



Images of Women in Athenian Literature

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #8

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Upcoming Dates

- Monday, December 8
Position Paper Due
- Sunday, November 2
Responses for Week 8 Due

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Five things today

- Position Paper
- Classical Athens
- Female protagonists
- Literary women vs. goddesses
- Antigone and Medea

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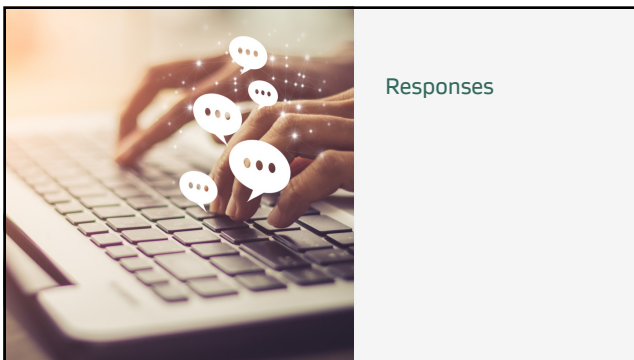
Quiz #5 | Women in Athenian Literature

- According to *Perseus*, Athenian tragedies often showed women as forceful and rebellious because the play's female protagonists
 - represented the needs of private life and family against the power of the state
 - were there to be destroyed and put in their place at the end of the play
 - accurately depicted Athenian women's agency and active public participation in real life
 - were actually gods dressed as women
- In the play *Antigone*, Antigone's sister Ismene insists that Antigone not do
 - delay in burying their brother
 - disobey Creon's ban on burying their brother
 - offer to fight Creon in single combat
 - visit Egypt during the tourist season
- In the play *Medea*, the legendary hero Jason
 - kills his own son to spite Medea
 - has sailed away and is not present in the play
 - lets aside his foreign wife, Medea, and marries a princess to get ahead
 - dies at the end
- According to *Perseus*, all of the following are true about Plato's utopian exercise, *Republic*, 456-472
 - No private property meant there was no need for monogamous marriage
 - Plato thought men and women were similar in nature apart from their roles in begetting children
 - Prostitution was common, accounting for one-sixth of the female population
 - Women were included in the ruling elite class, the guardians
- The comedy *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes, is about women ending a 20-year war by
 - abeying sex to the men until they declare peace
 - siding over the fighting of the war and winning
 - briding the men to make peace by giving them fine new clothes and homes
 - appealing to the gods to intervene and make the men more rational and less aggressive

Extra Credit

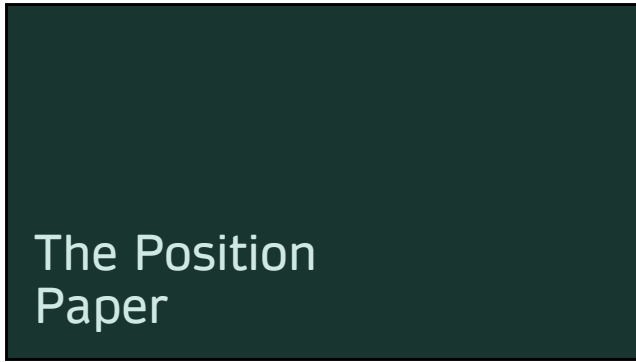
EC: The play *Medea* ends with Medea escaping in a flying chariot. What do you think this tells us about the play's sympathies and message?

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Responses

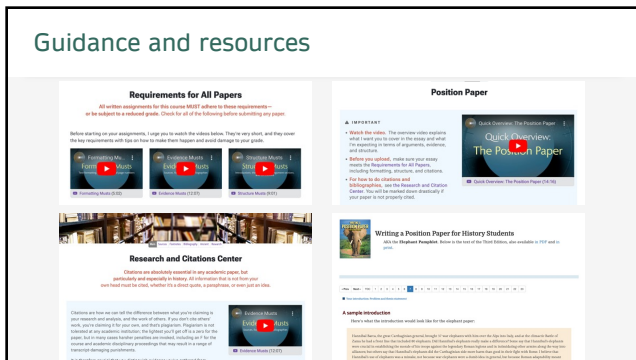
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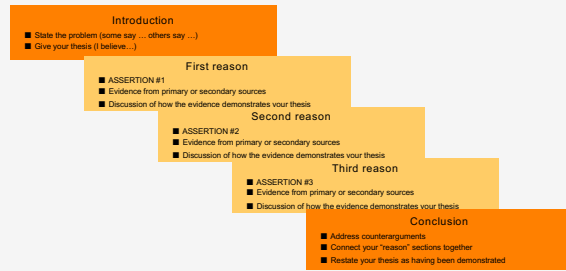


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Structure of an essay



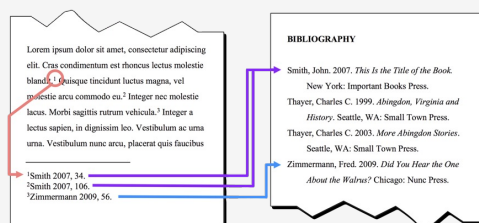
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Approaches to research

