

Brock University
Department of Political Science
4P02: Ancient Political Theory
“The Political Theory of Tragedy”
Winter 2013

Tuesdays 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Plaza 411

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When I was growing up in Orange County (California) we lived very close to Disneyland, which is often subtitled “The Magic Kingdom.” Being the smart-alecks that we were, Orange County teenagers regularly changed this to “Tragic Kingdom” as our way of poking fun at the leading cultural institution in our neighbourhood. We didn’t think very deeply about it at the time, but something about the ever-sunny Disney disposition seemed false or fake, and we found the constant advertising barrage trumpeting the Disney lifestyle to be simply oppressive. When Mickey Mouse (that is to say, a person working for Disney dressed in a Mickey suit) was stabbed one summer (not seriously injured, thankfully), my friend had a good chuckle about it. The tragedy we had been implicitly prophesying had finally struck Disneyland, and while there is no doubting my friend’s bad taste in laughing over this incident, we might wonder what lay behind our apparent perversity. Why, after all, would any sane person prefer a tragic life to the pleasant (if a tad plebeian) life promised by Disney?

I offer this vignette as a slightly off-kilter entre to the subject of tragedy and politics. There is much that is puzzling about tragedy. We say many things are “tragic,” but what do we really mean by this? Is tragedy more than something that makes us sad? Does tragedy even have anything to do with sadness at all? What are tragedy’s origins as an institution and an art form (in ancient Greece), and do these origins make tragedy more or less relevant today? Some literary critics (like George Steiner) have proclaimed that modern tragedy is actually impossible – that we are missing the objective conditions in the world today for something to be “tragic” – and yet Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Verdi seem to have no shortage of modern imitators. We shall be exploring each of these questions (what is tragedy, what was tragedy in ancient Athens, is tragedy possible today), but more importantly from the perspective of this class is a final question that we will devote much time and thought to: what is the relationship of tragedy to political theory? Or, as Socrates says in Plato’s *Republic*, are tragic poets the last people we should look to for political wisdom? Is tragedy “good to think with” when we approach contemporary political dilemmas? Can it help guide us, either in suggesting that we forego certain actions (say, those that are too much like Creon’s in *Antigone*), or by revealing the appeal

of particular institutions (like Truth and Reconciliation Commissions)? Or is tragedy's relation to political theory captured more by the disposition it cultivates in potential citizens as they ponder how to live their lives in the face of a cosmos that seems, on its face, to be indifferent to suffering?

As we explore these questions, through the texts of the ancient tragedians as well as the secondary academic literature, we will be assisted by viewing the twelve episodes of David Simon's "The Wire" (Season Three) throughout the semester. Simon produced his show with the ancient tragedians in mind, and I hope that viewing the conflicts between McNulty and Stringer Bell, or Stringer and Avon, will bring us a little closer to understanding the strife between Creon and Antigone, or Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. But perhaps not...perhaps Steiner was right to say that tragedy is from a bygone era. We'll take the semester (at least) to ponder the question.

Course Objectives:

- 1) Students will become familiar with the classic texts of the ancient Athenian playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.
- 2) Students will be able to identify the enduring cultural significance of figures such as Oedipus, Antigone, the Furies, and the Bacchantes.
- 3) Students will gain an understanding of the origins of tragedy in 5th century BCE Athens, including its social, religious, and political bases.
- 4) Students will learn to analyze tragedy from a variety of scholarly perspectives, including: psychoanalysis, feminism, structural anthropology, post-structuralism, Marxism, Straussianism, postcolonialism, and democratic theory.
- 5) Students will develop their own general theory of tragedy, and be able to argue its relevance for contemporary politics.

Books:

- 1) Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, ed. Robert Fagles. Penguin Classics.
- 2) Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, tr. Robert Fagles. Penguin Classics.
- 3) Euripides, *Bacchae*, ed. by Paul Woodruff. Hackett Publishing.

PLEASE USE ONLY THESE EDITIONS

- 4) *The Wire*, Season Three (available on iTunes for \$24.99)

Class Style:

This class will be conducted as a discussion-intensive seminar. This course will also utilize a number of different methods in presenting the materials, possibly including simulations, semi-formal debates, role-play, and short excerpts from contemporary films. Please come prepared to discuss the materials each day, and this means arguing about them in a thoughtful manner with your instructor and fellow classmates. These discussions should be respectful of others' views, but in no way does that suggest that we paper over our differences with others. We will learn from each other precisely to the extent that we can figure out exactly how much we disagree with one another.

Assignments:

Seminar Participation: 20%

Seminar Facilitation: 10%

Short Paper: 15% (5 pages, due February 26 in class). Questions will be distributed by the instructor in advance. This paper may be re-written after the Peer Review and submitted for a re-grade, which will be an average of the first and second versions of the paper. This re-write option, if exercised, is due March 19.

