

English 342: American Drama

Enacting America

Prof. Ryan Claycomb
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Class meets T/Th 2:30-3:45

138 Colson Hall
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Office Hours: Thurs 9:30-12:30 am
or by appointment

Course Description

“All the world’s a stage,” Shakespeare sagely told us, detailing the roles that a man (specifically: a man) might play in his lifetime. Several plays later, in *The Tempest*, he makes the connection between his theatre and the whole world (“the great Globe itself”), invoking the idea of the “world stage”—far bigger than just the roles of an individual person.

In this mindset, the English presence in America (for better or worse, our nation’s founding cultural presence) was established. The word “theatre” comes from the Greek *theatrôn*, meaning “viewing place.” From their earliest writings, the first Anglo-Americans understood their experiments as examples to be viewed by the world—from “a city on a hill,” to “history has its eyes on you.” In short, Americans believe the world has always been watching us, and in response, we imagine ourselves as always on stage.

Our drama reflects this: an understanding that we play out who we are in public, that the vagaries of American place can and must be represented in stage space, that the communities that we invite to the theatre participate in which people we invite into our American communities. American drama, then, doesn’t just happen to be America, or even *about* America—it’s often at its best working to *enact* America.

But drama-as-identity is always a tricky endeavor, since the whole premise of theatre is that it is not “real”: when the illusion of theatre dissipates, what has happened on the stage seems to dissipate too. Is the America we enact the real America? How do we live up to the Americas we stage? As such, we will examine how those authors who write for the stage imagine the representational messages of their plays and how those messages influence their audiences—beyond the end of the play and the walls of the theatre.

The semester will cover a range of historical periods and styles: 19th-century sentimental drama, social realism, expressionism, epic theatre, agit-prop, and even a smattering of performance art. We’ll examine these plays and styles both for the political positions they espouse and for the way that these styles and forms use the stage to achieve specific political ends.

Our **Course Objectives** will be multiple. By the end of the semester, students will:

- Identify major trends in American drama from the 19th century to the present;
- Compare various writing and staging strategies as they work to effect social and political change;
- Analyze plays as textual artifacts of theatrical performances in specific cultural contexts;
- Propose and enact various staging possibilities for presenting dramatic texts as theatre;
- Write in a variety of academic modes in order to critically engage the nuances of the American stage.

Texts:

These texts are available at both the University Book Store and the Book Exchange. Please obtain them immediately. It is generally important to obtain the same edition as is denoted here.

- The Norton Anthology of Drama, 3rd edition, Volume 2.
- Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight, Los Angeles, 1992*.
- Lin Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (and/or the original cast recording)

Several texts (both primary and secondary) will be made available in PDF format on the e-campus site. Those readings will be marked with three asterisks (***), and clearly labeled on the site. **Please print them** and bring them to class.

Course Requirements:

You are expected to meet the following requirements to achieve a passing grade.

1. Complete all reading by the date it is listed in the syllabus. This is the baseline activity in this course, so be sure to budget your time accordingly.
2. Complete all work by the date listed in the syllabus.
 - Grades on all assignments will drop one letter grade for every weekday they are late.
 - Work handed in more than one week past the due date will automatically be graded F (50%).
 - Work handed in more than two weeks past the due date will earn a zero.
 - A paper is not considered turned in until I have a hard copy in my hand.
 - Soft copy is accepted only with explicit permission beforehand.
3. Participate in class activities in such a way that enhances learning for both yourself and your classmates.
4. Participate actively in the draft workshop process.

Assignments and Grading:

100 pts. *In-Class Participation* As noted in the course policies below, attendance will also factor into this grade, so please see the attendance policy. See course policies for participation grading standards. Should reading quizzes become necessary, they will be factored into this component of the grade.

