

Fresh Voices Lecture Series TT 2025
Languages and Literature

All lectures are held in the Main Lecture Theatre of the Ioannou Centre, on Mondays at 10 am.

Charlotte Susser (week 2)

Can Drama be Didactic? Aristophanes' Depiction of Tragedy in *Frogs* and *Thesmophoriazusae*

In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, his character Euripides explains that, by putting critical thinking and examination into his plays, he teaches the people of Athens to put more thought into their own lives and to be better citizens. Aristophanes' Aeschylus takes umbrage with this point of view; he believes that poets must show the people good and upstanding behaviour, while concealing anything morally wicked, so as to encourage the people to emulate the positive characteristics they see on stage. Underlying these competing arguments is the core question: can drama be didactic? Can poets seriously teach the city (for good or ill) with their poetry, and do they? Moreover, what does it mean that Aristophanes presents this depiction in his plays, and how can this affect our interpretation of them? This lecture focuses on Aristophanes' depiction of poetic didacticism in *Frogs* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, especially regarding how this impacts our interpretation of these plays.

This lecture will interest all students of Athenian drama, whether they are taking the *Texts and Contexts* paper at Mods, *Greek Tragedy*, *Greek Core* or *Comedy* at Greats.

Milly Cox (week 3)

Theoretical Approaches to Greek Tragedy

In a whistle stop tour of contemporary critical theory, this lecture will introduce (or acquaint) students to methods of thinking from Reception Theory to Queer theory to New Materialisms and more. Together we will chart a brief history of contemporary approaches to Greek tragedy, focusing particularly on the *Oresteia*, *Medea*, and the *Bacchae* and their props/textiles/costumes as case studies to ground our theoretical exploration.

The lecture will be of interest to students taking the *Greek Tragedy* and *Greek Core* papers at Greats, *Texts and Contexts* for Mods, and anyone who would like to get a better handle on recent developments of theory in literature.

Marina Paschalidou (week 4)

Proverbial Speech in Aristophanes

This lecture seeks to provide insight into the poetics of proverbial speech in Aristophanic comedy. Following a brief discussion of the methodological challenges inherent in studying proverbial material from antiquity, I will examine the function of proverbial expressions across different dramatic levels in Aristophanes' plays. More specifically, using a wide range of examples, I will focus on three principal techniques: (1) the use of proverbial expressions to generate humour, particularly through creating surprise by subverting proverbial expressions and, at times, their underlying ideas; (2) the individualisation of proverbial speech as a means of characterisation; and (3) the "materialisation" of proverbial expressions in the creation of scenic action, at both micro- and macro-structural levels of the text. Ultimately, the lecture aims to introduce students to a less familiar dimension of Aristophanes' poetry, demonstrating that proverbial language is not merely a vehicle for incidental humour but a meticulously crafted and vital component of his "theatre of words."

This lecture will interest students taking the *Greek Tragedy*, *Greek Core* and *Comedy* papers at Greats, and *Texts and Contexts* at Mods.

Ben Willstead (week 5)**A close reading of Posidippos' *Lithika***

Posidippos' *Lithika* has remained one of the most exciting papyrological discoveries of the past 30 years, one which has transformed the present and future study of Hellenistic literature for good. This lecture aims to get up close and personal with some of the reasons behind the excitement that surrounds these multifaceted texts, including how their central microcosmic objects are made to reflect on issues of gender and literary objectification; the hermeneutics of "surface" and "depth"; epigram's poetics of scale; and the vexed relationship between art and text.

This lecture will be of particular relevance to those students taking the *Hellenistic Poetry* paper at Greats.

Clare Chang (week 6)**Reception of the *Oresteia* in South Africa**

With its themes of intrafamilial killings and revenge across generations, the myth surrounding Orestes, Electra, and the House of Atreus resonates deeply with the history of South Africa. This lecture will focus on Athol Fugard's *Orestes* (1971), which was produced during apartheid and merged the mythical figure of Orestes with Johan Harris, who bombed the whites-only platform of Johannesburg Park Station in 1964. Harris' attack shocked the country at the time because it was a white-on-white attack to protest against apartheid, and he was the only white person executed for crimes committed in resistance to apartheid. The second play is Mark Fleishman's *In the City of Paradise* (1998), which engages with the Oresteian myth through the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that started its work two years before the play was first produced. As a form of transitional justice, the TRC has often been praised for its participants' demonstration of tolerance and forgiveness in the face of blood feud, which creates a natural dialogue with the resolutionary power of the *Eumenides*.

This lecture will be of particular interest to students taking the paper *The Reception of Classical Literature in Poetry in English since 1900*.

Valentino Gargano (week 7)**Gender in the *Trojan Women***

Although the *Trojan Women* is often understood to be about women's experiences and sometimes even proto-feminist in its outlook, it has been observed that the characters of the play are hardly as destabilising or transgressive as other female characters of Greek drama. This lecture explores the role of gender in the *Trojan Women* and its interrelations with a number of other themes of the play, contextualising it within the vast scholarship on gender in Greek tragedy.

This lecture will interest students taking any of the papers involving Athenian tragedy (*Greek Tragedy, Texts and Contexts, Greek Core*) and anyone interested in the gender dynamics of the ancient world.

Adrian Kelly

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