

SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY

# BA English Studies



# TRAGEDY I

TO THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

LEVEL 2 UNIT GUIDE  
Semester 2 2007/2008

**UNIT TITLE: TRAGEDY 1: TO THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE**

Reference No: PES-2-213  
Unit Level: 2  
Credit Value: 1  
Study Hours: 150  
Contact Hours: 36  
Private Study Hours: 110  
Unit Co-ordinator: Gill Foster ([fosterg@lsbu.ac.uk](mailto:fosterg@lsbu.ac.uk))

**Aims**

- To introduce a representative range of examples of tragic drama to the English Renaissance;
- To introduce the theoretical discussion of the concept of tragedy;
- To examine possible continuities and differences between Greek and English Renaissance plays;
- To develop students' understanding of dramatic form and performance theory.

**Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the unit, students will be expected to:

- analyse critically a variety of tragic drama from the ancient world and the English Renaissance
- incorporate into their analysis theoretical discussion of the tragic form
- compare and contrast tragic drama across a range of historical periods

### Overview of Content

This unit studies the Greek and Renaissance stages and explores original staging conditions, developing students' understanding of the relationship between space, architecture and meaning. We will examine the original performance conditions of each period and analyse the relationship of form to meaning paying particular attention to changing concepts of dramatic tragedy. Many of the plays are quite short, but that said, the reading for this unit is fairly heavy; the goal in setting the syllabus has been to expose students to a representative variety of tragic drama in the periods under examination.

### Overview of Teaching and Learning Style

Each session will consist of a short lecture, and a longer seminar. Students are advised to focus their preparation for each class primarily on the play for discussion that week. In addition, you should make sure that you familiarize yourself with key critical theories contained in the required and secondary reading recommendations. Each week I have suggested secondary material that is either required reading or particularly relevant to the subjects or topics under study. These essays should not be understood to represent the sum total of secondary reading students should undertake; it is merely an effort to help guide students' reading and preparation for the unit. The bibliography at the end of this guide will help you navigate the wider reading required for the course.

### Syllabus Content (see core reading section below for the correct editions)

Sophocles	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>
Aeschylus	<i>Agamemnon</i>
Euripides	<i>Medea</i>
Marlowe	<i>Dr Faustus</i>
Kyd	<i>The Revenger's Tragedy</i>
Webster	<i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>

### Teaching and Learning Methods

While a certain amount of information will be conveyed in lecture format, you will be asked to take an active role in discussing and analyzing texts which might include play-readings, whole class discussion, small group and pair work. It is absolutely essential that you come prepared to the sessions and you must make sure that you have read the play for discussion. You should also look at the required reading section as this contains the key critical and theoretical works we will be considering. This material will form part of your assessment so you must be familiar with it. Where possible we will analyse the text in performance by reference to stage and film interpretations and the course will also include at least one compulsory theatre visit.

Attendance at every lecture and seminar is vital. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please notify me in advance of the class by:

- e-mail (fosterg@lsbu.ac.uk)
- voice mail (020-7815-5419);
- or in writing

### Course Outline

#### **Week 1: Introduction to the course**

After explaining the teaching programme and assessment of this unit, I will introduce the subject of tragedy in general terms. We will consider the condition of the tragic character and the form and subject of tragedy. Should we understand it as addressing social conflict and human pride, or should we avoid trying to make such trans-historical links? What might be the political function of tragedy – does it discourage individual aspiration, or is it a subversive genre? These questions will be explored with general reference to the work of some of the theorists and dramatists studied over the next eleven weeks.

**Recommended secondary reading:** Introduction to John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds, *Tragedy* (Longman, 1998); Peter Thomson, "Playhouses and Players in the Time of Shakespeare," Stanley Wells, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*; G. Ley, *A Short Introduction to Ancient Greek Theatre*

#### **Week 2: Sophocles - *Oedipus Rex* (or *Oedipus the King*)**

This lecture will provide an introduction to the conventions and staging conditions of the ancient Greek theatre. We will consider the original staging of the Greek plays and the ways in which the physical landscape and the architecture of the theatres conditioned the emotional, structural and dramatic scope of the works. We will then proceed to a close analysis of the text, paying particular attention to the character of Oedipus, the plot structure and the dramatic function of the chorus.

