

**ENG 2311: Literary Tradition III**  
University of Dallas  
Summer 2016

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Office Hours – By appointment

*The most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature,  
since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations.*  
– Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection"

**Purpose:** The dual foci of this course are comedy and tragedy, both conceptualized as literary mythos and mode. In the main, we will focus on the comedic and tragic poetry of the dramatic kind created during two high periods of the Western Tradition – that is, the classical Greek and the early-modern Elizabethan forms. In addition, we will take up the Book of Job as an emblematic work of the Hebraic tradition that manifests Jewish explorations of comedic and tragic notions of reality, focusing on man's fundamental relations with other men, with God, and even with himself. Finally, we will conclude by considering Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* to see what we can make of what has become of dramatic comedy and tragedy – a kind of tragicomedy – in our contemporary world. Throughout our ongoing reading (and occasional viewing) of numerous plays, we will discuss the poesis of drama, attending to its formal aspects and appreciating its aesthetic achievement. Aristotle's *Poetics* will serve as our principal text for dramatic analysis. Ultimately, our cumulative experience of comedic and tragic drama will motivate our expansive understanding of comedy and tragedy, while we extend our view toward the nature of reality and humanity's place within it. Since dramatic comedy and tragedy are imitations of our own conscious experience of life, we will dare to ask what Mark Edmundson calls "ultimate questions": Is reality comedic or tragic – or perhaps both or neither? If comedic and/or tragic, how should we then live? If it is neither comedic nor tragic, what other vital understanding might we conceive, and what would it look like to live accordingly?

**Classroom Etiquette:** Cultivating the habit of humane discourse about literary texts is the privilege of a liberal arts education. To this end, the instructor and students will promote a courteous atmosphere by observing proper classroom manners. Most importantly, only one person should speak at a time in order to avoid the social violence of interruption. Students may not use phones, computers, and other technological devices without the instructor's approval. Sleeping in class is prohibited. Please do not arrive late or leave early unless you secure the instructor's permission.

**Assignments:** This syllabus gives the general schedule for the required readings and apportioned assignments during the course of the Summer 2016 semester. You should read the entirety of each text by its scheduled date, preparing yourself for class discussion by a careful, close reading that evidences analytical and synthetic thought. All assignments must be retained over the course of the semester for revision or review. Any late assignment will receive a grade reduction of one letter grade per day late. Every student must complete all assignments in order to receive credit for the class. During the course of the summer semester, the instructor will announce the due dates for each assignment. The assignments for this course are as follows:

1) Participation in Classroom Discussion and Position Paragraphs. Please properly contribute to our literary discourse in a balanced way, avoiding either extreme of silent neglect or overbearing domination. In addition, take time to compose your thoughtful response to a central, critical question about each play as assigned by the instructor. Your written response should include your interpretive claim (highlighted in bold type), as well as the citation of relevant portions of the dramatic text. The length of your written response should be no less than one page and no more than two pages. Please

note that the instructor may read from each student's submitted response during classroom discussions.

2) Quizzes. Each quiz intends to motivate your disciplined reading of every text, as well as to compel your retentive comprehension of its important aspects. Unannounced quizzes may be given by the instructor's discretion.

3) Memorization and Recitation of Dramatic Verse. Since drama is created to be a performed art, you will experience its crucial oral and aural aspects by memorizing and reciting a chosen selection of Shakespearean dramatic verse.

4) Theatrical Critique. Another way you will experience the enacted aspect of a comedic or tragic drama is by watching a live or recorded performance of one of the Shakespearean plays we read this semester. A filmed version of one of these plays is an acceptable alternative, if the movie preserves the original Shakespearean script. Having watched your chosen play's performance, you will write a critical evaluation of it under the guise of a cultural critic, who intends its current publication by a popular media source (i.e., *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *The New Criterion*, or *The Huffington Post*).

5) Essay. You will write one essay that demonstrates literary criticism befitting our university's standards. This essay will show your analysis of a Greek play under its tragic or comedic aspects, while also showing your synthesis of these aspects of the play situated relative to similar and/or different aspects of another Greek play you read.

Since the task of this course is to analyze and synthesize primary texts, students should use secondary sources selectively, as directed by the instructor. Students should integrate quotations from primary texts and secondary sources using the proper MLA citation format. Please enclose all formal compositions in a University of Dallas theme cover, available on the English Department website. A completed "Essay Self-Evaluation" form also must be attached to each submitted essay. Grades will reflect not only correct grammar and usage and effective style and diction, but also clear thinking and substantive and well-substantiated textual analysis. Basic information regarding grammar, usage, and composition can be found in *The Little English Handbook*. All corrections will refer to this guide.

Finally, a word about proofreading and editing your essay is in order. Before submitting a fair copy of your essay, carefully proofread your work, making appropriate revisions. To this end, give yourself plenty of time for editing and rewriting, so that you turn in your best work. Any submitted essay that shows an obvious lack of proofreading and editing will be returned ungraded; it will be considered late until it demonstrates effort befitting a university essay. Students should take advantage of conversing about their essay with the instructor via personal meeting, phone call, or email.

6) Final Exam. This essay exam explores the contemporary dramatic (sub)genre of tragicomedy, considering how Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* manifests both tragic and comedic aspects, while gathering them together in a way that also carries forward William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and/or *Hamlet* (or another Shakespearean play).

