

MEAI NUCESQUE

A newsletter for Classics at the University of Dallas

THE EUMENIDES AS AN OPERA

Andrew Earle Simpson and Sarah Brown Ferrario, professors at Catholic University of America, have this past month just finished their last one-act opera version of the *Furies*, the third tragedy by Aeschylus in the *Oresteia* cycle. The opera premiered February 9-12, 2006. The tragedy tells of the Eumenides (hitherto called the Erinyes in Greek, also identified with the Dirae and the Furies in Latin). They have come to Athens pursuing Orestes for murdering his mother Klytemnestra, but, once there, Athena tries and acquits Orestes, and then placates the Furies by offering the guardianship of the city. The play highlights the tension between justice and vengeance in civil society.

Simpson and Ferrario's idea to produce the opera--using a new English translation by Ferrario--came in the summer of 1999. Ferrario translated the Greek text after their frustration with overseas publishers of current texts who were slow to respond to Simpson's inquiries. He writes, "communicating trans-Atlantically was going to be extremely cumbersome, especially if I wanted to make changes, cuts, and alterations to the translation, for which I would always have to be getting permission. Finally, Sarah, seeing my frustration, offered to translate two passages for me as a trial, to see what she could do". Simpson scrapped his old music, based on existing translations, and the two began working together on the project. Ferrario describes her translation techniques: "I have tried to strike a middle ground with my translation. The images and symbols which recur throughout the ancient text of the *Oresteia* are not only part and parcel of Aeschylus' artistic thought, but also crucial unifying devices for the trilogy. In making cuts in the text, then, I have tried to maintain the progressive recurrences of individual concepts which the composer and I deemed most essential for the plot and most effective for the stage...and I hope to be able to share something of this with those who view these operas."



"The Furies" from www.wikipedia.com

In Ferrario's translation, the chorus sings, troubled by Orestes' murder of his mother: "A man first should honor his parents,/ then think of his guests and respect for his house. /Willingly just, he will always be happy./ Destruction will flee from his door./The one who is lawless and daring/ who has mounded up wealth and owns it unjustly / will furl in his sails with all force at his troubles:/the mast of his ship is broken."

Simpson voiced the principle roles of the opera for two sopranos, and a mezzo-soprano, tenor, and baritone. The cast also included an SATB chorus of furies, a small dance ensemble, and a chamber ensemble for flute, oboe, violin, viola, violin-cello, piano, and one percussionist. You may watch this opera, or the previous two, at http://digitalmedia.cua.edu/calendar/event_dsp.cfm?event=2983.

A *Washington Post* review of the opera, dated February 14, 2006, seemed

pleased with the opera. It reads, "In libretto and music, Ferrario and Simpson are faithful to Aeschylus's spirit. The music neatly tracks the transformation of Furies to Eumenides: Dark, dense and difficult at first, it moves from dissonance toward consonance as the one-act opera progresses, eventually attaining lyricism." Certainly the production is exciting for Classicists and music-lovers alike. The lighting and costumes for the opera are certainly very stunning, especially for the small-scale production. Unfortunately, one cannot see the detail of the costumes very well on the video available on the web. Nor is the video's sound a very high quality. Nevertheless, it gives a good glimpse of the production. (*Information for this article was found on the Furies portion of the Oresteia Project website: <http://music.cua.edu/furies/>*)

From the Classics Links Page: Silva Rhetoricae

<<http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/>> by Gideon Burton, Brigham Young Univ. This has a long, good alphabetical glossary of rhetorical terms (with examples from English lit.), and a discussion by topics (kinds of oratory; kinds of proof; etc.). ***but a word of caution about rhetors from Tacitus: "...what poor quality is shown in their themes, and how unnaturally they are made up!...themes such as 'The reward of the Tyrannicide,' or 'The Ravished Maid's Alternatives,' ...and all the other topics that are encountered every day in the school but seldom or never in actual legal practice... set forth in magniloquent phraseology."

Tacitus *Dialogue on Oratory* XXXV: from LCL, adapted in Lewis and Reinhold THE EMPIRE, Readings.

THE MODERN EUMENIDES

- Jean-Paul Sartre's 1943 play *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*) uses a retelling of the *Oresteia* (with the Flies as the Furies) in a modern perspective against religion.
- In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante sees the Erinyes at the gates of the city of Dis, the entry point to the four lower circles of Hell.
- In his self-titled album, Rob Dougan calls the Furies "Furious Angels" and poetically imagines that his love for a woman is so strong that, should she leave him, "furious angels will bring you back to me". (from www.wikipedia.com)

Illud constat, imperatorem aculeo non uti. It's certain that the ruling (bee) doesn't use his sting. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 11.17



From www.buzzin.net

LOST AND FOUND

Have you seen a Cassel's Latin dictionary, c. 2000 edition, brown cover? Kindly report sightings to the Classics department.