**Recommended secondary reading:** P.D. Arnott, *An Introduction to the Greek theatre* (Macmillan Press, 1982) Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (Routledge, 1992)

#### **Week 3: *Oedipus Rex*/Aristotle's Poetics**

The lecture will open with a discussion of Aristotle's theory of tragedy, **which students should have read before class**. I will then offer a close analysis of the themes, characterization, and structure of the *Oedipus Rex*, exploring in particular some reasons why this play, according to Aristotle, was the ideal example of tragic drama. The seminar will provide students with the opportunity to consider more fully both Aristotle's theory and Sophocles' drama, and the relationship between them.

**Required secondary reading:** Aristotle, *The Poetics*

#### **Week 4: Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus***

This week we will focus primarily on close analysis of the text. We will discuss points of historical relevance and examine the differences and similarities with the ancient Greek theatre form. We will consider some of the social and religious conditions of the English Renaissance. I will highlight the play's indebtedness to mediaeval morality drama and reconsider Faustus' pact in the light of contemporary theology. We will explore Marlowe's treatment of the character and discuss whether or not Faustus can be identified as a tragic hero.

**Recommended secondary reading:**

#### **Week 5: Augusto Boal and Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy.**

The lecture this week will open with an examination of *Dr Faustus* in the light of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. We will then consider the limitations of trying to read examples of the tragic form according to a single theoretical model. Objections to what has been read as Aristotle's conservative agenda will be briefly presented through reference to Augusto Boal, "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy." Students

will be introduced to cultural materialism, and the view of tragedy as a potentially subversive form, through essays by Sinfield and Dollimore.

The seminar will go on to explore these critical and theoretical approaches to tragedy in more depth through further close analysis of the play.

**Required secondary reading:** Augusto Boal, "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy," in John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds, *Tragedy* (Longman, 1998);

**Recommended secondary reading:** Jonathan Dollimore, "Subversion through Transgression," in Kastan and Stallybrass, eds, *Staging the Renaissance*; Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, pp. 230-7

### **Week 6: Euripides - Medea**

This week I want to consider the role of women in the Greek theatre. We will examine the dramatic action of *Medea* closely, paying particular attention to the character of the tragic heroine and discussing the extent to which the role of the female protagonist is essentially subversive in a male-orientated society. We will also look at Medea's compulsion to self-determination in the light of Nietzsche's theory of dramatic tragedy.

**Required secondary reading:** Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy*

**Recommended secondary reading:** Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Images of Women in the Literature of Classical Athens," John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Liebler, eds, *Tragedy* (Longman, 1998); John Kerrigan,

### **Week 7: Tutorial Week**

This week will be set aside in order for you to make an individual tutorial appointment to discuss your essay assignment.

### **Week 8: Webster – The Duchess of Malfi**

This week's lecture will develop the discussion of the female tragic protagonist introduced in the session on *Medea*. We will begin by exploring Webster's portrayal of the claustrophobic world of the court, and discuss the relationship between Ferdinand and the Duchess. We will then contrast the male public arena of the court with the private domestic world constructed secretly by the Duchess and consider how the Duchess' gender threatens to destabilize the existing social order. This will lead to a discussion of the Duchess as tragic heroine, and an analysis of the play's unusual dramatic structure (the Duchess dies in Act 1).

**Recommended secondary reading:** Lisa Jardine, "I am Duchess of Malfi still': Wealth, Inheritance and the spectre of strong women; Dymphna Callaghan, *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*

### **Week 9: Webster – The Duchess of Malfi**

This week we will focus on a discussion of social and moral disorder. The debate will be linked to Webster's drama and its preoccupation with degree and social transgression. The presentation of sexuality and, in particular, what was seen to constitute deviant sexuality, will be examined. We will analyse the play's presentation of transgression particularly in the scene of the Duchess' s torture and murder and consider what the overall tragic message might be.

The seminar will be used also consider the dramatic conventions surrounding the figure of the malcontent, and the connections that might be drawn between Bosola and revenge tragedy.

