

# TRAGEDY QUEERED

6–7 July 2023

PROGRAMME

# TRAGEDY QUEERED

International Conference  
University of Reading  
6–7 July 2023

Supported by:

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*Content warning:* Attendees are advised that papers presented at this conference may contain language, terms, images and other material that some may find distressing, upsetting or offensive.

# PROGRAMME

## 6 July 2023

- Registration 10–11:00
- Opening of *Tragedy Queered* 11:15
- KEYNOTE LECTURE 11–12:30  
Professor Daniel Orrells (KCL) “Queer Oedipus After Freud?”
- QUEERING TRAGEDY 14:30–16:00  
Lane Anthony Flores (University of Texas at Austin)  
“Queering Agathon”  
F Wykle (UPenn) “Life That is Not a Life’: Unreality and Queer Existence in Euripides’ *Alcestis*”
- Will Shüler (RHUL) “The Athenian Male Gayze: Male Same-Sex Desire and Spectatorship in Ancient Greek Tragedy”
- QUEERLY PERFORMING TRAGEDY 16:30–18:00  
David Bullen (RHUL) “From Rotten Work to *The Gentlest Work*: Practice-as-Research Reflections on Queering the Atreids”  
Marcus Bell (Oxford) “Encountering absence: queer traces, and performance otherwise in Trajal Harrell’s *Antigone Jr ++*”
- Tom Sapsford (Boston College) “Ron Athey’s *Trojan Whore*: a study in queer and tragic kinship”
- Conference dinner TBC

## 7 July 2023

- QUEER SKENE 09:30–11:00  
Emma Pauly (UCLA) “The Roaring God and an Everything Bagel: Queer Rage and Rejection in *Bacchae* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*”  
Nikos Manousakis (Academy of Athens) “How to Stage Aeschylean Homoerotism: reconstructing love in the Achilles Trilogy”  
Alessandra Migliara (The Graduate Center, CUNY)  
“Dionysus as Sister: Blurred Bodies and Body Agency in Carlus Padriassa’s *Bacchae*”
- TRAGEDY AFTER STONEWALL 11:30–13:00  
Giulia Sperduti (Universität zu Köln) “A Cognitive Linguistic study of the re-use of Greek myth in Dove’s play *The Darker Face of the Earth*”  
Emilio Capettini (UCSB) “Heracles did not appear, we are where we are’: Rewriting Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* during the HIV/AIDS Crisis”  
Rioghnach Sachs (KCL) “Tragic Parody as Post-Transsexual Memoir in Something *That May Shock and Discredit You*”
- TRAGEDY BEFORE STONEWALL 15–16:30  
Constance Everett-Pite (Oxford) “Let our own imaginations fill out this harmonious outline’: how HD queers Euripides’ *Ion*”  
Joe L Watson (Warwick) “Negation Relation: The Absent Presence of Queer Tragedy in Frank O’Hara’s Poetry”  
Massimo Fusillo (Università degli Studi dell’ Aquila) “Death Drive and Polimorphic Desire: Hans Henny Jahnn’s Queer *Medea*”
- KEYNOTE LECTURE 17–18:00  
Professor Sara L Warner (Cornell) “Recasting Tragedy: The Queer Constellations of Lorraine Hansberry’s *Andromeda, the Thief*”
- Closing remarks 18:00

# FULL PROGRAMME — 6 JULY 2023

- Registration 10:00–11:00
- Opening remarks 11:15
- **KEYNOTE LECTURE 11:30–12:30**

## Professor Daniel Orrells (KCL). “Queer Oedipus After Freud?”

Freud's Oedipus has been positioned as the keystone of the heteronormative capitalist nuclear family. Freud's use of Oedipus produced the anti-Oedipus critiques of Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault's re-reading of Sophocles' drama and Butler's turn to Antigone. What would it mean to queer Oedipus now? The question of the relationship between queer theory and Freud is certainly vexed. What sort of legacy might Freud offer queers? This lecture explores this question with reference to the recent international production of *Thebes Land* by Daniel Goldman and Sergio Blanco.

