

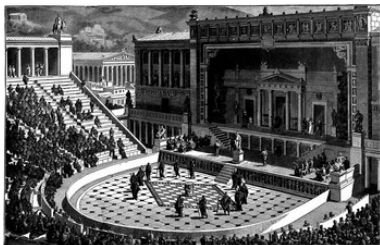


## The Greek Dramatists and the Epic Tradition in Homer and Quintus of Smyrna

Due Date: Monday, 2 May 2011

Length: 8-10 pages (not including your Works Cited)

By the time of the Classical Period in Greek history, the golden age of the dramatists, Homer was well known by the Athenian audiences that gathered in the Theatre of Dionysus to be entertained by the plays of Aeschylus (*ca.* 525-456 B.C.), Sophocles (*ca.* 495-406 B.C.), and Euripides (*ca.* 480-406 B.C.). In the readings for this course, you have had an opportunity to observe (a) how these great dramatists made use of the epic tradition of Troy, as preserved in Homer or elsewhere, and (b) that Quintus of Smyrna, in his reshaping of the epic tradition, may have been influenced by the Greek dramatists. This particular assignment asks you to focus on either how the dramatists made use of the *Iliad* or how Quintus may have been influenced by the Greek dramatists.



Here are a few of the more obvious questions you might ask yourself: Is the Agamemnon of Aeschylus the same character as is developed by Homer? Does Quintus's character development of Ajax or Menelaus appear to be influenced by Sophocles or Euripides? If the dramatists had a script of Homer to work with, how did they make use of it? Did

they honor it as though it were a sacred text that could not be modified or added to? Is there any evidence of disagreement or disapproval of Homer's development of the Troy tradition? Is the sapientia of Quintus in the Homeric or Athenian tradition?

There are, essentially, two different approaches that you can take in fulfilling this assignment. On the one hand, you can analyze the references to the epic tradition in all of your readings in the Greek dramatists and then come up with a broad thesis (*e.g.*, "The Greek dramatists, in their development of the epic tradition of Troy, never question or contradict the *Iliad*, but rather make use of it as a steady and unbroken foundation upon which to build." "Quintus of Smyrna, in preserving the epic traditions of the Posthomerica, reveals his indebtedness to the Greek dramatists."). On the other hand, you can compare and contrast a particular theme that is developed by the Greek dramatists that we've read and by Homer and/or Quintus (*e.g.*, "The Greek dramatists reveal that, in the centuries that intervened between Homer and the fifth century B.C., the Olympian gods had been transformed from distinct personalities into impersonal forces of nature." "Despite the lingering presence of Homer's gods, Quintus's characters cannot conceal traces of modern Euripidean anxiety.")\*

Keep in mind that the purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate that you have critically read and have comparatively analyzed the Greek dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, while focusing on the epic tradition of Troy as preserved in the poetry of Homer and Quintus.

\*Disclaimer: The sample theses are intended merely to indicate the approaches that may be used in order to arrive at an acceptable thesis for this assignment, and they should not be regarded as necessarily ideal or arguable.

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Two weeks before this essay is due you will be required to present your thesis, along with *at least* two supporting arguments (including textual citations), in a brief synopsis of 100-200 words. This will be presented on the online Discussion Board, on or before Wednesday, April 13, for the consideration and response of your classmates. You will also be required to respond critically, expressing reasoned agreement or disagreement, to two of your classmates' theses and argument synopses. Both of these responses must be posted on or before Wednesday, April 20. Your participation in this forum is equivalent to participation in a rough draft workshop, and failure to participate will lower your final essay grade up to one full letter (*e.g.*, from an A to a B).

Presentations of theses and argument synopses, as well as critical responses, should be posted within the forum "The Dramatists and the Epic Tradition" (a sub-forum of "Comparative Essay"), which is accessible only by password. The password will be provided to you during class.