

21L486: TWENTIETH-CENTURY DRAMA

In this course we will sample the range of mainstream and experimental drama that has been composed during the past century. Half of these plays are now acknowledged to be influential "classics" of modern drama; the other half are prize-winning contemporary plays that have broken new ground. We will study them both as distinguished writing and as scripts for performance. Moreover, all of these plays are historical: some draw their subject matter from past centuries, while others convey a sense of how contemporary events are informed by and located within a larger historical frame. During the first century of film, television, and computers, it seems that writers for the theater have been especially attuned to the relationships between past and present, in their art and in society. Within this multimedia context, we will consider what drama in particular has to offer now and in the future. This is also a HASS Communication-Intensive Course, in which we will work on improving your skills, awareness, and confidence as a writer and speaker; a variety of writing opportunities (including revision of at least one essay), class reports, and group performance work will aid us in realizing these goals.

Texts:

- Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, transl. David Mamet.
- Sean O'Casey, *Three Plays: Juno and the Paycock, The Shadow of a Gunman, The Plough and the Stars*. St. Martin's Press.
- Luigi Pirandello, *Henry IV*. William-Alan Landes, editor. Player's Press.
- Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo*. Charles Lughton, translator. Grove/Atlantic.
- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*. Grove.
- Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New Directions.
- Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. *Statements*. Theatre Communications Group.
- Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*, 2nd edition (1988). Methuen.
- Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*. faber & faber.
- August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*. Plume/Penguin.
- Anna Deveare Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. Anchor.
- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* Theatre Communications Group.
- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika* Theatre Communications Group.
- Michael Frayn. *Copenhagen*. Vintage/Anchor.

Please try to read each play twice: once before the first day we study it; then again (in most cases) for the following class, taking discussion into account.

Schedule of classes:

We will have some video screenings and (I hope) at least one trip to the theater during the semester; I am also hoping to arrange for you to meet some theatrical professionals. For this reason and in order to allow flexibility in our conversations, this is a tentative schedule of class discussion topics: PLEASE CHECK IN IF YOU MISS A SESSION, SO THAT YOU CAN PARTICIPATE FULLY IN CLASS.

Class #1: Introductions

Class #2: Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*

Class #3: Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*

Class #4: Sean O'Casey, *The Plough and the Stars*. Response essay #1 (2-3 pp.)

Class #5: Sean O'Casey, *The Plough and the Stars*

Class #6: Luigi Pirandello, *Henry IV*. Response essay #2 (2-3 pp.)

Class #7: Luigi Pirandello, *Henry IV*

Class #8: Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo*. Response essay #3 (2-3 pp.)

Class #9: Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo*. Outside plays chosen.

Class #10: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*.

Class #11: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*.

Class #12: Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

STREETCAR SCREENING?

Class #13: Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. OUTSIDE PLAY ESSAY DUE.

Class #14: Athol Fugard and John Kani, *The Island* (in Statements)

Class #15: Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*

TOP GIRLS VIDEO?

Class #16: Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*

Class #17: Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*.

Class #18: Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*.

Class #19: August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*.

PIANO LESSON VIDEO??

Class #20: August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*. Revisions due.

Class #21: Anna Deveare Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*

DEVEARE SMITH VIDEO??

Class #22: Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Millennium Approaches*.

Class #23: Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*.

Class #24: Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen*

Class #25: Brief reports. COMPARATIVE/RESEARCH ESSAY DUE.

Class #26: Conclusions. Brief reports.

Requirements:

You should come to class ready and eager to discuss the assigned play. That means having read it (at least once), thought about it, and taken sufficient care of yourself to be alert in mind and body. A short, focused response paper will be due on the first day we discuss three plays (two-three pages, double-spaced). An eight-page essay on an "outside play" will allow you to be the class expert and share your collective familiarity with more drama than we could manage to read collectively. Another longer essay (8 pages) will allow you to pursue a topic of most interest to you, either by comparing two of the plays in a specific, focused way, and/or by pursuing outside research to enrich your understanding of a play we've read together. During the second half of the course, the class will be divided into teams that will perform a scene and lead the discussion of a particular play. Students will also report on supplementary readings and research, and share the insights they gained through writing the comparative essay.

Response papers, 6-9 pp., total: 10%

Outside play essay, 8 pp.: 20%

Revision of one of the two assignments above required; revision of both, optional. **Turn in original drafts along with revisions.** [Original grade and revision grade will be averaged to replace the original grade.]

Comparative and/or research essay, 8 pp.: 20%

Scene performances and class leadership, 10%

Class participation, including development of discussion questions and reports, 40%

These are approximate weightings: I reserve the right to modify them slightly, usually in your favor.

This is a twelve-unit subject, which assumes that you will allot nine hours/week outside the classroom for reading, writing, rehearsing, and thinking deep thoughts about twentieth-century drama.

Please note: Written work must be submitted by the due date. Except in cases of personal emergency, late work will not receive written response and will receive a lower grade. Unless you receive an individual extension for special reasons or petition to receive a grade of Incomplete in the course, no work can be accepted after the final week of classes.

I hope the following statement is unnecessary: **conscious plagiarism of any sort is completely unacceptable.** Discussion of ideas and communal learning is a primary goal of this subject; stealing

others' ideas or words (as distinct from citing or adapting them openly and honestly) undermines this goal. Please consult my stylesheet and talk with me if you have any doubts whatsoever about proper citation of sources or about standards of intellectual honesty. Anyone whom I discover plagiarizing work will not pass this subject; furthermore, I will pursue disciplinary hearings and advocate expulsion from MIT. I hope and trust that none of this will occur.

MIT's academic honesty policy can be found at the following link: <http://web.mit.edu/policies/10.0.html>