

Personal Statement ~ Course II A/B

In Sophocles' 'Antigone', the power dynamics of Antigone/Creon and Antigone/Ismene were an important point of study for my youth theatre. This led to discussion around gender and power, a theme which has stuck with me ever since. Examined by Euripides and Sophocles in their plays, 'Electra' serves as another example of an eponymous tragic woman. In 'Gender and Transgression in Sophocles' Electra', Wheeler analyses how she "transgresses but in defence of patriarchy... For some contemporary feminists, she is the archetypal defender of the patriarchal order." He explores how the plays by Sophocles and Euripides do not have concrete ideas of how gender should be constructed, with discussions over a woman's role and purpose. It is for this reason that I am attracted to the study of the Greek Tragedies - they hold the potential for contentious and lively debate. With my background in writing and directing plays, I ask how exactly would this have been performed in the past and how would I stage it now?

Continuing my practice in theatre, I participated in a week-long stage summer school, led by playwright Nobby Dimon, exploring the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. Our work around the Greek Chorus was most illuminating, looking at how they served as both narrators and actors, and particularly exploring their musical and dance elements. Enacting these myself helped me appreciate the skill involved in coordinating a group to speak and move in unison. I also felt a sense of power due to the use of grotesque masks, which concealed our identities and created a strong discordance, giving us as performers control over a captivated audience. This really illustrated just how strongly the Chorus' words would come across to an audience and helped me to understand their authoritative position and the impact this would have when they offered moral judgements. The complexity of some of the choral odes, however, led me to question what subtleties have been lost in translation?

A firm grasp of language is essential to my study of the Roman world, with many of my views being formed through the lens of Latin GCSE. A-Level German offers the chance to expand my linguistic studies utilising the complexities of cases, as well as developing my understanding of how language learning works. Reading Suetonius' 'Caligula 55' in GCSE Latin, showed me the importance of reading a work in its native language. I found it challenged my preconceived notions about the Emperor, identifying that what is sometimes reported in pop-culture as fact, is clearly a rumour only being reported by Suetonius. This level of analysis has been developed in A-Level English Literature, reading classic texts with modern critical theories, such as a reading of 'Hamlet' supported by the field of Queer Theory.

Freisenbuch's 'The First Ladies of Rome' attracted me due to its promise to represent the imperial women. It gave me essential biographies of the powerful women within the dynasties of the Roman Empire, and led me to revisit the Yorkshire Museum. Most of the depictions of women were, as expected, either divine or tomb inscriptions. One of these, a touching artefact remains with me. A small tomb once held Simplicia Florentina - a ten-month old girl, described by her father's dedication as 'a most innocent soul'. This small glimpse into the tender relationship between a father and his infant daughter does not fit into the grand narratives Roman writers wanted to portray, and even Freisenbuch neglects in her narrow focus. Simplicia would never have been remembered were it not for this small inscription on her tomb. My training in naturalistic theatre leads to a great sense of empathy towards the people of the past and I believe that is why I am so committed to analysing the stories of those who are often forgotten by the annals of time.