- Assigned readings
 - Relevant primary sources
 - Ancient Texts index on my website markwilson.com/pages/texts.html
 - Articles assigned for class
 - Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores...*
- Search for library books
 - Lehman/CUNY OneSearch lehman.edu/library
 - Digital resource
 - Books on the shelf
 - NY Public Library browse.nypl.org
 - Worldcat worldcat.org
- Footnotes in the books you've already found
- Good ol' Prof. Wilson

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Citations and bibliography



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Citing ancient sources

Citing ancient sources

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Citing a play or poem

Citing a play or poem

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Footnote or parenthetical citation:

Clouds, lines 1087–1104

Bibliography:

West, Thomas G., Grace Starry West, Plato, and Aristophanes. *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito, and Aristophanes' Clouds* (Rev. ed.). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

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Points to remember

- Cite all information from outside your head
 - Direct quotes
 - Paraphrases
 - Information, facts, statistics
 - Ideas
- Everything in the paper should support your thesis argument
- Do not just narrate the history
- Check the requirements for all papers

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Questions about whatever



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Women in Athenian Literature

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Classical Athens

- Expansion and patronage of creative expression
- Build up and expansion of Athenian monuments and structures
- Escalation of Athenian influence

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Secondary Source Reading

K. J. Dover

"Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behavior"

- Sexual behavior is more complex than we think
 - Varies across class and situation
- Not one of suppression, but firm ideas about appropriateness
- Athens is changing so rapidly that some of these things are coming into question
 - Erosion of social norms through rapid transformations
 - Concern from people concerned about mores that things are being undermined
 - Backdrop for a lot of literature, especially comedies
- Bacchae*
 - A god comes to Thebes and people are like we don't really need you, we're responsible for our own community and justice
 - Gods respond to human failings - things that impact negatively on the community



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Natural philosophy

- Chaos ("expanse")
 - Primordial void / unformed mass
 - First thing to exist
 - First gods created from its substance
- Cosmos ("order")
 - Order and structure brought to the chaos
- Strong contrast
 - Chaos is the alternative to cosmos
 - Chaos is before / outside
 - Earth (place of order) vs. space (above or below)
 - Discussed in *Bios*
- Nous ("awareness")
 - Human genius
 - Faculty of the human mind necessary for understanding what is true or real
 - Source of reason and cosmos

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Secondary Source Reading

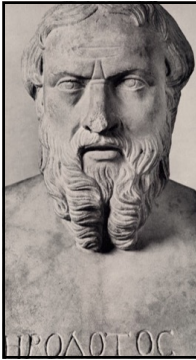
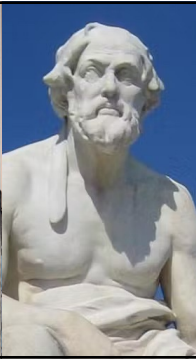
Voula Lambropoulou

"Some Pythagorean Female Virtues"

- Pythagoras - looking for a rational way of living and constructing a community
- Women have distinctive virtues characteristic of them
 - Generosity and bravery
 - Moderation, keeping an even keel
 - These exist to help ground and smooth out the wildnesses of men
- Pythagoreans believed that women are the foundation of society by being the foundation of family and marital relationship



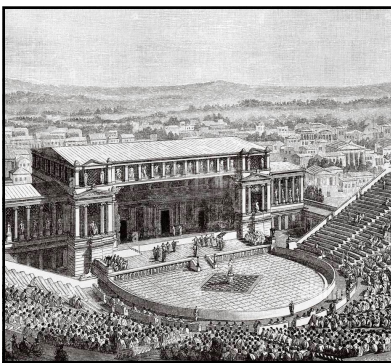
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Historians: Herodotus and Thucydides

- Herodotus
 - “Father of history”
 - Told the story of the Persian Wars
 - Social, anecdotal and subjective
 - Focus on human nature
- Thucydides
 - Main source for the Peloponnesian War
 - Evidence-based and objective
 - Focus on making an argument and supporting with narrative evidence

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Tragedy and comedy

- Interactive, communal creative expression
- Tragedy
 - Suffering of the community due to a selfish choice
 - Reinforcement of communal values
- Comedy
 - Targeting of a social issue or problematic person
 - Questioning and subjective
 - Call to arms

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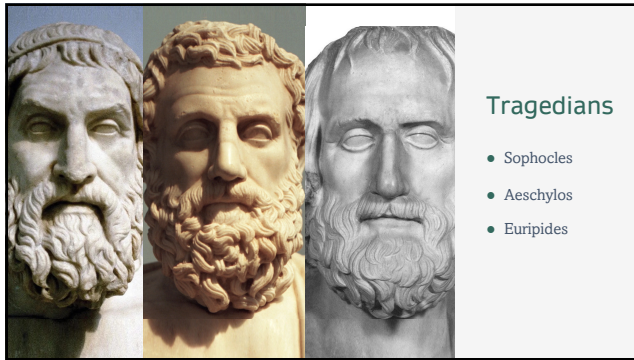
Secondary Source Reading