Book review from the Classics department library

Since not one of you has checked out a book from the Classics department's mini-library recently, I've decided to dust off a few gems from the shelves, like F.W. Hall's *A Companion to Classical Texts*.

Maybe you've heard Dr. Sweet's papyrus lecture about how ancient books were made. *A Companion to Classical Texts* presents that information and more. Hall's book also explains the transmission of texts up to the modern era and emendation of manuscripts. For people who'd rather not stick their noses into that dust, it is still worth your time to at least look at the pictures-- a fine picture of a papyrus plant on an end page and a sample from the 2nd cent. A.D. of Book II, lines 695 to 709 of the *Iliad*. Anybody can come check out this book in, or others, from the Classics department's shelves in the tutor room, though please sign it out in the yellow folder, so it doesn't disappear!



Picture courtesy of <http://www.lifeorceenergies.com/>

The Curiosity Corner

Here's a fragment from Ennius, qtd. in Cicero, as a an example of how not to use alliteration: "O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti!"

The third word "tute" is variant of form of "tu". Lewis and Short say that "tu" can have an emphatic -te or -met suffixed, only in the forms tute or tutemet, tibimet, tete, vosmet, and vobismet.

From Smyth's Greek Grammar

(Greek Grammar in small digestible bits.)
Have you ever wondered why ἀκούω has a funny perfect active stem. As Smyth explains, it's from the elusive digamma:

562. The second perfect is almost always formed from stems ending in a liquid or a stop consonant, and not from vowel stems. But...

a. ἀκήκοα (ἀκούω hear) is for ἀκηκο(Ϝ)-α (ἀκοϜ- = ἀκου-, 43).

Dear Fellow Classics students and friends,

This newsletter is the product of an idle thought on a Monday morning in the Classics department. We hope that you find something in it interesting/amusing/incorrect, so that you'll be quick to send in your comments or angry letters.

If you find the matter of this issue a little lacking in substance, or not to your liking, we'll gladly accept your own contributions--of any sort!--as long as they have anything to do with Classics, naturally! Artistic translations; reviews of current classics articles or events; questions of grammar, history, linguistics, or translation and drawings are especially welcome. Please submit them to the Classics department desk, or to U.D. Box 610, Attn: MN, or email them electronically to mpawlow@udallas.edu.

Courteously, the Editor

Verba Ultima Caesaris by T.D.

You have very likely read or heard the famous phrase, "Et tu, Brute!" These words are commonly attributed to Julius Caesar as his last, uttered as he was murdered by, among others, Marcus Iunius Brutus. William Shakespeare made them famous in his play *Julius Caesar*. But even before then the phrase was known: in the early 1590's, shortly before the production of *Julius Caesar*, an anonymous author wrote a play entitled *Caesar's Revenge* which makes use of the same phrase in English: "What, Brutus too?"

All of these can be traced back to two early accounts of Caesar's death, by Suetonius and Dio Cassius. They both mention popular accounts that Caesar died gasping the words, "καὶ σύ, τέκνον." These mean literally, "Even you, child." Some have suggested that this would indicate that Caesar was Brutus' father, but this is implausible, for Caesar was only seventeen years older than Brutus.

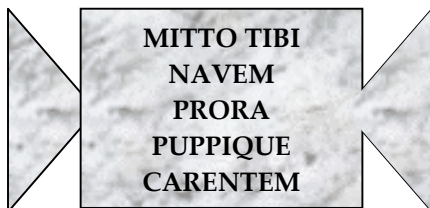
Evidence seems to suggest that, rather than implying surprise and disappointment, it is something akin to a curse. Thus it seems to have been an ancient formulaic phrase used to return evil to one's enemy, which is precisely the opposite of popular interpretation.

However, interesting as it seems, it is unlikely that Julius Caesar ever spoke these words. All the earliest accounts claim that he died in silence, and the two historians mentioned above both reject the report's veracity.



From www.rediff.com

καὶ σύ, τέκνον
|
Et tu, Brute
|
Et tu, Brute?
|
Even you, Brutus?



Can you figure out this rebus puzzle written by Cicero? Turn in your answer to the Classics department for the reward of public honor, and perhaps a prize!

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

The answer to the rebus is: _____



NOLITE FRAUDERE!