# Spring 2012 Dynamics of Play Reading: Elements, Structure, Paradigms

### **Basic** info

Amherst College THDA 160
Course in the History, Literature and Theory of Theater and Dance

Keywords: Fine arts for non-majors, writing and speaking attentive

Course meets TTHs from 11:30 a.m. to 12:50 p.m. in Studio 3

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## Course description

This course explores various elements of dramatic literature and their implications for audience experiences in performance. Character, language, spectacle, plotting and theme are studied in the light of dynamic play structures. In addition to analytical writing, students undertake experiential projects in realizing the underlying theatrical and narrative paradigms of the plays studied. Exemplary plays are chosen for their contrasting qualities, from antiquity to the present, and are read alongside related theoretical and critical texts. Particular emphasis is placed on exploring the legacy of classical form and later evolutionary and innovative responses to it.

#### **Focus**

We will read a variety of plays in this course and try to get to the heart of how each play "works". Our primary goal will be to develop facility in the reading of plays as meaningful theatrical experiences. You will gain insight into the dynamics of audience perceptions as they unfold in time and space, and the formal means by which playwrights influence those perceptions in order to translate literary themes into theatrical reality. In terms of dramatic form, our process together will include experiences in integrating parsed elements into a deeper understanding of the whole. If you enroll in this course, you should be prepared to read all of the required plays and to participate in short-form collaborative projects that will deepen your apprehension of the experiential qualities of plays in performance.

## **Materials**

Required reading is listed below, consisting of plays and Aristotle's *Poetics*. In addition, I will require several shorter critical reading selections that I will either hand to you or for which I will direct you to the library.

**Books** (available locally at Amherst Books; many also available at Frost library)

Poetics, by Aristotle, translated by Kenneth McLeish

Oedipus Rex, by Sophocles, translation by Fitts & Fitzgerald

Uncle Vanya, by Chekhov, translation by Brian Friel

You Can't Take It With You, by Kaufman & Hart

A Midsummer Night's Dream, by Shakespeare

Major Barbara, by G.B. Shaw

The Threepenny Opera, by Bertolt Brecht, translation by Mannheim & Willet

Marat/Sade, by Peter Weiss

Right You Are, by Luigi Pirandello, translation by Eric Bently

A Number, by Caryl Churchill

Blasted, by Sarah Kane

The Laramie Project, by Moises Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project

### Assignments overview

- Reading, as listed on the course schedule below, and additional critical reading as provided
- Nearly weekly short writing, as assigned
- Three essays, due on Mar. 1, Apr. 17, and May 9, respectively
- Six collaborative experiential projects presented in class during Weeks 3, 7, 8, 10, 12 & 14

## Weekly writing

Short writing assignments are due nearly every week. Assignments will be given one class prior. Missed assignments may not be made up after the following one is due, though you are welcome to re-write any assignment within one week after receiving my comments. Early assignments may not be graded.

## Essays

Three longer essays are required for this course, with topics to be assigned 1-2 weeks before they are due. The first two essays should be 3-5 pages in length. The last essay will be your "final" and should be 7-10 pages long.

# 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.
- In addition, you may re-write and re-submit any papers (except for the final paper) 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 a day in advance, or I may not grant one.

# **Experiential projects**

The experiential projects should be prepared outside of class. In some cases, we will also re-work on projects in class. I will ask you to do most of these projects in pairs on in groups, in which case all members of the group will receive the same grade. It is essential that you communicate with one another effectively to set aside time to meet and work together outside of class.

## Grading

Experiential projects (6) - 40% Short writing (10) - 25% Essays (2) - 20% Final Essay - 15%

### **Course Schedule (subject to change)**

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Week 1 Tue. Jan. 24 Thu. Jan. 26	Introduction	Short writing due
Week 2 Tue. Jan. 31 Thu. Feb. 2	Aristotle's Poetics Oedipus Rex	Short writing due
Week 3 Tue. Feb. 7 Thu. Feb. 9	You Can't Take It With You	Experiential Project #1 Short writing due
Week 4 Tue. Feb. 14 Thu. Feb. 16	The Threepenny Opera	Short writing due
Week 5 Tue. Feb. 21 Thu. Feb. 23	Marat/Sade	Short writing due
Week 6 Tue. Feb. 28 Thu. Mar. 1	A Midsummer Night's Dream	First essay due

Week 7

Tue. Mar. 6 Experiential Project #2
Thu. Mar. 8 Blasted Short writing due

Week 8

Tue. Mar. 13 Short writing due Experiential Project #3

#### SPRING BREAK

Week 9

Tue. Mar. 27 Major Barbara

Thu. Mar. 29 Short writing due

<u>Week 10</u>

Tue. Apr. 3 Experiential Project #4
Thu. Apr. 5 Uncle Vanya Short writing due

<u>Week 11</u>

Tue. Apr. 10 Right You Are
Thu. Apr. 12 A Number Short writing due

Week 12

Tue. Apr. 17 Second essay due
Thu. Apr. 19 Experiential Project #5

<u>Week 13</u>

Tue. Apr. 24 The Laramie Project

Thu. Apr. 26 Short writing due

Week 14

Tue. May 1 Experiential Project #6

Thu. May 3 Experiential Project #6 (continued) Final essay due May 9 at 5 p.m.

There is no examination during the Examination Period. The absolute deadline for any outstanding writing is 5 p.m. on May 9.

### 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. Therefor, 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 29 are listed below.

- Assigned group work outside of class is cooperative by design: it is your intellectual responsibility to yourself
  and to your peers to schedule and attend all meetings outside of class necessary to complete group work in
  good faith, and to communicate conflicts openly and promptly. In addition, since learning in this course
  takes place cooperatively and experientially, it is your responsibility to attend all class meetings.
- Writing that you submit to me must be your own.