

Athenian Drama CS3130G, Winter 2025



Image: *The Theatre of Dionysus, Athens.*

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theatre_of_Dionysus_Acropolis_Athens_Greece.jpg, reproduced under the CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

OVERVIEW

Course Information

Where/When

Instructor Dr Il-Kweon Sir

E-Mail

Office

Student Hours Tuesdays 11-12 am and by appointment.

Please come to student hours (also called “office hours”)! They exist to help you – both regarding this course and for your broader academic development. Drop in if you have questions, but also if you want to talk to me about something in class, in your reading, or even on TV that’s inspired you.

Course Website see Brightspace

Course Description

All the world’s a stage – or is the stage the world? Who and what is the theatre for? What’s religion got to do with it? What makes drama Athenian? This course explores the world of the classical Athenian theatre through a close study of Aeschylus’ *Persians*, Euripides’ *Bacchantes*, and Aristophanes’ *Frogs* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*. With these tragedies and comedies as well as other literary, philosophical, and archaeological material, we will consider the socio-historical context of democratic Athens, the spaces and modes of performance, and the literary and intellectual milieu that shape our approaches to and understandings of Greek drama.

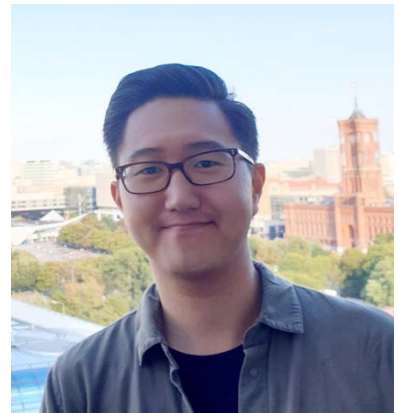
Learning Objectives

Students who complete this course will:

- be able to recognise, describe, and situate the plays within their literary, historical, intellectual, and social contexts;
- be able to recognise, describe, and engage with the different methodological approaches to Athenian drama;
- be able to recognise, describe, and analyse the rich poetic qualities of the texts studied;
- be able to consider the continuing afterlives of the genres of Athenian drama within Greek and Latin literature and in modern culture;
- have improved their research, presentation, and writing skills.

Instructor

Hello! I'm Il-Kweon Sir (my first name is pronounced in two syllables and rhymes with "one"; "Sir" is pronounced like the title). I hail from Korea via the UK and I'm very glad to be joining Western this year from the University of Cambridge, where I have researched and taught since receiving my degrees from the University of Oxford. My teaching and research are closely aligned, focused on the study of the ancient Greek and Roman world through its languages and literature with a special interest in lyric poetry. I'm especially excited to be teaching this course as the texts of Greek tragedy and comedy are almost limitlessly rich with meaning and interpretative possibilities; not only do they offer insights into the history and society of Classical Athens, they also pose difficult questions about humanity that resonate to this day as well as about how we approach the study of the ancient world.



Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course. The themes and content of this course would combine well with the "Greek Epic" (Fall), "The 'Good Life' in Greek Poetry" (Fall), "Ancient Greek Religion" (Fall), "Women in Ancient Greece" (Fall) courses in the Department of Classical Studies as well as the "Study Tour to Greece".

Required Books

- C. Collard, *Aeschylus. Persians and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). [Widely available second-hand and as e-book.]
- S. Esposito, *Euripides. Bacchae* (Indianapolis: Focus Publishing, 1998). [Also available second-hand and as e-book.]
- S. Halliwell, *Aristophanes. Frogs and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). [Widely available second-hand and online.]

All other primary texts will be made available on the course website on Brightspace.

Technical Requirements

This course will be conducted in person. However, you will need access to a computer and internet access to access the course website for course materials and notices and to submit work. I will also ask you to watch the occasional YouTube video.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND EVALUATION

Grading Structure

	Percentage	Components	Timings
Participation	30%	= presentation (10%) + performance (10%) + class discussion (10%)	Throughout the term
Mid-Term Project	30%	= 1 commentary (10%) + 1 guided essay (10%)	Released: Wednesday 12 February Submit by: Friday 28 February Auto-Extension: Monday 3 March
Final Project	40%	= commentary (10%) + essay (30%)	Released: Wednesday 19 March Submit by: Friday 4 April Auto-Extension: Monday 7 April

This is an “essay course”. As such, the course and assessments are structured in such a way that you can develop and demonstrate competence in essay-writing, including assembling information, structuring argument, and presenting it in appropriate language and style. Consequently, in keeping with the Senate requirement that students in an “essay course” must demonstrate “some minimal competence in essay writing”, you must achieve at least 50% on average in your written assignments (i.e. the Mid-Term + Final Projects) to pass this course.