- Lunch break 12:30–14:30
- **QUEERING TRAGEDY 14:30–16:00**

## Lane Anthony Flores (University of Texas at Austin) “Queering Agathon”

This paper seeks to engage principles of orientation through the application of queer theory and critical readings of gender to the fragments and testimonia of the 5th century tragedian Agathon. While images of the poet are historically clouded by his depictions in Plato and Aristophanes, as well as suggestion and allusion in the later work of Aelian, the surviving fragments of Agathon's texts have been underappreciated in terms of their unique construction and placement of gender. Rather than reconstructing identity from secondary sources and mimetics, this paper seeks to employ a fragment of Agathon's text and testimonia concerning his contributions to the form, which taken together corroborate an image of the artist as a self-authoring and possibly subversive figure that in both social commentary and erotic poetics provides a prototype of modern epistemologies travelling under the sign of “queer”.

My research begins with a close reading of the extant fragment of Agathon's *Thyestes*, preserved by Athenaeus in the *Deipnosophistae*. This fragment draws a unique etymological source for the Kouretes, in which Agathon imagines a complex orientation of desire that centers on *τρυφή*, itself a complicated word with multiple valences, illustrating “how ‘what’ we think ‘from’ is an orientation device” (Ahmed 2006). I continue with an examination of attestations concerning his innovations in musical composition, specifically *έμβολιμα*, or choral interludes with narrative material unrelated to the plot of the play, emphasizing the relationality of Agathon's use of *έμβολιμα* in context with his parody in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. I offer the theory that the attribution of *έμβολιμα* to Agathon suggests a hypermasculine, phallic valence that directly contrasts the famous effeminacy in his image as constructed by Aristophanes, possibly by way of reclamation. I argue therefore that this must lead us to a queer rejection of any binary assertions of the poet's character.

## F Wykle (UPenn) “A Life That is Not a Life”: Unreality and Queer Existence in Euripides' *Alcestis*”

This paper explores manifold transgressions present in Euripides' underexplored *Alcestis*, and how they serve to further understanding of the play's complex genre. The play's focus on individual feeling and experience is framed in an overarching space of unreality, as Admetus is repeatedly reminded that he now lives “a life that is not a life” after Alcestis' death, reframing the play in a liminal space that will be overturned with Alcestis' resurrection. Throughout the play, Euripides subverts traditional tragic relationships with reassessments of gendered and sexual norms. First, the death of Alcestis queers the marriage between her and Admetus, while overshadowing each action of the play and bringing the dynamic more into alignment with the institution of pederasty than heterosexual marriage. Indebted to her matchless gift of *kharis*, Admetus becomes the *eromenos* in this performance of pederasty, heightening tensions between his individual emotions and the pressures he faces as a Greek man. That tension then builds until the confrontation with his father, where Admetus disavows Pheres. In doing so, he disrupts the patriline and seeks to rebuild social systems around his now fundamentally queer existence, as well as his need to deny his own

guilt. Lastly, the introduction of Herakles not only provides a new model of masculinity to influence Admetus, but also catalyzes a performance of *xenia* that underpins the true extent of Admetus' moral decline in the wake of Alcestis' death. Queerness illuminates the complexities and emotional turmoil of the play, and facilitates an understanding of "interior" versus "exterior" tragedy in the Greek canon. The former iterates the subversiveness of the tragic genre, while establishing new and thrilling means of comprehending this "problem play".

### Will Shüler (RHUL) "The Athenian Male Gayze: Male Same-Sex Desire and Spectatorship in Ancient Greek Tragedy"

This paper argues that an understanding of male same-sex practices and desire in ancient Athens is important yet under examined component of how tragedies would have been perceived in antiquity. I begin the paper by introducing some examples of male same-sex desire and relationships, specifically that of the pederastic relationship. I then survey the extent to which male same-sex practices have been omitted from Greek tragic historicisations, despite male + female desire and relationships often being a guiding route into understanding the plays. I trace some examples of queer erasure and assumed heteronormativity in this scholarship. I introduce the term "male gayze" as a way of reading the performance of these plays under the assumption that the spectator has a desire for male bodies. Through this lens, I illuminate potential impacts on the understandings of these plays historically and signpost potentialities when staging tragedies today from this vantage. The case study is Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

- Break 16:00–16:30

- **QUEERLY PERFORMING TRAGEDY 16:30–18:00**

### David Bullen (RHUL) "From Rotten Work to *The Gentlest Work*: Practice-as-Research Reflections on Queering the Atreids"

