

The following suggested readings are divided into **primary resources** (i.e., original literature similar in nature to the readings we have been assigned) and **secondary resources** (i.e., scholarly writings examining or discussing the primary resources).

TRAGIC DRAMA--THE PRIMARY SOURCES (Other Greek tragedies, and tragedies generally):

Out of the 120 plays that Sophocles wrote, seven plays survive. Besides *Oedipus Rex*, you can continue Oedipus' misery by reading *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Likewise, seven plays survive today out of the 90 Aeschylus wrote. Of these, you might try *Seven Against Thebes* and *Prometheus Bound*, and the "Oresteian Trilogy" (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, and *The Euminides*). *The Euminides*, or "the kindly ones," is my personal favorite--a play in which the Furies, representing symbolically justice in the form of the primitive blood-feud and vengeance, learn to take up a new profession as the Euminides--"the kindly ones"--the just force of civilized law.

Euripides as a playwright is sadly under-appreciated today. Some possible tragedies there include *Andromache* (the tragedy of Hector's young wife during the Trojan war), *Hecuba* (the queen of Troy watches her kingdom destroyed by the Greeks), *Orestes*, and *Electra* (both dramas of families cursed by murder and past violence, the last two being my Euripidean favorites).

To see what Renaissance playwrights did with classical conventions of tragedy, look no further than Shakespeare! *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* are all so famous they need little introduction from me. Hamlet is also available in your textbook for this class. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is another excellent Renaissance drama, in which the tragic hero is a scholar so obsessed with learning and experiencing everything he sells his soul to the demon Mephistopheles in exchange for magical power. *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kydd, is a Renaissance story of vengeance and bloodlust in the form of a "revenge tragedy."

For more modern tragedies, try Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* in your class textbook. Here, our tragic hero becomes Willie Loman, an American Everyman obsessed with success. Instead of having the fates grind Loman into the dirt, Miller uses abstract economic forces as the modern equivalent of the inescapable hand of destiny, a power stronger than the individual human ability to resist. Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* gives us the Southern version of tragedy with Stella's inability to control her passions, and he offers a poignant look at handicapped individuals and broken dreams in *The Glass Menagerie* (available in the 102 textbook). Eugene O'Neill mixes an all weekend, alcoholic binge with murder and adultery in the wondrously painful and emotionally draining, *The Ice Man Cometh*. (Imagine a dark, unfunny version of the old sitcom, *Cheers* in which the character Norm shows up to join the buddies for a drink after he has hacked his wife Vera to death, and you've got the general tone for *The Ice Man Cometh*). T. S. Eliot, with his poetic modernist blend of past and present, creates *Murder in the Cathedral*, a tragedy of the assassination of the historical archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket.

TRAGIC DRAMA--THE SECONDARY SOURCES

A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) an oldie but a goodie.

H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (revised 1954)

Elder Olson, *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama* (1961)

George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) explores why tragedy seems to be less popular today than in the past.

R. B. Sewell, ed. *Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism*. In spite of the word "modern," most of the essays are forty years old. Still, this book contains some excellent essays.

COMEDY--THE PRIMARY SOURCES

If you have a taste for the Greek classics, you will find many worthy comedies. Aristophanes has written my favorite Greek comedy, *Lysistrata*. The plot concerns Athenian women, fed up with the Peloponnesian War, who barricade themselves in the Acropolis and go on a sex strike to force their husbands to vote for peace with Sparta, ending the long war. Other pretty good comedies by Aristophanes include *Frogs*, *Wasps*, *Birds*, and *Clouds*.

Roman comedies are a bit more derivative. Plautus and Terence wrote works in imitation of the earlier dramatist Menander, mostly concerned with stock characters and plots concerning youthful love. Try *Pseudolus*, *Bacchides*, and *Aulularia* (all by Plautus) or *Andria* and *Heautonimorumenos* (both by Terence.) For me, Roman comic prose is much funnier than Roman comic drama--so you might try a prose narrative like Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, a story about the misadventures of a lustful young man who makes the mistake of spurning a witch's advances, and she transforms him into a donkey as punishment (a possible influence on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I might add).

Renaissance comedies, like the Renaissance tragedies, are dominated by Shakespeare. *The Comedy of Errors* involves cases of mistaken identity when two sets of twins, separated shortly after birth, all end up together at Ephesus without realizing the other set's existence. Also try *Much Ado About Nothing* (a love story unfolds while a dastardly villain must be thwarted); *The Taming of the Shrew* (battle of the sexes between Petruchio and Katerina), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (satire about the decay of knighthood and the decadent Sir John Falstaff's attempt to extort money and have affairs from two happily married women, who turn the tables on him with quick-thinking and elaborate practical jokes).

For more turn-of-the-century modernist comic drama, try Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. For postmodern comedy, if you have already read *Hamlet*, try Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (the story of *Hamlet* told from the viewpoint of his two college buddies, who in this play are depicted not as the wicked spies Hamlet considers them, but as two bumbling, inept oafs who are desperately trying to figure out what's going on at Elsinore castle; I highly recommend watching on videotape the production from the early 1990s--available at most video rentals).

COMEDY--THE SECONDARY SOURCES

H. T. E. Perry, *Masters of Dramatic Comedy* (1939, another oldie but a goodie)

G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (1952)

Edward Berry, *Shakespeare's Comic Rites* (1985)

Louis Kronenberger, *The Thread of Laughter* (1952)

W. K. Wimsatt, editor, *English Stage Comedy* (1968)

Allan Rodway, *English Comedy* (1975)

Gary Waller, ed. *Shakespeare's Comedies* (1991)

C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959)

Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (1995)

Anthony Caputi, *Buffo: The Genius of Vulgar Comedy* (1978, see section on history of low comedy and farce from the Greeks)

Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957, see pages 163-86 for the relation of comedy to myth and ritual).

For good secondary readings on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in particular, look for David Young's *Something of Great Constancy* and David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Almanac* (1993). You can also look up the chapter on MND in Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human* (1998) for Bloom's meticulous, cranky, and stubbornly old-fashioned readings.

HENRIK IBSEN--Some more ideas:

If you like our third play, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, you might also try other Ibsen plays like *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People* (the last one is available in the 102 textbook). I particularly recommend Michael Meyer translations whenever possible. For some good secondary readings on Ibsen, try Yvonne Shafter, *Henrik Ibsen: Life, Work, and Criticism* (1985) and J. W. McFarlane, editor, *Discussion of Henrik Ibsen* (1962).