

Remote Learning Packet

NB: Please keep all work produced this week. Details regarding how to turn in this work will be forthcoming.

April 6-10, 2020

Course: 11 Humane Letters

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Weekly Plan:

Monday, April 6

- Read and annotate *The Libation Bearers (TLB)*, lines 1-311 (p. 177-192)
- Answer reading questions

Tuesday, April 7

- Read and annotate *TLB*, lines 312-773 (p.192-211)
- Answer reading questions

Wednesday, April 8

- Read and annotate *TLB*, lines 774-1075 (p. 212-226)
- Answer reading questions

Thursday, April 9

- Read the attached lecture
- Compose a one-page reflective analysis on Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*

Friday, April 10

- No School!

Statement of Academic Honesty

I affirm that the work completed from the packet is mine and that I completed it independently.

I affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, my child completed this work independently

Student Signature

Parent Signature

Monday, April 6

We continue the tragic events of the house of Atreus with Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*. The drama is short, but complex; you are encouraged to continue signposting the major motifs and themes mentioned last week. Once again, the intention is for much of the reading to be done independently; that being said, we have included a brief lecture highlighting a couple of major points at the end of the week. Please note that this lecture is intended to be read on Thursday, after you have finished *The Libation Bearers* and before composing your reflective analysis for the week.

1. Read and annotate *TLB* lines 1-311 (p. 177-192). Pay close attention to details of time and place, e.g. how long has it been since *Agamemnon*? how does Argos as a whole seem to have reacted to the event? what effect has this had on the family outside of Clytaemnestra herself?
2. Complete the worksheet questions for this day's reading.

Tuesday, April 7

1. Read and annotate *TLB* lines 312-773 (p.192-211). Note the cyclical pattern of the prayer in the first half of the reading, weaving the words of Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus in and out of each other before converging and unifying in thought towards the end. Do your best to signpost what emotion, image, or theme each character is highlighting to help draw connections between each prayer.
2. Complete the worksheet questions for this day's reading.

Wednesday, April 8

1. Read and annotate *TLB* lines 774-1075 (p. 212-226). Pay special attention to the conversation between Clytaemnestra and Orestes; look for parallels between this moment and the climax of *Agamemnon*. Like in the first part, attempt to identify moments where characters make claims to Justice, Right, or divine compulsion for their actions.
2. Complete the worksheet questions for this day's reading.

Thursday, April 9

1. Lecture:

Now that we have the first two-thirds of the *Oresteia* under our belts, there are several more complex ideas and movements within the plays that warrant emphasis. The ideas we'll be covering briefly today are triads (thematic sets of three) and the reconciliation of the masculine and feminine.

a) Triads

The *Oresteia* is a dramatic progression, a transformative and epic (albeit painful) movement not unlike those we were able to only glimpse in our time with Homer. Aeschylus divides these sorts of movements into sets of three (much like the trilogy of dramas itself). In *Agamemnon* 169-184, we are encouraged to begin thinking of the events of the drama in light of the triad of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus; each son overthrew the father. It is especially important that Zeus, the victor and progenitor of law and order among the Olympian gods, is the third generation and the victorious one; hence the abundant references to "Saving Zeus" and "the third victor". If we were to align this scheme to the characters of the drama, it might look something like this:

1. Ouranos	=	Agamemnon
2. Kronos	=	Clytaemnestra
3. Zeus	=	Orestes

This parallel is a sign of hope, as it lends a divine quality to Orestes' actions, despite all of the grotesque suffering involved on all sides: in the big picture, his actions will (hopefully) result in a cleansing of old blood feuds and a re-establishment of law and justice in Argos (as the Leader of the Chorus suggests on *TLB* 1044). However, these are of course not the only triads within the trilogy. A curiosity in the opening of *TLB* contains a foreboding three-part movement that appears to be in tension with the original:

But Justice waits and turns the scales:
a sudden blow for some at dawn,
for some in the no man's land of dusk
her torments grow with time,
And the lethal night takes others. (61-65).

