

A NEW ADAPTATION BY  
ROB HARDY  
DIRECTED BY RUTH WEINER  
SEMAPHORE DANCE COMPANY

AESCHYLUS'S

# AGAMEMNON OR RESTEIA

WEITZ CENTER FOR CREATIVITY THEATER  
MAY 11, 12, 13; MAY 18, 20  
7:30 FRIDAYS AND SATURDAY  
2:00 PM SUNDAYS

Tickets available at <https://carleton.tixato.com/buy>

For more information call 222-4531



Carleton College Players  
&  
Semaphore Repertory Dance Company  
*present*

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*Aeschylus's*  
**ORESTEIA**

*Directed by* Ruth Weiner  
*Translation and adaptation by* Rob Hardy  
*Music composed by* Mary Ellen Childs  
*Direction of Choreography by* Judith Howard in collaboration with  
the Semaphore Dance Company  
*Lighting Design by* Jeffrey Bartlett with Tony Stoeri  
*Video Design by* Paul Bernhardt  
*Scenic Design by* Joe Stanley  
*Makeup design by* Mary Ann Kelling

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# Cast

(in order of appearance)

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Greek Voices	Clara Hardy	Cassandra	Jessica Morrison
	Rob Hardy	Aegisthus	Nikhil Pandey
Watchman	Patrick Stephen	Guards/Attendants	Will Gray
Speaking Chorus	Emily Ban		Miles Douglas
	Rebecca Brown	Young Electra	Isabel Aylin
	Kristen Dooley	Orestes	Josh Davids
	Torre Edhal	Electra	Emily Altschul
	Elise Erickson	Pythia	Harper Makowsky
	Rebecca Feldman	Apollo	Chris Densmore
	Amelia Harris	Athena	Rachel Linder
	Sara Klugman	Jurors	Alex Crews
	Hannah Lucal		David Freedman
	Marisa Luck		Courtney Halbach
	Gustave Maisonrouge		Isabel Han
	Roman Morris		Fa Ngamnithiporn
	Deborah Tan		Emily Ness
	Hannah Joy Wirshing		Joss Olson
	Molly Work		Martius Phillips
	Winnie Zwick		Hiyanthi Peiris
Clytemnestra	Chelsea Lau		Malina Workman
Messenger	Soren Hopkins		
Agememnon	Dan Peck		

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# Crew

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Technical Director	Ben Chadwick
Make Up Designer/Costume Supervisor	Mary Ann Kelling
Master Electrician/Assistant Lighting Designer	Tony Stoeri Rebecca Brown (Cassandra)
Assistant Choreographers	Kristen Dooley (Iphengenia) Torre Edahl (Carpet) Amelia Harris (Furies) Marisa Luck (Furies) Deborah Tan (Cassandra) Hannah Joy Wirshing (Cassandra)
Costume Designers	Holly Abel, Emily Altschul, Emily Foster, Sherry Gu, Hannah Jensen, Jon Kittaka, Clara Labadie, Julie Leghorn, Jessica Morrison, Nora Munger, Amy Murdoch, Shavera Seneviratne, Deborah Tan, Philip Qian
Assistant Directors	Holly Abel Minji Jang Daisuke Kawachi
Stage Manager	Minji Jang



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Sound Kyle Markwalter  
Tom Birren  
Sound operator Ben Hubbert  
Recording Engineer Chris Baur  
Props Ryanne Chitjian  
Poster Emily Bauer  
Publicity assistance Peter Bumcrot  
Video Crew Alexander Cooney,  
Chenchu Fang,  
Rebekah Frumkin,  
Bethany McHugh, El-  
len McKinstry, Justin  
Schell, Roy Wiggins  
Board Operator Tony Stoeri  
Lighting Assistant Yawen Chen  
Run Crew Rebecca Stimson  
Tha Bui  
Costume and Makeup Hannah Jensen  
Crew Hannah Reed  
Celia Caffery  
Exhibition Team Rebekah Frumkin  
Ellen McKinstry  
Roy Wiggins  
Carma  
Eastern Indigo Matt Rand  
Snake Wrangler Rebekah Frumkin  
Special Effects Bethany McHugh  
Effects Assistants Ellen McKinstry  
IT Support Andreas Stoehr  
Russ Bauer  
Fiona MacNeill

Costume Shop Lee Conrads, Emily  
Workers Foster, Cassandra  
Iroz, Milanda Landis,  
Rachel Linder, Kassie  
Maxeiner, Rachel  
Porcher, Jennifer  
Rathsack, Emily Stur-  
man, Julie Tsang  
Additional Set Crew Daniel Roberts, Meg  
Kissel, Jeff Johnson,  
David Cutler-Kreutz,  
Danny Smith, Brian  
McClear

*Student Technical Staff*

Emily Bauer, Tom Birren, Alex Brewer,  
Ryanne Chitjian, Josh Davids, Charlotte  
Foran, Henry Gordon, Carlton Keedy,  
Kyle Leichter, Erik Madsen-Bond, Natalie  
Monaghan, Katherine Pavlekovsky, Anna  
Poaster, Quinn Radich, Jennifer Rathsack,  
Tony Stoeri, Alex Trautman

