONS \*\*\*  
BRIGHTSPACE: Midterm Exam Review Sheet (after class)

Wed. June 5 Review for **MIDTERM EXAM**

Thurs. June 6 **MIDTERM EXAM** (due date for electronic submission)

Week 4

Tues. June 11 Euripides *Electra*  
BRIGHTSPACE: Handout #3 (Euripides)  
Discussion Questions, Week #4a

Wed. June 12 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 7  
Euripides *Trojan Women*  
BRIGHTSPACE: Discussion Questions, Week #4b

Thurs. June 13 Euripides *Bacchae*  
\*\*\* ATHENS DAY #3 \*\*\*

Week 5

Tues. June 18 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 8  
Euripides *Medea*  
\*\*\* DEBATE / TRIAL \*\*\*

Wed. June 19 *The World of Athens*, Chapter 9 (Postscript)  
Video; Review for **FINAL EXAM**  
BRIGHTSPACE: Final Exam Study Guide (after class)

Thurs. June 20 **FINAL EXAM**

The Greek Myth & Tragedy **MIDTERM EXAM** and **FINAL EXAM** will each consist of two sections: the first will be closed-book, the second open-book.