

## Spring 2011 **Modes of Realism in Dramatic Literature**

### **Basic info**

Amherst College THDA 21

Course in the History, Literature and Theory  
of Theater and Dance

Keywords: artistic practice, writing attentive,  
speaking attentive

Course web page: <http://alturl.com/b55at>

Course meets MWs from 12:30 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.  
in Webster 19 (Studio 3)

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### **Course description**

This course considers the evolution of conventions of theatrical realism in plays since the late nineteenth century. In particular, we consider the ways that playwrights—and later directors—exploit or challenge ideas about the perceived authenticity of theatrical representation. At issue are conventions governing action, character representation, and theatrical image as the bases for thematic, political and cultural intents. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding the roles that audiences are intended to play in performance and the artistic means employed to engage them. Following consideration of Ibsen and Chekhov, the work of relevant realistic and quasi-realistic playwrights from the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries provides material for exploration of the course theme. We also explore the interplay of related artistic movements and technology with the evolution of theatrical conventions and directorial influence.

### **Focus**

We will read a variety of plays in the realistic tradition and try to get to the heart of how each play “works”. Our primary goal will be to develop facility in reading and writing about the plays as meaningful theatrical experiences. In particular, and in order to gain facility in understanding each writer’s underlying intentions, we will look at the formal means by which playwrights create various modes of “reality.” If you enroll in this course, you should be prepared to read all of the required plays and to do frequent short writing assignments in order to deepen your critical abilities with regard to play reading.

### **Materials**

You will be required to attend screenings of video & film productions of most of the plays studied.

In addition, I will ask you to attend at least 4 live performances on campus or as field trips. There will be additional expense for some admissions.

Required reading, consisting of fifteen plays, is listed below. In addition, I may require a variety of shorter critical reading selections that I will either hand to you or for which I will direct you to the library.

### Screenings

Please see the course schedule below and take note which of the plays for which there will be required **screenings** that will take place in Studio 3, some time during the same week each play is to be read. We will schedule these screenings outside of class time.

### Field Trips & Live Performances

- ➔ *John Gabriel Borkman* (Ibsen) at Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York City, February 5. (\$31). REQUIRED
- ➔ Chekhov One-Acts, Mt. Holyoke College, March 3-6. (\$3) -- Counts toward total of 4 required
- ➔ *The Skin of Our Teeth* by Thornton Wilder, April 14-17 (\$3) REQUIRED
- ➔ Amherst THDA 65 Directing Studio Projects (TBA, Free) -- Count toward total of 4 required

## Required Books

(available locally at Amherst Books, or online from a variety of vendors; some titles may be available in Frost)

*Four Major Plays: Ghosts, an Enemy of the People, the Lady from the Sea, John Gabriel Borkman*; Signet Classics; Henrik Ibsen

*The Cherry Orchard*; Grove Press; Anton Chekhov, Tom Stoppard (Translator)

*Heartbreak House*; London : Penguin, 2000; Bernard Shaw; with an introduction by David Hare

*The Children's Hour*; [New York, N.Y.] : Dramatist's Play Service, c1953; by Lillian Hellman

*Our Town*; New York : Coward-McCann Inc. in cooperation with Samuel French, c1965; by Thornton Wilder

*A Streetcar Named Desire*; New York : New Directions, c2004; Tennessee Williams; with an introduction by Arthur Miller

*All My Sons*; Penguin Classics, 2000; Arthur Miller; Christopher Bigsby, ed.

*Look Back in Anger*; New York, N.Y. : Penguin, 1982, c1957; by John Osborne

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; New York : New American Library, 2006, c2005; by Edward Albee

*Saved*; Methuen Drama; Edward Bond

*Betrayal*; New York : Grove Press, 1979, c1978; Harold Pinter

*Oleanna*; New York : Dramatists Play Service, c1993; by David Mamet

*Blasted*; London : Methuen, 2002; Sarah Kane

*The Laramie Project*; New York : Vintage Books, 2001; by Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theatre Project

*The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*; Overlook TP; Edward Albee

## **Assignments overview**

- **Reading**, as listed on the course schedule below, and additional hand-outs as assigned
- Frequent **short writing** (1-2 pages) associated with each play (1-2 times weekly)
  - ➔ **IMPORTANT: Your short writing will form the basis of our in-class discussions. You must complete reading and short writing assignments on time. Writing topics will be discussed in class as we proceed.**
- Two **longer essays** (3-5 pages), **due on Wednesday, March 9** and **Monday, April 18**, respectively. One of these essays will require additional research; another will be related to a live performance.
- A **final paper** (7-10 pages), due on **Wednesday, May 11**.

