

## **B.A. (Honours) in Contemporary English Studies**

<b>Course Title</b>	: Tragic Drama across Time and Space
<b>Course Code</b>	: ENG3004
<b>Recommended Study Year</b>	: 3 <sup>rd</sup> or 4 <sup>th</sup> Year
<b>No. of Credits/Term</b>	: 3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	: Lecture-tutorial mode
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	: 2-hour lecture per week 1-hour tutorial per week
<b>Category</b>	: Discipline Elective
<b>Prerequisite(s)</b>	: Nil
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	: Nil
<b>Exclusion(s)</b>	: Nil
<b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>	: Nil

### **Brief Course Description**

This course examines representative plays in the genre of tragedy from its origin in ancient Greece through its renaissance in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, its Chinese counterpart in the Yuan dynasty, to its “crisis” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the plays we read, theory and philosophy of tragedy will be introduced as assistance which can deepen our understanding of the form. This course also covers the cultural and intellectual contexts of the plays under discussion such as Greek mythology, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and in the case of Chinese tragedy, the popular belief that “virtue will be duly rewarded and vice punished” (善惡有報). There will be interesting debates over the vital questions that are related to this particular genre of literature.

### **Aims**

This course aims to accomplish the following:

1. to develop an awareness of tragedy as a vital form of human communication;
2. to develop the basic skills of reading and understanding tragedy;
3. to enhance competence in speaking and writing about tragedy;
4. to develop an appreciation of tragedy as a form of art;
5. to cultivate an independent reading habit that will enrich students’ future life.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, students are expected to:

1. be able to analyze and comprehend selected tragic texts from Greek to modern times;
2. be able to relate selected tragic texts to the cultural contexts from which they arose;
3. be able to explain the main features of tragedy, those that have remained constant throughout history as well as those that have changed over time;
4. be able to understand relevant critical terms so as to engage in meaningful dialogues with theorists of different times and places about the craft of tragedy;
5. be able to effectively synthesize primary and secondary sources while responding to tragic texts.

## **Indicative Contents**

Readings for the course are selected from the following:

### Greek tragedy

Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*.

Sophocles. *Antigone*.

Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*.

Euripides. *Hippolytus*.

### Renaissance and Neo-classical tragedy

William Shakespeare. *King Lear*.

William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*.

Pierre Corneille. *Le Cid*.

Jean Racine. *Phaedra*.

### Modern Tragedy

Henrik Ibsen. *Ghosts*.

Anton Chekhov. *The Cherry Orchard*.

Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman*.

John Synge. *Riders to the Sea*

Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

### Chinese Tragedy (in English translation)

Guan Hanqing. *Snow in Midsummer*

Ma Zhiyua. *Autumn of the Palace of Han* (also known as *Sorrows of Han*)

Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*

Meng Chengshun. *Mistress and Maid*.

### Theories of Tragedy

Aristotle. "Book VI" (from *The Poetics*).

Andrew Cecil Bradley. "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy" (from *Shakespearean Tragedy*).

Arthur Miller. "Tragedy and the Common Man" (from *New York Times*, February 27, 1949).

Richard Sewall. "Absence of Tragedy in Asian Drama" (from *Encyclopedia of Britannica*).

## **Teaching Method**

This course consists of three interactive components: lectures, student presentations, and group discussions. During the lectures, the instructor will provide overviews of the four different tragedies selected, not only outlining the major features of each play, but also alerting students to the opportunities for further exploration. Students are expected to research the background of each text in order to acquire a historical as well as a cross-cultural perspective to be demonstrated in their presentations. Students will also be asked to analyze each text in their tutorial groups.

## Measurement of Learning Outcomes

The progress and achievements in learning will be measured through class discussions, presentations, essays and a test at the end of the term.

Learning Outcome	Assessment Method				Assessment
	Brief Essay (AT1)	Brief Essay (AT2)	Presentation (AT3)	In-Class Exercise (AT4)	
ILO1 (be able to analyze and comprehend selected tragic texts from Greek to modern times)	x	x	x	x	Continuous Assessment: 100%  The progress and achievements in
ILO2 (be able to relate selected tragic texts to the cultural contexts from which they arose)	x	x		x	
ILO3 (be able to explain the main features of tragedy, those that have remained constant throughout history as well as those that have changed over time)	x	x	x	x	
ILO4 (be able to understand relevant critical terms so as to engage in meaningful dialogues with theorists of different times and places about the craft of tragedy)	x	x	x	x	
ILO5 (be able to effectively synthesize primary and secondary sources while responding to tragic texts)	x	x	x	x	

learning will be measured through class discussions, presentations, essays and a test at the end of the term. In terms of percentage, the final grade for this course will consist of the following two parts:

Assessment Task #1 (30 points):

Write a brief essay to discuss similarities and differences between the tragic texts covered in Unit One and Unit Two.

Assessment Task #2 (30 points):

Write a brief essay to support or rebut the view that tragedy is absent from modern society and Asian drama.

Assessment Task #3 (10 points):

Give a group presentation on assigned texts. The final marks for this category will take into consideration students' attendance record for the whole semester, their contribution to the classroom discussions, and the team spirit they display in group activities.

Assessment Task #4 – In-class Exercise

1. Read an excerpt drawn from one of the tragic texts covered in Unit Three or Unit Four and comment on its thematic significance. (15 points)
2. Write a brief essay on a given topic related to the study of tragedy. (15 points)

## Required/Essential Readings

One of the following Greek tragedies will be chosen for one semester:

- Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Sophocles, *Antigone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Euripides, *Hippolytus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

One of the following Renaissance/Neoclassical tragedies will be chosen for one semester:

- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.
- William Shakespeare, *King Lear*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2007.
- Pierre Corneille, *The Cid, Cinna, The Theatrical Illusion*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1976.
- Jean Racine, *Iphigenia; Phaedra; Athaliah*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1964.

One of the following modern tragedies will be chosen for one semester:

- Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*. London: Faber & Faber, 2010.
- Anton Chekhov, *Plays: Ivanov; The Seagull; Uncle Vanya; Three Sisters; The Cherry Orchard*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2002.
- Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- John Synge. *Riders to the Sea*. New York: Quill Pen Classics, 2008.
- Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2009.

One of the following Chinese tragedies will be chosen for one semester:

- Guan Hanqing, *Snow in Midsummer*. Bel Air, CA: Silk Pagoda, 2008.
- Ma Zhiyua, *Sorrows of Han: A Chinese Tragedy*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1997.
- Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.
- Meng Chengshun, *Mistress and Maid*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Aristotle, "Book VI" and "Book XIII", *Poetics*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1997.
- Andrew Cecil Bradley, "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy," *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Macmillan, 1904.
- Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. New York: Viking Press, 1978.
- Richard Sewall, "Absence of Tragedy in Asian Drama," *Encyclopedia of Britannica* (<http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/601884/tragedy/51130>)