

Christopher Grobe
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ENGLISH 232: READING DRAMA
(Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:20pm)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the unique challenges of experiencing performance through the page. While this course is not intended as a survey of dramatic literature or theater history, students in it will be introduced to a variety of drama from across the English-language tradition—including, as it does, work originally performed in other languages.

REQUIRED TEXTS (*available at Amherst Books*)

The Norton Anthology of Drama, shorter edition (Norton, 2010)
Edward Albee, *The Goat, or, Who Is Sylvia?* (Overlook, 2004)
Elizabeth Meriwether, *Heddatron* (Playscripts, 2006)
The Neo-Futurists, *100 Neo-Futurist Plays* (Hope and Nonthings, 1993)
Course packet (*required by Sept. 11; available in Johnson Chapel #001*)

COURSE FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS

Writings: This course requires only two formal essays, fewer than many courses at this level require. However, on a weekly basis, more or less, you will be asked to complete writing exercises and play analyses. (Up until the midterm paper, these are noted on the course schedule below in bold font.) These are designed to teach and test the skills you will need in order to write your formal essays, and they will also provide fodder for class discussion.

Screenings: Where noted on the syllabus, Tuesday night screenings are required part of preparation for Thursday class. In each case, you will have the choice of attending either a 4:00pm or a 7:00pm screening.

Performances: You may be asked to perform scenes or exercises informally in class. These performances are never an end in themselves, and you will be judged not on the aesthetic quality of them, but on your thoughtfulness in approach and diligence in seeing that approach through to its conclusion.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: Your attendance is expected and required. You are allowed to make up two absences, but after that, each day missed will lower your grade by one step (e.g., from A- to B+).

Grading: The regular exercises and analyses will be graded on a non-alphabetic scale, as follows:

- ✓- You've fallen short. You should discuss the exercise with me.
- ✓ You've hit the mark.
- ✓+ You've done especially well.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- 40% Final paper
- 30% Midterm paper
- 20% Exercises and play analyses
- 10% Performances, discussion, etc.

You must complete all assignments in this course in order to earn a passing grade.

Academic Integrity: Any time you use another person's words or ideas without giving them credit, that is plagiarism. Plagiarism is not only bad for your personal education; it also fundamentally undermines the process of academic dialogue. Make sure to cite your sources properly, and please ask me if you are unsure whether citation is necessary in a particular circumstance.



COURSE SCHEDULE

PLAYCRAFT

WEEK ONE

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 9/4 | <i>Introduction: Performance and Prose</i>
Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (handout)
Glaspell, <i>Des Moines Daily News</i> articles (handout) |
| 9/6 | Glaspell, <i>Trifles</i> (Norton 941-951)
Bring completed exercise, "Scoring Silence"/"Scoring Action" |
| Sun. | Turn in complete "beat analysis" of <i>Trifles</i> |

WEEK TWO

9/11 Albee, *The Goat* (quick read)

9/13 Hughes, *Soul Gone Home* (Norton 1001-4)

Sun. Turn in complete “role analysis” of *Soul Gone Home*

PLOT & RITUAL

WEEK THREE

9/18 Aristotle, excerpt from *The Poetics* (cp)
Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* (Norton 93-135)

SCREENING: *The Gospel at Colonus*

9/20 *Oedipus*, cont'd
Connerton, excerpt from *How Societies Remember* (cp)
[Skim *The Goat* for ritual form]

Sun. Turn in complete “formal analysis” of *Oedipus Rex*

WEEK FOUR

9/25 Euripides, *The Bacchae*

SCREENING: *Dionysus in '69*

9/27 *Bacchae*, cont'd
Schechner, “Six Axioms for Environmental Theater” (cp)
Dolan, excerpt from *Utopia in Performance* (cp)
[Skim *The Goat* for spatial concept]

Sun. Turn in complete “spatial proposal” for *The Bacchae*

HOW TO BE AN AUDIENCE

WEEK FIVE

10/2 Zeami, *Atsumori* (Norton 254-264)
Zeami, “On the Art of Nō Drama” (cp)

10/4 Yeats, *At the Hawk's Well* (cp)
Yeats, Introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (cp)
[Choose an “exquisite” scene from *The Goat*]

Sun. Hand in exercise on “audience pleasures”

WEEK SIX

10/9 No class (mid-semester break)

10/11 Anonymous, *Everyman* (Norton 270-90)
Anonymous, “A Sermon Against Miracle Plays” (cp)

WEEK SEVEN

10/16 Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Acts I-III (874-909)

SCREENING: *My Fair Lady*

10/18 *Pygmalion*, Acts IV-V (including afterword) (Norton 909-936)
[Find a “teachable moment” in *The Goat*]

Fri. Turn in MIDTERM PAPER

NATURALISM/REALISM/THEATRICALISM

WEEK EIGHT

10/23 Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (including “Preface”) (Norton 673-709)
Zola, “Naturalism on the Stage” (cp)
Bryusov, “Against Naturalism in the Theatre” (cp)

10/25 Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, Act I (Norton 717-34)
States, from *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (cp)
[Find moment in *The Goat* that might have been written by Strindberg]

WEEK NINE

10/30 *Hedda Gabler*, Acts II-IV (Norton 734-71)
Shaw, “The Technical Novelty of Ibsen’s Plays”
[Find moment in *The Goat* that might have been written by Ibsen]

11/1 Meriwether, *Heddatron*

ACTING STYLES

WEEK TEN

- 11/6 Brecht, *The Good Person of Setzuan*, first half (Norton 1010-44)
Diderot, "The Paradox of Acting" (cp)
Craig, "The Actor and the Uber-Marionette"
- 11/8 *The Good Person of Setzuan*, second half (Norton 1045-1062)
Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (cp)
[review Aristotle, *The Poetics*]
Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" (cp)
Brecht, "Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting" (cp)

WEEK ELEVEN

- 11/13 Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Acts
Stanislavski, excerpts from *An Actor Prepares* (cp)
Strasberg, on "sense memory" (cp)

SCREENING: *The Method Gun*

- 11/15 Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Acts
Williams, "The Timeless World of the Play" (cp)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/20 & 11/22 No class

SYNTHESIS

WEEK TWELVE

- 11/27 Cangiullo, *Detonation, or Synthesis of All Modern Theatre* (cp)
100 Neo-Futurist Plays
- 11/29 [One last, deep read of *The Goat*]

WEEK THIRTEEN

- 12/4 *Angels in America, Part I*
- 12/6 *Angels in America, Part I* (cont'd)

WEEK FOURTEEN

- 12/11 Performance of Mini-Plays

FINAL PAPER DUE 12/16