Are Orestes and Pylades, to use an appropriately flattening modernism, 'gay for each other'? In the past, scholars have been non-committal, and like many twentieth and twenty-first century theatre makers who have staged Euripides' *Orestes*, generally more excited by the potentially incestuous desires between Orestes and Electra. But in fan cultures online, a fragment of Anne Carson's translation of *Orestes* is the smoking gun that points not only to Orestes and Pylades as desirous of one another but committed to a relationship where labouring at the 'rotten work' of their queer love is a romantic ideal. From ambivalence and erasure to problematically decontextualised appropriation and idealisation: it was in this context that, as part of theatre company *By Jove* and with collaborator Nancy Rabinowitz, I was involved in a three-year practice-as-research investigation into the queernesses of the Atreids in tragedy. Initially planned as live performance, the project manifested as *The Gentlest Work*, a digital installation containing multiple fragments of text, video, audio, and visual material.

In this paper, I continue a reflective process began with Professor Rabinowitz in a chapter for the recent *Queer Euripides* volume. Here I focus my attention on how anti-teleological qualities of the project served to complicate the (reception of the) queernesses of the Atreids. I seek to trouble the emphasis on reading texts - whether said texts are written or performed - by suggesting that such readings are limited by a continued centring of product over process. I instead consider an approach that is not only attentive to process but makes the process of artistic creation part of the art itself; I thus reflect on *The Gentlest Work*'s development of queer(ing) encounters between ancient myth, contemporary lived experience, the academy, the rehearsal room, and online spaces.

### Marcus Bell (Oxford) "Encountering absence: queer traces, and performance otherwise in Trajal Harrell's *Antigone Jr ++*"

Tragedy is a central force in the work of contemporary queer performance artist and dancer Trajal Harrell. This paper, itself an iteration of a forthcoming chapter, analyses Harrell's engagement with Antigone as part of the public programme of documenta 14—organised by Paul B Preciado. By considering Harrell's intervention in the space of documenta I wager that performances of contemporary queer tragedy are replete with residues that contain a vitality of feeling/affect that is, in and of itself, capable of inhabiting/haunting us. I argue that such residues refuse to be bordered, bounded, or bracketed off by the temporal and spatial limits of a singular 'live' performance and thus I work to reconsider the performative turn in Classics – which has preferred to think of performance as an event that takes place live, in the present, and only for those who were there to witness it.

## Tom Sapsford (Boston College) “Ron Athey’s *Trojan Whore*: a study in queer and tragic kinship”

US-born performance artist Ron Athey first created his *Trojan Whore* persona for a memorial to Leigh Bowery, recently deceased due to AIDS related symptoms, held at Matthew Marks Gallery in July 1995. Described by Athey as a drag queen inside a drag queen, the performer emerges from a body-encasing shell of duct-tape and ends with Athey evacuating a yards-long string of pearls from his anal cavity. With its classically themed title, the short piece alludes to both the beginning and end of the Trojan War: Helen, the cause of the aggression, and the wooden horse that ultimately brings about Troy’s downfall. This paper explores the parallels between Athey’s presentation of the body in extremis and Euripides’ dramatic portrayals of Helen (*Trojan Women*, *Helen*, *Orestes*) through the lens of Queer Kinship. Emerging from Kath Weston’s work on kin relations chosen by queers in lieu of tenable biological ones (1991), subsequent scholarship on Queer Kinship has explored both the anti-social and hyper-social qualities of queerness (Bradway & Freeman, 2022). This paper argues that a tension between these anti-social and hyper-social drives is inherent both in ancient tragic and modern queer kin networks: be that in the sororal relationship between Clytemnestra and Helen or between Bowery and Athey; evident in a series of queer births – Helen from an egg, Bowery’s wife Nicola from within her own husband, Athey from a mummy casing shaped in Bowery’s signature silhouette; and lastly present in a slippage between birth and death, whether through the Trojan horse and its death-bearing contents, or in the mythical offspring that bring death for their progenitors such as Leda and Helen, Clytemnestra and Orestes, and the pearls delivered by Athey, reminiscent of the semen load that carries within it, from the 1980s onwards, both the promise of the child and/or the promise of HIV and death from AIDS.

