English 5327
Twentieth Century American Drama:
Family, History, and the American Dream
Mon – Thurs, 10:30 – 12:30, Summer I 2008

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Office hours: Mon – Thurs, 10 – 10:30, after class, and by appointment

Plays (in order):

O’Neill, Eugene:
   The Iceman Cometh
   Long Day’s Journey Into Night
   A Moon for the Misbegotten
   A Touch of the Poet
Miller, Arthur: Death of a Salesman
Hansberry, Lorraine: A Raisin in the Sun
Smith, Anna Devere: Twilight: The Rodney King Episode (in class video)
Albee, Edward: Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
Shepard, Sam, Buried Child
Mamet, David: Glengarry Glen Ross
Kushner, Tony: Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches
Hwang, David Henry: M. Butterfly
Hellman, Lillian: The Little Foxes
Williams, Tennessee: A Streetcar Named Desire
Horton Foote:
   Orphans’ Home Cycle, Vols. I, II, and III
   Young Man from Atlanta
   The Last of the Thorntons
Wilson, August: The Piano Lesson

Schedule:

May 27  Introduction to the class; theory, terminology, and critical methodology
Readings (electronic reserve): Aristotle, Poetics; Martin Esslin, An
Anatomy of Drama, chapters 2 & 3; Walter Kerr, Tragedy and Comedy,
chapter 2; Thomas E. Porter, Myth and Modern American Drama,
chapter 1.
May 28  The Iceman Cometh  
May 29  Long Day’s Journey  

June 2  A Moon for the Misbegotten  
June 3  A Touch of the Poet  
June 4  Death of a Salesman  
June 5  Raisin in the Sun and Twilight (in class video)  

June 9  Virginia Woolfe  
June 10  Buried Child  
June 11  Glengarry Glen Ross (Dr. Tom Porter)  
June 12  Angels in America (in class video)  

June 16  M. Butterfly  
June 17  Little Foxes and Streetcar Named Desire  
June 18  Orphans’ Home, Vol. I (Roots, Convicts, Lily Dale, and Widow Claire)  
June 19  Orphans’ Home, Vol. II (Courtship and Valentine’s Day)  

June 24   Young Man from Atlanta and Last of the Thorntons  
June 25   Piano Lesson  
June 26   Final class: synthesis, evaluation, presentation of papers  

June 30   Final exam due* (see “Exams” below)  

Goals and objectives of the course:  
Course description:  Drama is the stepchild of literature. Of all the genres, it is the least theorized and the least taught. Yet without question, the greatest writer in the English language is a playwright. The fact that the shelf space bookstores devote to Shakespeare generally equals that of all other playwrights combined speaks to the fact that most Americans don’t read plays for pleasure—arguably, because they don’t know how.  

This course offers you a method for both understanding and teaching drama, using some of America’s best plays as examples. Our readings will be bracketed by one week devoted to Eugene O’Neill, the father of American drama, and another to Horton Foote, who at the age of 91 is writing some of his best work. On one level these two playwrights present a study in contrasts: the first half of the century vs. the second half; Northern vs. Southern, urban vs. rural. Yet for all their differences, they are the only two playwrights in America to attempt (in Foote’s case, complete) a cycle of plays that traces several generations of a family against a backdrop of historical events. We will study both historical/autobiographical cycles for what they have to teach us about family as a source of individual and cultural identity; the immigrant experience; slavery and its legacy; the intersection of race, class, region, and gender; and the American dream gone awry.
In between we’ll read a range of plays by other great American dramatists. Following in O’Neill’s footsteps--Miller, Hansberry, Albee, Shepard, Mamet, Anna Devere Smith, Kushner, Hwang; in Foote’s--Hellman, Williams, and Wilson. This approach combines both a (relatively) in-depth study of two playwrights with a survey of a dozen others.

**Learning outcomes:** Students should be able to:
- Respond critically to course material, using synthesis and analysis
- Utilize research materials to make and present an analytical argument
- Apply knowledge of theoretical material to analysis of texts
- Apply appropriate critical frameworks to the analysis of texts
- Synthesize multiple critical approaches to formulate their own argument

**Assignments:**

**Readings:** In addition to reading the assigned texts, please come to class with notes, questions, and one passage from each reading that you find especially significant or powerful.

**Response papers:** In addition to preparing the works under discussion for each class period, please write a total of ten one-page (typed, double-spaced) response papers: five drawn from the topic prompts and five abstracts of a critical or theoretical article or book chapter that relates to one of the plays.

The objective of an abstract is to extract all the essential points of that article, along with enough explanation and examples to make the points clear. Please ask me if you have questions about how to write an abstract. For examples, consult DAI in the library or “Dissertation Abstracts” online. Be sure to include the citation, in MLA format, at the top of your paper (this serves as a title). Attach a xeroxed copy of the article you’re summarizing. Please don’t rely entirely on online sources for the abstracts; one of the objectives of this assignment is to help sharpen your library skills. If you have time, try to read or at least skim some critical article(s) for each class period, even if you’re not electing to do an abstract that day.