Peer Review: 10% (due March 5). Instructor will provide a template.

Discussion Posts (online in the Forum, via Sakai): 10% (10 postings total, 1% each)

Final Paper: 35% (15 pages for undergraduates; 20 pages for graduate students, due April 17)

Seminar Participation:

Given that this is a fourth-year/graduate course, participation counts heavily. Please make sure to actively (and thoughtfully) engage in conversation each session, and please check with the instructor if you have any questions regarding your participation grade throughout the semester.

Seminar Facilitation:

Each student will be responsible for facilitating one of the class sessions, probably in conjunction with one other student. Facilitators do not need to provide a lengthy introduction on their appointed day, but should provide several questions or topics for discussion, and should be prepared to briefly introduce each question or topic.

Discussion Posts:

Prior to each week of class BEGINNING WITH WEEK TWO, each student is required to post one item to the Forum section of Sakai by 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday of that week. THERE IS NO POSTING DUE IN WEEK TWELVE. This posting is to be approximately 50-100 words. The grade will be based on whether the posting meets these requirements – it will not be graded for content, though postings that are clearly not related to the week’s readings, or that demonstrate a lack of acquaintance with the readings, will not be counted.

Each post should address a question to the text, or to one of the other student posts for that week. They can take many forms, and the following are just a few examples: 1) puzzle through what the author means... e.g. “Author X seems to state that Z is the case, but I cannot understand how this argument works, since the Author also says Y. One way to resolve this seeming dilemma is to include B in the argument, which removes the contradiction; 2) argue with the author... “Author M states X and Y, both of which result in a argument that is immoral (state why) and threatens democratic legitimacy (state why). Author M’s position is of no use to us in crafting a theory of tragedy; 3) “Student U has posted that Author P is wrong because of K. While I agree that K is a problem, Student U does not take into account Author P’s argument J, which answers the contradictions raised by Student U.” Hopefully these dreary examples will give you an idea of the flavour of the postings, but please do make your commentary livelier than what I have

just written above! I expect that these postings will facilitate class discussions by placing a number of issues on the table well before the actual class session, and I will likely be responding to some of the issues raised in my own discussion for that week.

Deadline to Withdraw is Friday, March 8

Last date for withdrawal without academic penalty and last day to change from credit to audit status for duration 3 courses without academic penalty.

Academic Integrity:

In this course we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. You are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. You are encouraged to study together, discuss readings outside of class, and share your drafts during peer review and outside of class. In this course, those activities are well within the bounds of academic honesty. However, when you *use* another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signalling it with a standard form of academic citation.

Midnight Café

This is an experimental and completely ungraded chat forum, which will be open from midnight to 1 a.m. Thursday night/Friday morning only. It's dangerous, probably a bad idea, and you're not really ready for it. So just move on.

Turnitin.com

Written assignments may be submitted through turnitin.com, at the instructor's discretion. Links and password will be supplied at the time of the assignment by the instructor.

Students With Disabilities:

As part of Brock University's commitment to a respectful work and learning environment, the University will make every reasonable effort to accommodate all members of the university community with disabilities. If you require academic accommodations related to a documented disability to participate in this course, you are encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities in the Student Development Centre (4th Floor, Schmon Tower, ex. 3240). You are also encouraged to discuss any accommodations with the instructor well in advance of due dates and scheduled assessments.

Schedule:

NOTE THAT ALL READINGS ARE AVAILABLE EITHER ON SAKAI OR VIA THE LIBRARY'S ONLINE RESOURCES, EXCEPT FOR THE THREE COURSE TEXTS.

Week One, January 8: Introducing Tragedy

Short readings from Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche in class for group-work;
Introducing "The Wire"

Week Two, January 15: The End of Tragedy? A New Beginning?

Rethinking Tragedy: essays by George Steiner (29-44) and Simon Goldhill (45-62)
Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence* ("A Theory in Ruins" 1-22; "The Value of Agony" 23-40)

Walter Kaufmann, "Toward a New Poetics," in *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Anchor Books (1968), pp. 87-117.

Simon Goldhill, "Modern Critical Approaches to Greek Tragedy," from *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (1997) pp. 324-347.

Week Three, January 22: The Thick Description of Attic Tragedy

Paul Cartledge, "'Deep Plays': Theatre as Process in Greek Civic Life," from *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (1997), 3-35

P. E. Easterling, "A Show for Dionysus," from *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (1997), 36-53.

Edith Hall, "The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy," from *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (1997), 93-126.