**Extra Credit Options:** In order to further your engagement with comedic and tragic drama, as well as to enhance your grade for this course, you may opt to do one or more of the opportunities

listed below. I have highlighted in bold type the two options that would most complement your travel abroad experience. Exemplary work on any of these options will raise your grade on a previous assignment by one full letter (for example, from a B to an A). Satisfactory work on any of these options will raise your grade on a previous assignment by one marked degree (for example, from a B+ to an A-). Unsatisfactory work on any of these options will not merit any grade adjustment.

**1) Book of Quotes. Create a trove of quotations from various works you encounter this semester that you intend to contemplate repetitively, eventually committing them to memory. You may style your collection through an electronic medium or some other way, such as a notebook, journal, or diary.**

**2) Critical Conversation. Gather together a group of students and read aloud one of the Greek or Shakespearean dramas. Then discuss how you understand the play, as well as how you respond to its oral expression and aural experience. Finally, write a short critique of your group's discursive experience.**

3) Shakespearean Criticism. Read in its entirety a highly regarded book of Shakespearean criticism by a reputable poet and/or scholar, taking extensive notes about what you learn, particularly about the dramatic aspects of comedy and tragedy. You may select a book listed on the Suggested Bibliography for this course, or you may seek the instructor's approval for another option.

4) Dramatic Criticism. Watch or read interviews with playwrights, directors, actors, producers, scholars, critics, philosophers, theologians, and/or poets, who discuss any of the plays and their performances that we address in our class. Take extensive notes, considering how each commentator's respective discipline informs her/his view.

5) Critical Essay. Read Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and write a short essay (two or three pages) that considers the distinct dramatic features that distinguish it from Shakespearean drama.

6) Personal Letter. Write a letter to a family member or friend (real or imaginary), who has experienced profound suffering, structuring its form and composing its content in view of the rhetorical style and poetic wisdom you take away from your study of the Book of Job. (If the family member or friend is real, please use appropriate discretion regarding whether or not to allow her/him to read your letter.)

**Plagiarism:** Claiming as your own the words or ideas of others is a grave offense against the university community (see the *University of Dallas Bulletin*). Instances of plagiarism will be met with prompt and serious disciplinary action. Any act of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for that assignment; it may also necessitate a failing grade for the entire class. Rather than risk any form of plagiarism, the student should consult with the instructor about any questions or concerns s/he may have before submitting a completed assignment.

**Grading:** The grading structure for the class will be as follows:

Quizzes – 10%

Participation in Classroom Discourse and Position Paragraphs– 30%

Memorization and Recitation of Dramatic Verse – 10%

Theatrical Critique – 10%

Essays – 20%  
Final Exam – 20%

**Absences:** In accordance with departmental and university policies, a student cannot continue in the course after missing more than three class hours; any absences beyond this maximum must be approved by the instructor. A student who is absent on the due date of an assignment must provide a physician's note in order to submit the assignment late without penalty. Students must take the Final Exam on the assigned date.

**Texts:** The student must read all assigned texts in their entirety. Please bring the appropriate text(s) to every class meeting. The list of required texts for this course follows:

Aristophanes. *The Frogs*. (Focus Publishing)  
Aristotle. *Poetics*. (Penguin)  
Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame*. (<http://samuel-beckett.net/endgame.html>)  
*Greek Tragedies*. Vols. 1-3. (University of Chicago Press)  
*The Holy Bible*. (New American Bible or English Standard Version)  
Shakespeare, William. *Four Tragedies*. (Bantam Books)  
\_\_\_\_\_. *The Merchant of Venice*. (New American Library)  
\_\_\_\_\_. *The Tempest*. (New American Library)

**Schedule:** (*Nota bene:* The following itinerary of reading is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.)

- 6/4 (Sat) Class Introductions: Instructor and Students; Domain of Liberal Arts Education; Syllabus; Course Introductions: Literary Genre and Form of Drama (Tragedy and Comedy as Literary Mode and Mythos); Aristotle's *Poetics*; *Tractatus Coislinianus*; Fragments of *On the Poets*; The Art and Craft of Writing (Part 1)
- 6/8 (Wed)** Aeschylus' *Oresteia: Agamemnon*; (**Quiz: Aristotle's *Poetics***)
- 6/9 (Thurs) Aeschylus' *Oresteia: The Libation Bearers*
- 6/10 (Fri) Aeschylus' *Oresteia: The Eumenides*
- 6/13 (Mon) William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
- 6/14 (Tues) The Art and Craft of Writing (Part 2); William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*
- 6/20 (Mon) William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*
- 6/21 (Tues) Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*
- 6/22 (Wed) Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*
- 6/24 (Fri) Sophocles' *Antigone*
- 6/27 (Mon) The Book of Job; William Shakespeare's *King Lear*
- 6/29 (Wed)** William Shakespeare's *King Lear*; (**Quiz: The Book of Job**)

- 6/30 (Thurs) Trajectory of Contemporary Drama (20C-21C); Literary (Sub)Genre of Tragicomedy; Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*
- 7/1 (Fri) Euripedes' *The Bacchae*
- 7/8 (Fri) William Shakespeare's *Othello*
- 7/9 (Sat) Aristophanes' *The Frogs*
- 7/11 (Mon) William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*
- 7/12 (Tues) Genre of Romance; William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
- 7/13 (Wed) FINAL EXAMS**