## **Writing process and extensions policy**

I am happy to read rough drafts and to meet with you individually as you work through the writing process on longer essays. In addition, except in the case of the final paper, you may revise and re-submit any papers after the due date within one week of receiving my comments, and I will give you a higher grade if your revision warrants one. If you need an extension on written work, please ask at least two days in advance, or I may not grant one. There can be no extension on the final paper due Wednesday, May 11 (during the exam period).

## **Grading**

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Frequent short writing, averaged together - 50%

Longer essays (2) - 30%

Final paper - 20%

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

| DATE        | IN CLASS                                       | SCREENING? | IMPORTANT INFO & DUE DATES   |
|-------------|--|------------|--|
| Mon, Jan 24 | Introduction, in-class playwriting             |            |  |
| Wed, Jan 26 | Lecture/discussion                             |            | Your short plays and responses due (Short writing #1)                          |
| Mon, Jan 31 | <i>Ghosts</i> ; Ibsen                          | YES        | Short writing #2 due   |
| Wed, Feb 2  | <i>Ghosts</i> ; continued                      |            | NEW YORK CITY FIELD TRIP THIS WEEKEND, FEB. 5                                  |
| Mon, Feb 7  | Discussion of <i>John Gabriel Borkman</i>      |            | Short writing #3 due   |
| Wed, Feb 9  | <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> ; Chekhov            | YES        | Short writing #4 due   |
| Mon, Feb 14 | <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> ; continued          |            |  |
| Wed, Feb 16 | <i>Heartbreak House</i> ; Shaw                 | YES        | Short writing #5 due   |
| Mon, Feb 21 | <i>Heartbreak House</i> ; continued            |            |  |
| Wed, Feb 23 | <i>The Children's Hour</i> ; Hellman           | YES        | Short writing #6 due   |
| Mon, Feb 28 | <i>Our Town</i> ; Wilder                       | YES        | Short writing #7 due   |
| Wed, Mar 2  | <i>Our Town</i> ; continued                    |            | CHEKHOV ONE-ACTS @ Mt. Holyoke this weekend                                    |
| Mon, Mar 7  | <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> ; Williams     | YES        | Short writing #8 due<br>THDA 65 Directing Projects will occur around this time |
| Wed, Mar 9  | <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> ; continued    |            | Longer Essay Due   |
|             | <b>SPRING BREAK</b>                            |            |  |
| Mon, Mar 21 | <i>All My Sons</i> ; Miller                    | YES        | Short writing #9 due   |
| Wed, Mar 23 | <i>All My Sons</i> ; continued                 |            |  |
| Mon, Mar 28 | <i>Look Back in Anger</i> ; Osborne            | YES        | Short writing #10 due  |
| Wed, Mar 30 | <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> ; Albee |            |  |
| Mon, Apr 4  | <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> ; cont. | YES        | Short writing #11 due  |
| Wed, Apr 6  | <i>Saved</i> ; Bond                            |            | Short writing #12 due  |
| Mon, Apr 11 | <i>Betrayal</i> ; Pinter                       | YES        | Short writing #13 due  |

|             |  |     |  |
|-------------|--|-----|--|
| Wed, Apr 13 | <i>Betrayal</i> ; continued                    |     | THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH @ Mt. Holyoke this weekend       |
| Mon, Apr 18 | <i>Oleanna</i> ; Mamet                         | YES | Short writing #14 due<br>Longer Essay Due              |
| Wed, Apr 20 | <i>Blasted</i> ; Kane                          |     |  |
| Mon, Apr 25 | <i>Blasted</i> ; continued                     |     | Short writing #15 due                                  |
| Wed, Apr 27 | <i>The Laramie Project</i> ; Kaufman/ Tectonic | YES | THDA 65 Directing Projects will occur around this time |
| Mon, May 2  | <i>The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?</i> ; Albee     |     | Short writing #16 due                                  |
| Wed, May 4  | <i>The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?</i> ; cont.     |     | Final Paper Due on ONE WEEK FROM TODAY AT 5 P.M.       |

**There is no examination during the Examination Period; the Final Paper is due May 11.  
The absolute deadline for any outstanding writing is 5 p.m. on May 11.**

#### **Statement of Intellectual Responsibility and Implications**

*Every person's education is the product of his or her own intellectual effort and participation in a process of critical exchange. Amherst cannot educate those who are unwilling to submit their own work and ideas to critical assessment. Nor can it tolerate those who interfere with the participation of others in the critical process. Therefore, the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.*

Some implications of the Statement of Intellectual Responsibility for THDA 21 are listed below.

- In the spirit of group learning and discussion, it is your responsibility to attend all class meetings, screenings and live performance events.
- Writing that you submit to me must be your own.