Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

2022 Colloquium Program with Abstracts
Tuesday, April 19, 2022

Please use this link for joining:

9:00-9:05   Prof. Richard Last, *Introductory remarks*

9:05-9:20   Prof. George Kovacs, Program Coordinator of Ancient Greek and Roman Studies**,** *Looking ahead to 2022-2023*

9:20-9:40   Harper Jin, "Love, Sexuality and Violence in Euripides' *Hippolytus*: Trapped in the Web of Desire"

Abstract: In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Phaedra has fallen in love with her stepson, Hippolytus, as a part of Aphrodite's plot to get revenge on the youth for refusing to acknowledge and honor her. In the context of Athenian society, this love would have been considered unacceptable, both because it implies adultery, and also because of Phaedra's position in society. However, what it is interesting about the main plot points of the play is that Phaedra and Hippolytus' conditions mirror (and opposes) the other: Phaedra is a legitimate Athenian noblewoman who has no personal sexual agency and who is unable to reject the feelings she is afflicted with despite her attempts at doing just that; Hippolytus, on the other hand, is an illegitimate non-Athenian male who has personal sexual agency but vehemently rejects the feelings he should be feeling—that is, love and sexual desire. This rejection of desire eventually leads to both characters' destruction, albeit in entirely different ways. In this way, Euripides presents a dichotomy by which we are invited to reflect upon the unattainable positive between two extreme negatives. Thus, in this paper, I will explore the agency of both Phaedra and Hippolytus as opposites, taking into consideration the role of sexual desire, *eros*, and the actions taken by each character respectively.

9:40-10:00   Ray Berry, "Skilled in Drugs and Witchcraft: The Language of Medea and Circe in the *Argonautica* and *Odyssey*"

Abstract: References to, subversions of, and plays on the story and characters of the *Odyssey* are littered throughout Apollonius' *Argonautica* in varied forms. While the connection between the two texts is clearest in their respective heroes and their journeys, there is a pronounced connection being drawn between the role of Apollonius' Medea and Homer's. This thread is plainly visible in the narrative connection between the two characters, in their shared knowledge of sorcery and the relationships they cultivate with their respective heroes. Using such points of comparison alone, however, one could argue that the *Argonautica* does not employ such references to the *Odyssey* as an intentional, poetic choice, but merely as a product of the text's epic mode. This argument becomes harder to support when looking beyond the basic elements of plot and towards Apollonius' subtle use of language, taking the specific words used in the *Odyssey* to describe Circe and applying them, with

little to no alteration, to his own portrayal of Medea. This use of language ties Medea's character intrinsically with Circe's and emphasises the rich intertextuality of the *Argonautica* as a whole.

10:00-10:20   ***Coffee Break***
The Zoom session will remain open for those who wish to continue socializing, though there is no obligation.

10:20-10:40   Isobel Atkins, "Hallucinatory Drugs in the Eleusinian Cult"

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to further clarify purpose of the possible use of hallucinatory drugs in the Eleusinian cult by exploring other contexts for consuming mind-altering substances within ancient Greece. I will be taking the position that the *kykeon* did in fact contain hallucinatory drugs as a way to further enhance an initiate's interaction with the divine and create a situationally personal experience that could only be accomplished through this participation. This feature of the cult likely generated interest in the festival as this sort of personal religious experience would have been actively sought out. However, the purpose of this paper is not to explain the overall goal of the cult in relation to the drugs but instead how such substances would aid in the overall experience and personal connection between initiate and divinity that was actively sought out.

10:40-11:00   Shelby Beebe-Johnson, "Near Death Experiences and the Eleusinian Mysteries"

Abstract: The Eleusinian Mysteries were a part of a multi-day festival that was central to Athenian polis religion. The exact details of the rites remain obscure but ancient accounts have identified various aspects. Yulia Ustinova and Drew Griffith have brought forward a theory which states that the rites at Eleusis, specifically that of the sacred drama, may have involved initiates undergoing a ritualistic near-death experience. The notion of near-death experiences was not unheard of in the Greek world as the word *deuteropotmoi* or 'second fated ones' was used for those who were pronounced dead and later returned to their community. In the 1970's, physician Dr. Raymond Moody Jr conducted a study interviewing 150 individuals who had recounted a near-death experience to see if he could find commonalities between those individuals. In doing so, he was able to establish particular 'stages' of a near-death experience. This paper will compare a variety of his stages to ancient accounts and aspects of the rites. It will ultimately argue that several aspects of the rites at Eleusis suggest that the initiation aimed to mimic a near-death experience.

11:00-11:20   Cyanna Blackmore, "Theodosius II and Personal Agency in the Nestorian Controversy"

Abstract: Theodosius II often has his agency stripped away from him on account of his more charismatic courtiers and starting his reign at the age of eight. One of the greatest instances of this erasure - both by ancient spectators and modern scholars - is his role in the Nestorian Controversy. However, there is no better place to look than the Controversy to see Theodosius' personal and political agency in motion. This paper aims to illuminate how essential Theodosius - as an autonomous actor - was in the Controversy from its inception to its conclusion.

11:20-11:40   Prof. George Kovacs, *Closing remarks and awards*