

GREEK TRAGEDY

Syllabus

INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Greek playwrights were remarkable for their canny understanding of human nature and their innovative ability to translate this sensibility into dramatic form – a form which has remained popular and indelible for millennia. The plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are noteworthy not only because they begin the historical cycle of classical tragedy, but because of their early, innovative understanding of how plays can illustrate the human condition in a compelling, engaging way. The plays' mix of violence, evil, heroism, jealousy, and ambition; and the playwrights' canny use of melodrama and soap opera devices to further plot and character make the plays perennially interesting. Understanding Greek drama is to understand the form of drama itself.

The course will focus on theme, character, plot, style, and historical, mythical, and literary origins; and because the plays are so influential for the rise and continued popularity of classical and modern drama, references will be made to later important literary achievements, only one example of which is Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, a trilogy based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

SCHEDULE

AESCHYLUS

Week 1: *Agamemnon*

Week 2: *The Libation Bearers*

Week 3: *Eumenides*

Week 4: *Mourning Becomes Electra (O'Neill)*

SOPHOCLES

Week 5: *Oedipus Rex*

Week 6: *Oedipus at Colonus*

Week 7: *Antigone*

EURIPIDES

Week 8: *Electra* (both Sophocles' and Euripides' versions)

Week 9: *Helen*

Week 10: *The Trojan Women*

FORMAT

Classes will include lecture (60 percent) and discussion (40 percent). The lecture will be based on literary criticism, with frequent references to relevant critics, and the instructor's own reading and interpretation.

READING

It is expected that the plays to be discussed will be read before class. Most of the plays are of reasonable length but some are longer and may require more time. The plays of Aeschylus are more stylistically complex and may take more time to read, understand, and assimilate than those of the other playwrights. The compendium, *The Greek Plays*, edited by Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm, is an excellent one volume source for reading; and the translations are excellent.

PARTICULARS

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