



Course Title: The Tragedies of Aeschylus

Course Code: CLA 77

Instructor Name: Barbara Clayton

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Mondays, July 7 - August 14, 7-9pm PT

Meeting location: On-Campus (details will be shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)

The class sessions will not be recorded.

Course Features

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, and Q&A
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Instructor will provide feedback on assignments

Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
 - Students must attend at least five of the six class sessions. Students must also submit, on Canvas, a very brief reader's response to the play we are reading for that week. I'm looking for a personal response, not a fully formed interpretation! This could be as simple as a single question, or highlighting a passage you found to be of special beauty or interest. There is no length requirement. All reader responses will be acknowledged, and I will respond to each one.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - Students must attend five sessions and submit a reader's response each week as above. Students must also write a 5-6 page paper on a topic of your choosing. The paper could be a traditional interpretative essay on one of our plays, but it need not be. Other possibilities include but are not limited to: a comparison of different translations of a play, or of a passage from a particular play; a critique of a performance of one of the plays.

**Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Learning Objectives

Our main work will be a close reading and discussion of 5 Aeschylean tragedies. By the end of our course students will:

- Have an appreciation for the technical artistry of Aeschylus, in terms of language, themes, and dramatic power
- Have a deeper understanding of the plays through a familiarity with what current historical and political issues shaped Aeschylus' handling of his mythic material
- Come away with a sense of what is distinctive about Aeschylean tragedy

Textbooks/Required Materials

Required:

The Complete Greek Tragedies, Aeschylus I, David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, eds. (Univ. of Chicago Press)

The Complete Greek Tragedies, Aeschylus II, David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, eds.

(Univ. of Chicago Press)

Recommended:

A Commentary on the Complete Greek Tragedies. Aeschylus, James C. Hogan (Univ. of Chicago Press)

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week 1:

Introduction to 5th century Athenian tragedy: What do we know about its origins? Where and when were the tragedies performed? What were the specific conventions associated with tragedy? What exactly was the chorus, and how did that work?

Week 2:

The *Agamemnon*: Agamemnon's return from Troy sets the stage for this play. He arrives as a victorious hero, but the brutal sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia at the beginning of the war overshadows his triumph, as a constant reminder of the price he has paid. This is the first play in our only extant trilogy, so we will want to tease out how Aeschylus lays the groundwork here for the remaining two plays, especially in terms of thematic motifs and a complex network of imagery. The central question concerns justice, and two strongly competing claims for who is in the right.

Week 3:

The *Libation Bearers*: The question of justice continues to run through this play as does the issue of revenge. Our focus will be on Agamemnon's daughter Electra, who longs for the return of her brother Orestes to avenge Clytemnestra's murder of their father. We will read a selection of passages from both Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra* (available on Canvas) to get a sense of how these tragic poets differed from their Aeschylean model in their treatment of the same story.

Week 4:

The *Eumenides*: The *Oresteia* trilogy comes to a close with this play. The potentially endless cycle of revenge is brought to a close, and the prominent themes and recurring images knit together into a coherent whole. The central question of justice is resolved in a move that, astonishingly, transfers us from the world of myth to the world of the nascent democracy in 5th century Athens. There will be supplementary reading (on Canvas) to provide background on the development and functioning of Athenian democracy.

Week 5:

The *Persians*: This is the only extant historical play in all of Greek tragedy. Aeschylus himself fought at the Battle of Marathon, and he considered it one of the most important achievements of his entire life. The play's central character is Persia's King Cyrus. We will be particularly interested in seeing how Aeschylus' characterization of Cyrus reveals Athenian attitudes towards 'barbarian' non-Greeks. To deepen our understanding of this play we will also read a few sections from Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars in his *Histories* (available on Canvas).

Week 6:

Prometheus Bound: This play is about a struggle between Prometheus, a venerable god in his own right, and Zeus, the undisputed king of all gods and men. The characterization of Zeus is the main crux of this play, especially the fact that Aeschylus has presented him as a ruthless tyrant, which is very much unlike the profound piety we find in the other tragedies. Prometheus is a proud and defiant rebel, who has challenged Zeus, not to usurp his power, but to benefit mankind. A second feature of this unusual tragedy is the fact that the main character spends most of the play chained to a big rock, unable to move! Supplemental reading for this week will be the account of Prometheus Hesiod gives us in the *Theogony*, and a second, slightly different one, in *Works and Days* (available on Canvas).