

HAMARTIA



Byre Youth Theatre
School of Classics,
University of St Andrews



University of
St Andrews

HAMARTIA

The terrible mistake or fatal flaw that brings a hero low...

In a post-apocalyptic world of drought and environmental ruin, an ambitious politician tries to save his city, but only causes more suffering. Summoned from the dead by a chorus of vengeful spirits, he must stand trial for the actions he took while he was alive. The trial takes place in a realm which is intermediate between that of the living and the dead; something akin to the Tibetan Buddhist state known as 'Bardo'. The case against the politician is developed through the testimony of three characters: his wife, a colleague and a political rival. The allegations are serious, but is he really to blame? Can he defend himself successfully? And what will happen to his spirit if he cannot?

Cast

The Furies

Gillian Campbell

Alice Linton

Mirte Timmermans

The Politician

Cameron Melville

Credits

Director

Stephen Jones

Costume and stage design

Lillias Chisholm

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Programme design: Ralph Anderson.

Cover image: User: katja/ pixabay.com/ Creative Commons CC0.

Other images by Ralph Anderson.

We welcome spirits to the light!

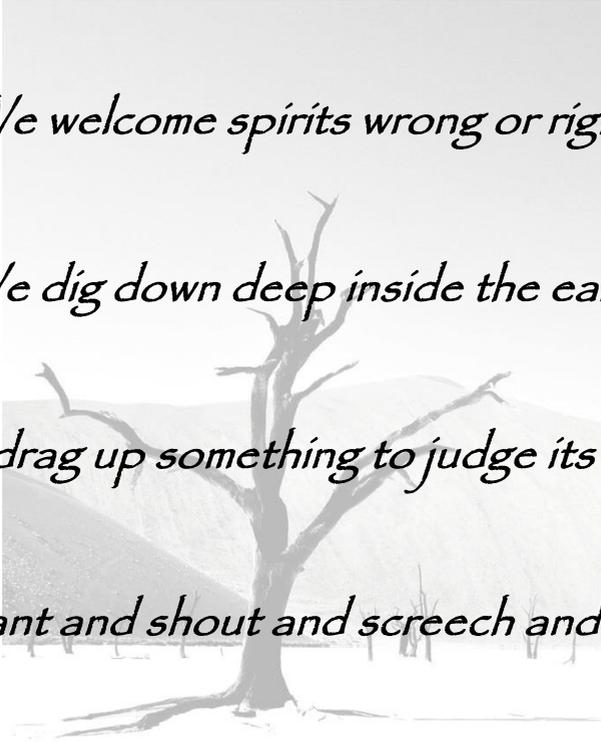
We welcome spirits wrong or right.

We dig down deep inside the earth

And drag up something to judge its worth.

We chant and shout and screech and scream.

But we do not appear as we first may seem.



The making of *Hamartia*

Hamartia is a devised piece, created in collaboration between the Byre Youth Theatre's Collaborative Performance Group, led by Stephen Jones, and Dr Jon Hesk and Dr Ralph Anderson in the School of Classics in the University of St Andrews.



“This isn't a project about ‘putting on a Greek play’ or trying to bring ancient Greek theatrical practice to the modern stage. Instead, we've been using Greek tragedy as a focus for discussion, a stimulus for the group's own creative endeavours and as fresh resource for their development as performers. Stephen and I wanted to show the performers that Greek drama can

improve their understanding of theatre's history and its social, political and cultural potential for the ‘here and now’. We soon discovered that my own academic expertise in Greek tragedy could be tapped by the group as a creative resource. Their devised play certainly *does* contain elements and themes which are recognizably Aeschylean: for example, the opening chants draw on the ‘necromantic’ choral hymn of *Persians* and the invocation of underworld powers in *The Oresteia*. The play's moral dimensions gained more texture and complexity after we talked about Euripides' *Medea* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. This is the great thing about Greek tragedy: whatever you're trying to say or create, it's *good to think with*. So we're not too worried about how far the final product conforms to academic definitions of Greek tragedy in aesthetic and formal terms. The most important thing is that the performers have used the ancient material as a creative stimulus, have had fun doing it, and have produced a performance which is genuinely their own and – we hope – speaks to a contemporary audience.”

Dr Jon Hesk, University of St Andrews

“Ancient Greek drama is a rewarding tool to use to explore the roots of our Western theatrical tradition. Working with Jon Hesk and Ralph Anderson from the School of Classics in St Andrews University, the collaborative performance group and I have learned much about Greek theatre, from its social and religious factors to its performative and technical aspects. It



was fascinating to discover how valued Greek theatre was by the ancient Athenians. To think that within Athenian culture, a theatrical practice was so integrated into community life is a profound realisation to me. In some ways it is a bitter pill to swallow – I do not feel that theatre carries within our own culture the same significance and respect. Both Jon and Ralph have therefore shown us what a rich resource Ancient Greek drama is. It is a means through which we can



look both to theatre’s past and its future. By digging into Western theatre's ancient past, the group has succeeded in using Greek dramatic conventions to create a piece that is uniquely theirs, one that speaks to them as young adults today. It has been my pleasure to help frame and nurture their ideas – I feel privileged to work with such talented and passionate individuals.”

Stephen Jones, Byre Youth Theatre

A project about 'process'

Our project is as much about the exploratory journey we have taken together as it is about the final destination of tonight's performance. We are developing a web page of blogs and short films which document that process. We hope that this page and its findings will be a valuable resource for others. You can find the page at this address: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/classics/research/impact/greek-drama/>

Some of our workshops have focused on the challenges and opportunities presented by Greek dramatic conventions. For example, the performers developed a viable choral identity by looking at some texts of Greek choruses and through using the exploratory technique of 'flocking' (where a group mirrors the improvised movements of an appointed leader). And although



masks proved unworkable given the dynamic nature of the final production, rehearsals with them helped the performers to focus on the importance of bodily movement and voice as a means of expressing their different characters. The Greek convention of the agōn (debate scene) provided a focus for the play's scenes of conflict and political rhetoric. Greek tragedy's persistent concern with rituals of initiation and sacrifice have also shaped the performers' work, as have its depictions of necromancy, ghosts and Furies.

Our first workshop focused on the meaning and value of Greek drama as a mass art form which was central to the culture and community of the Athenian city-state. And across several sessions we looked at some key themes in passages of Greek drama which closely reflect the School's research expertise: deception and rhetorical manipulation, dilemmas and decision-making, and the question of how far we should blame someone for their well-intentioned mistakes or flaws of character.