Our course will be discussion-based: you are expected to learn from your fellow students as much as from me. At each Wednesday class, one student or a pair/group of students (depending on numbers) will be expected to prepare an informal presentation (of 7-10 minutes) on the presentation question of the week (listed in the schedule). The student or group will give their presentation to the class, which will be followed by class discussion using the presentation as a starting-point. Other sessions will consist of short lectures on specific topics, group exercises, performances, and discussions.

As the schedule below suggests, there is also an emphasis on the reading of the Greek texts in translation. This is a crucial element of the course: we are fundamentally interested in what we can *do and think with* these works rather than learn “facts” about the ancient world.

Assessment Details

Participation

The success of the class discussions depends largely on the level of your preparation. You will be assessed on your presentation, performance, and on level of participation and engagement in class discussions.

Presentation: This need not be fancy, though a PowerPoint presentation or a handout would be very welcome. It should be an informal talk (up to 10 minutes) on the presentation question listed in the syllabus. The questions are purposefully broad and provocative: you should tell the class how you understand the question and the material. You are not expected to offer a definitive answer, but present enough ideas as to act as a conversation-starter. The presentation requires you to answer the question directly and clearly and offer your own perspective on the material, informed by scholarly reading. Please don’t be afraid to offer your own “take”, bring in material not on the syllabus, or use humour – all these will be highly appreciated by your classmates and by me! Your presentation will be assessed on clarity, originality, and argumentation. We will agree on a schedule for presentations in the first class (Monday 6th January).

Performance: Every Friday class will begin with a performance of a scene. This not meant to be a sophisticated dramatic production, but rather an engaged reading and an attempt to think about, interpret, and put into practice the performative aspects of the plays. I expect to grade generously and to give full marks for this portion of the overall grade if you organise well with your performance partner(s) and show enthusiasm. We will agree on a schedule for performances in the first class (Monday 6th January).

Class Discussions: Although only one person or pair/group will be asked to present or perform in a given session, I will expect everyone to have (1) read the primary texts for the week, (2) read the suggested scholarship, and (3) thought carefully about the presentation question. This means, I will expect everyone – regardless of whether you were the presenter/performer or not – to be able to engage with the presentation/performance, interact with the arguments made in class, and contribute your opinions. Likewise, everyone will be expected to participate in group exercises and class discussions that are not prompted by student presentations/performances. In assessing participation, I value quality of participation over quantity – comments and questions that offer a new perspective in the discussion or advance the discussion are key.

We will discuss what participation might look like in greater detail in the first session; there will be opportunities to provide self-assessments mid-way and at the end of the course which will be used to inform my mark for the class discussion portion.

Mid-Term Project

In Week 6 (Wednesday 12 February), I will release the task for the Mid-Term project with several passages for the commentary and guided essay (you will be able to choose between passages). You are required to do 2 tasks:

(1) a “commentary” (i.e. a close analysis) on a short passage or image. The word limit for the commentary is 700 words excluding bibliography (but I will read up to another 50 words). I do not expect you to extensively “research” the passages/images for comment, but rather to interpret them in the context of what you have learnt during the course. I expect you to spend between 60 minutes on this exercise.

(2) a “guided essay”. This requires you to answer an essay question with detailed reference to a short passage provided. The word limit for the guided essay is 1400 words excluding bibliography (but I will read up to another 100 words). The word limit is not a “target”; an A-grade should be achievable in an essay of 1200 words. I would expect you to spend up to 4 hours in total, including research and writing time, on this exercise.

These pieces of writing need not be “masterpieces”; please treat them as if they were a kind of timed essay or take-home examination with less pressure. I will assume you have spent approximately the amount of time I have suggested above on these exercises and grade your work accordingly.

Please remember that the commentary and guided essay should adhere to the University’s standards of academic integrity and be referenced fully.

There is no time limit, but you must submit them to me via Brightspace before our class on Friday 28 February (Week 7). In line with the Academic Consideration Policy (below), I am offering a no-questions-asked grace period: work may be submitted until 1 pm on Monday 3 March without penalty; as such, requests for academic consideration for this assessment will be denied. Grading criteria will be distributed with the project.