*Graffiti Artists*

Holly Abel, Emily Altschul, Peter Bum-  
crot, Celia Caffery, Josh Davids, Miles  
Douglas, Chenchu Fang, Rob Hardy, Kyle  
Markwalter, Bethany McHugh, Holden  
Sauve, Shavera Seneviratne

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# *The Project:* Tragedy Today

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*This photograph and the others featured in the program were taken during rehearsal by*

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**T**his spring term, approximately twenty students enrolled in “The Oresteia Project: Visualizing Greek Tragedy,” a course dedicated to the exploration of Greek Tragedy with Ruth Weiner of the Theater Department (and our director) and Clara Hardy of the Classics Department. The course has entailed readings of the extant Greek tragedies and other secondary material, and all of us have been required to participate in this Players’ production of *The Oresteia*—be it as actors, assistant directors, dramaturges, projectionists, or publicists.

Over the past two months, as we’ve moved from page to stage and rehearsals have cranked up, our class has enjoyed generous discussion of the challenges and questions of staging Greek tragedy. And, indeed, producing Greek tragedy today is not without its considerable challenges and questions: questions of translation, of how to present the Chorus—a quintessential element of Greek tragedy, questions of balancing ancient and contemporary politics, of acting complex and poetic rhetoric, of presenting the supernatural, and of how to create a theatrical space that adequately represents the political and mythical world of the play. Furthermore,

what elements of the play can or should be highlighted to emphasize the contemporary relevance? How do we balance the historical context in which the play was written and performed with the contemporary context in which it is being produced and performed? Our class has come to realize that there is no definitely correct way to stage these plays today, but that the best production choices are always informed by an understanding of the historical, theatrical, political contexts in which the plays were created. Many of the production decisions you will experience tonight are the fruit of such considerable informed discussion and problem solving that has included Ruth, Rob, Clara, the entire creative technical team, and, to a significant degree, all of the students in our class. In this production, we've shied away from limiting the scope of your experience with particular social or political message, but we hope that you will revel the rich and complex personal, political, ethical, and emotional questions and perspectives addressed in this narrative and leave the theater with some juicy food for thought.

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*How do we balance the historical context in which the play was written with the contemporary context in which it is being produced and performed?*





## Myth, Gender and Politics in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*

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**T**he back cover of any translation of the *Oresteia* will tell you that the trilogy enacts the transition from the *lex talionis* of blood vengeance to the foundation of a civic court. What the jacket covers are less likely to advertise, but what is uncomfortably clear to a reader of the work, is that Aeschylus has fused this progress from archaic revenge to trial by jury with a different one: the shift from powerful female to powerful male. Clytemnestra, the wronged mother, dominates the first play, while the work's conclusion judges the death of the father more consequential. The ancient female Furies are defeated by the new god Apollo, whose argument in part rests on a modern "scientific" way of

thinking about embryology that privileges the father over the mother. Civic justice is founded upon and inseparable from the subordination of woman to man.

The shift from a strong mother-figure to a dominant male is a pattern that recurs frequently in Greek myth. To take just a single example: in the *Theogony* Hesiod tells the story of the creation of the universe. He starts with the earth goddess Gaia, who gives birth to her own mate Uranos, and ends in the third generation of gods when Zeus swallows the goddess Metis and gives birth to Athena from his head. Gaia the earth mother gives way to Zeus the father; female reproductive power is appropriated by the male; the female womb gives way to the male brain.



In the nineteenth century this female-to-male pattern was interpreted as reflecting history: J. J. Bachofen argued that the myth preserved a distant memory of a matriarchal pre-Greek culture defeated by patriarchal invaders. More recently the pattern has been seen instead as reflecting the individual experience of boys in the culture. Their early childhood was spent in the household, where women and particularly their mothers were dominant; once they came of age and moved out into society they joined a world of men. Past mother-right gives way to present father-right, and the physical ties of blood cede to the social bond of marriage. But whatever the origin of this mythic pattern, its principal function seems to be to justify the current situation: male dominance is not simply the “natural” way to structure a society, but the product of a history that renders it just and logical.

This is the raw material, then, out of which Aeschylus forged his trilogy. In the language of myth he deployed,

the female aligned intuitively with the archaic and male with new; progress was gendered. But the terms would have resonated with his audience in more specific ways as well. The relation between city and family and the state’s concern with marriage were also urgent contemporary issues in 458 when the trilogy was first performed. Was it advantageous or disruptive to the city if aristocrats made marriage ties with the elites of other Greek city-states? Could the children of foreign mothers be Athenian citizens? What was the appropriate balance between the power of elite families and the broader male citizenry?

The *Oresteia* resists a simple political reading that would allow us to see Aeschylus as partisan of one side or the other in these complex and interrelated civic problems. But his work forces us, as it did its initial audience, to confront both the costs and the benefits of the community it creates.

