

The Other Plays of Aeschylus, Professor Alex Purves

Hopefully at least once in a Classics class at UCLA you will have read Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, but it is less likely that you will have spent much time with his other surviving plays:

The Persians

The Suppliant Women

Seven Against Thebes

*Prometheus Bound (*disputed authorship)

In this class, we will spend time reading these four plays carefully and discussing the scholarly questions that surround them. We will also delve into the remaining fragments of Aeschylus in order to acquire a broader sense of his work and style. My hope is that an intensive period of time spent studying the "other" plays of Aeschylus will give you the opportunity to build upon the foundations of your reading in previous classes of the *Oresteia* and tragedy in general.

The goal of the class will be to develop your discussion and research skills, culminating in a substantial undergraduate research paper. Each student will present one in depth report and will come up with a research topic for a paper in consultation with me.

JANUARY 9/ Week 1: Meet at YRL. Introduction to scholarly resources, presentation from Classics librarian; Introductory lecture on Aeschylus.

JANUARY 18/ Week 2: each group will meet in YRL Research Commons at 2 - we will separate into study rooms # 12, 13, 14, 15. I will distribute laptops for you. You can upload images or notes that you will have researched over this week into the Dropbox account I have set up for Classics 191. I have set up a folder in that dropbox for each presentation. You may add an extra folder inside that one with your name. In your groups, I will give you 30 minutes to put together a 10 minute presentation on your topic and to discuss the various resources you looked at. We will present these google presentations (same as powerpoint, but using google docs) in the pod (R4) at 3.00. One person should work the computer, and the others should sit around / behind and contribute to the presentation.

Group David G: Early Greek Tragedy

Group David C: The Ancient Greek Theater in the Time of

Aeschylus

Group David S: Tetralogy

Assignment for next week: re-read *Persians*, the two readings assigned by me below, and one chosen by you. For the self-chosen article, turn in a paragraph reflection report by Monday of next week. Research through your own resources either 1) Persian Wars; 2) Aeschylean Stagecraft.

Articles (in dropbox)

Winnington-Ingram, R. P., "Zeus in *Persae*", in *Studies in Aeschylus*. Cambridge 1983.

Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, pp. 69-100.

JANUARY 25/ Week 3: The *Persians* (Public Policy 2325)

Discussion of articles

2 individual reports

Assignment for next week: two assigned articles. Work through Fragments and be prepared to discuss one fragment or collection of fragments (from a single play) before the class next week.

FEBRUARY 1/ Week 4: The *Persians & Fragments* (Public Policy 2325)

Discussion of articles

2 individual reports

Brief individual reports on fr.

Assignment for next week: *research and write short papers (3-5 pp.)* on *The Persians*.

FEBRUARY 8/ Week 5: (Research Commons, study rooms 12, 13, 14, 15)

Go to YRL for the entirety of the class period and research / write your paper. You might choose to work on the 5th floor of YRL; the Research Commons area; the Reference Library, or another space in YRL.

Note that some spaces in YRL are for quiet study and others allow for discussion. Choose the space that meets your needs. Everyone meets in a pod at 4.30 to sign in and discuss progress with their papers. I will be visiting the University of Toronto as a guest lecturer this week. Your papers are due by Sun 2/12.

Assignment for next week: read *Seven Against Thebes* and 2 assigned articles

FEBRUARY 15/ Week 6: *Seven Against Thebes* (Public Policy 2325)

Discussion of articles

3 individual reports

Assignment for next week: read the *Suppliants* and 2 assigned articles

FEBRUARY 22/ Week 7: The *Suppliants* (Public Policy 2325)

Discussion of articles

3 individual reports

Assignment for next week: read *Prometheus Bound* and 2 assigned articles

FEBRUARY 29/ Week 8: *Prometheus Bound* (Public Policy 2325)

Discussion of articles

2 individual reports

Assignment for next week: 3 assigned articles

MARCH 7/ Week 9

Aeschylus' Other Plays (Public Policy 2325)

3 individual reports

Assignment for next week: prepare abstract and bibliography for final paper.

MARCH 14/ Week 10: Paper Preparation and Idea/Resource Sharing (YRL).

Students separate into Individual Study Room depending on play they have chosen. Share abstracts, bibliography, and ideas within those groups. Regroup in classroom (Open / Interior) to discuss and present paper topics.

