

THEA 0810: Introduction to Dramatic Art

Fall 2019; M/W/F 2:00-2:50 PM

Location: Cathedral of Learning 342

Professor: Reza Mirsajadi

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00-6:00 PM or by appointment

Cathedral of Learning 1626

Course Description

This course focuses on script analysis, which is the examination of how a dramatic text is put together. Exploring a diverse range of dramatic forms spanning histories and geographies, we will study how a play and its structural characteristics offer possible meaning on the page and on the stage. What different analytical tools help us interpret a play text or production? How does a play's dramatic structure and historical circumstances inform its visualization and staging in a specific time and space for an intended audience? The course will evaluate written texts as well as live performances.

Course Objectives

- Acquire a working knowledge of dramatic techniques, terms, and strategies
- Understand and apply multiple forms of dramatic analysis to theatrical works from across the world with diverse form and content
- Interpret and analyze how a play offers possible meanings
- Develop an understanding of how dramatic structure transformed over time and how historical circumstances contribute to the creation of a text and production's meaning
- Investigate scripts as texts to be performed through in-class discussions, informal performances, and written and oral exercises and assignments.

Required Texts

- Worthen, W.B., ed., *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, sixth edition (**recommended**)
- Flotsos, Anne, *Interpreting the Play Script: Contemplation and Analysis*, 2011 edition
- Drury, Jackie Sibblies, *Fairview*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Careful, insightful reading or viewing of assigned plays and articles in preparation for class each day.
2. Active, thoughtful and intensive participation in class discussions and projects.

3. Four posts on Blackboard responding to the assigned plays.
4. Four creative responses to the assigned plays.
5. Two performance critiques, four pages each.
6. Final group project, with an in-class group presentation and submitted creative material.

Participation:

A great deal of the learning in this course takes place in the classroom. To participate effectively, you must be present and on time for class. Be advised, however, that participation is more than simply showing up for class. To receive full credit for participation, you must be prepared to engage in classroom discussions, share your work, and show knowledge of the readings.

Attendance:

- Attendance MATTERS in this course! Being absent will affect your participation grade and will make it difficult for you to keep up with assignments. You are allowed two absences throughout the semester, which can be used for whatever purpose.
- Please let me know if you must miss class due to illness, travel issues, family commitments, religious observance, etc. Absences for legitimate reasons are understandable, but I must be notified IN ADVANCE, and more than two absences will lower your final grade. If there are extenuating circumstances, please discuss them with me and we can try to make arrangements for you.
- Your success in this course will depend on your engaged participation in class. Our discussions will be based on assigned readings, so it is crucial that you keep pace with assignments and prepare material for the day it is assigned.
- Regular and respectful contributions to our ongoing exploration of theatre are an essential part of this class.

Inclusivity and Engagement:

Our goal is to collaboratively construct a class environment that fosters intellectual exploration and expression. We will be exploring material in this course that may include language or subject matter that is particularly emotionally charged, difficult, upsetting, or traumatic for members of the class. I ask that you be sensitive to yourself and your classmates. I also recognize that the nature of some of our material has the potential to cause individuals to relive traumatic experiences. Please see me if you experience apprehension about approaching particular readings, assignments, viewings, or discussions that stem from this concern.

Every student in this class will be valued and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Students will be treated fairly regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, socio-economic status, or national identity. Issues of diversity will be an integral part of our class discussions, assigned readings, and assignments. We will approach our work in this course with a shared foundation of

respect and a shared responsibility to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. I encourage you to ask questions and/or to state any concerns you have -- either in class for further discussion, or privately with me -- about the sometimes sensitive, uncomfortable stuff that may emerge. If you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the classroom climate, please do not hesitate to speak with me.

Disability Resources:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, visit www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drsabout.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are due by the start of class on the date stated, unless otherwise specified; they cannot be made up unless there has been an excused absence, upon the discretion of the instructor. For every weekday (not class day) an assignment is late, the grade for the assignment will be reduced by one full letter.

Readings:

There will be reading assigned for most classes, which may encompass plays, historical texts, or supplemental material. Readings are subject to change at the discretion of the professor, but students will be notified in advance if that is the case. All reading must be completed before the start of class, and students must be able to discuss them in depth!

