

Aesthetics: Drama and Philosophy

PHL 346 [43208] / WCV 320 [48215] / EUS 347 [36150]
The University of Texas at Austin
Spring Semester, 19 Jan to 06 May 2010
TuTh 12.30–2.00p, WAG 308

Instructor: Christopher Moore

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Required Texts

Aeschylus, *Persians and Other Plays*, tr. Collard (OWC, 2009)
Sophocles, *Four Tragedies*, tr. Meineck and Woodruff (Hackett, 2007)
Euripides, *Hippolytus*, tr. Halleran (Focus, 2001)
Aristophanes, *Frogs*, tr. Henderson (Focus, 2008)
Plato, *Early Socratic Dialogues*, tr. Saunders (Penguin, 2005)
Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. Janko (Hackett, 1987)
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Edwards (New Cambridge Shakespeare, 2003)
Racine, *Phèdre*, tr. Rawlings (Penguin, 1992)
Corneille, *Le Cid*, etc., tr. Cairncross (Penguin, 1976)
Molière, *The Misanthrope*, etc., tr. Slater (OWC, 2008)
Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts*, tr. Bloom (Cornell, 1968)

Course

How might watching theater and doing philosophy improve us, if either can at all? What are these activities' respective strengths and inabilities? We study these questions, and some possible answers, by focusing on the dramatic work and its critical response of two societies, Ancient Athens (5th- and 4th-c BCE) and Classical France (17th-c CE), with an interlude in Elizabethan England (16th-c CE). We will study some of the best tragic and comic drama of these three eras alongside the theoretical works that most thoughtfully and explicitly address both those plays and the broader puzzlements about aesthetic experience and practice that attention to such plays incites. In three instances the plays themselves will contain explicit remarks about and depictions of drama (a device called "metatheater"). We will discuss whether and how art might help a person gain self-knowledge and advance political critique, both particular goals of philosophy.

We will look into what it might mean for a fictional work to have a moral lesson or be of moral worth. We will ask what effort is expected of an audience or reader, given the genre in question (serious or light theater; philosophical dialogue, lecture, letter, encyclopedia excerpt, or dictionary entry). We will inquire into the special nature of tragedy – characterizing exceptional deaths – and comedy – provoking laughter. And we will talk about the kinds of reasons and arguments to which a person could appeal to establish something’s aesthetic or intellectual excellence. We can summarize the above: What is it to watch theater well? And how does that relate to living philosophically? The fact that plays particularly depict both conversation and significant decisions will be of great importance in answering these questions.

Our foreign-language texts are all (mostly newly) translated, but interested students may join readings groups in Greek or French.

Class-time

We will spend much of our time in conversation about our assigned texts, often through close reading of important or characteristic passages, but also through argument reconstruction and assessment, character analysis, summary at various levels of abstraction, and critical response. During other blocks of time, we will talk more generally about the puzzles and themes of this course, hypothesizing, for example, what parameters there might be on a dramatically-depictable “worldview,” or what could warrant laughing at people less well-off than ourselves (the “paradox of comedy”). Occasionally I will lecture briefly to provide historical, intellectual, and literary background, or to model what I take to be productive ways of responding to our assigned works. I hope our class-time will help show how to talk about the quality both of arguments and of artworks. In particular you should learn how to appeal to your personal experience as evidence for broader claims about individual works or texts themselves or about the experience others should have toward those works or texts.

You should take notes every day, about what your classmates or I say, not just what’s written on the board. I will expect your papers to reflect familiarity with what we’ve talked about, whenever it’s appropriate. You may use your computer for note-taking, but for that purpose only; please do not use it for in-class research. Bring at least the current and the previous text to class every day. Please do not read or write txt or other electronic communications during our official meeting time.

Work

A broad range of writing assignments will give you a chance to work on the skills learned in class, to strengthen your familiarity with our texts, and to develop your ability to articulate your reactions to dramatic performances and philosophical claims. There are three categories of assignments; each involve some degree of revision.

Five Homework Assignments [40%]

Every several weeks you will respond to a prompt about the reading I will distribute at least two class-periods in advance. For each you may write as much as you wish.

HW I: The aspects of writing about tragic drama.

HW II: The political philosophy of Athenian drama.

HW III: Plato and Aristotle on the value of watching theater.

HW IV: Shakespeare and the invention of the human.

HW V: Tragedy and morality in the modern era.

