

LIT 351 | Attic Tragedy In Translation
Spring Semester 2026

Course Instructor: Demetrios Kritsotakis
Email: demetrios.kritsotakis@cyathens.org

Course Description

This course is intended to introduce the student to the work of the great tragedians of the fifth century BC (Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles). From the end of the Persian Wars to the battle of Aegospotami, the Athenian state flourished in an unprecedented way that marked the history of the western world. It is in this time frame that tragedy emerged as the culmination of the literary tradition of the eighth-sixth centuries BC and the product of the prosperity of the "golden era" of Athens. Thus, the plays of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles are both a fascinating way into the wider political, social, and religious culture of fifth-century Athens and a rich part of, and an important tool for the study of theater in antiquity and nowadays.

The course consists of lectures, in which the instructor will introduce and comment on various topics; and reading and discussion of the ancient texts, in which the students will contribute their own ideas. The lectures will offer background information, close examination of select texts, and identification of important issues in the plays. The tragedies in discussion in this course will be analyzed with respect to each poet's language and style. At the same time, they will be considered in their literary, cultural, intellectual, and historical contexts, and the following questions will be addressed: what was the Attic tragedy; how and why did it emerge; what were the mechanisms of theatrical production in ancient Greece; how did the plays relate to the events of the fifth century; what is the impact of ancient tragedy on modern culture; why and how those plays influence the 21st century reader, and so on. No previous knowledge is required, and all texts will be studied in translation.

Also, as part of our class activities, we will visit and have a class meeting at the Theater of Dionysus, where the City Dionysia festival was celebrated and the great tragedians competed!

Learning Objectives

This course will primarily teach students to:

- Read independently across the whole range of Attic tragedy texts.
- "Feel" the spirit of a play and the ethics of its characters.
- Engage confidently with Greek literature in translation.
- Be aware of the impact and relevance of Attic tragedy today.
- Develop and improve their critical abilities in the study of literature.
- Recognize the role of the texts in the history of Greece and the literature produced there
- Read and review modern scholarship and show where they stand with respect to it
- Write an academic paper

Texts

In order for students to gain a good understanding of the variety and evolution of Attic tragedy, it is necessary that they read closely a selection of plays from all major tragedians of 5th c. Athens. These plays are:

Aeschylus

The Eumenides

Sophocles

Antigone

Oedipus the King

Euripides

Hippolytus

Medea

The Bacchae

As the course proceeds, discussion will be more and more comparative in focus, and for this reason passages from other plays and modern scholarship will be addressed.

A selection of study material will be available in the course's moodle page, which will be updated regularly.

Course Requirements

Class Contribution – Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, and participation in class discussions. Class contribution is one of the most important factors for determining your grade for the semester. You are expected to have all assignments completed (reading, review of modern scholarship, and so on) before you come to class.

It is very important that you come well prepared to our meetings: read the texts closely, think about the questions raised, and bring your own ideas and questions in class. You are encouraged to consult with the instructor on all matters pertaining to the course: difficulties in mastering the texts, complications in proceeding through the materials of the course, and so on. Do not be afraid to ask questions, volunteer to read or answer questions.

Play Essays – There will be two in-class play essay exams. Upon completion of a play (or group of plays) you will be asked to write a short essay (2 pages) on a topic pertaining to the content or context of it.

Midterm Exam – This exam will consist of 3 short essays (2 pages each) and cover the material (plays and scholarship) already discussed in class.

Research Paper and Presentation – Students are expected to write one research paper of about 3000 words (Times New Roman, size 12, double-spaced) excluding bibliography. Students can choose their own topic or select one in discussion with the instructor. Individual titles and bibliography will be agreed after consultation. You are encouraged to discuss research topics with the instructor by **early March** (at the very latest).

The paper will be graded on:

- originality of thought
- critical analysis of an aspect or aspects of a tragedy
- clarity of argument and structure
- variety of evidence and bibliography used

Students are also expected to make an oral presentation of their topic in class. That should be about 15 minutes long, and you should be ready to answer questions and discuss issues pertaining to your topic with the instructor and your colleagues.

Those who wish to turn in rough drafts of their papers for consultation are welcomed to do so by **Friday, May 8**. The deadline for the submission of the final research paper is **Friday, May 15**.

Grading and Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Class Contribution 15%
Play Essays 20%
Midterm Exam 25%
Paper Presentation 10%
Research Paper 30%

Grading Scale:

A+ 100-98	B+ 89-87	C+ 79-77	D+ 69-67	F 59-
A 97-93	B 86-83	C 76-73	D 66-63	
A- 92-90	B- 82-80	C- 72-70	D- 62-60	

Please note: in the name of fairness to all students, there will be no extra points awarded, even if you are very close to a higher letter grade.

CYA Regulations and Accommodations

Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

Policy on Assignments and Make-up Work

I will accept no late assignments or make-up exams except for valid excuses that will be communicated to me in advance. If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand.

ePolicy on Original Work

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be.

Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

N.B. The use of cell phones is prohibited during class time.