Final Project

In Week 10 (Wednesday 19 March), I will release the task for the Final project with several passages for the commentary (choose one) and several essay questions (choose one). You are required to do 2 tasks:

- (1) a “commentary”. (Same guidelines apply as for the Mid-Term project.)
- (2) an essay. The essay questions will reflect the topics covered throughout the course but will require you to bring the course material together in new ways. The word limit for the essay is 2500 words excluding bibliography (but I will read up to another 250 words). The word limit is not a “target”.

I would expect you to spend around 7-9 hours in total, including research and writing time.

Please remember that the commentary and the essay should adhere to the University’s standards of academic integrity and be referenced fully.

There is no time limit, but you must submit them to me via Brightspace before class on Friday 4 April. In line with the Academic Consideration Policy (below), I am offering a no-questions-asked grace period: work may be submitted until 1 pm on Monday 7 April without penalty; as such, requests for academic consideration for this assessment will be denied. Grading criteria will be distributed with the project. Grading criteria will be distributed with the project.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Mon 6th Jan, Wed 8th Jan, Fri 10th Jan)

Introduction: Greece, Athens, and the Theatre

Presentation Topic: Why should we study Athenian theatre?

Week 2 (Mon 13th Jan, Wed 15th Jan, Fri 17th Jan) [N.B. Tues 14th Jan is the last day to add/drop without the course showing on the transcript]

History and Fiction: Aeschylus’ *Persians*

Presentation Topic: Is Aeschylus’ *Persians* a mythologising of history?

Week 3 (Mon 20th Jan, Wed 22nd Jan, Fri 24th Jan)

Sense and Sensibility: Aeschylus’ *Persians*

Presentation Topic: Does Aeschylus’ *Persians* inspire empathy or Schadenfreude?

Week 4 (Mon 27th Jan, Wed 29th Jan, Fri 31st Jan)

Humanity and Divinity: Euripides’ *Bacchae* (and Aeschylus’ *Persians*)

Presentation Topic: Is Euripides’ *Bacchae* ultimately about knowing your place?

Week 5 (Mon 3rd Feb, Wed 5th Feb, Fri 7th Feb)

Madness and Wisdom: Euripides’ *Bacchae*

Presentation Topic: How helpful are words in Euripides’ *Bacchae*?

Week 6 (Mon 10th Feb, Wed 12th Feb, Fri 14th Feb)

Sex and Politics: Euripides’ *Bacchae*

Presentation Topic: Are sex and gender ever just sex and gender in Euripides’ *Bacchae*?

[WED 12th FEB: MID-TERM PROJECT PASSAGES & ESSAY TITLES RELEASED]

SPRING READING WEEK

[FRI 28th FEB: MID-TERM PROJECT DUE *BEFORE* THE CLASS]

Week 7 (Mon 24th Feb, Wed 26th Feb, Fri 28th Feb)

Drama: The Origin Story

Presentation Topic: “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” (W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII). How true is this according to Euripides’ *Bacchae*?

Week 8 (Mon 3rd Mar, Wed 5th Mar, Fri 7th Mar) [N.B. Friday is the last day to drop this course with WDN on the transcript; drops after this date show as F.]

The Chorus: Euripides’ *Bacchae* and Aristophanes’ *Frogs*

Presentation Topic: What does the Chorus contribute to the *Bacchae* and *Frogs*?

Week 9 (Mon 10th Mar, Wed 12th Mar, Fri 14th Mar)

Comedy and Politics: Aristophanes’ *Frogs*

Presentation Topic: Is politics just a framing device?

Week 10 (Mon 17th Mar, Wed 19th Mar, Fri 21st Mar)

Tragedy and Comedy: Aristophanes’ *Frogs* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*

Presentation: Do Aristophanes’ *Frogs* and *Women at the Thesmophoria* present a coherent view of tragedy as a genre?

[WED 19th MAR: FINAL PROJECT PASSAGES & ESSAY TITLES RELEASED]

Week 11 (Mon 24th Mar, Wed 26th Mar, Fri 28th Mar)

Sex and Fantasy: Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria*

Presentation Topic: How fantastic is the world of the Thesmophoria in Aristophanes’ play?

Week 12 (Mon 31st Mar, Wed 2nd Apr, Fri 4th Apr)

Closing Discussions

Discussion Question: “For the stage is not merely the meeting-place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life” (Oscar Wilde, “The Truth of Masks”). Discuss.