Abstracts

Kevin Armonio, "Mommy Knows Best: Mother-Son Dynamics in Aeschylus' *Persians*"

Aeschylus' *Persians* on the surface tells the story of a mother awaiting the return of her son from war. However viewing the play as a straightforward story of nostos, as simply the homecoming of Xerxes back to Persia, is too simple an interpretation and leaves out complexities that might not be apparent on the surface to a modern reader, particularly complexities of the family dynamics. Through an examination of familial relationships in the play, particularly the mother-son dynamic of Xerxes and Atossa it is possible to shed light on the complexities within the relationships of this family. Dissecting the relationship of Xerxes and Atossa in *Persians* through an inspection of the ancient sociology gives more depth to the understanding of the relationship. The ancient sociology shows that Atossa has many aspects of the actual Greek mother. Her actions while being those of a Greek mother have the dramatic affect on her relationship with Xerxes by transforming him from a man into a child. Through the text we are able to see how Atossa shows aspects of the actual Greek mother as well as how the relationship, despite being ancient, finds parallels in the modern day world.

Chelsea Brown, "Prophetic Speech in Aeschylean Tragedy"

This paper explores the relationship between the two prophecies with the *Agamemnon* and the *Persians*. I will argue that there is a similar relationship between the paired prophecies in both plays; namely, that what is foretold in the first vision is revealed, through the mirroring of images and the repetition of certain words, to have set in motion a crucially prophetic revelation whose full trajectory is not realized until the second vision has occurred. Ultimately, the recurrence of key symbols throughout each play is meant to encourage the characters to take heed of the final prophecies when they come. Both initial apparitions are therefore didactic in their promotion of piety and warn of the importance of the gods' messages.

Michael Chern, "Tragic Pity in Prometheus Bound"

Scholarship on pity in Greek tragedy has revolved around the Aristotelian idea of a tragedy invoking pity among the audience members. This paper seeks to answer the question of whether this tragic pity differed from everyday pity. Rachel Sternberg has argued that there was a difference in that feeling tragic pity did not entail a material cost while everyday pity carried with it the necessity to spend money or effort in order to act on it. I will argue that there was a difference between the two, but the difference between tragic pity and everyday pity lies in the context. Tragedy takes the audience outside the normal context of the day-to-day, thus allowing them to feel pity for kings and gods, figures who are usually outside their social circles. Therefore, one can distinguish tragic pity from everyday pity in that the former could be applied more broadly than the latter.

David Cochran, "Bia/Peitho in Aeschylus' Suppliants"

In Aeschylus' *Suppliants* persuasion is a key component in the way that the characters interact with their surroundings. Peitho is a Greek term that has many definitions but can simply be used as persuasion. The Greeks pride themselves on their ability to persuade through politics and rhetoric, while Barbarians are known for their commitment to force, or bia, which is believed to be the opposite of peitho. Pelasgus is the main Greek representative and as such holds democracy as his cornerstone for handling the situation with the Danids. In the short scene with the Egyptians it is also very clear that they are violent in the way that they treat the women. Although it may seem like barbarian and Greek are mutually exclusive the chorus manages to tread that line and actually create an identity that is representative of both societies and their respective methods of action. In this play the two terms are used in many different ways by many different characters but the most important is the way in which the chorus combines peitho and bia into what turns out to be a superior to the others by themselves. Through interactions with the Egyptians and the Argives it becomes apparent that force or persuasion by themselves are not enough to overcome this unique combination.

Carlos Galdamez, "Barbarian Self Identification through *Bie* and *Metis*"

Edward Osborne Wilson, a Harvard biologist stated that humans seem perfectly comfortable with labeling each other as "members versus nonmembers, kin versus non kin, friend versus foe." In 5th century Athens the term *barbarus* became a label of the foreigner and non-Greek, and this dichotomy of Greek versus barbaric became one of the topics of Aeschylean plays. *Bie* and *metis* are the foundation of Aeschylean argument of who is barbarian and who is Greek. However he unsuccessfully tries to prove this through the perspective of Theban and Persians when it only makes Athens identify themselves

with barbarians. It is apparent through *Prometheus Bound* that only those that are part of the cosmos had cunning intelligence (*metis*) while humans have the innate characteristic of being animalistic in using force (*bie*) for personal gain. It is only through divine intervention that human may acquire *metis*. In this paper I seek to prove that Aeschylus while trying to place Athenians as being superior only accomplished to identify Athenians as barbaric through their extensive use of *bie*.

David Gordon, "Aeschylean Stagecraft to Illustrate Air Imagery: Going Far Beyond Stage Direction"

This paper reflects an inquiry into how stagecraft could have been implemented by Aeschylus in his infamous work, *Prometheus Bound*. The play itself lacks explicit stage directions to show when and how visual imagery would have been used to augment underlying meaning within the play. Here, scholarly arguments are examined in order to show how stage design and innovative text construction were most likely used as vehicles to invoke visual implementations of air imagery within ancient performances.