7 JULY 2023

### • QUEER SKENE 09:30–11:00

## Emma Pauly (UCLA) “The Roaring God and an Everything Bagel: Queer Rage and Rejection in *Bacchae* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*”

This paper will incorporate and elaborate upon portions of my MA thesis from the University of Chicago: “On Being ξοικώς: Towards a Non-Binary Dionysus In and Beyond Euripides’ *Bacchae*”, which proposed a reading of *Bacchae*’s Dionysus through the lens of non-binary lived experience, with focus on the way in which the gendered god was cast, directed, and received in contemporary productions of the play. In this paper, I will narrow my focus to an analysis of the queer rage of Dionysus in contemporary performance of *Bacchae* and its adaptations. The god’s anger onstage is often read as shallow, remotely cruel, or disproportionate, with *The New York Times* describing Alan Cumming’s 2008 characterization as “a preening pop-star androgyne with a mean streak”, while Ben Whishaw’s 2015 production contains “vindictive cruelty” according to *The Guardian*; these reviews and similar ones create a firmly Othered and distanced reception of the god, binding their queerness and their rage together and away from audience identification. I believe a closer examination of the god’s rage, especially through a queer lens, reveals an eminently comprehensible anger and hurt at being denied self-identification and recognition, especially within kin-ties.

In tandem with examinations of extant productions (and adaptations such as *Hurricane Diane*), I will offer a “what if”, positing a new direction for theater-makers and scholars, a direction drawn from classical scholarship (my own and others) and performance studies, but also from my experience with *Bacchae* as a translator, director, and actor. Part of this “what if” will be influenced by the character of Jobu Tupaki/Joy in *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, the multiversal, reality-warping antagonist played by Stephanie Hsu, a character framed initially in-narrative as remote, cruel, and alien, eventually revealed to be a young queer woman deeply hurt by her mother’s rejection and elision of her queer identity. Rather than read Dionysiac influence into *EEAO*, I propose inverting the flow of reception and reading the present into the past; what might a future performance of *Bacchae* become if brushed by the expressiveness of Jobu Tupaki’s rage and heartbreak, a rage already so palpably present?

**Nikos Manousakis (Academy of Athens) “How to stage Aeschylean Homoerotism: reconstructing love in the Achilles Trilogy”**

Most likely rather early in his career, Aeschylus composed a connected trilogy – *Myrmidons*, *Nereids* and *Phrygians* or *The Ransoming of Hector* – closely based on the Iliadic story of Achilles. This trilogy, in which Aeschylus focused on the Achaean embassy to Achilles, the hero's lament for his lover Patroclus, the return of Hector's body to Priam, and on other highly dramatic moments of the epos, is not extant. Yet what is extant is the source of the Aeschylean adaptation, the *Iliad*, as well as various more or less extant fragments of the plays. Further, the impact of this trilogy on classical artists and authors, especially Aristophanes and Plato, enable us to gain some insight on its structure. Based on this manifold material, during the academic year 2018–19 the Research Centre for Greek and Latin Literature of the Academy of Athens and the Drama School of the National Theatre of Greece joined forces in a research project, to “reconstruct”, on paper and stage, parts the Aeschylean trilogy. Classicists, professional theatre practitioners and drama school students worked close together on this project, facing a series of intellectual and stagecraft challenges, the most demanding of which was how to stage the love affair between Achilles and Patroclus. On the surface, the two main textual sources used in the project, the *Iliad* and Aeschylus' fragments, greatly differ on this point. However, as we found out, in practice there is an underlying thread, a pervasive homoerotism, connecting these sources exactly on this point. This paper focuses on how the love affair between Achilles and Patroclus was actually “reconstructed” in the stage production that was the final outcome of the project under discussion, using several old and modern materials (textual, visual, musical, kinesiological, etc), and what was its impact on both the research team and the audiences who attended the performances.

**Alessandra Migliara (The Graduate Center, CUNY) “Dionysus as Sister: Blurred Bodies and Body Agency in Carlus Padrissa's *Bacchae*”**