50 pts. *Article Annotations*: For both of the two plays following the library day, *Waiting for Lefty* and *Machinal*, students will locate a substantial peer-reviewed article or chapter on the play in question, and will write the bibliography entry and an annotation for the article. Each annotation should summarize the main points of the source, zero in on its contribution to the critical conversation, read the text for critical gaps or omissions (attending particularly to points where your work might intervene), and identify ways in which the source will be useful to your research. Each annotation will likely run 200-300 words.

200 pts. *Director's Paper*: 1500-2000 words (5-7 pgs). This paper of 5-7 pages will ask you to think like a theatre director. Choose one of two possible plays (*Waiting for Lefty* or *Machinal*), and argue for a theatrical production of that text that is designed to advance a specific interpretation. Further guidelines on this paper will follow. We will hold a draft workshop in class the class before the essay is due. Failing to come to that class prepared with a full draft of the essay will result in a letter-grade penalty to the final draft.

150 pts. Performance Project: The group project will take place throughout the semester on various dates marked in the syllabus. Groups of 4-5 people will choose a scene or short extract from their assigned play to perform for the class. After performing the scene, the group will lead a 15-20 minute discussion on the scene, the choices made, and how those choices reflect a larger interpretation of the play. On the day of the performance, each group will turn in 1) individual work reports on who did what in the group, and 2) a brief group lesson plan outlining their goals for class discussion. Group assignments will happen in wk 2.

500 pts. Final Project (Proposal (50), Annotated Bibliography (100), Final paper (350)): These three components will be graded separately, though they are all part of a unified final project.

- The proposal should take the form of a memo that prefaces your bibliography and a basic outline for the idea of your final project. Accordingly, it should describe the landscape of criticism about your play/topic, and outline the argument you hope to make in your paper. The proposal should run around 300 words (1 page). You may very well want to be in conversation with me about your topic as this due date nears. Please be aware that we will discuss some texts after this is due. If you think you might want to write on one of these texts, do read ahead so that you are prepared to begin work on this process.
- The annotated bibliography will list at least ten viable secondary sources of use to your final project sources and should analyze five of those sources, (of which no more than two may have been used in class). Each annotation should summarize the main points of the source, zero in on its contribution to the critical conversation, read the text for critical gaps or omissions (attending particularly to points where your work might intervene), and identify ways in which the source will be useful to your research. Each annotation will likely run 200-300 words.
- The final project will include three options: 1) a critical academic argument suitable for presentation at an academic conference (~3500 words), 2) a teaching unit for high school or a freshman level college classroom, or 3) a shorter critical argument followed by a production pitch. Details for all options will follow. The project will include a draft workshop, where students will read and respond to one another's work, and an optional recommended conference with the professor. Failure to come prepared to participate in the workshop will result in a one letter grade penalty for the paper.

SpeakWrite:

English 342 has been designated as a SpeakWrite course by the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. This class is committed to fostering students' abilities in writing, speaking, visual presentations, and multimedia communication. For resources, please visit SpeakWrite.wvu.edu.



Purpose: What exactly do I want to happen?

Audience: Who is reading, listening, or viewing?

Conventions: What is expected in this context?

Trouble: What could get in the way of my goals?