Blackboard Responses: (4 total, 350-500 words each)

Throughout the semester, you will be required to respond to four plays assigned for class sessions on our Blackboard Discussion page. Your response can encompass personal reflections, but it is important that you also use a scholarly voice to grapple with what is going on in the play and how the playwright is communicating to audiences with the text. Make sure that you are making an argument, and that you use direct quotations and specific details to support it. You are required to write a total of five responses throughout the semester, which means that everyone has seven weeks off from this assignment. Responses should be posted on Blackboard by noon on the day that class is to meet. An acceptable response will be a thoughtful analysis that digs deeply into the play and has a strong argument in 350-500 words (although you are free to write more if you are so moved).

Creative Responses: (4 total)

Throughout the semester, you will be required to respond to four plays assigned for class sessions with a creative work of your choice. These can be taken from the visual arts (collages, mood boards,

comics), performing arts (musical performance, playlists, interpretive dance, Happening), creative writing (spoken word poetry, fictional short essay), SWAPA (Spoken-Wor(l)d-Art-Performance-As-Activism), or anything of your choosing (with instructor approval). Get creative and expressive! Accompanying your creative piece, each student will also hand in a 150+ word summary/explanation of their creative response. If a student chooses to share (or perform) their creative response in class, they do not have to submit a written summary.

Performance Critiques: (2 total, 4 pages each)

You will be required to attend performances of two productions within the Pitt Stages series:

1. *Next to Normal* (Oct. 3-13)
2. *The Wolves* (Nov. 14-24)

After seeing the productions, you will write a four-page (1250+ words) paper about each piece, exploring them as both texts *and* performances. What are the themes in the play? What is the writer trying to communicate to the audience, and how? What choices have the directors and designers made to highlight those messages, or intervene within them? What motifs recur and to what effect?

The response should NOT be a summary of the plot, what occurred onstage, or a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” judgment. Rather, it should be a thoughtful analysis of both the play and production. The response should be emailed to the instructor within two weeks of attending the production.

For extra credit, you may attend a performance of either play (or both) staged within the Pitt Student Lab series:

1. *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (Oct. 2-6)
2. *Ordinary Days* (Nov. 20-24)

To receive the extra credit, you should submit a three-page (950+ words) paper on the performance within two weeks of attending the production.

The cost of tickets for all of these productions is covered in your course fee.

Grading:

Argument: 30 points

- Are you taking a stance and asserting your interpretation of the production as the expert?
- Is the argument that you make more or less valid?
- Does the argument involve a consideration of the *both* the text (script, score, etc.) and the *performance* of it (acting, design, etc.)?

Support: 30 points

- Do you bring up specific details from the performance? From the text?
- Do you synthesize these details and explain how they bolster your argument?
- Are the details adequate (in both quantity and quality) in proving your argument?

Organization: 20 points

- Does the overall structure of the paper make sense?
- Is there a logical flow to the ideas that supports your argument?

Clarity: 20 points

- Is the language that you use coherent?

- Are there excessive spelling and grammar mistakes?
- Do you vary your word choice and sentence structures?

TOTAL: 100

Guiding Questions:

After attending the performance, try asking yourself the following questions:

- What were the playwrights trying to say? Without putting words in their mouths, what specific details from the text help you to draw these conclusions?
- What themes were embedded within the text? What recurring motifs were used to convey those themes? How are the characters shaped?
- What was the director trying to say? What was their overall vision for the piece, based on both your own interpretation of the production and the director's note in the program? Is this in contrast with what the playwright is doing, an extension of it, an elaboration of it, or something else?
- How did the actors embody the characters? What moments from the performance (physical ticks, facial expressions, vocal inflections, etc.) helped you to understand the character(s) in a way deeper than what the script would have allowed?
- Which theatrical elements (set, lighting, costumes, props, color, movement, mimesis, music, sound, shape, etc.) stood out to you? Were they reflecting reality, departing from it, or offering a new interpretation of it?
- How did these theatrical elements impact your understanding of the director's interpretation? Why might they have made certain choices, and how do these relate with the play's *text*?
- What was my experience like as an audience member? How were the other audience members engaging with the performance? How was my experience impacted by the other audience members?
- What were my affective responses to the production? How did the theatrical elements evoke these feelings and emotions? Why would the directors and designers *want* me to have this affective response? Or was it unintentional and/or counter to what would best serve the play?
- How was identity performed onstage? In the script? Were there particular moments that spoke to a character's gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability, class, neurodiversity, etc.?
- Were there moments when the division between actors and the characters they portrayed broke down? Were there moments when the division between actors and audience broke down? If so, what could be the utility of these moments?