**Recommended secondary reading:** "Still Harping on Daughters; Frank Whigham, "Incest and Ideology," Kastan and Stallybrass, eds, *Staging the Renaissance*

### **Week 10: Aeschylus - *Agammemnon***

The lecture will begin by outlining the background to the events of the play as found in Homeric legend. I will then examine the presentation of justice and the thematic significance of the gods in *Agammemnon*. We will also analyse Aeschylus's treatment of the character of Clytemnestra in light of our discussions of *Medea* and *The Duchess*. We will then move on to consider the theatrical presentation of violence on the Greek stage beginning with a discussion of the convention of reported action and progressing to a close analysis of the structural and linguistic means by which Euripides creates a sense of horror. This discussion will be further developed in the following week when we will compare and contrast the dramatic techniques of Euripides and Tourneur.

**Recommended Secondary Reading:** "Medea Studies: Euripides to Pasolini," *Revenge Tragedy*; Martha Nussbaum, "Aeschylus and practical conflict," *The Fragility of Goodness*

### **Week 11: Tourneur and Middleton - *The Revenger's Tragedy***

This week I want to further consider the representation of violence in theatrical form while also considering revenge tragedy as a distinct genre. I will begin by explaining the peculiarities of revenge tragedy and the extent to which Tourneur's play is dependent on the Senecan tradition; in particular, the hero doesn't fall from greatness due to any fault of his or her own, but rather is confronted with an action seemingly demanding revenge. The very plot structure of revenge tragedy thus implies a different moral agenda from other tragic forms. I will then discuss the manner in which Kyd draws on conventional features of revenge tragedy, offering close analysis of key scenes. The seminar will explore the particular ways in which Kyd handles revenge through close analysis of the treatment of violence, madness, and state authority. Students will be asked to compare and contrast Aeschylus' and Tourneur's treatment of the genre.

**Recommended secondary reading:** John Kerrigan, "'Remember me!': Horestes, Hieronimo, and Hamlet," *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*; Robert N. Watson, "Tragedy," in Braunmuller and Hattaway, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (NB: this chapter is of general relevance to the Renaissance drama studied on this unit)

### **Week 12: Revision Session**

In this final lecture I will highlight some of the continuities and developments in the tragic form we have uncovered over the course of the twelve-week unit, and I will offer a broad overview of the range of theoretical work we have studied in relation to the drama. In the seminar we will return to some of the questions with which the unit opened concerning the subject matter of tragedy and its relation to human nature and society. We will then brainstorm responses to past exam papers, thinking about how different plays and theorists may be related and contrasted to one another.

## Unit Guide

### Assessment

The assessment will consist of two components, each worth **50%** of your total mark.

- One 2 000 word essay;
- One 2 hour unseen exam.

The pass mark for the unit is **40%**. The pass mark for each element is **30%**. In order to pass the unit students must attain a mark of over 30% for each element.

### Assessment Criteria

These are the areas that we consider in arriving at an assessment of your work:

- A. Knowledge of the topic of the essay question or task. Ability to refer to the texts under discussion with accuracy and clarity.
- B. Analysis of the issues in relation to the primary and secondary material.
- C. Evidence of a critical framework and a coherent and developing argument.
- D. Appropriate and accurate use of background material and secondary reading
- E. Presentation of work in line with academic conventions of spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, sentence structure, referencing.

With these in mind, the following model can be used as a guide:

Fail	0-35%	Badly misunderstood question. Contains factual errors and a preponderance of irrelevant material. Major incoherence in organisation of material. Scant evidence of reading. Extensive use of unacknowledged quotation.
	35-39%	Otherwise pass standard answer spoiled by serious inaccuracies. Inclusion of irrelevant material. Some evidence of relevant and appropriate reading.
Third	40-49%	An essentially descriptive answer to pass standard. Some significant omissions and/or mistakes. Lack of clarity or coherence in organisation. Evidence of appropriate reading, but inadequately used. Attempts at evaluation with limited success.
2:2	50-59%	A comprehensive answer showing a reasonable appreciation of the relative importance of the material and discussion presented. Appropriate use of reading. Reasonable attempt to evaluate material and structure an argument.
2:1	60-69%	Good comprehensive answer, presented in a clear style and organisation, showing grasp of relevant material with an appreciation of the relative examples. Evidence of originality and analytical abilities, critical appraisal with application of appropriate reading.
First	70-79%	Relevant material (discussion, analysis, response) presented in a clear and coherent discussion and subjected to a logically argued critical appraisal. Evidence of original thought and analytical ability. Imaginative use of relevant reading, fully and accurately acknowledged.
	80-89%	Adds a deeper understanding and evaluation of the issues.