Because this course is not a one-on-one tutorial, writing serves as the principal way by which you develop and articulate your thoughts about the reading and class discussion. And because this course contributes to the liberal arts curriculum of the Bachelor's degree, it has the obligation to help you improve those skills implied by a successful completion of that curriculum. Accordingly, you should take the writing seriously.

To get a C on an assignment, your work must be mostly responsive to the prompt, acknowledge relevant portions of the texts in question, have relatively clear exposition, and show some personal reflection. Getting a B takes complete responsiveness to the prompt, fully substantiated claims and citations, good structural organization, and demonstrated serious thoughtfulness about the issue. Getting an A- requires the above, plus excellent command of the reading, multiple modes of argument and preemptive counter-argument, crystalline structural organization, and both rigor and imagination in confronting the issues in question. An A paper exceeds an A- especially in its rigor (analytic sharpness and systematicity) and imagination (creative and exploratory and comprehensive ways of answering the prompt).

At least once this semester your paper will not receive credit the first time I read it. I will return it to you with comments and a request to meet in office hours by a certain date. You will think about the comments, we will talk in detail about problems with your old draft and your plan for reworking it, and then you will resubmit a dramatically revised version or section of the original paper by another specified date. After reading this revision, I may require yet another sequence of revisions; refusing or failing to try to make adequate revision will prevent your paper from receiving credit.

My request for a revision does not at all mean that your paper would have otherwise earned an F. It much more likely deserves a B or C+ or even an A-. A request means only that your writing has some weakness I think necessary for you to confront. But because each revision can work on only *some* weaknesses, you should not expect to receive an A at the end of a revision sequence. You must be careful not to misinterpret what you take to be a low score on a paper. Do not think to yourself, "But I put so much time into this paper; I thought about it from every direction; this is very unfair!" Mastery of these written exercises may take much more than time: they take the development of certain skills, ways of arranging your notes, reading the texts, and rereading and editing your written work. So a low score simply measures your having not yet acquired all these

skills, or not having yet been able to apply those skills to the prompt. This class is meant to help you isolate your weaknesses and aid you in strengthening your abilities. I expect your grade through the semester to reflect your gradual improvement in these areas.

Assignments will always be due in class at the beginning of class. I will accept assignments only by hardcopy, never by email, unless you are explicitly told on the syllabus or prompt to email them. You must staple and paginate multi-sheet assignments, and include full heading information (full name, course number, name of the assignment, and the date it is due); failures will lower the grade.

Late assignments will not be accepted except by my discretion and if you have a good faith reason. In this case your assignment will lose a grade letter every two calendar days it is late. For example, if your printer broke thirty minutes before class and you want to run the paper over to my office after class, I will likely accept it, but you will still receive a grade-letter reduction. Or if you forget an assignment due Thursday and drop it by my mailbox the following Monday before 12.30p, you will receive a two grade-letter reduction.

Local Theater Blog [30%]

You are each to see five plays on your own, with classmates, or with friends, by the end of April. For each play you see, you will post an analysis on our class blog, phl346.wordpress.com. Your classmates and I will ask follow-up questions to which you should give detailed and prompt reply. You should also make sure to ask questions and make rejoinders to your classmates' or my analyses, especially if they or I have seen the same play you've seen. You may also introduce other topics related to local theater, our class, or drama and philosophy from the three eras we're studying.

You should aim to write at least weekly, with many of your postings at least several paragraphs long. For original contributions, focus on specificity (e.g., what aspects had what qualities for what reasons), thoughtfulness (e.g., finding patterns, inferring causes, identifying trenchant questions), innovation (writing in valuably novel ways), resourcefulness (bringing to bear, e.g., prior reading, class meetings, others' unexpectedly relevant remarks), and provocation of further discussion. For follow-up comments, focus on sympathetic reading, asking productive questions, sharing of contrasting or corroborating experiences or assessments, and helpfulness in drawing connections, inferences, or contradictions the original poster didn't see. For responses to follow-up comments, focus on giving complete replies and on being open to revising and extending your earlier ideas.

I will share with you a non-binding in-progress grade by Spring Break and give you a final grade at the beginning of May. Your grade will depend both on (i) the quality and quantity of your contributions relative to the most committed participants from our class and (ii) your following of the criteria cited in the previous paragraph and your responsiveness to whatever questions I ask or comments I make as blog moderator.