Production Concept (Final Group Project):

You are the production team of a theatre company preparing for the next offering of your annual season. Each of you will be responsible for your particular roles, but you must collaborate as a group to decide how the play will be staged, the vision behind it, etc.

As a group, you will decide which of the following plays you wish to stage:

Lysistrata (Aristophanes)

The Rover (Aphra Behn)

The Love of Three Oranges (Carlo Gozzi)

Ubu Roi (Alfred Jarry)
Mother Courage and Her Children (Bertolt Brecht)
Machinal (Sophie Treadwell)
Cloud 9 (Caryl Churchill)
Venus (Suzan Lori-Parks)

You will rank your top three choices and submit them to the professor via email by noon on Friday, Nov. 1. Taking everyone's preferences into account, each group will then be assigned a play. Then, each member of your group will carefully read the play, contribute to the development of the vision and production concept, conduct pertinent background research, and fulfill their specific requirements as a member of the production staff.

Overarching Questions

Once everyone has had a chance to read the play, everyone in the group should discuss these questions and come to collaborative decisions. Your answers to these questions will serve as the backbone for the rest of your work (individually and collectively) on the production:

- What is the play saying and how does it say it? How will your approach with this production speak to these themes, or intervene within them?
- How will you make this play speak to contemporary audiences? What do you want for this production to *say*?
- Specifically, what audiences are you targeting and why? What could this play have to offer those audiences that is vital in today's historical and cultural moment?
- How will your production (through design, marketing, etc.) speak directly to those audiences, and convey your overall message and themes?
- How much of the original performance aesthetic will inform your choices as a production team? How will your production differ in themes and intent from what the playwright might have had in mind? What will stay the same?
- What affective reactions and feelings do you want your audience to experience? How will staging and design choices contribute to that?
- What questions do you want your audience to be left pondering after they leave the production? How will you ensure that these issues remain central for them?

Considerations for Your Production

Let the following questions guide your approach to staging the play. The work of each member of the production staff will be influenced by these decisions, so consider them carefully! Make sure that your reasoning is always informed by the group's particular *vision* for this production of the play:

- In what type of space will this production be staged? With a proscenium stage? In the round? In a black box theatre? Alley-style? Thrust? Outdoors? Site-specific? Immersive or environmental? In a repurposed space? Why? How will the audience be arranged?
- What motifs stand out to you in the script? What will be the recurring motifs of your production? Are there specific colors, objects, images, symbols, melodies, etc. that will be featured throughout your production?
- Will you be staging the play with its originally intended setting (time and place), or will you be changing that? Keep in mind that you are not allowed to change the text (although you can select a different translation, if you'd like).

- How abstract or realistic will this production be? Consider the variety of “isms” we have discussed in class, and the wide range of approaches to creating theatre. How will your approach to staging the play be evidenced in the design, in the acting, etc.?
- Will you use a framing device? If so, to what effect and why?
- How will you cast the production? Consider gender, race, ability, and other identity categories. Be careful that casting decisions have intent but are still done respectfully so as to not tokenize marginalized groups. Will your casting decision match or differ from what the playwright might have intended?

Production Staff Roles:

1. Director

- In charge of the overall vision for this production, which should be based on a strong and workable concept
- The “manager” of the production staff, the director makes sure that every person’s contribution fits the overall goal with the piece
- Supports the dramaturg in research endeavors
- In charge of considering what will be the style of acting, movement, and staging, and justifying this approach within the production’s overall vision.
- The director will submit a final copy of the “Director’s Note,” which would be included in the hypothetical program. This message (500-750 words) should address why the company is doing this play now, the themes of the play that are relevant to the audience, and what questions the audience should consider.

2. Dramaturg

- In charge of conducting background research on the play, considering the time period in which the play was first written, how it was initially performed, the themes that were most relevant at the time, information on the playwright, etc., as well as how recent productions have staged the material.
- Some of these plays deal with topics that will need significant contextualization (historical figures, events, cultural ideas). The dramaturg is responsible for deciphering the play for the production staff.
- The dramaturg will submit a final copy of the Dramaturgy Packet that synthesizes research on the play, any relevant background information necessary to understanding the piece, a glossary of terms and terminology, etc.

