

Christopher Grobe
Johnson Chapel #105
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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)
Chekhov, *The Plays of Anton Chekhov* (HarperCollins, 1997)
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)
Cosson, et. al, *The Civilians: An Anthology of Six Plays* (Playscripts, Inc. 2009)

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”

M, Sept. 9, Ibsen, *A Doll House*; Shaw, “The Technical Novelty in Ibsen’s Plays”

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**

M, Oct. 28, Addison & Steele, *The Spectator* (excerpts)*; Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (excerpt)*; Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics”*

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*