

**Lecture: 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2014**

**TITLE: "Life-Lessons from Ancient Greek Tragedy: Enjoying Euripides"**

**MORE DETAILED INFO**

The ancient Athenians acted out the stories of their legendary kings and princesses every spring during their dramatic festival, the Dionysia. These tragedies have remained at the core of Western literature because they continue to be relevant in every age. This lecture looks at the plays of Euripides from the late fifth century B.C. His female protagonists make extreme choices in the face of extraordinary misfortunes. Through both positive and negative examples, the heroines of Greek tragedy can even today teach us life lessons about grief, endurance, and forgiveness.

This lecture looks primarily at Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, which was first performed around 410 B.C. This play survives through papyrus fragments which were only discovered about a century ago, so the play remains an unexplored source for Euripides' life lessons about forgiveness. It is the only known tragedy to dramatize the accidental death of an infant through the negligence of his nursemaid. It is also one of the few tragedies in which a woman—in this case, the infant's mother—is persuaded not to seek revenge for the death of her family. In many other Euripidean plays, women are represented as motivated by irrational passion to seek revenge. This lecture will briefly examine the stories of Medea (who kills her own sons in order to punish her husband for abandoning her) and Electra (who kills her own mother, who had conspired to kill Electra's father) as counter-examples of women whose inability to forgive leads to confusion and destruction. Yet persuading someone not to seek revenge is an extremely difficult and delicate task. Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, despite its sad plot, is an uplifting 'tragedy' which raises a deep question about how one person's misfortune can be turned around to the good fortune of another.

**Biography**



Dr K.O. Chong-Gossard is Senior Lecturer in Classics at The University of Melbourne.

He is the author of *Gender and Communication in Euripides' Plays: Between Song and Silence* (Brill 2008).

He has twice been funded by Australian Research Council grants, first to research sex scandals in the Roman empire, and second to investigate the first printed editions of the Roman comic playwright Terence in 15th-century Germany.

K.O. is also the Honorary Secretary of the Classical Association of Victoria (CAV).

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