**COM507 EUROPEAN TRAGEDY, 2024/25**

**Credit Value:** 15 credits

**Level:** 5

**Semester:** 2

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

**Pre-requisite:** COM4206 Introduction to Comparison or equivalent

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

**Convenor:** Prof Adrian Armstrong

**Contact details**: a.armstrong@qmul.ac.uk

**Drop-in hours:** tbc

**Timetable:** Seminar: Monday 9-10, Bancroft 1.08; Lecture: Thursday 4-5, Bancroft 1.08

**All students must ensure that they follow the guidelines and regulations of the School of the Arts in all matters regarding this module**

**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.

**CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY**

By taking a range of approaches to the plays studied, students will gain the skills necessary to write in different forms, involving creative writing as well as textual analysis. By assimilating these approaches, and by working on texts produced in very different cultures, students will be able to creatively reimagine where writing can take them in the future and develop their senses of cultural awareness, flexibility and adaptability. During the writing of assignments, students taking this module will have an opportunity to:

* Develop close attention to how information is conveyed, by analysing both the content and the form of translated texts.
* Develop a reflective approach to verbal fluency, by devising a creative plot summary and providing an accompanying reflective commentary to a specific brief. High-level communication skills are vital in any workplace, and are improved by a clear awareness of what is most appropriate to say and why.
* Work with a high degree of independence and intellectual initiative, by engaging critically and reflectively with texts and theories, and learning how to write analytically and reflectively. In the age of social media and disinformation, the ability to communicate complex ideas, synthesise information, and conduct research is essential for a range of employers.

In addition, seminars will often include task-based activities, typically in the form of structured debates or discussions involving teams of students. These will enable students to develop teamworking skills, as well as the analytical and reflective abilities outlined above.

In sum, the key employability skills that students will be able to develop on this module include:

* creativity and innovation
* communication
* self-awareness
* adaptability/flexibility
* resilience
* self-management
* teamworking

# ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES

Assignment 1: Monday 24 February (week 6), 1300

Assignment 2: Monday 12 May, 1300

Your assignments must be submitted to QMplus. Late submissions without an extension will be penalized. Applications for Extenuating Circumstances should be made in advance of the deadline; see the Student Guide for submitting ECs claims on QMplus.

**MARKING CRITERIA**

Essays will be marked according to the standard criteria for work in Comparative Literature. 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*.*

Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996)

Seamus Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)

Jean Racine, *Phaedra* (*Phèdre*), in Racine, *Britannicus, Phaedra, Athaliah*, trans. C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [first published 1987])

Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts* (*Gengangere*), in Ibsen, *Four Major Plays* [*A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*], trans. James McFarlane and Jens Arup, intro. James McFarlane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [first published 1981])

Federico García Lorca, *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de sangre*), in Lorca, *Four Major Plays* [*Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Doña Rosita the Spinster*], ed. Nicholas Round, trans. John Edmunds, with notes by Ann Maclaren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [first published 1997])

**LECTURE AND SEMINAR SCHEDULE**

Guidance on reading tasks will be supplied via QMplus

**L** = lecture; **S** = seminar

Week 1 [Video clips] Introduction: Practical aspects of the module

 Ancient tragic theory: Aristotle’s *Poetics*

Week 2 **S** Mon Reflecting on Aristotle’s *Poetics* / Team exercise: creative synopsis

 **L** Thu Tragedy in ancient Greece; Sophocles, *Antigone*

Week 3 **S** Mon The Antigone Inquiry Session 1

 **L** Thu Sophocles, *Antigone*

Week 4 **S** Mon The Antigone Inquiry Session 2

 **L** Thu Racine, *Phaedra*

Week 5 **S** Mon *Phaedra*: close reading

 **S** Thu The Artistic Committee: Consultations on Producing *Phaedra*

Week 6 **S** Mon *Phaedra*: close reading **NB assignment 1 due 1300 today**

 **L** Thu Ibsen, *Ghosts*

Week 7 Study Week

Week 8 **S** Mon *Ghosts*: close reading

 **S** Thu The Medical Ethics Board

Week 9 **S** Mon The 19th-Century Censorship Committee

 **L** Thu Lorca, *Blood Wedding*

Week 10 **S** Mon *Blood Wedding*: close reading

 **L** Thu *Blood Wedding*: tragedy and symbolism

Week 11 **S** Mon Anthropological Fieldwork

 **S** Thu *Blood Wedding*: literature review workshop

Week 12 **S** Mon Comparative essay workshop

 **L** Thu Guidance on academic writing