

HUM1A, Tragedy: Love and Death in the Creative Imagination

MWR 10:10 -11

This course will meet in person. Zoom link for emergencies:

<https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/98470417577>

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Peer Assistant: Makayla Wigder

Office Hours: John Burt Office Hours for John Burt: M 2 W 1 and by appointment, Rabb 141

(Emergencies only (email me first): <https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/2022729258>)

Steve Dowden TBA

Our seminar concerns elemental experiences, above all love and death. The medium through which we will explore them is *tragedy*, an ancient literary form closely allied with myth. But why not address love and death more scientifically, through neurology or psychology, chemistry or biology? Why the appeal to archaic myth and art? Doesn't "myth" just mean: unscientific superstition? The Enlightenment established the idea that science can and should crush myth as a way of knowing the world and guiding our actions. Yet myth and art do still have a place. Science has nothing to say about good and evil, which are the aegis under which love and death flourish. Consider this remark by philosopher Simone Weil:

Nothing is so beautiful and wonderful, nothing is so continually fresh and surprising, so full of sweet and perpetual ecstasy, as the good. No desert is so dreary, monotonous, and boring as evil. This is the truth about authentic good and evil. With fictional good and evil it is the other way around. Fictional good is boring and flat, while fictional evil is varied and intriguing, attractive, profound and full of charm. (S.W., *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, 160)

Hence the appeal of the tragic, which directly addresses evil. There will be abundant, and sometimes horrifying evil in the plays, fiction, and poetry we read this term. We begin with Cormac McCarthy's shocking *Blood Meridian*, a tragic tale of the American West, much as the *Iliad* is a tragic tale of ancient Greece. But why belabor the tragic, the mythic? Because in myth and tragedy we find not merely the self-confident moral posturing so common in modern writing but instead an attempt to get at that which underlies morality: good and evil, love and death. They are more fundamental, possibly divine, and therefore the remit of myth and tragedy rather than science and law.

This tension between science and myth is played out distinctly in one of the key works on the syllabus: *Antigone*. The girl-mystic Antigone clashes with her uncle, the king-rationalist Creon, over the burial of her brother, his nephew, Polyneices. He had laid siege to the city in a bid for the kingship and died in the effort. Creon will leave him outside the city walls to rot and be eaten by dogs and birds, unmourned, unburied, and with no last rites. Here we have love and death: Antigone loves her brother and demands respect for the dead. Creon says Polyneices is a traitor and has forfeited any legal claim or moral right to last rites. For Antigone, funeral rites are a divinely ordained, *i.e.* mythic, duty. For Creon his death is a matter of political rationality, public morality, and jurisprudence, not mythic powers beyond his control. Which of them has a just claim? Tragedy opens this question to our imaginative reflection.

Books:

Cormac McCarthy. *Blood Meridian*. Knopf Doubleday, ISBN 978-0679728757
Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. S. Whiteside. Penguin ISBN 978-0140433395
Anon. *Bhagavad Gita*. Trans. S. Mitchell. ISBN 0609810340
Anon. *The Book of Job*. Trans. S. Mitchell. Harper Collins, ISBN 978-0060969592.
Anon. *Gilgamesh*. Trans. S. Mitchell. Atria Books. ISBN 978-0743261692
Sophocles: *The Oedipus Cycle*. Trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald. ISBN 978-0156027649
Sophocles. *Antigonick*. Trans. Anne Carson. New Directions ISBN 978-0811222921.
Anton Chekhov. *The Seagull*. Bloomsbury Methuen, 978-0413771001
Jean Racine. *Phèdre*. Trans. Ted Hughes. FSG, ISBN 978-0374526160.
Shakespeare. *Measure for Measure*. Signet. ISBN 9780451527158
Herman Melville. *Melville's Short Novels*. Norton ISBN 978-0393976410
Wole Soyinka. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*. Norton, ISBN 978-0393325836.
----- *Death and the King's Horseman*. Norton, ISBN 0-393-97761-7
Samuel Beckett. *Endgame*. Grove Press. ISBN 978-0802144393

These texts are all on reserve at the Library

Learning Goals:

This humanities seminar offers students an integrated, liberal arts experience in a small classroom setting. It presents the opportunity for a guided tour of established landmarks of tragic literature, but the real goal of the course is to learn how to find your way around art without a map. No reliable map even exists for tragedy as a form of expression. This is because in tragedy traditional assumptions about art begin to falter. In our seminar the emphasis falls on discussion rather than lecturing because the goal of the course is to learn how to think critically, speak cogently, and produce good arguments 1) verbally in class presentations, and 2) in written papers. You will analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing knowledge on your feet, not taking notes and memorizing what the professor says is so. Our goals are to

1. Develop the habit of independent critique, intellectual self-reliance, and self-confidence from the perspective of attentive reading and collaborative discussion;
2. Become conversant with the major questions, concepts, theories, traditions, and techniques of humanistic enquiry vis-à-vis tragedy;
3. Grasp the difference between thinking without banisters or maps and the limitations of mere technique (relying on banisters and maps). Students will demonstrate critical reflection of context, audience comprehension and purpose in written and oral communication.
4. reflect on quality peer-to-peer interaction.
5. develop and sharpen writing skills through rigorous assignments.

