

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Tragedy as a Way of Life: Theory, Philosophy, Literature

Course Number and Section

ENGLISH

3265G 550

Instructor Name(s): M. Curtis Allen

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL Brightspace is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

In the modern popular imagination, tragedy is a dramatic genre typified by misfortune befalling the story's protagonist. Moving away from this definition while holding onto its kernel of truth, this course will look at the ways in which the idea of tragedy becomes a prism of ethical, political, and existential conflict through which human life can be modelled. In this way, a tragic life may not only be something to be avoided, but perhaps, to the contrary, an ideal to strive for. In order to do this, we will investigate canonical works of tragedy, from ancient times to now, alongside films and other media, while deploying a variety of theoretical and critical uses of tragedy, focusing on the relation between the idea of the tragic and the realization of a life worth living.

Learning Outcomes: one outcome per entry

Learn to critically parse differences between dramatic genres and themes.

Engage with critical theories of tragedy alongside literary forms and other artistic media which tackle the conceptual and affective dimensions of tragedy from diverse cultures, times, and places.

Learn advanced techniques of reading, writing, interpretation, and critical thinking.

Learn to better appreciate the relationship between narrative modes and ethical paradigms.

Learn how to become more human (fingers crossed).

Textbooks and Course Materials:

MODULE I — ANCIENT TRAGEDY: ANTIGONE

Week 1 – Antigone I: Introduction – Tragedy as a Genre

- LIT: Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Mark Griffith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), lines 1–331.
- Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Harvard University Press, 1995), chs. 1–6, 7–9, 13–14 (1447a–1453a).

Week 2 – Antigone II: Tragedy and Moral Luck

- LIT: Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Mark Griffith (Cambridge University Press, 1999); lines

332–780.

- Nussbaum, Martha C., *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001), "Luck and Ethics," pp. 1–22.

Week 3 – Antigone III: Ethical Conflict and Necessity

- LIT: Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Mark Griffith (Cambridge University Press, 1999), lines 781–1353.
- Hölderlin, Friedrich, "The Significance of Tragedies" and "Remarks on Antigone," in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. Thomas Pfau (State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 83–89, 109–116.

Week 4 – Antigone IV: The Ethical World

- LIT: Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Mark Griffith (Cambridge University Press, 1999), continue reading as necessary.
- Hegel, G. W. F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge University Press, 2018), "Spirit," pp. 253–284.

Week 5 – Antigone V: Politics of Kinship

- LIT: Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. and trans. Mark Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), continue reading as necessary.
- Butler, Judith, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 1–56.

Week 6 – Adapting the Ancients

- FILM: Nolan, Christopher, dir., *The Odyssey* (Universal Pictures, 2026).

Week 7 – Reading Week

MODULE II — EARLY MODERN TRAGEDY: HAMLET

Week 8 – Hamlet I: Revenge, Ghosts, and Tragic Action

- LIT: Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Acts 1–2.
- Kierkegaard, Søren, "The Ancient Tragical Motif as Reflected in the Modern," in *Either/Or, Part I*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings IV* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Week 9 – Hamlet II: Inwardness and Reflection

- LIT: Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act 3.
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000), "Analytic of the Sublime," §§23–29, pp. 128–159.

Week 10 – Hamlet III: The Dionysian and Apollonian

- LIT: Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act 4.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Chapter 1, Chapter 10.

Week 11 – Hamlet IV: Mourning

- LIT: Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act 5
- Benjamin, Walter, "The Role of Language in Trauerspiel and Tragedy," in *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 267–270.

Week 12 – Tragic Violence: Reactive or Revolutionary?

- FILM: Taymor, Julie, dir., *Titus* (Fox Searchlight, 1999).
- David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004), "The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment," pp. 170–208.

MODULE III — CONTEMPORARY TRAGEDY: WAITING FOR GODOT

Week 13 – Beckett I: Nothing to Be Done

- LIT: Beckett, Samuel, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (Grove Press, 1954), Acts 1–2.
- Williams, Raymond, *Modern Tragedy* (Broadview Press, 2006), "Tragic Deadlock and Stalemate: Chekhov, Pirandello, Ionesco, Beckett," pp. 169–188.

Week 14 – Beckett II: The Tragicomedy of Extinction

- FILM: McPherson, Conor, dir., Endgame (Ambrose Video, 2000).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bT2M9mu8p6Y>.

Methods of Evaluation: one assignment per entry

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
In-class assignments	Weekly	40% (cumulative)
Attendance and Participation	n/a	20%
Short Writing Assignment	Last day of class	20%
Final Exam	TBD	20%

Friday, August 14, 2026

Huron Brief Course Outline 2026/27

In-course Costs \$000.00

For Textbooks and Course Materials (below), you are required to include the cost of each textbook or other learning material.

Note whether there are any restrictions that would prevent a student from using a second-hand copy. Here is some suggested text:

- Required textbook: [author, title, edition, publisher, date]. Cost: [insert amount].
 - Or include the weblink of the textbook’s publisher site that includes the cost information.
- Students need to purchase this edition. Second-hand or older editions will not be sufficient.
- OR Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.
- This course has an optional field trip that costs [insert amount].
- This course has a required field component that costs [insert amount].

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.