Performing Greek Tragedy
CLS164 (Winter 2013)

Prof. Tarik Wareh, Lamont House 203, wareht@union.edu, (518) 388-6743
W13 office hours: Tue. 2pm & Fri. 2pm (Drop by anytime.)

Course description
Performance is scholarship! Students work in small groups to adapt and stage scenes from Greek tragedy. By responding to all the questions, problems, and choices that come up in this process, we will gain a unique perspective on some of the greatest ancient works of literary art, and on the fifth-century Athenian culture within which they were first performed for a large popular audience. Exploring several Greek tragedies through research, discussion, and performance exercises, we will arrive at our own views about how they engaged ancient audiences, and on how to adapt and communicate them to a modern audience. We will not only apply ancient techniques (for example, Euripidean speeches) to modern preoccupations and social tensions, but also look creatively for modern forms of expression that can bring home the essence of the ancient mythic dramas (for example, musical styles that have personal meaning to us and to our audience).

No acting or theatrical experience is required—just a willingness to commit to the performance approach. Students are graded on the thoroughness and care of their performance work (not on their talent or skill as performers), and on the explanations and arguments that back up their chosen performance approach. Work in the video medium is an option for interested students.

Student learning objectives
Note that the performances are not the ultimate goal of this course, but a very rewarding means towards the following objectives.

1. to become familiar with Classical Athenian culture, and especially with social and political identities, roles, and tensions;
2. to become familiar with Greek tragic literature and the circumstances and conventions of its ancient production;
3. to strengthen skill in defending evidence-based arguments about the interpretation of literary texts;
4. to understand and respond to the choices and problems that arise in the stage production of a dramatic text;
5. to explore the expressive resources of our own culture and experience through modernizing adaptation, including of the nonverbal aspects of the ancient plays (music, visual spectacle, etc.);
6. to develop, explain, and defend a theory of how a modern performance can both
   a. communicate cultural difference and distance in a meaningful way;
   b. suggest points of intersection between ancient and modern experience.

**Required books**
3. Anne Carson (trans.), *An Oresteia*, Faber and Faber, ISBN 086547916X

Other sources will include films, theatrical productions (including college and university productions), and secondary readings.

**Wiki/online resources**
There is a wiki page for this course that contains important links to videos and other resources (for example, to look up quick plot information, etc., about Greek tragedies). Find it at [http://wareh.wikia.com](http://wareh.wikia.com). It's a wiki, so you can create an account and edit this page as you discover further resources, especially online ones. (The wiki also looks better if you follow the instructions for participation on the main page. Adblock helps too.) Other documents may be distributed via Moodle ([http://nexus.union.edu](http://nexus.union.edu)).

**Media services**
We need to make special arrangements with Media Services (x6438) to project audio/video in Old Chapel. Please plan ahead for any presentations that will require audio or video, so that I can make the necessary request at least a couple of days in advance.
**Grading**

10% Tragic poetic style/close reading assignment (due Tu 1/22)
20% Presentation: Analyzing the resources of a modern musical (or visual) style (Th 2/7 – Tu 2/19)
   Scene #1 with initial groups (focus on modernization)
   5% “Draft performance” in class Tu 1/29
   15% Production notes (in class week 9, due in writing at end of term)
   10% Final performance, week 10
   Scene #2 with different groups (focus on expressive style)
   5% Discuss ideas with me by mid-February
   15% Present prospectus in class, Th 2/21
   10% Final performance, week 10
   15% Production notes (due in writing at end of term)
10% Participation and daily contributions

**Groups**

Tentative “initial groups” for scene #1

   Group A: Alex Clain, Garrett Lawson, Thomas Franzese, Aaron Elkin
   Group B: Jake Sullivan, Maggie Ostrander, Henry Scherck, James Herrington

You will select the composition of your other group for scene #2 (Group C and Group D), to be as different as possible (2 members from each group above).

**Late policy.** All assignments must be turned in on time. No work will be accepted more than seven days after the original due date. Late work is penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. The presentation and performance assignments are essential to our class plan and cannot be accepted late.

**Gentle reminder.** Come to class on time with the reading (including printouts of anything distributed online and, when possible/requested, your other tragedy translations for script exercises), and do not leave except during the designated break. (Feel free to suggest that it’s time for the break!) All electronic devices should be switched off and stowed away in your bags: this course is about human interaction!
Schedule: readings, locations, topics, assignments

Tu 1/8  Ensemble-building and improv exercises
       Introduction to the course

Th 1/10 Goldhill, pp. 1-29
       Euripides Hippolytus (pp. 47-54)
       Synthesize the readings (given as an example of how I always want you
       thinking as producers when you read both the primary and secondary texts):

1. Know the four key elements of the Greek theater's resources of space
   and focus & Goldhill’s examples of productions.
2. Apply Goldhill’s topics to what you see already in Hippolytus.
   a. What significance is each of the four key elements likely to
      have in this play? How would you set up each of those four
      elements of the theatrical space?
   b. Artists like Mnouchkine and Breuer carefully consider issues
      like the audience’s position, or the presence of the chorus in
      the theater as an “internal audience.” Their theatrical choices
      reflect their understanding of the basic spirit of the play they
      are producing. Come up with a theatrical strategy to
      specifically target some payoff in how these kinds of choices
      might be made for Hippolytus.
   c. Goldhill discusses the gain and loss of doing Greek tragedy
      with an atmosphere of “bourgeois domesticity” (pp. 21-24).
      What gain and loss might you anticipate from this approach
      to Hippolytus?