# Adaptor's Note

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First performed in Athens in 458 BC, the *Oresteia* is a story of murder, revenge, and reconciliation set in the aftermath the Trojan War, as the cycle of violence engulfs the family of Agamemnon, the general who led the Greeks to victory against the Trojans. It's a challenging work of art that explores the costs and rewards of forming a community, and attempts to dramatize the shift from tribal justice to the justice of the state—from the rule of blood to the rule of law. It's a work that's both relevant and strange, dealing with issues that still resonate with modern audiences, but coming out of a culture that flourished almost 2,500 years ago.

In the words of Washington Post book critic Michael Dirda:

Above all, the *Oresteia* shows us the burdens of a culture based on the *lex talionis*—an eye for an eye—and the blessings of a jury trial in a court of law. After seemingly endless bloodletting—in just one family a man ritually sacrifices his child, a wife murders her husband, and a son executes his mother—there is a final cauterization, and the butchery stops for good. Quite literally for good. In every way, it is a foundational literary work for examining the crucial place of law in society.

“That said,” Dirda continues, “the *Oresteia*'s widespread reputation for solemn grandeur may scare off some modern readers.”<sup>1</sup>

Aware of that daunting reputation, and of the more than five-hour playing time of the original trilogy, Ruth Weiner commissioned me to create an adaptation of the *Oresteia*—a much shorter play that would preserve the story and the themes of Aeschylus's original in language that would be more accessible to a modern

audience.

Most of the writing of this adaptation took place between October 2010 and October 2011. One of the highlights of that year was a trip to Athens with Ruth and Clara, during which we discussed the work-in-progress while drinking Nemean wine in the shadow of the Parthenon, not far from where the *Oresteia* was first performed. In March 2011, Greece was already suffering from the economic turmoil which has continued to accelerate to this day, and some of the spirit of that contemporary unrest has found its way into this retelling of an ancient story.

This adaptation was written in close collaboration with Ruth Weiner, and was further refined through the instincts and insights of a talented group of actors. Their work has made the work tighter, sharper, and more compelling. Although I had spent more than a year and a half with the text before it reached rehearsals, it was Ruth Weiner and this incredible group of Carleton students who finally made it come fully alive for me.

The tragedies of Aeschylus are the earliest surviving complete dramas in the history of theater, and so it is appropriate that his work should help to inaugurate the Weitz Center for Creativity Theater. A little over a decade ago, when this was the Northfield Middle School, my eldest son was a sixth grader here and I was a frequent substitute teacher. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a small part of this wonderful building's exciting new life.

Special thanks to my students in the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium and to Bob Gregory-Bjorklund and his theater students at ARTech for exploring Greek tragedy with me this spring, and to Clara Shaw Hardy for her understanding of the ancient Greeks and of everything else. And the most special thanks of all to Ruth Weiner—a great director, teacher, and friend—to whom I would like to dedicate this adaptation.

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1. Michael Dirda, “The *Oresteia*: Law & Order,” *Lapham's Quarterly*. Accessed 3 May 2012. < <http://www.laphams-quarterly.org/reconsiderations/michael-dirda-reconsideration-the-oresteia.php?page=all> >.

# Director's Note

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I'm writing this after sitting in a long technical rehearsal watching the actors and the Semaphore dancers, supported by the visual elements of production and the music, put their work together to tell the story. The new Weitz Center for Creativity theater feels big, and Joe Stanley's set with its soaring high platforms and its massive palace doors even bigger. But *The Oresteia* demands a large canvas. Its trajectory, from the end of the Trojan War to Athena's creation of the first trial by jury, is huge. It is the story of the movement from a tribal cry for blood revenge to a system of justice designed by a god but carried out by men. It addresses the struggle between male and female, chthonic and Olympian gods, tribe and polis, law and tradition, justice and revenge and feels surprisingly modern.

*The Oresteia* is a foundational play celebrating a civic religion. I realize as I watch and listen how vital the chorus is both to our understanding the events of the

play and to our connection to the ancient theater. The chorus may act as a character in the drama, but they also speak to us directly, filling us in. The chorus explores the history and linkages between events vocally, and their emotional impact through movement and dance. We've used music to underscore many of the choral odes as well as for setting the dance. It foregrounds the mytho-poetic elements in the text and carries emotional heft.

It has been exciting to watch the actors' and dancers' work develop, to see in a technical rehearsal how a light focused in a precise way, or the timing of a sound cue or a particular video image can shape the way we experience the play.

We're now excited to present the work to an audience. We hope you enjoy it!

*Ruth Weiner, Director*

*Class of 1944 Professor of Theater and the Liberal Arts*



# The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival™ XLIII

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**T**he Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education; Dr. Gerald and Paula McNichols Foundation; The Honorable Stuart Bernstein and Wilma E. Bernstein; the Kennedy Center Corporate Fund; and the National Committee for the Performing Arts.

This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, direc-

tors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for inclusion at the KCACTF regional festival and can also be considered for invitation to the KCACTF national festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in the spring of 2011.

Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.

## Special Thanks

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