At the beginning of the adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* directed by Carlus Padrissa (Siracusa, Italy, 2021), Dionysus introduces himself as “mujera, hija, hermana, guerrera, compañera”. Indeed, throughout the performance, Dionysus, who was played by a young actress, appears to be a companion to the other bacchants, a fellow warrior, rather than a god who possesses them. The Catalan company *La fura dels Baus* presented an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* that takes the dramatic use of the human body to the extremes and emphasizes the blurring of the bodies and genders already present in the text. I argue that this extreme use of corporeity, in contrast to other adaptations of *Bacchae*, dramatizes neither the bacchants' sexual liberation nor a passive acceptance of Dionysus' power, but rather a demand for political power and body agency. I also explore how the blurring of genders contributes to the representation of Dionysus as a collective force. I conduct this analysis in reference to Honig's concepts of depathologization of the women and heterotopia, arguing how the choreography is used to make the heterotopia of the Theban women visible to the audience. First, I discuss the dramatic ways in which the human body is shown on the stage, starting with the scenography. Then, I explore the powerful physicality of the double chorus of the bacchants, discussing the relevance of the presence of both men and women. My discussion of the gender implications continues with an analysis of the performance of the first messenger, played by two actors: a man and a woman who resemble a Platonic androgynous and perform the speech while constantly intertwining their bodies. In conclusion, I situate this play in the history of recent performances of *Bacchae* and their connection with feminist and LGBTQI+ movements, while analyzing the explicit references to feminist protests in Mexico in 2019.

- Break 11:00–11:30
- TRAGEDY AFTER STONEWALL 11:30–13:00

**Giulia Sperduti (Universität zu Köln) “A Cognitive Linguistic study of the re-use of Greek myth in Dove's play *The Darker Face of the Earth*”**

This paper presents a cognitive study of the re-use of Greek myth in Rita Dove's play *The Darker Face of the Earth*. It places itself at the intersection of several disciplines including the study of ancient Greek literature; cognitive linguistics; cognitive literary studies; finally, black classicism. The research is based on recent cognitive theories applied to literature and linguistic analysis, such as the conceptual metaphor model, and blending theory. I focus on the extended conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST, used by proslavery and racist thinkers to understand and shape the conceptual domain of racial interrelation, the opposition to interracial intercourse and marriage, and, therefore, through the taboo of incest, the reinforcement of the idea of sexual racism. I claim that this conceptual metaphor is articulated in Rita Dove's work with particular reference to the narrative trajectory delineated in her play *The Darker Face of the Earth* and the Sophoclean play *Oedipus the King*. I argue that the blend with the Greek Tragedy led Dove to change and reverse the racial and gender relations,

we usually find in the slaves' narrations. In Dove's work, miscegenation, due to the reversal of intersectional normative roles, is not the result of sexual and power abuse of the white male slave owner on his slaves, but it is an act of love, repressed by patriarchy and the system of slavery. Incest, as a form and metaphor for interracial love, contributes to dismantling, temporarily, a system of hate and division. Incest overcomes oedipal familial boundaries and represents the complex dynamics hidden under rigid racial segregation. The emergent meaning is that incestuous miscegenation is a subversive element in a system of annihilation as the one of slavery; a tool for comprehension, overcoming, and ultimately liberation.

#### **Emilio Capettini (UCSB) “Heracles did not appear, we are where we are”: Rewriting Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* during the HIV/AIDS Crisis”**

Even though “the multiple uses of Greece in queer fictions of the past” (Bravmann 1997, 67) have recently attracted much attention, the evocations of Greek antiquity in the rich output of the queer writers who, in the 1980s and the 1990s, faced the HIV/AIDS epidemic remain largely unexplored. In this paper, I will focus on a fascinating example of this co-optation of ancient Greece: Mark Merlis’ rewriting of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* in his 1998 novel *An Arrow’s Flight*. Merlis preserves most of the key elements of Sophocles’ tragedy – the snakebite, Helenus’ prophecy, and Odysseus’ manipulation of Neoptolemus – but radically transforms it by transposing its characters into a sociocultural setting reminiscent of Greenwich Village in the late 1970s. Most importantly, though, both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are reimagined as gay, and this latter’s mysterious ailment, which in the “post-Lemnos” world of the narrator has extended to many gay men, is described in terms that evoke the condition of people living with AIDS before the introduction of antiretroviral medications. What makes Merlis’ novel a distinctively queer rewriting of Sophocles’ tragedy are, I will suggest, its “resistance to determinations of meaning” and its “stubborn denial of teleology” (Edelman 2004, 27). On the one hand, the notion that the snakebite represented the punishment for Philoctetes’ sexual transgressions – an idea that evokes widespread homophobic interpretations of the HIV/AIDS crisis – is powerfully rebuked by the narrator, who insists that destiny “has no point to make.” On the other, the resolution brought about by Heracles’ appearance as *deus ex machina* is rejected by Merlis: “If I owe nothing else to dead, I can at least refrain from wheeling out Heracles,” tells us the narrator, and, in an act of queer defiance of the heteronormative system that is embodied by Odysseus, Philoctetes breaks the bow on his knee.

