



Seminar

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Hegel was Right? The Political Meaning of Sophocles' "Antigone"

Tuesday, 17 October, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT NIKOLAY P. GRINTSER

Nikolay Grintser holds the degrees of Candidate of Science (Ph.D.) and Doctor of Sciences (habilitation) from Moscow State University (1991 and 1999). For more than 25 years, he has been Professor of Classics at Moscow State University and the Russian State University for the Humanities, teaching Greek language and literature, mythology, history of religion, history of the humanities and education in the classical age. Since 2013, he has been the head of the School of Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), and also heads its research center of classical studies. He has been awarded several foreign fellowships, including at Harvard University (1993–94); Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris (1999); the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D.C. (2000–01); and Freie Universität Berlin (2005–07). In 2016, Grintser was elected a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

His fields of scholarly interest include the history of Greek literature (with special emphasis on Homeric epics and classical drama), comparative mythology and the history of linguistic and literary theory in the antiquity. Among his publications are a monograph in Russian, *Stanovlenije Literaturnoj Teorii v Drevnej Gretsii I Indii* [The Emergence of Literary Theory in Ancient Greece and India], written together with Pavel A. Grintser (2000), commented Russian editions of Homer (2003) and Sophocles' *Antigone* (2016) and numerous articles, including those recently published in English: "Common Grief: Weeping over Hector and Rama," *Classics@ 14* (Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, 2016); and "The Birth of European Linguistic Theory: The Idea of Language in the Sophists," *From Ancient Manuscripts to Modern Dictionaries: Select Studies in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek* (Gorgias Press, 2017).

At SCAS, Grintser will work on a project about the use of etymology as a literary device in archaic and classical Greek literature.

ABSTRACT

Sophocles' *Antigone* is definitely one of the most discussed and controversially interpreted pieces among classical Greek tragedies. It has been explored from different viewpoints: those of ethics, ideology, gender, and politics, to name only a few. The opposition of its two main characters, Antigone and Creon, made scholars (and not only them) infinitely argue upon two crucial questions: "who is right?" and "who is the main hero of the play?" In my talk, I will briefly survey two most prominent interpretations. The first (that could be traced back to J-W. Goethe and A. Schlegel) takes Antigone's moral principles to be of a higher value than the political arguments backed by Creon. This approach is rather predominant in contemporary scholarship and its advocates by far outnumber those supporting Hegel's view who regarded Antigone's claim of conscience and Creon's claim of law to be equally valid and at the same time equally limited. Obviously, Hegel adapted this interpretation to his famous 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' scheme, and one of its weak points was the fact that *Antigone* seems to lack any 'synthetic' prospective.

However, I will try to show (through a closer analysis of lexical and dramatic leitmotifs) that within tragedy, Creon and Antigone are indeed depicted as both opposite and symmetrical figures, and this internal symmetry is crucial for the entire structure of the drama. Even their names turn out to be rather significant within this complicated interplay. Hence, Greek text itself seems to endorse 'Hegelian' approach.

Finally, in order to support my interpretation by some extra-literary evidence, I will address a curious fact that keeps puzzling the commentators of Sophoclean masterpiece. Sophocles ignores one of the main Athenian ideological and political myths that is directly linked to *Antigone's* plot. It is the story, according to which Athenians played the crucial role in persuading Thebans to allow the corpses of their Argive enemies to be buried. I will argue that this 'intended silence' might give us a clue to a proper understanding of the drama's poetical and ideological design. It might also explain why Sophocles was highly praised for it and even granted an important political office.