3. Designers (two total)

- The two-person design team will divide up the following responsibilities: lighting design, set design, sound design, costume design.
- Working closely with the director, the designers will create blueprints for the visual and aural aesthetics of the production. These absolutely must fit within the group’s overall vision for the piece.
- The designers are in charge of conveying the mood and atmosphere of the production, as well as implementing many of the ideas of the wider production staff.
- The designers will submit sketches and collages of inspiring images, and sound files that convey their visions. There should be a drawn or digitally-rendered image of the set (ideally from different angles), a detailed color palette in terms of lighting with an attention to lighting transitions and specific lighting moments, sketches of costumes

with color (or else an extremely-detailed collage), and some rendering of soundscapes, incidental music, pre-show and post-curtain music, etc.

4. Marketing and Education Outreach

- In charge of facilitating the audience's engagement with the play, conveying its contemporary relevance, and what we might gain from the production.
- Works closely with the dramaturg to ensure that audiences are aware of any cultural or historical information they may need to fully grasp the play and what the production staff is doing with it.
- In charge of publicizing the play, with an attention to *how* this will be done, the representative *imagery*, what types of audiences are being targeted and why.
- In charge of creating materials for high school-aged audiences to further their understanding and classroom discussions of the production
- The marketing and educational outreach coordinator will submit the poster design, which should build on the themes of the play and the production staff's vision. They will also submit a three-page booklet for high school students, including pertinent background information, interesting facts, discussion questions for the classroom, etc.

Examples of each of the above submitted documents will be given to the class for reference. You will not be graded on artistic ability, but I want to see *thoughtfulness, rigorous analysis, clarity, effort, and presentation*. The above responsibilities and assignments are the very least that will be expected of you, so if you would like to receive an A, make sure that you go above and beyond!

Final Product:

Each group will work together to deliver a 20-minute presentation on their production concept to the rest of class. These will be done during class time on the week of December 2. Each group should share A/V materials, physical products, or both. All items that are to be submitted will be due at the time of the group's presentation.

Project Timeline:

Friday Nov. 1 – Plays are ranked and assigned (production staff positions should also be figured out by this point)

Friday Nov. 8 – Each group meets to discuss their play, their vision, overall concepts, delegate responsibilities, etc.

Friday Nov. 15 – Professor meets with each group to check on their progress, their interpretation of the play, early drafts of research, design sketches, or publicity materials, etc. to make sure that the group is on the right path

Monday Dec. 2 – Group presentations begin!

Note on Written Assignments:

The performance critiques and your individual group project write-ups should be 12-point font, Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri, double-spaced, and with one-inch margins all around. These should be emailed to the instructor as .doc or .docx files by 11:59 PM on the day they are due. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all instances of this will immediately result in a failing grade for the course.

GRADING

Participation (attendance, effort, and involvement)	25%
Blackboard Responses	20%
Creative Responses	15%
Performance Critiques	20%
Group Project	20%

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND KEY CONCEPTS

Monday, August 26	Introductions and Overviews
Wednesday, August 28	Questions to Ask a Play <ul style="list-style-type: none">• READ: Fuchs, "Visit to a Small Planet" (Blackboard)• IN CLASS: Parks, <i>365 Days/365 Plays</i>
Friday, August 30	Feeling a Play <ul style="list-style-type: none">• READ: Fliotsos, pp. 1-34• READ: Alvarez, "Ritual, Transformation, and Community: Teaching Latinx Theatre and Performance" (Blackboard)

WEEK 2: THE GREEKS AND THEATRE

Monday, September 2	NO SCHOOL (Labor Day)
Wednesday, September 4	Theatrical Origins <u>DUE: Creative Response #1</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• READ: Euripides, <i>Medea</i> (Wadsworth 98-110)
Friday, September 6	Greek Tragedy and Form <ul style="list-style-type: none">• READ: excerpts from Aristotle's <i>The Poetics</i> (Blackboard)

WEEK 3: RELIGION AND THE MIDDLE AGES

Monday, September 9	Formalist Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none">• READ: Fliotsos, pp. 35-75
Wednesday, September 11	Medieval Morality Plays <u>DUE: Blackboard Response #1</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• READ: Anonymous, <i>Everyman</i> (Wadsworth 284-293)

Friday, September 13

Medieval Theatre in Context

- IN CLASS: read *Dulcitius* (Hrotsvitha)

WEEK 4: CLASSICAL JAPAN IN PERFORMANCE

Monday, September 16

Noh Drama

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Kan'ami Kiyotsugu, *Matsukaze* (Wadsworth 199-203)

Wednesday, September 18

Noh Aesthetics

- READ: Zeami Motokiyo, excerpt from "A Mirror Held to the Flower" (Wadsworth 224-233)

