

# LT145 Tragedy

Seminar Leader: Dr. David Hayes  
Email: d.hayes@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: by appointment  
Course times: W/F 17:30-19:00

## 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 every text for this course is 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. The BCB library has a limited number of copies to lend. 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 in the lecture hall and extend later for a film screening and discussion. Be sure to be aware of the class schedule. Sometimes, there is also a reading assignment in preparation for a screening.

### 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. These devices undermine the effort to create and sustain a common conversation.

### Handies/Smartphones

In order to facilitate an environment that is constructive for seminar discussion, please do not enter the classroom until you have put your smartphone away in a bag or backpack. This means: **do not sit at the seminar table with your phone out, even before class has begun.** Please also make sure that your ringer is turned off before you enter the room.

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

The use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software is not permitted in assignments for this course.

### **Accessibility**

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, ([accommodations@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:accommodations@berlin.bard.edu)) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for longer-term accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker ([j.harker@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.harker@berlin.bard.edu)) or Maria Anderson-Long ([m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu)).

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

For each absence over two, I will deduct from the final grade according to the following ascending scale: -.05, -.05, -.1, -.1, -.15, -.15.

I will excuse absences with a doctor's note or a bureaucratic appointment confirmation (excused absences still count against the 30% rule). Every other absence is simply counted as an absence. There is no need to send me any email messages if you will be absent.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

I freely give extensions — but the request must be made at least 24 hours before the deadline. Late papers will be downgraded a third of a letter grade (e.g., from A- to B+) for every 24 hours that passes.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Seminar participation grade: 30%  
First paper (approximately 1000 words): 15%  
Second paper (approximately 1500 words): 20%  
Final paper (approximately 2500 words): 35%

### **Schedule**

#### Week 1

September 4: selection from Herodotus, *The History* (1.34-1.45), and opening discussion  
September 6: *Agamemnon*, lines 1-257; hyperliteral translation (David Hayes) of the 1<sup>st</sup> choral song of *Agamemnon*

#### Week 2

September 11: *Agamemnon*, lines 258-810; excerpt from Martha Nussbaum, Interview with Bill Moyers, "The World of Ideas" (1988)  
September 13: *Agamemnon*, lines 811-1371

#### Week 3

September 18: *Agamemnon*, lines 1372-end  
September 20: 17:30-20:30 (**lecture hall**): *Detour* (1945, dir. Edgar Ulmer)

**First paper due by email: Monday, September 23, before midnight**

#### Week 4

September 25: *Oedipus the King*, lines 1-633  
September 27: *Oedipus the King*, lines 634-1072; Freud, selection from *The Interpretation of Dreams*

#### Week 5

October 2: *Oedipus the King*, lines 1073-end  
October 4: Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 1-9 (pgs. 1-28); Berg, "My Dad" from *Reading and Loving*

#### Week 6

October 9: Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapters 10-end (pgs. 29-71)  
October 11: 17:30-20:30 (**lecture hall**): *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955, dir. Robert Aldrich)

Week 7

October 16: Pippin, Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Fatalism in American Film Noir*

October 18: Hegel, selection from *Aesthetics*

**Fall Break: October 21-27**

**Second paper due by email: Monday, October 28, before midnight**

Week 8

October 30: *Medea*, lines 1-445

November 1: *Medea*, lines 445-1080

Week 9

November 6: *Medea*, lines 1081-end

November 8: 17:30-20:30 (lecture hall): *Aoi No Ue* ("The Lady Aoi")

**It is required to read the text of the play before the screening.**

Week 10

November 13: Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, sections 1-14

November 15: *King Lear*, Act 1

Week 11

November 20: *King Lear*, Act 1

November 22: *King Lear*, Act 2

Week 12

November 27: *King Lear*, Act 3

November 29: *King Lear*, Act 4

Week 13

December 4: *King Lear*, Act 5

December 6: 17:30-20:30 (lecture hall) *Hollow Triumph* (1948, dir. Steve Sekely);

To read before the screening: Warshow, "The Gangster as Tragic Hero"

Week 14

December 11: Kierkegaard, "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama"

December 13: Sebald, "Paul Breyer"; Steiner, "Tragedy Pure and Simple"

*Completion Week*

**Final Paper due by email: Friday, December 20, before midnight**