Schedule of Readings:

Th	8/31	Introduction. Kafka: "The Top"	Sep 4 Labor Day
W	9/6	Blood Meridian	
Th	9/7	Blood Meridian	
M	9/11	Blood Meridian	
W	9/13	Blood Meridian	
Th	9/14	The Birth of Tragedy 1-7	Sep 15 Rosh Hashanah
M	9/18	Gilgamesh	
W	9/20	Gilgamesh	
Th	9/21	The Birth of Tragedy 10-14	Sep 25 Yom Kippur
T	9/26	Job (and Glatzer)	Brandeis Monday FIRST PAPER WRITING GROUP
W	9/27	Job	
Th	9/28	The Birth of Tragedy 15-18	
M	10/2	Oedipus Rex	
W	10/4	Oedipus Rex	FIRST PAPER FINAL
Th	10/5	The Birth of Tragedy 18-25 plus pp. 3-12	Oct 9 Indigenous Peoples Day
W	10/11	Oedipus at Colonus	
Th	10/12	Aristotle Poetics (LATTE)	Brandeis Monday
M	10/16	Antigonick	
W	10/18	Bhagavad Gita (with Prof. Avinash Singh)	
Th	10/19	The Book of Mark (LATTE)	
M	10/23	Measure for Measure (Acts 1-3)	
W	10/25	Measure for Measure (Acts 4-5)	
Th	10/26	Hegel "The Genres of Dramatic Poetry" (LATTE)	
M	10/30	Racine: Phèdre (with Prof. Michael Randall, ROMS)	
W	11/1	Racine: Phèdre	
Th	11/2	Kierkegaard "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern," (LATTE)	
M	11/6	Büchner: Woyzeck (LATTE)	

W	11/8	Schopenhauer (LATTE)	
Th	11/9	Kleist: Earthquake in Chile (LATTE) (with Prof. Irene Kacandes, Dartmouth)	
M	11/13	Melville: Billy Budd	
W	11/15	Melville: Billy Budd	
Th	11/16	Chekhov: The Seagull (with Professor Robin Feuer Miller)	
M	11/20	Chekhov: The Seagull	Thanksgiving Break Nov 22-4
M	11/27	Pritam: The Skeleton (LATTE)	
W	11/29	Death and the King's Horseman	
Th	11/30	Death and the King's Horseman	SECOND PAPER TO GROUP
M	12/4	The Bacchae of Euripides	
W	12/6	Beckett: Endgame	SECOND PAPER FINAL

Writing Assignments

The writing assignments in this course are designed to bring out students' full powers as authors in the Humanistic disciplines.

Over the course of the semester you will be required to keep class notes and produce a *protocol*, i.e. a narrative of what happened in that seminar sitting. Every student will produce one protocol over the course of the term. Here's how it works: One student takes notes for the entire class on a given day. He or she should aim for one page, single spaced. You summarize the most important aspects of the discussion. A day before the next class the student submits the page to Dowden or Burt for corrections or comment. At the beginning of the next class, the student reads his or her protocol aloud for the whole class. A discussion ensues: students can ask for clarifications and changes ("I did not mean that, what I meant was..."), etc. This discussion warms everyone up for the day's new material and creates segues into it. The protocol writer then amends the protocol if changes are called for. Then everyone a copy will be posted to our LATTE site. At the end of the term you will have a good record of what when on in our seminar.

Every week you will also be asked to post a short—1 to 2 paragraph—reading response to our LATTE site for one of the two days we meet. Responses to Wednesday's readings are due by 10 PM Tuesday evening. These responses will be ungraded, but they will be weighed, along with your attendance and participation record, as 25% of your final grade. Topics for each week's LATTE assignment will be posted several days before the due date. Some times we will assign topics for these posts. Other times we will simply ask you to comment upon some aspect of the text that took you by surprise, or that made some point you weren't expecting the text to make, or that raised some deep and difficult-to-grasp issue.

The major papers are designed to build on each other, bringing into play increasingly advanced skills required in all University writing. Part of writing is re-writing, and therefore all the

assignments include opportunities for peer response and revision. There will be three major papers in this course, but each will include a rough draft as well as a final draft. Each paper will be due first to a small group of your class peers, who will read your paper and provide comments and reactions. Over the next week your group will meet outside of class online to discuss your papers. Revised versions of your papers will be due to your instructors one week after the drafts were due.

Every student will make a zoom appointment with one of the instructors during the week prior to turning in the first draft of each paper to discuss their paper (special office hours will be available for this purpose). With every first draft, students will include a one-page “cover letter” laying out their ambitions for their paper, its claim, its warrant, and its evidence.