"The Rebirth of Tragedy": <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/art-books/wire-greek-tragedy-optimism/>

Walter Burkert, "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual," in *Savage Energies: Lessons of Myth and Ritual in Ancient Greece*, University of Chicago Press (2001), pp. 1-21 (notes go until page 36).

Week Four, January 29: The Oresteia – The Family and the Polis

Oresteia, entire text of all three plays

Peter Euben, "Introduction" to *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, pp. 1-42

Charles Segal, "Greek Tragedy and Society: A Structuralist Perspective," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* pp. 43-75

Week Five, February 5: Oresteia – Patriarchy, Reconciliation, Difference

Froma Zeitlin "Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the Oresteia" *Arethusa* 11 ½ (1978) 149-181

Peter Euben, essay on the *Oresteia* from *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken*

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, "Hunting and Sacrifice in Aeschylus' Oresteia" from *Myth and Tragedy* pp. 141-160

Goldhill, "Civic Ideology and the Problem of Difference: The Politics of Aeschylean Tragedy, Once Again" *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120: 34-56

Week Six, February 12: Oedipus and Freud

Oedipus Rex, in *Three Theban Plays*

Walter Kaufmann, "The Riddle of Oedipus," in *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Anchor Books (1968), pp. 118-158.

Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 81-89

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, "Oedipus Without the Complex" in *Myth and Tragedy* pp. 85-111

NO CLASS February 19 (Reading Week)

Week Seven, February 26: Antigone, Ismene, Tegonni

Antigone, in *Three Theban Plays*

Tina Chanter, "Exempting Antigone from Ancient Greece: Multiplying and Racializing Genealogies in *Tegonni: An African Antigone*," in *Whose Antigone: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery*, SUNY Press (2011) pp. 87-117.

Elshtain, Jean Bethke. "Antigone's daughters." *democracy* 2.2 (1982): 46-59.

Honig, Bonnie. "Ismene's Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles' *Antigone*." *Arethusa* 44.1 (2011): 29-68.

Week Eight, March 5: Queering Antigone

Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, pp. 1-26, 27-56, 57-82

John Seery, "Acclaim for Antigone's Claim, Reclaimed (or, Steiner Contra Butler)" *Theory & Event* 9:1 (2006)

http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.library.brocku.ca/journals/theory_and_event/v009/9.1seery.html

Week Nine, March 12: Revolution, Tyranny, Reconciliation?

Alain Badiou, "Theory of the subject according to Sophocles, theory of the subject according to Aeschylus," in *Theory of the Subject* (158-168)

Terry Eagleton, "Thomas Mann's Hedgehog," in *Sweet Violence* pp. 274-297

C. Fred Alford, "Melanie Klein and the "Oresteia Complex": Love, Hate, and the Tragic Worldview" *Cultural Critique* 15 (1990) pp. 167-189.

Arlene Saxonhouse, "Tyranny of Reason in the Polis" *APSR* 82 (1988) pp. 1261-1275.

Week Ten, March 19: Slaves and Sacrifice

Page duBois, "Slaves in the Tragic City," in *Out of Athens* 72-90 (2010)

Rene Girard, "Sacrifice" and "Oedipus and the Surrogate Victim," in *Violence and the Sacred* pp. 1-38; 68-88

Page duBois, "The Persistence of Oedipus" in *Out of Athens: The New Ancient Greeks*, Harvard University Press (2010), pp. 157-172.

Week Eleven, March 26: Dionysus and Bacchanalian Women

Bacchae

Helene Foley, "The Bacchae," in *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* pp. 205-258.

Zeitlin on "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama," in *Nothing to Do With Dionysos?* pp. 63-96

E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, "Maenadism," pp. 270-280

Week Twelve, April 2: Mourning, Memory, and Generations

Werner Riess, chapter from *Performing Interpersonal Violence*

David McIvor, 'A Splintering and Shattering Activity': Race, Reconciliation, and the Work of Mourning. Unpublished manuscript.

P.J. Brendese, "For Love of the Impossible: *Antigone*, Memory and the Politics of Possibility," in *When Worlds Elide: Political Theory, Cultural Studies and the Effects of Hellenism*, J. Peter Euben & Karen Bassi, eds. (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010)

Elizabeth Markovits, "Birthrights: Freedom, Responsibility, and Democratic Comportment in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*." *American Political Science Review*, 103 (2009), pp. 427-441.

