PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

Course Title:  Five Phaedras: Re-Envisioning a Classic Myth
Course Code:  CLA 60
Quarter:  Winter 2017
Instructor:  Barbara Clayton

Course Description:
In this course we will use the myth of Phaedra to explore what we call the Classical Tradition. The Classical Tradition is a way of thinking about how later cultures interpreted and re-imagined ancient Greece and Rome. We will be using the myth of Phaedra to time-travel from the world of 5th century Athens to the world of American and European cinema in 1962, looking at five very different dramatizations of Phaedra’s story. Our goal is to understand the way each of these complex re-tellings of the myth reflects its own time period, each with distinctive values, ideology and artistic principles, while essentially telling the same story.

Our Five Phaedras:
Hippolytus by Euripides, translated by Diane Arnson Svarlian (2007)
Phèdre by Racine, translated by Ted Hughes (2000)
Phaedra by Marina Tsvetaeva, translated by Zara Martirosova Torlone (2012)
Phaedra by Jules Dassin, a movie (1962)

Grade Options and Requirements:

No Grade Requested:  This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
CR/NC:  Submit a one page reader’s response to each of the 5 Phaedra texts.
Letter grade:  A 5-6 page paper on a topic of your choosing.

*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.
Weekly Outline:

Week 1:
Understanding the Classical Tradition: what it is and how it works; a broad historical overview.
The big question: How does a culture define itself in relation to its past? In imitation or in opposition?

Week 2:
Euripides’ *Hippolytus*
What qualities does Euripides emphasize in his Phaedra? (Note that in this, our first, Phaedra, she is not the principal character; her step-son Hippolytus is the tragic hero.)
What does Phaedra tell us about Greek attitudes towards women? About the power of desire?

Week 3:
Seneca’s *Phaedra*
Seneca was a Roman Stoic philosopher and thus very interested in the power of the emotions; he was also a part of Nero’s inner circle and experienced Nero’s tyrannical excesses at first hand. How is this reflected in his portrayal of Phaedra?

Week 4:
Racine’s *Phèdre*
We move to 17th century France and the court of Louis XIV, the “Sun King.” Racine’s *Phèdre* belongs to a period in which Neo-classicism was the order of the day, with an emphasis on elegance, restraint and simplicity. How does this impact the characterization of Phaedra? Moreover, Racine changes the plot with the addition of a new character. We will want to consider how the change affects our interpretation of the tragedy.

Week 5:
Marina Tsvetaeva’s *Phaedra*
Tsvetaeva, born in 1892, lived through the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. She left Russia after losing a daughter to the great famine that followed the Revolution, and lived for many years in Europe, where her *Phaedra* was written in 1928. Hers is our only *Phaedra* written by a woman.

Week 6:
Jules Dassin’s *Phaedra*
Dassin brings Phaedra into the 20th century in his 1962 film, in which she is the wife of a Greek shipping tycoon. Does retelling this myth as a contemporary drama significantly alter our response to it? How does the filmmaker use visual techniques to translate important themes and motifs we have seen in our earlier versions?