

2026-27 Course Outline: Tragedy in Western Literature

LA&PS Department of English, Also, offered in the Department of Humanities.

Course Code AP/EN 3192, HUMA 3014 (Y) 6.0 Each Wednesday

Course Director - Prof. Marcia Blumberg

Classes from 2.30 – 5.20pm

Course Description

The course focuses on close readings of PLAYS, theatrical analyses, and the quality of your own writing. We examine tragedy as a genre and important writings by Aristotle and other theorists. We briefly analyze the context of Ancient Greece and the staging of these tragedies. Choosing 5 significant Greek tragedies, Aeschylus *Oresteia*, Sophocles *Antigone* and *Oedipus The King*, Euripides *Medea* and *The Bacchae*, we study each ancient text **followed by a cluster of modern or contemporary re-visionings** utilizing Adrienne Rich's definition of that term: "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction," We compare plays from Ancient Greece, where tragedy portrayed the fate of famous men and women and their relationship to the gods, with recent plays that represent the crises associated with ordinary men and women and their positions in many different worlds. The latter texts are situated in many countries and cultures from Argentina, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Poland, South Africa. Britain, USA. They offer new insights into the Tragedies utilizing many theatrical forms.

The course interrogates theatrical, formal, thematic, and theoretical issues. It also analyzes cultural and political contexts, specific times and places, aspects of race, class, gender, and power differentials. Interpretations of the Greek Tragedies and the contemporary plays emphasize theatre as a dynamic medium that uses language and bodies in diverse stagings and contexts; they also empower us with a keen awareness to see with fresh eyes.

Course Delivery

Delivery Mode: [ONLN SYNCHRONOUS ZOOM]

The course combines lecture and tutorial structures. Each week focuses on one play with a power point presentation that can include relevant art slides and political satirical material, extracts from productions and occasionally a full theatre viewing when I have special presentations to share. I provide brief contexts. Participation is vital so I take attendance and each week there is an informal oral quiz where I note student involvement towards a participation grade. At the end of the course when all the grades are tallied, I add extra participation if there is a cusp grade and there has been regular attendance. I analyse each assignment during a seminar well ahead of time and emphasize my availability to answer queries on email as well as appointments on phone calls.

Course Materials

3 Plays (including Sophocles, *Antigone*, Euripides, *Medea* and, *The Bacchae*) (Nick Hern). From York Bookstore to be ordered from England. Excellent translations and notes.

The Oresteia of Aeschylus, in a new translation by Ted Hughes (Farrar, Straus & Giroux 2000) Scott Library Read Online.

Antigone, Jean Anouilh, (Samuel French 2002) York Bookstore

Steven Berkoff, *Greek* in *Steven Berkoff Plays One* Scott Read Online Bertolt Brecht,

Antigone trans Judith Malina (Applause) Course Kit Bookstore

Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats* in *Marina Carr Plays One* Scott read Online,

Caryl Churchill and David Lan, *A Mouthful of Birds* Scott Read Online

Rita Dove, *The Darker Face of the Earth* (1994) Scott Read Online

Maureen Duffy, *Rites in Plays by Women* ed. Michelene Wandor Read Online

Yael Farber, *Molara* (Oberon) in *Yael Farber Plays One*, Scott Online Print

Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, *The Island* in *Statements* Scott Online Fully Printable

Griselda Gambaro, *Antigona Furiosa* in Course Kit York Bookstore

Janus Glowacki, *Antigone in New York* (Samuel French) in York Bookstore

Eugene O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Electra* in *Three Plays*. (Vintage) Bookstore

Franca Rame and Dario Fo, *Medea Prologue* and *Medea* in *Orgasmo Adulto Escapes from the Zoo* in Course Kit York Bookstore

Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*. Many versions Scott Library Online. Course kits must be ordered from the bookstore. Scott Reserves have some copies of old Course Kits and most of the texts that are not online. Check with the library.

Tentative Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

All assignments must be on word doc, preferably not pdf, 12pt font, double spacing. double sided, and sent by email to blumberg@yorku.ca

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
Theatre review	15%	4 pages by email.	Date due 28 Oct 2026
Comparative Essay 1	25%	7-8 pages	Date due latest 20 Dec, 2026
Comparative Research Essay	30%	9-10 pages	Date due 3 rd March 2027
Open Book Test	20%	Synchronous Open Book Test	Date held March 31
Participation	10%		
	100%		

Additional Information

Category:	N/A
Historical Requirements:	N/A
Open To:	YR 3 , 4 (EN, ENPR, CRWR students only)