### Core Reading

These are the editions I will be using in class and the ones you should read. **You must make sure that you bring a copy of the correct edition to the session.**

Sophocles: *Oedipus Rex* in 'The Three Theban Plays', 1984 *Penguin Classics*  
Christopher Marlowe: *Dr Faustus*, *Revels Plays* 1993, Manchester University Press  
Middleton and Tourneur: *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Revel's Student Editions* 1996, Manchester University Press  
Euripides: *Medea*, *Drama Classics* 1994, Nick Hern Books  
Aeschylus: *Agammon* in 'The Oresteia: A Translation of Aeschylus' Trilogy' by Ted Hughes, 1999, Faber and Faber  
John Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Revel's Student Editions* 1997, Manchester University Press

### Secondary Reading

This bibliography is not exhaustive; it merely offers a good starting point for your own research. There is more relevant reading in the library than is indicated on this reading list, and you may further wish to take advantage of other libraries in and around London. Please note that a core text for the English Renaissance section of the unit, *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments*, ed Arthur Kinney, offers excellent suggestions for further reading for each play.

### Overview

- A.C. Bradley 1904, rpt 1978) *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan)
- Drakakis, John and Naomi Conn Liebler (eds) (1998) *Tragedy* (London: Longman)
- Eckbert Faas (1984) *Tragedy and After: Euripides, Shakespeare, and After* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press)
- Walter Kaufmann (1992) *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)
- John Kerrigan (1996) *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Richard Kuhns (1991) *Tragedy: Contradiction and Repression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
- George Steiner (1995) *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber)

### Greek Tragedy

- L. Aylen (1964) *Greek Tragedy in the Modern World* (London: Methuen)

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- P.D. Arnott (1982) *Introduction to the Greek Theatre* (Macmillan Press)
- Simon Goldhill (1986) *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- H.D. Kitto (1961) *Greek Tragedy: a Literary Study* (London: Methuen)
- H.D. Kitto (1964) *Form and Meaning in Drama: a Study of Six Greek Plays and of Hamlet* (London: Methuen)
- A. Lesky (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (1978) *Greek Tragedy* (London: Benn)
- G. Ley (1991) *Short Introduction to Ancient Greek Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
- Martha Nussbaum (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Rush Rehm (1992) *Greek Tragic Theatre* (Routledge)
- Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1988) *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books)

### English Renaissance Tragedy

- F.S. Boas (1940) *Christopher Marlowe: A Critical and Biographical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (eds.) (1990) *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Dympna Callaghan *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy* (not in SBU library)
- Jonathan Dollimore, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (1984) *Radical Tragedy* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf)
- Philip Edwards (1966) *Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy* (London: British Council)
- D.M. Farr (1973) *Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism* (London: Oliver and Boyd)
- C.R. Forker (1986) *The Skull Beneath the Skin: Interpretations of Webster* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press)
- A.H. Gomme (1969) *Jacobean Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- P. Henderson (1962) *Christopher Marlowe* (London: British Council)
- Jean E. Howard (1994) *The Stage and Social Struggle* (London: Routledge)

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- G.K. Hunter (1969)      *John Webster: A Critical Anthology* (London: Penguin)
- Lisa Jardine (1983)      *Still Harping on Daughters* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf)
- David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass, eds, 1991      *Staging the Renaissance* (London: Routledge)
- J. O'Neill (1969)      *Critics on Marlowe* (London: Allen and Unwin)
- Alan Sinfield (1992)      *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)