If we are to align the movement from dawn to dusk to night with our triad, Orestes' actions seem to take on a more foreboding quality. As we have now seen at the end of the drama, the nature of his actions has caused him to be subjected to the wrath of the Furies. Whether he shall be consumed by "the lethal night" or not is the primary tension of *Eumenides*.

b) Reconciling the masculine and the feminine

One interesting thing to note about the triad of Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, and Orestes is that each claims a family member of the opposite gender as their victim: Iphigenia for Agamemnon, Agamemnon for Clytaemnestra, and Clytaemnestra for Orestes. Complicating this dynamic further is the fact that Cassandra and Aegisthus are evidence of the lack of fidelity and unity. The "mission statement",

so to speak, of *The Libation Bearers* is to set the household of Atreus back in order; the key to this appears to be the cooperation and familial bond between Orestes and Electra.

Electra recognizes Orestes once and for all once she is shown a piece of clothing that she wove for him--both a contrast with Agamemnon's "great robe" that Clytaemnestra wove (975, 1010, among others) and a literal sign of her love and care for her brother, the cause of their reunion. As they embrace and Electra names Orestes as the "four loves in one" (240) of her family, she declares him to be the entirety of her family now. We are given a moment of hope at the idea of Orestes healing the wound between masculine and feminine forces within the household.

Of course, the sins of his parents still plague Orestes, and he must wrestle with the inherent contradiction of the good of avenging his father and the evil of murdering his own mother before any clear sense of order can be established. The apparent dual morality of certain actions appears to also be related to the trilogy's ongoing emphasis on double meanings: for example, page 219 is rife with references to "double fates", "the double lion", and "the double onslaught" (918, 925-26). Thus far, every victory or moral claim has had someone who holds the opposite perspective. I shall withhold from saying too much on the subject of Orestes' difficult choice, however, as I hope for it to play a key role in your reflective analysis this week.

2. Prompt for *The Libation Bearers* reflective analysis: As Orestes hesitates to kill Clytaemnestra in the climax of the drama, we see this exchange:

Orestes:

What will I do, Pylades? - I dread to kill my mother!

Pylades:

What of the future? What of the Prophet God Apollo,
the Delphic voice, the faith and oaths we swear?

Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods. (*The Libation Bearers* 886-889)

This should jump out as significant, if only for it being the only time we've seen Pylades speak. In at least two thoughtful paragraphs, attempt to explain why Pylades' words succeed in persuading Orestes. Your answer should also draw from at least one of the major themes we've highlighted so far.

Monday: TLB lines 1-311 Reading

Questions

Answer in complete sentences.

1. What might the fact that this drama opens with a prayer say about the ethos of the drama, or what tone does it set for what is to come?

2. Toward the start of the drama, what reason does the Chorus give for the sudden decision to pour libations at Agamemnon's grave?

3. What is it that unites Electra, daughter of the king, and the chorus of slaves in the royal house? What do they have in common that brings them together in this section?

4. Why does Electra re-focus the love she had toward her mother and late sister toward her brother?

5. What is the primary motivation for Orestes to avenge Agamemnon? What does he suggest the consequences for neglecting this would be?

Tuesday: *TLB* lines 312-773 Reading Questions

Answer in complete sentences.

1. “It is the law: when the blood of slaughter wets the ground it wants more blood” (*TLB* 394-5). What “law” is being referred to here?

2. What seems to be the purpose or telos of the lengthy dialogue with the dead before the altar (ending at line 496)? What might Orestes and Electra be trying to accomplish?

3. How does Clytaemnestra react to the news delivered by Orestes, posing as a stranger?

Wednesday: TLB lines 774-1075 Reading Questions

Answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe your impression of Aegisthus based on his brief appearance in this scene.

2. According to Orestes, what is his next move after avenging the death of his father?

3. Orestes convinces himself that killing his mother is an act of justice. She had, in part, justified her killing of Agamemnon by appealing to his sacrifice of their daughter. Is one of these acts more in accordance with true justice, or were both of them equally warranted?
