

A Springtime Feast with Seneca: Performing *Thyestes* as a Radio Drama

Due to the 2020 COVID-19 challenges, many artists and arts organizations around the world have had to change the way in which they created and presented their work. Because of this, both professionals and academics found ways to develop new techniques and discover inventive methods that allowed them to continue offering their art. Now, we zoom in to student art exhibits, become an audience member at a renowned symphony orchestra recording, and attend the live streaming of a professional theatre production staged in Epidauros, Greece, all from our computer screens. In light of this, the purpose of this workshop is twofold: to share the findings of a Roman tragedy previously presented as a radio drama and then to use that experience as a basis to support workshop participants in their hands-on approach to create and present a scene from Seneca's *Thyestes* as a radio drama presentation.

When the Shackouls Honors College at Mississippi State University had to postpone its annual Classical Week event, which included the performance of a classical play, until the fall of 2021, the director wanted to continue to present a classical theatrical activity for the honors college, the university, and the community. After some research, the director decided that Seneca's *Oedipus* could be produced as a radio drama, based on the popular 20th Century radio dramas, and reminiscent of *The War of the Worlds* broadcast of 1938. The play has all the elements of a timely, audio-type presentation, with its discussion of the plague, voices heard from a ghost and a god, with sounds effects of an animal sacrifice, impalement, and disfigurement. These ancient plays translate well to a radio drama structure not only because of the play's limited staging needs for the characters, the settings, costumes, and props, but also because the scripts provided the audience with stories told through timeless, poetic language. For

the production of Seneca's *Oedipus* at Mississippi State, entitled *A Halloween Feast with Seneca*, the play aired and replayed several times during the last week of October 2020. The event was marketed as "combining a 1st Century Roman tragedy, based on 20th Century radio dramas, and staged through 21st Century technology."

This workshop will be led by two presenters. The first presenter will begin with a discussion of adapting Seneca's *Oedipus* as a radio drama performance. Audio examples from the presentation will be offered. The second presenter will speak about picking the right translation for the format. A discussion between the workshop members and presenters will follow with a focus on the successes and challenges of the project and recommendations moving forward.

Using the ideas gained from this discussion, the participants attending the workshop will be placed in groups of their choice and given the opportunity to create certain aspects of a radio drama based on what they had learned. For example, those that are so technically inclined might enjoy handling the sound effects; others might enjoy presenting their ideas on the narration and character development. A scene from the end of Seneca's *Thyestes*, which provides opportunities for various character voices and options for sound effects and narration, will be used as basis of discovery by the participants. After the individuals have had time to work together in their groups, everyone will come together to share their findings towards presenting a recording of the scene. The participants can then take this workshop recording and ideas back to their respective institutions to share with their students and faculty.

The workshop will be beneficial to both teachers and scholars. Radio dramas, which are often referred to today as podcasts, may be basis for additional activities within a department. Adapting classical plays for faculty and student radio dramas/podcasts may be another option for

in-and-out of class activities and programs wanting something else besides a fully staged theatre production or a staged reading. As theatres and the rest of arts world begin to reopen in the shadow of COVID-19, these radio dramas/podcasts may have found a more permanent place in 21st Century society and be available to more individuals and groups--artists and audiences--as our technology grows and continues to offer new ways of experiencing the Classics.