

TH 555: Classical Greek and Roman Drama

Prof. Steve Burch, RJ 219 348-0343, sburch@as.ua.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

Required Texts:

Marianne McDonald: *Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*

Individual texts by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Menander, Seneca, Plautus, Terrence (all from Gorgas Library); plus handouts in class

Prerequisites: TH 551, or instructor's permission

Course Description:

This will be a comprehensive introduction to the beginnings of western theatre theory and praxis, playwriting, and cultural history. When Athens organized the first festival devoted to drama in 534 BCE, it set in motion a sophisticated means of expression, cultural and political argumentation, and community celebration which has guided western arts for 2500 years. Under Rome, what had started out as a civic and religious duty in Athens became a commercial enterprise of spectacle, and these twin foundations have remained in the theatre ever since. Twenty-one out forty-three complete and extant plays from Greece and four extant Roman plays will be read, discussed, viewed and occasionally performed, along with several key essays by Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Quintillian and Tertullian.

Learner-Centered Outcomes:

1. To grasp the beginnings of western theatre practice and why it occurred in a single place when it did
2. To understand and articulate the links between the classical theatre and our modern theatre
3. To argue the moral effects of such theatre on the community, both from its citizens and from our postmodern perspective

Papers and Presentations:

At the beginning of the semester, students will be assigned one or two plays to present to the class. These presentations will consist of background information (historical, cultural, and biographical), the plot structure of the play, an analysis of its characters, themes, and production/performance challenges, and lead a discussion on the relevance of the play to our current society and what a production today would consist of and look like.

Students will also be required to write a research paper, 12-15 pages, on a subject agreed upon between the student and the instructor. It will be due at the time of the final exam and will be preceded by an annotated bibliography.

Attendance Policy:

This is a class which depends on its students to be present for discussions and arguments. Sometimes life takes over and interrupts our schedules. Accordingly each student is allowed two (2) unexcused absences during the semester. Use them wisely and sparingly. Do not treat them as freebies. You will be responsible for all the information in the class you have missed, whether the absence is excused or not.

While there are no exams in this class, there will be the occasional quiz on the reading. Stay current.

Grades:

Research Paper: 400 points

Annotated Bibliography: 100 points

Presentation: 150 points each, total 300 points

Classroom Participation: 200

Total 1000 points

Schedule: (still being determined)

Development of themes, styles, dramaturgy

Aeschylus (A), Sophocles (S), Euripides (E), Aristophanes (AR), Menander (M), Herondas (H), Seneca (SN), Plautus (P), Terrence (T)

Greek Stories: 1.) Trojan War and Return of the Heroes; 2.) Theban Civil war; 3.) Wars (Persian, Trojan, Peloponesian); 4.) Gods and Myths; 5.) Athenian Society, Vales, Justice; 6.) Domestic Life

- 1.) Trojan War and the Return: *Iphigenia in Aulis* (E), *Philoctates* (S), *Trojan Women* (E)
- 2.) Theban civil war: *Seven Against Thebes* (A), *Antigone* (S), *The Phoenician Women* (E)
- 3.) Wars: *The Persians* (A), *Ajax* (S), *Hecuba* (E), *Lysistrata* (AR)
- 4.) Gods and Myths: *Prometheus Bound* (A), *Oedipus the King* (S), *Herakles* (E), *The Bacchae* (E), *Cyclops* (E)
- 5.) Athenian Society: *The Oresteia* (A), *Elektra* (S) and (E), *The Frogs* (AR), *The Clouds* (AR)
- 6.) Domestic Life: *Women Celebrating the Festival of the Thesmophoria* (AR), *Dyskolos* (M), *Mimes* (H), *Alcestis* (E)

Essays Greek: Plato (from *The Republic*); Aristotle (*The Poetics*); Sue-Ellen Case ("Classic Drag")

Roman Theatre: 1.) Greek stories; 2.) Roman stories

- 1.) Greek Stories: *Medea* (SN), *Phaedra* (SN), *The Menaechmi* (P)
- 2.) Roman stories: *Phormio* (T)

Essays Roman: Horace (from *Ars Poetica*), Cicero, Quintillian, Tertullian