TRAGEDY AND LITERATURE
ESSAY TWO
Due: November 4, 11:59 pm
Length: 3-4 pages, double-spaced
25 Points

ANSWER ONE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

Remember to pay close attention to the language of the text you are discussing. Provide close readings of the passages that you quote and try to build your argument to a firm conclusion (rather than a summary). Remember, as always, that content can never be fully discussed apart from the writer’s style. Finally, try to use concepts that we have discussed in class. Your grade will be based on how clearly and precisely your essay responds to these concerns.

1. In a famous essay on the Iliad, Simone Weil stated that:

“Might is that which makes a thing of anyone who comes under its sway. When exercised to the full, it makes a thing of man in the most literal sense, it makes him a corpse. There where someone stood a moment ago, stands no one. This is the spectacle the Iliad never tires of telling.”

Provide three examples from the Iliad which illustrate Weil’s point. You may use the poem “The Horses of Achilles” by Cavafy. How does Homer’s intense concern for human suffering both pity human beings and place them in the context of a tragic universe? Discuss the concept of Kleos, Glory.

2. Discuss the unique demigods, Helen and Achilles, and the difficulties they have in understanding their limitations. How are they both subject to the will of the gods and independent? How do they compare to heroic human characters, such as Hector and Andromache? Note that Homer allots human beings one thing that the gods do not possess: the dignity of their mortality.

3. Provide a close reading of any three scenes in the Iliad, focusing on Homer’s writing style. Note the use of similes and precise detail. How is the depiction of the gods similar to the humans, yet different? How does Homer interject his own feelings about the brutal happenings in the text?
4. Watch the film “Troy” and provide a critique. Discuss how the film does or does not remain faithful to the text. Analyze at least two or three scenes from the film in close detail. How does an understanding of Homer’s language affect your viewing of the film? How does the book, through language, convey force and fragility in ways the film cannot?

5. Discuss the concept of the “Sophoclean hero” in Antigone. Why is Antigone a Sophoclean hero and Creon not? Discuss the similarities and differences of these two characters and their significance for the play, particularly as they pertain to concepts of the city and the family. Should Creon be accorded pity at the play’s end?

6. Discuss the significance of the secondary characters, Ismene and Haimon. Note how they differ from Antigone and Creon. Do they, in your view, represent important voices of moderation, and if so, why?

7. Expand one scene of the Antigone, or create a dialogue that never happened. (For instance, maybe a dialogue between Haimon and Antigone.) Write two pages of dialogue, staying as close to the verse as you can. Then write two pages explaining your word choices. What does the assignment help you to see anew in the text?