Academic Accommodations

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

Class Schedule

Class Day	Day/Date	Topics/ Reading/ Assignments
	Jan 22-24	Field Study: Delphi and Ancient Olympia
1	Jan 26	Lecture: Introduction- From viewer to reader: "Reading" a tragedy on stage
2	Jan 28	Lecture: Origins and cultural context of the dramatic festivals in Athens Reading: The Eumenides
3	Jan 30	Lecture: Theatrical space and staging Reading: The Eumenides
4	Feb 2	Lecture: The development of Attic tragedy in the 5 th century Reading: The Eumenides
5	Feb 4	Essay 1 Lecture: The art of acting
6	Feb 9	Lecture: Music in Ancient Drama Reading: Oedipus the King
	Feb 11-14	Field Study: Northern Greece
7	Feb 16	Lecture: Dance and the chorus Reading: Oedipus the King
8	Feb 18	Lecture: Aristotle's Poetics and its relevance to 5 th c. tragedy Reading: Oedipus the King
	Feb 23	Clean Monday (National Holiday)
9	Feb 25	Lecture: Drama, Kingship, and Democratic Sentiments Reading: Antigone
10	Feb 27	Lecture: Divine Will and Self-Determination Reading: Antigone
11	Mar 2	Reading: Antigone
12	Mar 4	Lecture: Act like a man, behave like a woman: representation of women in tragedy
	Mar 5	Class Day Trip
13	Mar 9	Midterm Exam
14	Mar 11	Reading: Hippolytus
15	Mar 16	Reading: Hippolytus
	Mar 18-21	Field Study: Abroad
16	Mar 23	Reading: Medea
	Mar 25	Greek Independence Day (National Holiday)
17	Mar 30	Reading: Medea
18	Apr 1	Lecture: The Impact of Attic tragedy on renaissance drama Reading: Medea
	Apr 3-13	Spring Break
19	Apr 15	Essay 2

	Apr 17-19	Optional Field Study: Crete
20	Apr 20	<i>Paper Presentations</i>
	Apr 22-24	Field Study: Peloponnese
21	Apr 27	<i>Paper Presentations</i>
	Apr 28	Student Conference
22	Apr 29	<i>Lecture: Echoes of Greek tragedy and myth in cinema</i> <i>Reading: The Bacchae</i>
	May 1	May Day (Labor Day) National Holiday
23	May 4	<i>Reading: The Bacchae</i>
24	May 6	<i>Reading: The Bacchae</i>
FEW	May 15	<i>Submission of Final Paper</i>

N.B.: **Class schedule**, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and in keeping up to date with current research.

Course Bibliography

- Arnott P.D. (1965), *An Introduction to the Greek Theatre*. New York
- Bieber M. (1971), *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*. Princeton
- Carter D.M. (2007), *The Politics of Greek Tragedy*. Bristol
- Csapo E. & Slater W. (1995), *The Context of Ancient Drama*. Ann Arbor
- Dillon J.M. & Wilmer S.E. (2005), *Rebel Women: staging ancient Greek drama today*. London
- Duncan A. (2006), *Performance and Identity in the Classical World*. Cambridge & New York
- Easterling P.E. (ed.) (1997), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge
- Easterling P.E. & Hall E. (2002), *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*. Cambridge & New York
- Edmunds L. & Wallace R.W. (1997), *Poet, Public, and Performance in Ancient Greece*. Baltimore & London
- Ehrenberg V. (1954), *Sophocles and Pericles*. Oxford
- Fergusson F. (1961), *Aristotle's Poetics*. New York
- Foley H.P. (1991), *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*. Princeton & Oxford
- Garland R. (2004), *Surviving Greek Tragedy*. London
- Gentili B. (1990), *Poetry and its Public in Ancient Greece: from Homer to the fifth century*. Baltimore & London
- Goldhill S. & Osborne R. (1999), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*. Cambridge & New York
- Goldhill S. (2007), *How to Stage a Greek Tragedy Today*. Chicago
- Gregory J. (1991), *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians*. Ann Arbor
- Grube G.M.A. (1958), *Aristotle: On Poetry and Style*. Indianapolis & Cambridge
- Hall E. et alii (2004), *Dionysus Since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*. Oxford
- Hall E. (2006), *The Theatrical Cast of Athens: interactions between Ancient Greek drama and society*. Oxford
- Jones J. (1962), *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*. Oxford
- Lawler L.B. (1964), *The Dance in Ancient Greece*. London
- Ley G. (2007), *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: playing space and chorus*. Chicago & London
- McClure L. (1999), *Spoken like a Woman: speech and gender in Athenian drama*. Princeton
- Michellini A.N. (1987), *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*. Madison
- Pickard-Cambridge Sir A. (1968), *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*. Oxford
- Podlecki A.J. (1999), *The political background of Aeschylean tragedy*. London
- Rabinowitz N.S. (1993), *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*. Ithaca
- Rehm R. (1992), *Greek tragic theatre*. London & New York
- Rehm R. (2003), *Radical Theater: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*. London
- Storey I.C. & Allan A. (2005), *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*. Malden, MA
- Syropoulos S.D. (2003), *Gender and the Social Function of Athenian Tragedy*. Oxford
- Taplin O. (1977), *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford
- Taplin O. (1983), *Greek Tragedy in Action*. London
- Vernant J.P. & Vidal-Naquet P. (1990), *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. New York
- Walton J.M. (1984), *The Greek Sense of Theatre: tragedy reviewed*. London
- Webster T.B.L. (1969), *An introduction to Sophocles*. London & New York
- Webster T.B.L. (1970), *Greek Theatre Production*. London
- West M.L. (1994), *Ancient Greek Music*. Oxford
- Wiles D. (1997), *Tragedy in Athens: performance space and theatrical meaning*. Cambridge
- Wiles D. (2000), *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction*. Cambridge
- Wilson P. (2000), *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia: the chorus, the city, and the stage*. Cambridge
- Winkler J.J. & Zeitin F.I. (1990), *Nothing to do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*. Princeton
- Winnington-Ingram R.P. (1990), *Sophocles: An interpretation*. Cambridge
- Zelenak M.X. (1998), *Gender and Politics in Greek Tragedy*. New York
- Zuntz G. (1955), *The Political Plays of Euripides*. Manchester
- Zyl Smit B. v. (2016), *A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama*. Chichester, West Sussex