**School of Languages, Linguistics and Film**

**Queen Mary, University of London**

**COM507 EUROPEAN TRAGEDY, 2022/23**

**Credit Value:** 15 credits

**Level:** 5

**Semester:** 1

**Assessment:** One creative plot summary and reflective commentary (1500 words, 40%); one essay (2000 words, 60 %).

**Pre-requisite:** COM101 Introduction to Literature or equivalent.

Texts originally written in Greek, French and Spanish will be studied in English translation

**Convenor:** Dr Richard Mason

**Contact details**: [richard.mason@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:richard.mason@qmul.ac.uk)

Please email me to arrange an appointment to discuss any aspect of the module.

**Co-teachers:** Dr Rachel Bryant-Davies (r.bryant-davies@qmul.ac.uk)

**Timetable:** Combined lecture and seminar, Tuesdays, 15.00–17.00, Laws: 207

**All students must ensure that they obtain a copy of the School handbook and follow the School’s guidelines and regulations in all matters regarding this module.  Students must note that failure to do so may result in de-registration from the module, which may have a significant impact on their overall degree classification**

**DESCRIPTION**

Tragedy is one of the most vital and enduring European literary genres. Tragic dramas are often perceived as among the most significant achievements of different national literatures. Not only are there outstanding examples of the genre in the national literatures drawn on in this programme, tragedy has from antiquity been the object of intense theoretical reflection on the part of critics and philosophers. Hence the course introduces students to important ways of thinking about literature as well as important literary texts. Moreover, tragic drama has sometimes been seen as embodying a distinct world view (a ‘tragic vision’ of human life), and various attempts to formulate this have been very influential, although rejected by some critics. The course will therefore engage with questions such as these: what do we gain from and why can we take a kind of pleasure in the spectacle of human misfortune? Are the benefits psychological, spiritual, intellectual? What kind of pleasure is produced? What kinds of misfortune produce the effect proper to tragedy? What can tragedy tell us about the cultures in which it flourishes? What kind of theoretical approaches (social, psychoanalytical, historical) are most fruitfully applied to it?

**LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE MODULE**

* An acquaintance with important tragic dramas from several national traditions, and a sense of the distinctive features of those traditions, in so far as these influence tragedy;
* A grasp of key literary concepts (such as ‘action’ and ‘character’) insofar as these are instantiated in tragedy;
* A sense of how the tragic text engages or clashes with the belief-systems of different cultures (that from which it came but also those in which it is received);
* An understanding of key philosophical and theoretical perspectives on tragedy.

# ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES

Your assignments must be submitted to QMplus by 23:55 on the given deadline. No hard copy needs to be submitted. Late submissions without an extension will be penalized, as set out in the School Handbook. Applications should be made in advance of the deadline using the online form available on the School’s landing page.

**MARKING CRITERIA**

Essays will be marked according to the criteria set out in the School of Languages, Linguistics, and Film Handbook for Undergraduate Students. Over and above these, students are expected to display a detailed and first-hand knowledge of the primary texts for the module and the capacity to use the critical works to illuminate the plays and vice versa.

**SET TEXTS/PRIMARY READING**

These texts can be read in the original language or in translation. Students should obtain the prescribed translations below to facilitate class work. We will focus on the English version of Beckett’s *Endgame.*

Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by Malcolm Heath (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996)

ISBN 978-0-140-44636-4

Euripides, *Bakkhai*, translated by Reginald Gibbons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

ISBN 9780195125986

Jean Racine, *Britannicus, Phaedra, Athaliah*, translated by C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

ISBN 978-0-19-955599-4

Federico García Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, translated by Gwynne Edwards (London: Methuen, 1997).

ISBN 9780413708700

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (London: Faber, 2009)

ISBN 97800571243730

A full reading list, including extensive suggestions for secondary materials, can be found via Reading Lists Online. Please search for the module code ‘COM507’.

**LECTURE AND SEMINAR SCHEDULE**

(RM=Dr Richard Mason; RBD: Dr Rachel Bryant-Davies)

Week 1: Introduction: What’s so Tragic about Tragedy? (RBD/RM)

Week 2: Aristotle and Classical Greek Tragedy (RBD/RM)

Week 3: Euripides, *Bacchae* (RBD)

Week 4: Euripides, *Bacchae* (RBD)

Week 5: Jean Racine, *Phaedra* (RM) [deadline for Assignment 1 at the end of week 5]

Week 6: Jean Racine, *Phaedra* (RM)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Lorca, *Blood Wedding* (RBD)

Week 9: Lorca, *Blood Wedding* (RBD)

Week 10: Beckett, *Endgame* (RM)

Week 11: Beckett, *Endgame* (RM)

Week 12: Comparative Essay workshop (RBD/RM)