

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies

Workshop

**Aris Alexandrou's *Antigone* (1951):
A Critique of the 'Blank Pages on Which
the Revolution Writes Its Instructions'**

Gonda Van Steen

University of Florida

Visiting Fellow, Hellenic Studies

Respondent: Brooke Holmes, Classics

The talk will focus on some of the Brechtian themes of Aris Alexandrou's *Antigone* and on the Greek author's capacity for self-critique: the author wrote an apparent review of his one and only play into the Civil War novel that brought him literary fame, *To Kivotio*, or *The Mission Box* (1974). Both Alexandrou's self-critique and the Brechtian foci of his *Antigone* illuminate the role of the committed play and, more broadly, deliver a speculative proposition on the role of the engaged-but isolated--writer vis-à-vis the dominant Greek political camps. Alexandrou's free adaptation of the *Antigone* motif emphasizes artistic as well as moral integrity, posits aesthetic resistance to political demands, and delivers the complex other side of the radical resistance that inspired postwar Greek politics and culture. The artist's self-reflection set an inspiring example in the aftermath of the Civil War through the Greek dictatorship of 1967-1974 and leaves a legacy of cultural criticism that has been ignored for too long. Alexandrou was well ahead of his time with his characteristic ideological reservations and constructive revisionism, which repeatedly worked to his own detriment.

Gonda Van Steen earned B.A. and M.A. degrees in Classics in her native Belgium and a Ph.D. degree in Classics and Hellenic Studies from Princeton University. As the Cassas Chair in Greek Studies at the University of Florida, she teaches courses in ancient and modern Greek language and literature. Her research interests include classical drama, French travelers to Greece and the Ottoman Empire, nineteenth and twentieth-century receptions of the classics, Greek feminism, and contemporary Greek intellectual history. Van Steen's first book, *Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece*, was published by Princeton University Press in 2000 and was awarded the John D. Criticos Prize from the London Hellenic Society. In her book of 2010, *Liberating Hellenism from the Ottoman Empire*, revolutionary uses of Aeschylus' Persians (1820s) and The Venus de Milo take center stage. Van Steen recently published another book titled *Theatre of the Condemned: Classical Tragedy on Greek Prison Islands* (Oxford University Press, 2011), which discusses the ancient tragedies that were produced by the political prisoners of the Greek Civil War (late 1940s through 1950s).

Friday, February 10, 2012

1:30 p.m.

Scheide Caldwell House, Room 103

Light refreshments to follow