

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM, Spring 2016

“WAR IN ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA” SYLLABUS

Taught by Dr. BELLA VIVANTE, Professor Emerita of Classics

bvivante@email.arizona.edu

<http://classics.arizona.edu/node/109>

WELCOME to this exploration of Ancient Greek dramatic portrayals of warfare! As a child of the 1960s I fully believed peace was possible in our time. But global realities show that’s not imminently likely. To the Ancient Greeks war was an unquestionable fact of life, recognized for its horrors and idealized for the benefits it was seen to confer. Because these ancient views contrast so dramatically from contemporary Western ones, they can offer valuable insights into ideas about war that still influence our thinking, especially in connection with the wars and enemies we are fighting today.

TEXTS – NOTE: Any translation of the assigned plays is acceptable. The texts ordered aim to provide decent translations in as few volumes as possible. Below each text I list the plays included.

TEXTS ORDERED:

REQUIRED:

Aeschylus Oresteia, trans. by Peter Meineck. Hackett Publishing, 1998. ISBN 978-0-87220-390-7.

Play: *Agamemnon*

The Complete Aeschylus, vol. II: *Persians* and Other Plays, trans. by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780195373288.

Plays: *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*

The Complete Sophocles, vol. II: *Electra* and Other Plays, trans. by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro, Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780195373301.

Plays: *Ajax*, *Philoctetes*

Electra and Other Plays: Euripides, trans. by John Davie. Penguin Classics, 1999. ISBN 9780140446685.

Plays: *Hecuba*, *The Suppliant Women*, *The Trojan Women*

Aristophanes: The Complete Plays, trans. by Paul Roche. Penguin, 2005. ISBN 9780451214096.

Plays: *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Lysistrata*

RECOMMENDED:

Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis* in *Euripides Bacchae and Other Plays*, trans. by James Morwood. Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780199540525.

Additional brief readings will be stored in an online cloud storage called Box @ UA. Kerstin Miller will email you the link for these readings to be downloaded at your convenience. These are identified as **HSP Rdg** in the Syllabus below.

Syllabus – Readings will be discussed on the date they are listed:

Jan. 28 **Introduction** to the course:

- ◆ **History of warfare** and its importance in ancient Greece; Timeline, **HSP Rdgs**
 - ◆ **Types of War:** military, between the sexes, generations, classes
 - ◆ **Legendary Wars:** War with the Amazons; Theban wars; 2 Trojan Wars
 - ◆ **Actual Wars:** Messenian Wars, Ionian Revolt, Persian Invasions, Peloponnesian War
- ◆ **Practice of warfare:** types of armor and weaponry; types of combat and battle formation; “rules” of warfare; reasons for the success of Sparta’s military, the Sacred Band of Thebes, Alexander’s military victories

Feb. 4 **Cultural Meaning of Warfare in Ancient Greece:**

- ◆ **Literary Images:** From Hesiod, *Theogony*, Homer, *The Iliad*, poets Tyrtaios, Kallinos, and Arkhilokhos, and philosopher Herakleitos; **HSP Rdgs**
- ◆ **Visual Images:** examples of monumental temple relief sculpture and vase paintings that visually reveal the meanings warfare carried in ancient Greece
- ◆ **Background to Ancient Greek Drama**

Feb. 11 **Rare Portrayal of Contemporary War: Aeschylus' *The Persians***

War as Ennobling: Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: like Homer's *Iliad*, the first play of the *Oresteia* trilogy presents both the horrors of war and its ennobling heroization

Feb. 18 **War as Disruptive and Devastating: Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*:** the other major mythic cycle of the Oedipus family tales and the wars between Argos and Thebes
Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*: Euripides' follow-up to Aeschylus' play

Feb. 25 **Sophocles: Questioning the Notion of the Heroism of Warfare**

***Ajax*:** through the hero's rare male suicide, the play explores the value and goals of war
***Philoctetes*:** the wavering idealization of warfare

Mar. 3 **Late 5th c. History and Perceptions of War, HSP Rdgs**

- ◆ **Late 5th c. Reality of War:** Civilians relocated, crops burned, the Melian massacre, Sicilian disaster, others
- ◆ **Late 5th-4th c. Perceptions of War**
 - ◆ Early historians Herodotus' and Thucydides' theories about rationales for war
 - ◆ Aristotle's philosophical defense of the naturalness of war.

Mar. 10 **Euripides: the Devastation of War**

***Trojan Women*:** war's devastation through the conquered women of Troy

***Hecuba*:** the conquered Queen of Troy's monstrous transformation resulting from the pile-up of war's unbearable horrors.

Mar. 17 **Spring Break—No Class**

Mar. 24 **Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*: Questioning the Heroics of Warfare**

Mar. 31 **Aristophanes' Comedic Attempts at Peace**

***The Acharnians*:** this suburb of Athens tries to make a private peace

***Peace*:** fantastic attempt at peace

Apr. 7 **Final Comedy and Conclusion:**

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*: how the war of the sexes brings about military peace

Concluding comments on the portrayals of war in Greek culture and dramas, and what they suggest about the significance of war in Ancient Greece and about the place and perception of war in our modern world.