

Maximum length: 1500 words
Due: Saturday, November 11th, 5 p.m.
in your conference leader's Eliot Hall mailbox.

Topic 1 Aristotle, the most famous ancient Greek theorist of literature, writing in the 4th century BCE, with the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and others in mind, gives this characterization of tragedy:

Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e. its plot, that is the end and purpose of the tragedy; and the end is everywhere the chief thing. Besides this, a tragedy is impossible without action, but there might be one without Character.

Aristotle, Poetics 6

(When Aristotle speaks of “the end” of something he does not mean the temporal end, or the last moment in time. The Greek word is *telos*, and Aristotle’s use is close in meaning to *purpose* or *point*.) To what extent does Aristotle’s account correctly describe how a tragedy works? Argue your case by a reading of *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, or any or all of the plays of *The Oresteia*.

Topic 2 In her article “Parthenon and Parthenoi: A Mythological Interpretation of the Parthenon Frieze,” Joan Connelly makes a revisionist argument about the subject of the Parthenon frieze. Based on your knowledge of Greek culture, especially 5th-century Athenian culture, evaluate the plausibility of Connelly’s argument. You should consider Connelly’s insistence that the Parthenon was primarily a religious monument as opposed to a piece of political propaganda: “There has been an emphasis on certain lines of inquiry influenced by modern interests, such as politics over religion, art as propaganda tool over art as *agalma*, ‘pleasing gift for the gods’” (56).

Topic 3 Thucydides makes this comment in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, on the powerful and important city of Sparta:

Suppose, for example, that Sparta were to become deserted and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be. . . . Since the city is not regularly planned and contains no temples or monuments of great magnificence, but is simply a collection of villages, in the ancient Hellenic way, its appearance would not come up to expectation. If, on the other hand, the same thing were to happen to Athens, one would conjecture from what met the eye that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it is.

(Thucydides I, 10)

There are many passages in which Thucydides makes reference to disjunctions between appearance and reality, disjunctions of various kinds: grandeur vs. real power (as above); word vs. deed; reasons expressly given vs. true causes; and so forth. How do such disjunctions between appearance and reality inform Thucydides' understanding of political affairs? You should focus on specific examples in your answer.

Topic 4 Compare Pericles' funeral oration (Thucydides II, 35–46) to his speech to the Athenians during the second Peloponnesian invasion of Attica (II, 60–64). Analyze how Pericles' defense of the Athenian empire reinforces or undermines his commitment to democracy.

Topic 5 The *polis* and the individual are interdependent; yet the *polis* and the individual compete. The interplay of this interdependence with this competition was a theme of constant interest to classical Athenians. Examine how this interplay is addressed in one of Thucydides' speeches (e.g. Pericles' Funeral Oration or Alcibiades' speech), and compare it to the treatment put forward in either *Antigone* or *Eumenides*.

Topic 6 In consultation with your conference leader, write on a topic of your own devising.