

LT 145. Tragedy

Instructor: David Hayes

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Class times: Tues/Thurs 17:30-19:00

On Sept. 15, Oct. 6, Nov. 1, Dec. 1., Dec. 8: 19:15-22:00.

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

While we ordinarily use the word “tragic” to refer to very sad events, in its full sense it refers to a specific kind of artwork and an entire way of looking at life. What makes an artwork or a worldview tragic, rather than merely pessimistic or sad? Is it possible to hold a tragic view of life today? Or is this view rooted in a kind of society (aristocratic), with its attendant values, or a kind of metaphysics (fatalistic)—neither of which are, presumably, ours? Beginning with the flourishing of tragedy in ancient Greece, we will examine works of art and literature from different time periods and cultures (including non-Western). Special attention will be paid to the surprising reemergence of tragic concerns in the American/Central-European *film noir* of the 1940s. Alongside the works of art, we will also consider the analysis and significance of tragedy within Greek, Anglo-American, and Continental moral philosophy.

Requirements

Texts

Almost all the readings for this course are assembled in the Course Reader. The exception is Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Students are required to purchase this – but you may use any unabridged English edition you like. My recommendation is the Arden Shakespeare edition, edited by R.A. Foakes. **Note that students must attend class with a printed copy of the relevant text for the session. Screen use is not permitted, except in case of a disability accommodation.**

Preparation

It is expected that students will begin the seminar already having read and thought about the text(s), and already having mastered the basics, e.g., what the plot is, who the main characters are, etc. On some days, the class will meet later in the evening in the lecture hall for a screening and discussion. Be sure to be aware of the class schedule. Sometimes, there is also a reading assignment in preparation for a screening.

Participation

The first and most basic aim of a seminar is to understand the text by reading and thinking together. While the instructor typically takes the lead, this is a shared task. It demands good preparation, the ability to listen to others, and the courage to think aloud. What matters in these conversations is not

the quantity of contributions but the quality. The best contributions are often good *questions*. For grading purposes, the most important thing will be the student's contribution to the overall conversation, which stretches through the semester.

Use of Electronics

The use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. The research is unequivocal that the presence of laptops hurts the academic performance of the user – and also of whoever else can see the screen. Put away and silence your smartphones during the seminar. These devices undermine the effort to create and sustain a common conversation.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct. Anything is better than turning in work that is not your own, and that is the result of your own personal engagement with the texts and artworks. If you are having difficulties with any assignment, please contact me.

Attendance

As the Student Handbook specifies, more than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will affect the participation grade for the course. I will deduct .1 from the final grade point average for each absence over two. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence. A college rule states that course credit cannot be given for any reason when a student's absences exceed 30% of total number of classes, no matter whether these absences are excused or unexcused.

Please note that the film screenings and discussions are required sessions.

In case you cannot attend a class due to illness, please notify me. I will then offer a short assignment that can be completed in order to make the absence "excused."

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

The Bard College Berlin Student Handbook specifies that: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Concerning extensions for papers in this course, I freely give extensions as long as the student requests one at least 24 hours before the essay deadline has passed.* You may request an extension via email.

Grade Breakdown

Paper #1 (1300 words): 20%

Paper #2 (1700 words): 30%

Paper #3 (2000 words): 35%
Class participation 15%

Schedule

Tuesday, August 30: selection from Herodotus, *The History* (1.34-1.45), and opening discussion
Thursday, September 1: *Agamemnon*, lines 1-257; hyperliteral translation (David Hayes) of the 1st choral song of *Agamemnon*
Tuesday, September 6: *Agamemnon*, lines 258-810; excerpt from Martha Nussbaum, Interview with Bill Moyers, "The World of Ideas" (1988)
Thursday, September 8: *Agamemnon*, lines 811-1371
Tuesday, September 13: *Agamemnon*, lines 1372-end
Thursday, September 15, 19:15-22:00 (lecture hall): *Detour* (1945, dir. Edgar Ulmer)

First paper due by email: Sunday, September 19, before midnight

Tuesday, September 20: *Oedipus the King*, lines 1-633
Thursday, September 22: *Oedipus the King*, lines 634-1072; Freud, selection from *The Interpretation of Dreams*
Tuesday, September 27: *Oedipus the King*, lines 1073-end
Thursday, September 29: Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 1-9 (pgs. 1-28)
Tuesday, October 4: Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 10-end (pgs. 29-71)
Thursday, October 6, 19:15-22:00 (lecture hall): *Out of the Past* (1947, dir. Jacques Tourneur)
Tuesday, October 11: Pippin, Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Fatalism in American Film Noir*
Thursday, October 13: *Alcestis*, lines 1-476
Tuesday, October 18: *Alcestis*, lines 477-end
Thursday, October 20, selection from Hegel, *Aesthetics*

Tuesday and Thursday, October 25 and 27: Fall Break

Tuesday, November 1, 19:15-22:00 (lecture hall): *Adachigahara*. It is required to read the text of the play before the screening.
Thursday, November 3: *Adachigahara*; Scheler, "On the Tragic"

Second paper due by email: Sunday, November 6, before midnight

Tuesday, November 8, Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, sections 1-14
Thursday, November 10: *King Lear*, Act I
Tuesday, November 15: *King Lear*, Acts 2 & 3
Thursday, November 17: *King Lear*, Act 4
Tuesday, November 22: *King Lear*, Act 5
Thursday, November 24: Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love"
Tuesday, November 29: Kierkegaard, "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama," from *Either/Or*
Thursday, December 1, 19:15-22:00 (lecture hall): *Scarlet Street* (1945, dir. Fritz Lang); Warshow "The Gangster as Tragic Hero"
Tuesday, December 6, Sebald, "Paul Bereyter"; Steiner, "Tragedy Pure and Simple"
Thursday, December 8, 19:15-22:00 (lecture hall): *City Lights* (1931, dir. Charlie Chaplin)

Tuesday, December 13 Completion week
Thursday, December 15 Completion week

Third (final) paper due by email, Saturday, December 17, before midnight