

Sophocles' Antigone: a performance by our students



On a pleasant evening in the month of May, the first year students of Global Governance enriched their experiences with a theatrical performance within the walls of their classroom.

Professor Perilli, who teaches “Foundations of European thought”, decided that it would be a great idea to make his students play the part of the characters of “Antigone”, the famous tragedy of Sophocles dating back to the 5th century BCE, the cradle of Western civilization. In doing this, he left free choice to the students so that everyone could decide their own group and the character he/she liked the most.

Many of them, having a background focused on the humanities subjects (with a particular attention to the Greek literature), knew already what the story was

about. Nevertheless, their feedback was pretty positive about this innovative theatre lesson, involving and giving them a different type of analysis as regards the various topics covered in the book.

For instance, a student (Cristina B.) in giving her opinion about it, stated: “It made me really satisfied to discover new points of view about this huge topic of the individual and the struggle between law of the state and law of the heart, unwritten law that made possible all the relationships between humans. I felt really happy about having the possibility to build a teamwork on it and because of my knowledge on it I found very interesting and involving to direct and organize all the work that we did on it (I cut the pieces of the dialogues and I did the “arrangements”) to make it more suitable for the play including all the main points. Great opportunity and job!”.

Afterwards, the students had the chance to make a discussion out of it trying to understand everyone’s point of view and comment on what they found most interesting in the whole performance. In addition, they investigated a special part of the behavior of the character they had to play.

Furthermore, many even though a bit skeptical in the beginning as regards their ability to perform, discovered a different side of themselves when acting with so much passion and also how to be less shy while talking in front of the public. Many found it a very productive way of learning: “I played the role of Creon in the most emotional part of the piece, the last one, when the tragedy finally hits its edge of drama! Actually I don’t know if I reached my aim of transmitting all of the King’s feelings to my classmates; however, I tried to understand which were the forces and the beliefs that pushed the monarch in doing his actions, a work that resulted to me very important for the preparation of the final exam!” (Gloria P.).

On the whole, the unconventional lesson offered by prof. Perilli gave the students the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of some fundamental issues of European culture, namely the conflict between the individual and the State, public rules vs personal choice, law vs moral values, religion as compared to rationality. The beginnings of Greek and European philosophy taught them the profound meaning that is hidden behind one of the most influential tragedies of Western culture.





Below there are some quotes chosen by students as being the most iconic of the tragedy:

CREON

“Not even death can make a foe a friend.”

“Die then, and love the dead if thou must;

No woman shall be the master while I live.”

HAEMON

“A State for one man is no State at all.”

“If thou best woman, yes. My thought's for thee.”

ISMENE

“I scorn them not, but to defy the State
Or break her ordinance I have no skill.”

GUARD (monologue)

“So debating, I went on my way with lagging steps, and thus a short road was made long. At last, however, it carried the day that I should come hither--to thee; and, though my tale be naught, yet will I tell it; for I come with a good grip on one hope--that I can suffer nothing but is my fate.”

“Every man was the culprit, and no one was convicted, but all disclaimed knowledge of the deed. And we were ready to take red-hot iron in our hands--to walk through fire--to make oath by the gods that we had not done the deed--that we were not privy to the planning or the doing.”

“So here I stand--as unwelcome as unwilling, well I wot; for no man delights in the bearer of bad news.”