Helene Foley
“The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama”

- How to approach the understanding of:
 - how women are presented in literature and
 - how we can gain insight into real women in Greek society
- Conclusion:
 - Simple relationships are upended in drama
 - For the purpose of understanding what is the norm and how it is violated
- The simplest conflict is two people already connected by family
 - Clytemnestra / Agamemnon
 - Orestes / Opheloneia
- These private relationships reflect, parallel, and twist the problems in public society



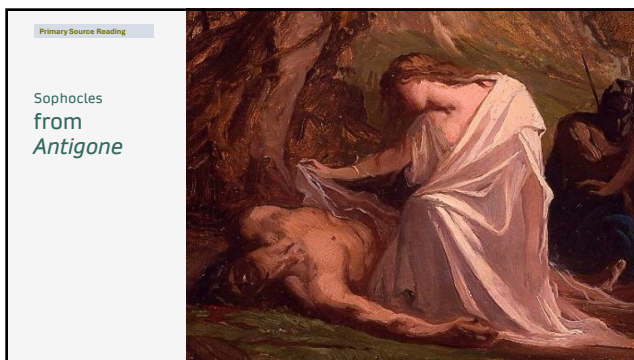
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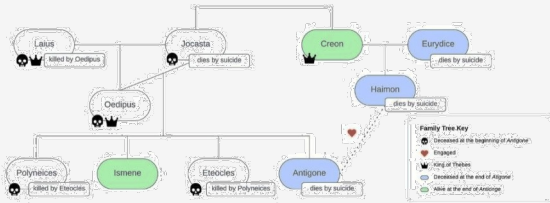


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Antigone's family tree



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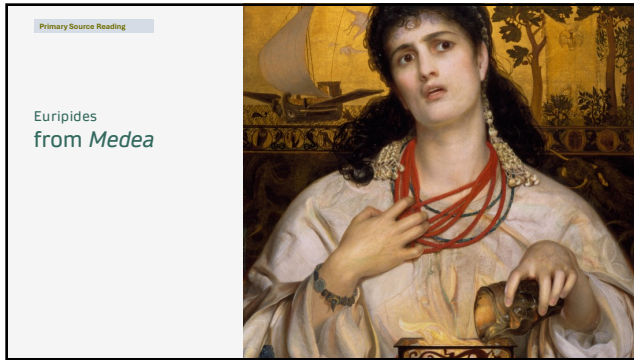
Antigone
and Creon

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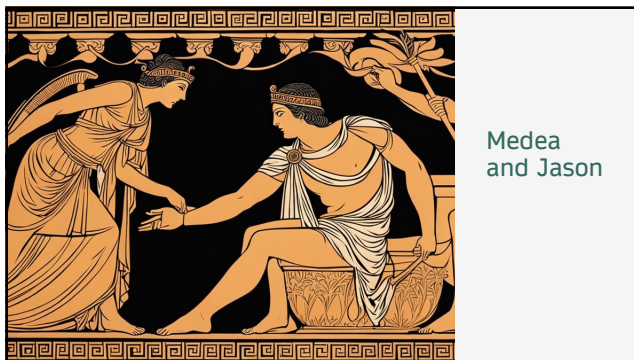


Antigone
and Ismene

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Dramatic characters are dramatic

- Cannot map literary figures onto ordinary society
 - As with mythology, literary figures are a response and a critique
- Stories in drama are deliberately designed to be abnormal
 - Exaggerated circumstances and especially exaggerated characteristics

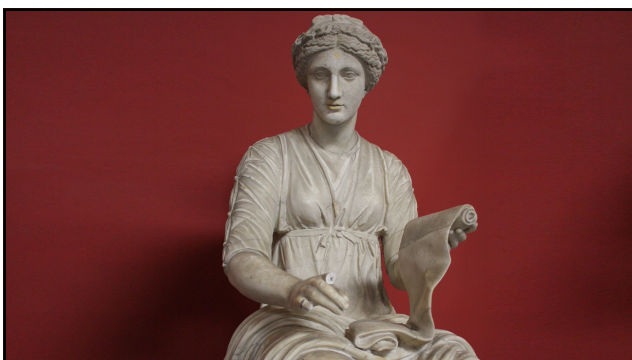
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Women in Athenian Literature

- Especially true of female characters
 - Antigone and Medea are extremely unusual figures
 - Plights are extremes and abnormal
 - Designed to throw into relief the contrasting circumstances people would be familiar with by presenting aberrant examples
- Cannot say "this is what women's lives were like"
 - Instead, this is what provokes a response in contrast to the reality of women's lives

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