In class: view video from Lynn Kozak’s electronica Hippolytos (McGill U.)
       (also the chorus in her hard-rock Agamemnon, part 3)
In class: Bringing in a musical tradition and style. The Gospel at Colonus

Tu 1/15 Finish Euripides Hippolytus
       “Physical Action” (A Practical Handbook for the Actor, pp. 13-18)
       Reading question: How tricky can it get to find the justification for
       Roche’s stage directions? (There are no stage directions in our ancient
texts.) Where could you argue a different way to stage it? What additional important stage action makes sense to you?
In class: Implicit stage directions in Orestes, pp. 190-195 (bring Carson!)

Th 1/17
**Class meets in Reamer Auditorium**
Goldhill, pp. 29-59
In class: The arena of conflict. Elektra, pp. 103-113/121 (bring Carson!)

Tu 1/22
**Tragic poetic style/close reading assignment due (800-1500 words on the detailed wording and phrasing in a tragic scene: interpret what’s going on under the surface, and compose an imitation of the same style/idea on a different subject/action)**
Finish Euripides Alcestis
Group time: Inventory of theatrical resources and talents (musical instruments or singing, motion/dance, breakdancing, parkours, acrobatics, techie stuff, DJ’ing, clothes and costumes, construction, crafty stuff, videography, lighting, audio, interesting props, possible special effects, etc., etc.)

Th 1/24
Goldhill, pp. 59-79
In class: An improv Alcestis

Tu 1/29
**“Draft performances” of initial groups’ modernized scenes**
Finish Sophokles Elektra (Carson, pp. 77-172)

Th 1/31
Acting Techniques with guest artist Patricia Culbert
Goldhill, pp. 81-117

Tu 2/5
Finish Aiskhylos Agamemnon (Carson, pp. 3-74)
Greek song culture, Greek song forms

Th 2/7
**Individual presentations (musical style/tradition) begin**
Goldhill, pp. 119-152
Tu 2/12  Finish Euripides *Medea*
Ancient audience exercise

Th 2/14  **Class meets in Reamer Auditorium**
Mapping the emotional arc of a Greek tragedy: *Once Were Warriors*
Goldhill, pp. 153-187

Tu 2/19  Finish Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus*

Th 2/21  **Class may meet in Reamer Auditorium** (stay tuned)
**Scene #2 prospectus presentations in class**
Goldhill, pp. 189-223

Tu 2/26  Finish Sophocles *Antigone*

Th 2/28  No readings
No class: Attend the production of Euripides’ *Trojan Women* in Troy!
Adapted and directed by Leigh Strimbeck (Theatre Institute at Sage)
Meader Little Theater, 5 Division St., Troy NY 12180  *parking at 1st & Division; entrance across from 92 1st St, through McKinstry Courtyard tunnel*
Th 2/28 – 10am   F 3/1 – 10am & 8pm
Sa 3/2 – 8pm   Su 3/3 – 2pm
[http://tickets.sage.edu](http://tickets.sage.edu)

Tu 3/5  Finish Euripides *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*

Th 3/7  No readings

Tu 3/12  No readings

Th 3/14  No readings

Th 3/21  Old Chapel reserved, 2:30-4:30pm (just in case)
Your honor code! Union College recognizes the need to create an environment of mutual trust as part of its educational mission. Responsible participation in an academic community requires respect for and acknowledgement of the thoughts and work of others, whether expressed in the present or in some distant time and place. Matriculation at the College is taken to signify implicit agreement with the Academic Honor Code, available at http://honorcode.union.edu. It is each student’s responsibility to ensure that submitted work is his or her own and does not involve any form of academic misconduct. Students are expected to ask their course instructors for clarification regarding, but not limited to, collaboration, citations, and plagiarism. Ignorance is not an excuse for breaching academic integrity. You are encouraged to affix an Honor Code Affirmation to your work submitted by grading. (Perhaps you can use your growing writing skills to improve on the recommended text, “I affirm that I have carried out my academic endeavors with full academic honesty.” [Signed, Jane Doe]). However, such a written affirmation is merely a reminder, and the Honor Code is always binding on all work done at Union College.

If you have ever consulted any unassigned work (including standard internet sources, the introductions to our textbooks, etc.), you must completely cite everything your ideas might owe to the ideas of others, so that your reader or hearer (1) can never mistake an idea that owes something to someone else as your own original work, (2) can always trace anything owed to another’s ideas to the specific page you consulted. Bear in mind that your selection of which passages to write about (not only what you say about them) falls under the category of your work’s “ideas.” While you should discuss your readings and ideas with classmates, your individual graded work must be the product of your own effort, not collaboration.

Statement on disabilities. It is Union College policy to make accommodations for individuals with disabilities. If you have any disability or special concern, please let me know what your needs are in order that they may be accommodated. All discussions will remain confidential to the extent permissible by law. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations must also: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Dean of Students Office; (2) bring a letter to the instructor from the Dean of Students Office indicating what academic accommodations you require. This must be done within the first two weeks of the term. For more information about services available to Union College students with disabilities, please contact the Dean of Students Office: Shelly Shinebarger, Director of Student Support Services, Dean of Students Office, shinebas@union.edu, (518) 388-6116.

I am a member of Union’s Faculty & Staff LGBTQ Ally Program and a “safe space” promoter.