#### **Rioghnaigh Sachs (KCL) “Tragic Parody as Post-Transsexual Memoir in *Something That May Shock and Discredit You*”**

Daniel M Lavery is a contemporary American writer known for parodying the classics on his entertainment blog (eg ‘Dirtbag Sappho’). This paper considers how his parodies serve more serious ends in *Something That May Shock and Discredit You*, his memoir of gender transition. In particular, Lavery’s parodies of Greek tragedy underline his contribution to an emerging literary genre: Pellegrini’s ‘post-transsexual’ memoir, which queers the conventions and linearity of traditional trans memoirs.

In one chapter, ‘Did You Know That Athena Used to Be a Tomboy?’, Lavery parodies a tragic scene. Athena, a deuteragonist, and a female chorus ask a silent Lavery whether he has ‘tried everything.’ They offer him an ‘exit interview’ from womanhood, and reminisce about their own tomboy childhoods, wondering whether he takes gender too seriously. In particular, Lavery parodies Athena in Greek tragedy, where she is protective and authoritative (eg *Eumenides*, *Ion*), helping the hero and, for Ion, revealing his identity. In contrast, Lavery’s Athena is self-centred, unhelpful and short-sighted, undermining Lavery’s identity (‘Have you tried being the tutelary of Athens?’). A thwarted hero of his own tragedy, Lavery playfully self-deprecates. Simultaneously, he cathartically dramatizes his fears about his changing relationship to women.

Likewise, in ‘Something Nice Happens to Oedipus,’ Lavery parodies *Oedipus Rex*, bathetically rewriting the oracle as predicting that Oedipus will shake hands with his father and have lunch with his mother. Lavery mediates anxiety about discovering his ‘true self’ through Oedipus discovering his true parentage. Just as he rewrites Oedipus’ lack of self-knowledge as benign, he reassures himself that his decision to transition, while fraught with uncertainty, may also end well.

Queering the linear, serious, confessional first-person narratives of traditional trans memoirs, Lavery’s tragic parodies are ‘post-transsexual.’ They alleviate his fears about transition indirectly, in multiple voices, and through humour, ultimately aligning with Snediker’s ‘queer optimism.’

- Lunch break 13:30–15:00

• TRAGEDY BEFORE STONEWALL 15:00–16:30

**Constance Everett-Pite (Oxford) “Let our own imaginations fill out this harmonious outline’: how H D queers Euripides’ *Ion*”**

Spurred by two powerful provocations – the first being Kirk Ormand’s conclusion that it is impossible to read Euripides’ *Ion* as queer since the play fails to challenge heteronormative standards (2022), and the second Sebastian Matzner’s argument that classical reception studies can be the “queer other” of traditional “straight” classics (2016) – I propose that Hilda Doolittle’s 1937 *Ion* does queer Euripides’ play. The form which H D chooses for *Ion* emblematises what Sebastian Matzner calls “queer metalepsis”, since she persistently disrupts the translated Greek with a commentary which collapses divisions between writer, reader, scholar, original, and reception. The commentary invites the reader to imaginatively “fill out” Euripides’ outline, adopting a first-person plural voice and forming a choral collective with the reader. The commentary is both authoritative, stating for example “Kreusa has the inhumanity of a meteor”, but also uncertain, asking “who is this?”, and crucially by its playful anachronisms, the commentary “play[s] fast and loose with conventions of here-and-now”, as H D reflects. The queerness of H D’s *Ion*, I argue, lies in its formal hybridity achieved by the metalepsis which her commentary effects, evidenced by an introductory note which explains that the play may be “read straight through”, ignoring the commentary; such a ‘straight’ reading, however, is impossible since the text’s layout tightly interlaces the poetry with the prose. I show, further, how H D’s *Ion* creates a manifesto for queer, affective, translation (drawing on Heather Love’s connection between queerness and affect studies) when H D writes that Greek cannot be learnt “only with a dictionary” but must be felt with “your hands [...] your feet and [...] your lungs”. Finally, the translation is published with an epigraph dedicated to her lover, Bryher (Winifred Ellerman), whom she met during *Ion*’s composition, and so this work poses the question of queering *Ion* from its opening.