Recommended Additional Texts on Tragedy and Politics:

Hegel on Tragedy, edited by Ann and Henry Paolucci

J. P. Sartre, *The Flies*

Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City State*

Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy*

Helene Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*

George Steiner, *Antigones*

George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*

Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean*

Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds, edited by Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie

Richard Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World*, Cornell UP, 2005

Miriam Leonard, *Athens in Paris: Ancient Greece and the Political in Postwar French Thought*, OUP 2005

Jacques Lacan, *Seminar of JL*, Book VII, pp. 243-290

Romand Coles, "Tragedy's Tragedy," in *Beyond Gated Politics*

Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*

Robert Fagles, "The Serpent and the Eagle," in *The Oresteia*, edited by Robert Fagles, pp. 13-97

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*

Goldhill, "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology" *JHS* 107 (1987): 58-76

H. P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness; The Call of Cthulhu*

Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya, *The Watch*

Slavoj Žižek, "From Antigone to Joan of Arc," *Helios*. 31 (Spring-Fall 2004) (51-62)

Stefan Dolgert, "Sacrificing Justice: Suffering Animals, the *Oresteia*, and the Masks of Consent." *Political Theory* 40:3 (2012), pp. 263-289.

Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*

Christopher Rocco, "The Tragedy of Critical Theory" in *Tragedy and Enlightenment*

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Because academic integrity is vital to the well-being of the university community, Brock University takes academic misconduct very seriously. Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, which involves presenting the words and ideas of another person as if they were your own, and other forms of cheating, such as using crib notes during a test or fabricating data for a lab assignment. The penalties for academic misconduct can be very severe. A grade of zero may be given for the assignment or even for the course, and a second offense may result in suspension from the University. Students are urged to read the section of the Brock University Undergraduate Calendar that pertains to academic misconduct. Students are also reminded that the Student Development Centre (Schmon Tower, Room 400) offers free workshops on writing and study skills and on avoiding plagiarism.

POLICY ON LATE ESSAYS

The policy of the Department is that essays received by the instructor or deposited in the Political Science department Essay box after 4:00 p.m. or at a time designated by the instructor, of the date on which they were due will be penalized **two per cent** for each day late from Monday through Friday and **five per cent** for the period from Friday 4:00 p.m. to Monday 8:30 a.m., and that no paper will be accepted two weeks after the due date.

An essay is considered received when the **original** hard copy (printed-not disk) of the paper is in the hands of the instructor or in the box outside the Political Science Department's office. (ALL ESSAYS MUST INCLUDE A TITLE PAGE WITH THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION CLEARLY MARKED: STUDENT NUMBER, TA and INSTRUCTOR'S NAME, COURSE NAME and NUMBER).

Having an essay date-stamped by security, or the library, or anyone else does **not** constitute receipt of the essay by the Political Science Department. Instructors may require that essays be submitted electronically through turnitin.com. In this case, students must consult with the Instructor on what constitutes a late essay.

Instructors may establish more restrictive deadlines or more severe penalties in particular courses – check the course outline. Extensions of due dates are granted only in circumstances that are beyond the student's control, such as health problems that are supported by a medical certificate or other, clearly equivalent, situations.

Time management problems are not grounds for extensions. You are strongly urged to avoid these penalties by beginning to work on essays early in the term; by setting your own target dates for completion that are several days before the due date; and by carefully budgeting your time.

POLICY ON RETURNING MARKED ESSAYS

Marked essays will normally be returned during class meetings or at the final examination. Students who are not in class to receive their essays or do not receive them at the final examination can obtain them in two ways:

- _ directly from the instructor during his/her office hours (unless the instructor specifies in the course outline or by notice on his/her office door that this option is not available), and/or
- _ directly from the instructor on specific days and at specific times announced in class or posted on his/her office door.

Note: Essays that are not picked up within six months after the end of term will be shredded.

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please read and sign the following statement, and submit this sheet with your paper. Your paper will not be graded until you have submitted this form.

I, the undersigned, confirm that I understand that all the following constitutes academic misconduct according to Brock University's policy on academic misconduct, which in turn is consistent with general academic practice:

Quoting someone's words without using quotation marks.

Quoting someone's words without acknowledging the source.

Citing someone else's ideas in my own words but without citing the source.

Using someone else's organization of ideas.

Allowing someone else the opportunity to borrow material from my paper (e.g., by letting them have access to my paper when they are writing their own paper).

Writing the paper for another student, or doing some of the work for them (such as, but not limited to, reading the articles for them and providing them with notes on the articles).

Allowing someone else (or paying someone else) to write part or all of my paper, or do some of the work for me. The exceptions to this are that it is acceptable to allow someone to type the paper for me or make editorial comment on it. However, if someone types the paper for me, or if I incorporate an editorial suggestion, and there are errors in the typing or the suggestion was misguided, I take full responsibility for those errors.

Submitting this work to another course without both instructors' permission.

I confirm that I have not done any of the above forms of academic misconduct.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____