Hannah Marston, "Keep Calm and Listen On: Male Authority and Female Motivation in Aeschylean Choruses"

The major concern of the female choruses of Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* and the *Suppliants* is their domestic safety, which leads them to enter the public sphere and reveals the dangers that a woman brings to her society when without proper male guidance. Although the Danaids of the *Suppliants* dutifully follow the edicts of their father Danaus in regards to their actions before the altar of Zeus and the King of Argos, Pelasgus, their denial of the system of marriage endangers the stability of the male controlled society in which they wish to gain sanctuary. The Theban maidens that make up the chorus of *Seven Against Thebes* offer a more typical female threat to the public sphere when they race to the public altars in a panic to beg the gods for the protection of their homes. Eteocles acts quickly to restrain the hysterical outbursts of these unmarried women by instructing them to ask the gods to aid their menfolk who will be physically fighting to protect their homes. Both Eteocles and Danaus, however, act themselves as hindrances for the actions of the females under their guardianships, as one fails to heed their advice for self-control and the other keeps his daughters from marriage and the fruition of their female purpose as procreators. Aeschylus uses the choruses of Theban maidens and Danaids to both show why male guidance was necessary to control and civilize women and what could happen when a male guardian put his own interests before the welfare of the city, pursuing his own goals often with detrimental effects to the domestic sphere and thus women.

Maryanne Mendoza, "Divinity and the Chorus: Separation and Integration into the Divine World of Aeschylus"

The tragic chorus has been the topic of much scholarly debate. As a fundamental element of Greek tragedy, the chorus helps to define the world of each play. The world of Aeschylean drama is imbued with divine influence which facilitates the playwright's unique use of divine choruses. Though many scholars have already analyzed the tragic chorus in terms of social, religious, or civic functions, the added element of divinity adds new layers onto the chorus' role. This paper will focus on two sets of choruses that can be considered divine in different ways and how their interactions with Olympian gods on stage affect the world of the play. First, the chorus of Erinyes from *Eumenides* and Oceanids from *Prometheus Bound* represent groups of immortals who pull away from Olympian rule and are eventually reintegrated into the divine order by the actions of the gods surrounding them. Second, the chorus of Danaids from the Danaid tetralogy and bacchantes from the fragmented Dionysus trilogies

constitute groups of mortals whose deep connections with a particular deity pulls them away from normal roles in human society. Unlike the immortal choruses, their interaction with Olympian gods serves to sever this connection and reintegrate them back into the human sphere. The different treatments of these two sets of choruses, whether “divine” by blood or by a strong affinity with a god, illustrate integral themes in the tragedies of Aeschylus.

Shamash, David, “Contrivance or Cunning? *Metis* and *Bie* in Aeschylean Tragedy”

Through the dichotomy of *metis* and *bie*, a subtle confirmation of Greek values and prosperity is found in the vernacular and syntax of Aeschylean drama. The four complete surviving Aeschylean plays not in the *Oresteia* trilogy are rife with signs and references to the polarity of the two methodologies. In *Persae*, the latent implications in the speeches of both the messenger and Darius provide subdued testimonials to Greek success. In *Septem*, Eteocles chooses to use *metis* to select his commanders that will face the army of Polynices outside Thebes instead of utilizing brute force to fight off his brother. In *Suppliants*, the persuasion and wiliness of the Danaids successfully gains them the protection of King Pelasgus, an important comparison to the raw power used by the Egyptians following them. *Prometheus Bound* is the best display of the potency of *metis* over *bie*, as Prometheus is actually chained up for using strategy to go against Zeus. A potentially more influential inclusion of the contrasting terms is seen in reference to the gods; many instances pit immortals on opposite ends of the strategic spectrum, highlighting the importance of a balance between the two ideals and displaying the difficulty in fully categorizing *metis* and *bie* situationally.

Norma Vasquez, “Oedipal Undertones in Aeschylean Tragedy”

By examining the actions and decisions of the characters in Aeschylus’ *Persians* and *Seven against Thebes*, one finds that the tragedies have Oedipal undertones. Although it may be tempting to apply the controversial Oedipal complex to the plays, I will argue that slight modifications must be made in order to obtain a more meaningful interpretation of the plays. Whereas the Freudian theory establishes that an individual has sexual desires toward the mother and a desire to do harm to the father, I will argue that neither Xerxes nor Eteocles share these impulses. Instead, it is the search for one’s identity that motivates the protagonists to launch a war in order to protect their mother figures. In this paper, I will argue that by reading the tragedies through a non-traditional Freudian lens, it is possible to come away from the texts with a better understanding of the pressures that come from standing in the shadow of one’s father, how the life of the father affects the way in which a son views himself, and how the son’s desire to establish his own identity pushes him to do ill.