These papers are to be turned in the day we discuss the play you’re writing on. You may turn them in through-out the five week semester at your own discretion, but I’d advise you to start early in the term so that I can give you feedback, both on your writing and your understanding of concepts.

These brief papers should help to focus your preparation of the texts and enrich our class discussions; I encourage you to contribute your article’s perspective to the conversation on days you’ve done an abstract. Writing one-page papers is an exercise in economy. I think you’ll find that this practice also tightens your writing.
All papers will be graded on a ten point scale and returned, with comments, the following class period. If you’d like to do more than ten, I’ll drop the lowest score(s).

Please keep your graded papers in a folder, to be turned in June 25th; I’ll return them June 26th. **Total points: 100**

**Oral presentation:**
1) Select a text and playwright you find interesting (perhaps the dramatist you plan to write your paper on) and prepare an annotated bibliography of key critical and/or theoretical sources on this work and/or playwright (no less than ten entries) to distribute to the class. For some plays—Death of a Salesman or Streetcar, for example—you will find more criticism than you can possibly read. Your task in this case is to get an overall sense of the body of criticism, include some of the key works (these will become obvious as you immerse yourself in the literature), and try to include a range of articles. Balance out the criticism with a few theoretical articles, as appropriate.

2) Select one of the articles on your bibliography to share orally with the class. Isolate the main argument(s) and supporting points and relate them to that day’s reading. Your presentation should also include a brief overview of the playwright’s canon (with or without a handout) and a summary of the criticism, drawing on your bibliography—the major critics, approaches, critical debates, and so forth.

Your abstract (2 pp) on this article will be handed in, along with your bibliography.

This assignment is designed as an exercise in research and an opportunity for you to begin work on your major paper. It’s also a chance to practice making oral presentations. Please don’t simply read your paper to the class; that defeats the purpose.

Presentations will be given at the beginning of each class. Time limit: 15 minutes (I will adhere strictly to this). Since we need to begin these presentations in two weeks to give everyone a chance, you’ll need to sign up for your play/playwright no later than Thursday, June 4th. **Total points: 50** (25 for paper and quality of oral presentation, 25 for bibliography).

**Seminar paper:** Choose a playwright you want to work with (either from our syllabus or another American playwright), read a play of this dramatist that we haven’t studied, and write a 12 – 15 page critical analysis, drawing upon (though not limited to) the cultural-structural methodology we use in class. As with all literary criticism, your ultimate objective is to illumine the play. By explaining the cultural milieu of your play as revealed in the characters and action, the ethos and mythos, as well as the play’s structure, its issues and insights should come into focus. Be sure to include close readings of passages, arguing from the text, not just about it.
Draw on secondary sources (at least 5-6) to position your analysis within the critical conversation already taking place, but please don’t think of this as a research paper, per se. I’m primarily interested in your interpretation of the play and your ability to apply the methodology of this course. Include a title page with a meaningful title and observe standard MLA format for quotations and bibliography.

**Due:** Monday, June 23rd. Please consult with me about your paper as early as next week, but no later than June 10th. I’m available for conferences before and after class. **Note:** *No late papers will be accepted without a pre-arranged extension.*

You will also be asked to write a one-page abstract of your paper and present it to the class at our last meeting.

*Exams:* optional final exam (see below).

**Grading and General Policies:**

**Grading:** The course grade will be determined as follows:

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<th>Plan A</th>
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<td>Oral presentation</td>
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<td>One-page papers</td>
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<td>Major paper</td>
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90% and above = A, 80% and above = B, 70% and above = C.

I will also take into account the quantity and quality of your contributions to class discussions. All papers and exams must be completed to receive credit for the course. Please sign up for either Plan A or Plan B by June 18th. Once you’ve chosen an option you may not change your mind, so please consider your choice carefully.

**Attendance:** Since as a seminar this class relies heavily on discussion, attendance is imperative. You are required to attend every class. More than two absences may lower your grade. Please get in touch with me if for some reason you anticipate an extended absence. (If you plan to withdraw from the course, you must follow University procedures. I am not allowed to do this for you.)

**Disabilities policy:** If you have a disability, let me know what I can do to accommodate your needs. You may also want to draw upon the resources of the Office of Students with Disabilities.
Plagiarism: As researchers and scholars, you should be aware of your moral obligation to document your use of others’ words or concepts. Academic dishonesty of any kind, should it occur, will not be treated lightly and will be dealt with according to department and university policies.

Office hours: I will be available in my office in Carlisle Hall approximately 30 minutes before each class, after class, and by appointment. You’re welcome to stop by and talk about the readings, your paper, or other concerns. If you need to reach me during non-office hours, leave a message on my voice mail (817-272-2693) with your phone number and a time you can be reached, and I’ll call you back, or email me at home. If all else fails, you may call me at home, but I’d appreciate it if you’d use this option judiciously.

Welcome to the course!