Final Paper [30%]

The final paper is in lieu of a final exam, and thus serves in part to ensure you take a comprehensive, systematic, and detailed review of what we've learned, talked about, and read over the four-month semester. I will distribute a prompt after Spring Break. A two-page paper plan will be due by email on the last class-day of April. I will return it to you with advice for writing the final version, a hardcopy of which will be due on the first day of finals period. The quality of your two-page plan will contribute to your total Final Paper grade; you are to print out the marked-up version I return to you and staple it to the back of your final version. I will be happy to read an intermediate or partial draft up to the last Friday of the semester.

Attendance

Much of the activity and value of the class comes through our twice-weekly discussions. Accordingly, your final grade will take into account your attendance, which I will spot-check. Repeated tardy arrivals and insufficient participation may count as absences. You must submit appropriate paperwork to excuse any absence. Use the following table to determine by how many grade-points to adjust your overall course score.

<u>Absences</u>	<u>Adjustment</u>
0 days	+0.1
1 day	0.0
2 days	-0.10
3 days	-0.33
4 days	-0.66
5 days	-1.00
6 days	-2.00
>6 days	-3.00

Grades

Your course grade will represent the precision, accuracy, comprehensiveness, care, thoughtfulness, and effort demonstrated by your participation in the course activities. This course will use +/- grading. You will receive the grade nearest to your average numerical score; for example, a 3.9 will be an A; a 3.47 will be a B+.

A 4.0 – Excellent	B- 2.66	D+ 1.33
A- 3.66	C+ 2.33	D 1.0 – Pass
B+ 3.33	C 2.0 – Average	D- 0.66
B 3.0 – Above average	C- 1.66	F 0.0 – Fail

Further Logistics

Technology

Please check class-related emails each weekday, and respond promptly. I will do the same. I will email you additional readings and assignments if I do not distribute paper copies. Please check with fellow students to ensure you have not missed any handouts, which include paper-prompts and notes.

Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the University. This includes, but is not restricted to, any plagiarism on any paper, or cheating on any portion of the homework. Plagiarism includes, among other things, not citing text, paraphrases, or ideas taken from any assigned or unassigned reading, or other students' comments or papers. Please ask about any case you're concerned about.

University Honor Code

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin

The UT Learning Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

Accessibility

"The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone)."

Reading and Assignment Schedule

January

Tu 19 The Origins of Tragic Drama. Syllabus Overview.

Th 21 *Persians*. Student Introductions.

Tu 26 *Philoctetes*, ll. 1-826.

Th 28 *Philoctetes*, ll. 827-1471. **HW I.**

February

- Tu 02 *Hippolytus*, ll. 1-731.
Th 04 *Hippolytus*, ll. 732-1466.
- Tu 09 *Frogs*, "Introduction," ll. 1-673.
Th 11 *Frogs*, ll. 674-1098.
- Tu 16 *Frogs*, ll. 1099-1533. **HW II.**
Th 18 *Ion*.
- Tu 23 *Hippias Major*.
Th 25 *Republic* (Xeroxed excerpts)

March

- Tu 02 *Poetics*, 1.1-4.4, 5.2, 5.5.
Th 04 *Poetics*, "Reconstruction of *Poetics II*" (pp. 47-55). **HW III.**
- Tu 09 *Hamlet*, Act I.
Th 11 *Hamlet*, Act II.
- TuTh 16, 18 **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**
- Tu 23 *Hamlet*, Acts III-IV. **HW IV.**
Th 25 *Hamlet*, Act V.
- Tu 30 *Le Cid*, Acts I-III.

April

- Th 01 *Le Cid*, Acts IV-V.
- Tu 06 *Phèdre*, "Preface," Acts I-III.
Th 08 *Phèdre*, Acts IV-V. **HW V.**
- Tu 13 *The Misanthrope*, Acts I-III.
Th 15 *The Misanthrope*, Acts IV-V.
- Tu 20 *School for Wives*.
Th 22 *School for Wives Revisited; Impromptu at Versailles*.
- Tu 27 *Letter to D'Alembert*, pp. 4-7, 15-47.
Th 29 *Letter to D'Alembert*, pp. 47-65.

May

- Tu 04 *Letter to D'Alembert*, pp. 65-92. **2pp plan for Final Paper.**
Th 06 *Letter to D'Alembert*, pp. 92-137. Course Evaluations.