[FRI 4th APR: FINAL PROJECT DUE *BEFORE* THE CLASS]

POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Content Notice and Etiquette

This is a discussion-based class, which can only succeed in a safe and inclusive community that learns from the many different perspectives of its participants. Ancient Greek poetry, especially Athenian drama, often treats many topics which affected the daily life of people (ancient and modern) – including death, violence, sex and gender, sexuality, race, and age – in ways that appear to us to be insensitive or offensive. All participants must be respectful of others in the classroom. If you ever feel that the classroom environment is affecting your participation and learning in a negative way, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Religious Accommodation

When a course requirement conflicts with a religious holiday that requires an absence from the University or prohibits certain activities, students should request accommodation for their absence in writing at least two weeks prior to the holiday to the course instructor and/or the Academic Counselling office of their Faculty of Registration. Please consult University's list of recognized religious holidays (updated annually) at:

<https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>.

Accessibility and Accommodation Policies

I am committed to teaching a course that is fully inclusive of all students. Please let me know as soon as possible if you foresee or encounter any barriers and we will determine if there are any adjustments or accommodations that can be implemented. I am open to creative solutions and to work with you.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf.

Academic Policies and Communications

The website for the Office of the Registrar is <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>.

In accordance with policy (https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf), the centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university e-mail address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that e-mail received from the University at their official university address is attended to in a timely manner.

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/login>) on a regular basis for news and updates. For assistance with the course OWL site, see the OWL Help page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800, or with a support ticket: [create an OWL Brightspace service ticket](#).

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity policies are about equity. Academic writing is a product of labour and so appropriating others' work without credit or attribution is theft. You can also see plagiarism as a form of censorship as incorrect citation or omission of authorship can amount to the silencing of scholarly perspectives and identity.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf. You, as the student, are responsible for knowing and avoiding misconduct.

I encourage you to make sure you understand and know how to avoid plagiarism before submitting any work for assessment. The University offers an Academic Integrity Tutorial for Undergraduate Students on OWL; students who complete the tutorial will earn a certificate: <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal/site/dc11302e-3b48-41b2-bdf6-05a2d96c86cc>. Western Libraries also offers resources on plagiarism: <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>.

I do not mind which referencing system you use as long as it is consistent and complete. I suggest using the style of a respected journal in our field, such as *Phoenix* or *TAPA*. The Western Libraries website offers handy guides to citation styles: <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/essayhelp/index.html>.

Statement on the Use of Plagiarism-Checking Software

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com

(<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Electronic Devices and the Use of AI

There are no restrictions on the use of electronic devices for assessments.

However, in this course, the use of AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT) are strictly prohibited for the purposes of gathering information or generating ideas: not only do such uses of AI tools go against and hinder the aims of this course, but the issues of large language models fabricating (or “hallucinating”) facts and sources are also well known, making them unhelpful as sources of information in an academic setting. For what it’s worth, no essay that I have generated using ChatGPT as a test case (even with further prompts) seemed likely to achieve a B grade. AI tools (e.g. Grammarly, or ChatGPT with commands such as “reword”) may only be used to edit work in a limited way (e.g. to check grammar or as a thesaurus) – that is, they may only be used as a linguistic aid; they may not be used to produce partial or entire drafts and they may not be used to generate, inspire, or alter your argument in any way. (A very limited exception is the use of AI image tools to create images for illustrative purposes – for example, memes – in informal presentations, as long as the use of AI is acknowledged; these cases are clearly contributing to the presentation of your thinking and not replacing thinking.) All uses of AI tools contrary to this policy will be treated as cases of academic dishonesty.

My own AI policy is different to other professors’; it is your responsibility, as the student, to fully understand my policy or ask me questions before preparing your presentations and Mid-Term and Final projects.

Absences and Extensions Policies

The University’s Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs can be found at https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf.

I have opted to utilise flexible assessments in lieu of academic consideration. I have scheduled two weeks for both the Mid-Term and Final projects: each of these projects are designed to be manageable alongside other work for your courses and work; the extra time is given so that you can space things out if necessary. Because of this, there can be no conflicts except for medical and religious reasons (above) that last for longer than a couple of days. Please plan ahead appropriately. Any academic consideration “directly related to a permanent or temporary disability should seek reasonable accommodations through Accessible Education” (above).

I reserve the right not to mark unauthorised late submissions: such late work will be marked solely at my discretion and availability. Late work will be penalised at a rate of 10% per day.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic Counselling

Your Home Faculty’s Academic Counselling or Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html.

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence

Western University is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre (<https://learning.uwo.ca>) are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.