ENGLISH 435
THE PLAY OF IDEAS

Course Description
Ideas don’t just exist; they happen. They aren’t just mental abstractions; they move within our daily, material lives. This course draws on a wide variety of plays to ask:

- What is a “play of ideas”? How can we “play with” ideas?
- When and why is thought theatricalized?
- What does it matter whether and how an idea is performed?

In the process of confronting these questions, this course will prepare students for thesis-level reading, research, and writing.

Readings:
Starred readings appear in the course packet (available in Johnson Chapel #001)
All others are available at Amherst Books; please get these exact editions

Ibsen, Four Major Plays (Oxford, 2008)
Shaw, Plays Unpleasant (Penguin, 2001)
Shaw, George Bernard Shaw’s Plays (Norton, 2002)
Shaw, Heartbreak House (Penguin, 2001)
Sophocles, The Three Theban Plays (Penguin, 1984)
Plato, Six Great Dialogues (Dover, 2007)
Brecht, The Good Person of Szechwan (Penguin, 2008)
Kushner & Tesori, Caroline, or Change (Theatre Communications Group, 2004)
Miller, The Price (Dramatists Play Service, 1998)
Wilson, The Piano Lesson (Plume, 1990)
Stoppard, Jumpers (Grove, 1994)
Wallace, One Flea Spare (Broadway Play Publishing, 1997)
Churchill, Cloud Nine (Theatre Communications Group, 1994)
Campbell, The Pride (Dramatists Play Service, 2010)

Requirements:

- Active participation
- Two midterm essays (5 pages each)
- In-class presentations (introducing on-syllabus material; bringing in off-syllabus material)
- A final prospectus (i.e., proposal for and précis of thesis-scale project)


**Course Schedule**

**W, Sept. 4**, Opening discussion

**Introduction – Modernism and “The Play of Ideas”**

**W, Sept. 11**, Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

**M, Sept. 16**, Ibsen, *Ghosts*
**W, Sept. 18**, Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*

**M, Sept. 23**, Wilde, “The Decay of Lying,” excerpts from “The Critic as Artist”
**W, Sept. 25**, Shaw, *The Philanderer*

**M, Sept. 30**, Shaw, *Man and Superman*
**W, Oct. 2**, Shaw, *Major Barbara*

**M, Oct. 7**, Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*
**W, Oct. 9**, Shaw, *Heartbreak House*

*F, Oct. 11, Paper #1 Due*

**Complication – Precedents & Problems**

**M, Oct. 14,****FALL BREAK****
**W, Oct. 16**, Sophocles, *Antigone*; Aristotle, excerpts from *The Poetics*

**M, Oct. 21**, Plato, *The Symposium*; Rokem, from *Philosophers & Thespians*
**W, Oct. 23**, Plato, *Phaedo & The Republic* (excerpt); Puchner, from *The Drama of Ideas*

**W, Oct. 30**, Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*

*F., Nov. 1, All Day*

*Trip to NYC to see Caroline, or Change (Theater on Film & Tape archive) and The Good Person of Szechwan (The Public Theater)*

**Application – Recent Approaches**

**M, Nov. 4** Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan*
**W, Nov. 6**, Kushner & Tesori, *Caroline, or Change*
*F, Nov. 8, Paper #2 Due*
M, Nov. 11, Miller, *The Price*
W, Nov. 13, Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*

M, Nov. 18, Stoppard, *Jumpers*
W, Nov. 20, Wallace, *One Flea Spare*

********************************* THANKSGIVING BREAK *********************************

M, Dec. 2, Churchill, *Cloud Nine*
W, Dec. 4, Campbell, *The Pride*

M, Dec. 9, Van Itallie, *The Serpent*
W, Dec. 11, Civilians, *Gone Missing*

*M, Dec. 16, Final prospectus due*