The first paper (of 1000 to 1500 words) will be a "close reading" of a passage of your choosing (about twenty lines of verse or about 200 words of prose) from one of the assigned works. A close reading is not a paraphrase or a description but an analysis. The paper will turn upon something you have noticed in the text which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text, upon which you will base a coherent argument and complete argument about the text as a whole. In other words, you should not pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point that has been already made in the lecture, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a commentary on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but who does not know what precisely your point of view about it is – someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance.

The second paper (of 2000 TO 2500 words) will be a more ambitious close reading project. You are to pick several passages, passages that seem somehow to engage each other, for close reading. They may be passages from different but related works, or different passages from a longer work. How the passages engage each other is yours to determine. One may seem to retract the other, to add a new complication to the other, to qualify the other, to extend it into a new area by analogy, or cause one to rethink the point the first passage seemed to be informed by. . You may put together a literary and a philosophical text, a classical and a modern tragedy, or a tragedy and a text that skirts the boundaries of tragedy.

In addition we will have an out-of-class workshop on the Zotero reference manager.

Course Policies

- **Attendance**
- Students will be allowed two unexcused absences. Any other absences will have an impact on a student's final grade.
- **Grading**
- Your final grade will be broken down as follows: 15% for the first paper, 25% for the second paper, 20% for the weekly LATTE posts, 15% for your protocol, and 15% for participation

- **Student Participation Grades:**

A: Students who receive an A for participation come to every class. They have not only read the assigned texts and watched the movies, but also thought about them and formulated questions to ask and issues to raise. They take risks in discussion by sharing thoughts or positions about which they are not 100% certain. Moreover, A students listen and respond thoughtfully to issues raised by other students.

B: Students who receive a B for participation have completed all the reading and film assignments on time, but do not always come to class with questions in mind and do not put much independent thought into the readings. B students wait for someone else to take the lead. They participate, but only occasionally.

C: C students attend class, complete the assignments, and listen attentively to the discussions, but rarely participate unless directly asked a question.

D and E: Students who fail to complete the assignments, fail to participate in classroom discussion, who are unable to answer questions when called upon, fail to bring their readings and notes to class, or are frequently late, absent, asleep, or doing work for other classes during class periods will receive a D or lower for their participation grade.

- **Academic Integrity:** Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. Infringement of academic integrity by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University or other sanctions. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work via TurnItIn.com or similar software to verify originality. A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic integrity as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Department of Student Rights and Community Standards. Citation and research assistance can be found at Brandeis Library Guides - Citing Sources.

- **Disabilities:** Brandeis seeks to create a learning environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all students, and I want to support you in your learning. Live auto transcription is available for all meetings or classes hosted on Zoom and you can turn it on or off to support your learning. Please [check for Zoom updates](#) to take advantage of this new feature. To learn more, visit the [Zoom Live Transcription webpage](#). For questions, contact help@brandeis.edu If you think you may require disability accommodations, you will need to work with Student Accessibility Support (SAS) (781-736-3470, access@brandeis.edu). You can find helpful student FAQs and other resources on the [SAS website](#), including guidance on how to know whether you might be eligible for support from SAS. If you already have an accommodation letter from SAS, please provide me with a copy as soon as you can so that I can ensure effective implementation of accommodations for this class. In order to coordinate exam accommodations, ideally you should provide the accommodation letter at least 48 hours before an exam.

- **Four Credit Hours:** Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation of protocols, etc.).
- **Hardware and Software:** In this course, the minimal set of hardware, software and course supplies needed to be successful in this course are: A laptop or desktop computer with standard word processing software, a pdf reader such as Acrobat Reader, access to wifi, Zoom software
- **Financial Need:** Undergraduate students with financial need should contact Student Financial Services to discuss options available to purchase equipment and other technology and supply needs. If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your student financial services or academic services adviser to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives
- **Student Support:** Brandeis University is committed to supporting all our students so they can thrive. The following resources are available to help with the many academic and non-academic factors that contribute to student success (finances, health, food supply, housing, mental health counseling, academic advising, physical and social activities, etc.). Please explore the many links on this Support at Brandeis page (<https://www.brandeis.edu/support/undergraduate-students/browse.html>) to find out more about the resources that Brandeis provides to help you and your classmates to achieve success.
 - The Care Team
 - Academic Services (undergraduate)
 - Graduate Student Affairs
 - Directors of Graduate Studies in each department, School of Arts & Sciences
 - Program Administrators for the Heller School and International Business School
 - University Ombuds
 - Office of Equal Opportunity.
- **Classroom Health and Safety**
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 - On the Brandeis campus, all students, faculty, staff and guests are required to observe the university's policies on physical distancing and mask-wearing to support the health and safety of all classroom participants. Review up to date COVID-related health and safety policies regularly.
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- **Privacy**

To protect your privacy in any case where this course involves online student work outside of Brandeis password-protected spaces, you may choose to use a pseudonym/alias. You must share the pseudonym/alias with me and any teaching assistants as needed. Alternatively, with prior consultation, you may submit such work directly to me.

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