**Joe L Watson (Warwick) “Negation Relation: The Absent Presence of Queer Tragedy in Frank O’Hara’s Poetry”**

Frank O’Hara was both a gay man and a prolific poet of the mid-century New York scene. A glance at the contents page of his massive *Collected Poems* might suggest that he was poet who engaged with Classical antiquity. Titles such as ‘Jove’, ‘An Image of Leda’, ‘The Argonauts’, ‘Dido’ or ‘Clytemnestra’ emerge as should-be indicators of a poet who drew on the Classical past and, perhaps especially, Greek myth. However, *prima facie*, none of these poems seems to have much to do with its Greco-Roman namesake.

In this paper, I argue that Frank O’Hara’s relationship with Greek Tragedy is constituted through paradoxically—and, appropriately queerly—absent presences. Tragedy is rarely named, but its spectre is inescapable. The tragic becomes a queer impulse which the poet reformulates and redirects in queer articulations. “The universal light of tragedy” (‘To Gottfried Benn’) “not wrongly reveal[s]” O’Hara’s queer poetics. Queerly burgeoning beneath the façade of the un-Tragic, “a tragic instance may be imminent” (‘Poem in Two Parts’).

**Massimo Fusillo (Università degli Studi dell’Aquila) “Death Drive and Polimorphic Desire: Hans Henny Jahnn’s Queer *Medea*”**

Starting from Franz Grillparzer’s trilogy on the Argonauts, the figure of Medea has become more and more a powerful metaphor of alterity, especially regarding ethnically marked, non-Western identities (from Africa as well as the far East). In the huge corpus of rewritings of Euripides’ work, there is enough for versions exploring homosexual scenarios (including Ursula Haas’ 1984 novel *Freispruch für Medea*, adapted as opera by Rolf Liebermann in 1995, in which Jason falls in love with a young boy). Premiered in Berlin in 1926, Hans Henny Jahnn’s *Medea* offers a wild, expressionist rewriting of this tragedy, focusing on ethnic issues (the protagonist is an aged “Negress”) and especially on a polymorphic vision of sexuality, which shows an impressive queer potential. Exploiting a free mythopoetic approach, Jahnn depicts Medea’s children as adolescents imbued of homoerotic, incestuous drives: the older son is his father’s bedfellow (*eromenos*); the younger one longs for sexual intercourse with his brother, and is characterized by a strong death drive (“You may kill me if you only love me”). This image of family life (one might define it proto-Almodovar, evoking as it does his neo-baroque masterpiece, *Matador...*) can be read in terms of the apocalyptic, antisocial strands of queer theory, while the parallel vision of a pansexual desire actively queers any stable sexual role and relationship: thanks to Medea’s magic craft, Jason is eternally young, and extremely narcissistic and compulsive; he and his son and lover also become love rivals towards the young princess Glauce. This complex, baroque net of sexual drives and erotic passions culminates in a spectacular closure, that exacerbate the romantic love-death theme: Medea kills her children while their bodies are united in the sexual act.

• Break 16:30–17:00

- KEYNOTE LECTURE 17–18:00

Professor Sara L Warner (Cornell). “Recasting Tragedy: The Queer Constellations of Lorraine Hansberry’s *Andromeda, the Thief*”

As we consider the impact of Graeco-Roman tragedy on queer culture, we might also consider the inverse of this inquiry, the impact of queer culture(s) on our engagement with classical antiquity. Which queer cultures command center stage? Which are understudies waiting in the wings, vying for the spotlight? Which scripts galvanize their attention? Which characters direct their desires? In this talk, I explore *Andromeda, the Thief* (1955), a previously unknown play by the Black lesbian author and activist Lorraine Hansberry. Restaging tragedy as a bawdy, interracial sex farce, Hansberry’s Ethiopian queen appears only once, in the penultimate scene, stealing the show and everyone’s heart. In a reading of this closet drama with members of her Sapphic Circle, Hansberry herself played the star Andromeda. This segregation-era script, written during the author’s participation in the Civil Rights and Homophile Movements, recasts as Black and queer a figure white-washed and straitened by history. I show here how *Andromeda, the Thief*, finding inspiration in a lost tragedy of Euripides, decenters Stonewall as our LGBTQ+ myth of origin while signalling the need for a constellation of critical theories to apprehend the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in queer cultures.

- Closing remarks 18:00