Friday, September 20

More Classical Japanese Theatre

- IN CLASS: read *The Delicious Poison* and *Caught in a Sack*

WEEK 5: SHAKESPEARE SHAKESPEARE SHAKESPEARE

Monday, September 23

The Scottish Play

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, September 25

Understanding Shakespeare

- IN CLASS: translating classical text

Friday, September 27

Shakespeare in Adaptation

- IN CLASS: watch and discuss filmed adaptations

WEEK 6: HONOR AND FANTASY IN SPAIN

Monday, September 30

A Royal Fantasy

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream* (Wadsworth 464-487)

Wednesday, October 2

The Spanish Golden Age

- READ: Lorca, "Theory and Play of the Duende" (Blackboard)

Friday, October 4

Theatrical Shifts

- IN CLASS: discussion of neoclassicism, the well-made-play, etc.

WEEK 7: MODERNITY AND THE THEATRE

Monday, October 7

Beyond Melodrama

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, October 9

Understanding Naturalism and Modernism

- READ: Émile Zola, *Naturalism in the Theatre* (Wadsworth 1064-1070)

Friday, October 11

Early Theatrical Feminisms

- READ: Elin Diamond, "Realism and Hysteria: Toward a Feminist Mimesis" (Blackboard)

WEEK 8: NONSENSE AND THE POLITICAL

Monday, October 14

Reading Musical Theatre

- IN CLASS: Discussion of *Next to Normal*

Wednesday, October 16

Breaking Realism

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Ionesco, *Rhinoceros* (Blackboard)

Friday, October 18

"Theatre of the Absurd"

- READ: Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd" (Wadsworth 1091-1093)

WEEK 9: MEMORY AND IMMERSION

Monday, October 21

Understanding Postmodernism

- READ: Fliotsos, pp. 76-100

Wednesday, October 23

Information for Foreigners

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners* (Wadsworth 1554-1572)

Friday, October 25

Argentine Theatre in Context

- READ: Montez, "Introduction" of *Memory, Transitional Justice, and Theatre in Postdictatorship Argentina* (Blackboard)

WEEK 10: THEATRES OF IRAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Monday, October 28

Responding to the Script

- READ: Fliotsos, pp. 101-114
- IN CLASS: Begin work on group projects

Wednesday, October 30

Storytelling and the Stage

DUE: Response (Choice)

- READ: Beyzaei, *The Death of the King* (Blackboard)

Friday, November 1

Iranian Performance and Politics

- READ: Yeghiazarian, "Dramatic Defiance in Tehran"

WEEK 11: CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION

Monday, November 4 **Queer (of Color) Feminisms**
DUE: Response (Choice)
• READ: Cherríe Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*
(Wadsworth 1443-1467)

Wednesday, November 6 **Exercising Dramaturgy**
DUE: Dramaturgy Worksheet for *The Hungry Woman*
• IN CLASS: Discuss adaptation theory

Friday, November 8 **NO CLASS**
• SUGGESTION: Meet with your groups!

WEEK 12: REPRESENTATION AND POWER

Monday, November 11 **Latinx Representation**
• IN CLASS: read Luis Valdez, *Los Vendedos* (Wadsworth 1288-1291)

Wednesday, November 13 **An African Radio Play**
DUE: Response (Choice)
• READ: Kisia, *Homecoming* (Blackboard)

Friday, November 15 **Group Work**
• IN CLASS: Check in on group projects

WEEK 13: AFFECT AND THE AUDIENCE

Monday, November 18 **Sports in/as Performance**
• IN CLASS: Discussion of *The Wolves*

Wednesday, November 20 **Changing Places?**
DUE: Response (Choice)
• READ: Drury, *Fairview*

Friday, November 22 **Feeling Identity in the Theatre**
• READ: P. Carl, "Becoming a White Man in the Theatre" (Blackboard)
• READ: Weiss, "Pass Over envisions a Godot-like endgame for young black men" (Blackboard)
• READ: Nwandu, "When Critics Don't Like Their Reflection" (Blackboard)
• READ: Editorial Board, "We stand by our critic and a vital Chicago theater scene" (Blackboard)

NO SCHOOL NOVEMBER 25-29 (THANKSGIVING)

WEEK 14: INTERPRETING AND COMMUNICATING

Monday, December 2 **Group Presentations**

- IN CLASS: Groups 1 and 2 share their production proposals

Wednesday, December 4

Group Presentations

- IN CLASS: Groups 3 and 4 share their production proposals

Friday, December 6

Group Presentations

- IN CLASS: Groups 5 and 6 share their production proposals