Class Schedule/ Syllabus Spring 2018

Schedule subject to change upon announcement in class and/or via email

Wk	Dy	Date	Class Schedule, Readings, Assignments
1	T	1/9	Introduction: Staging America
	TH	1/11	Ways of Viewing: Susan Glaspell's <i>Trifles</i> Read: Susan Glaspell, <i>Trifles</i> (Norton 473-486) "A Jury of Her Peers"*** Due: Diagnostic Writing Assignment
2	T	1/16	Early American Plays: Staging American Space Read: Excerpts from Early American Plays*** "Theatre in the United States 1800-190," Norton 57-59
	TH	1/18	<i>Sentimental Melodrama</i> Read: <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> *** Acts 1-3
3	T	1/23	Research for Literary Study MEET in the Downtown Library, Room 136 Explore http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/
	Th	1/25	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> Read: Acts 4-5***; Optional: Frick, from <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin on the American Stage and Screen</i> *** Hartmann, from <i>Scenes of Subjection</i> pgs 56-59.
4	T	1/30	Gender and American Spaces Read: Sophie Treadwell, <i>Machinal</i> (Norton 565-625) Skim: Modern Theatre 1880-1945 (Norton 59-67)
	TH	2/1	<i>Machinal</i> Optional: Gainor and Dickey, "Staging Feminist Modernism..."*** Due: Annotation Assignment #1
5	T	2/6	Social Realism and Agit/Prop Read: Clifford Odets, <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> ***
	TH	2/8	<i>Waiting for Lefty</i> Optional: From Chinoy, <i>The Group Theatre</i> *** Due: Annotation Assignment #2
6	T	2/13	Draft Workshop: Director's Paper DUE: Complete draft of Director's Paper, hard copy
	TH	2/15	Tragedy and the "Common Man" Read: Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> (Norton 821-892) "Postwar American Theatre" (Norton 72-74) Today!!! Live for one performance only!!! Performance Group 1!!!!

7	T	2/20	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> Read: "Tragedy and the Common Man" (Norton 893-896) Due: Director's Paper
	TH	2/22	Other ideas about "The Common Man" Read: Lorraine Hansbery, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Norton 1005-1073)
8	T	2/27	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> Read: Plays in Performance: "A Raisin in the Sun," (full color pages in Norton)
	TH	3/1	The Legacy of <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> HONORS GROUP TEACHING DAY Optional: Bruce Norris, <i>Clybourne Park</i> *** Kwame Kwei-Armah, <i>Beneatha's Place</i> ***
9	T	3/6	American Theatre and the Global Stage Read: David Henry Hwang, <i>M Butterfly</i> (Norton 1450-1501)
	TH	3/8	<i>M. Butterfly</i> Optional: Shimakawa***and Kondo*** on <i>M. Butterfly</i> Today!!! Live for one performance only!!! Performance Group 2!!!
			<i>Spring Break! Be good!</i>
10	T	3/20	Staging a Queer America Read: Tony Kushner, <i>Angels in America, Part I: Millennium Approaches</i> (1502-1568)
	TH	3/22	<i>Angels in America</i> Read: Plays in Performance: "Angels in America," (full color pages in Norton) Optional: David Savran*** Today!!! Live for one performance only!!! Performance Group 3!!!
11	T	3/27	Oral History Performance and the American Community Read: Anna Deavere Smith: <i>Twilight, Los Angeles, 1992.</i>
	TH	3/29	<i>Twilight, Los Angeles, 1992.</i> Optional: Claycomb, "(Ch)oral History"***
12	T	4/3	Class Canceled: Do your Research!
	TH	4/5	Politics and Performance Arts HONORS GROUP TEACHING DAY Optional: Hughes, <i>World Without End</i> ,*** Miller, "The NEA Four Case"*** Due: Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography
13	T	4/10	The Great (w)Hole of History Read: Suzan-Lori Parks, <i>The America Play</i> (Norton 1604-1637)

	TH	4/12	<i>The America Play</i> Today!!! Live for one performance only!!! Performance Group 4!!!
14	T	4/17	History has its eyes on you Read: Lin-Manuel Miranda: <i>Hamilton: The Revolution</i> —Just lyrics and footnotes, essays optional. —Or listen obsessively to the soundtrack
	TH	4/19	<i>Historians on Hamilton</i> Read: Assigned essay from <i>Historians on Hamilton</i>
15	T	4/24	<i>Hamilton: Staging America</i>
	TH	4/26	Draft Workshop for Final Paper Due: Completed draft of final paper
	F- R	4/27- 5/3	Individual Writing Conferences (optional, recommended, by appointment)
***	F	5/4	Final Projects and any revisions due in my office by 10 am

Course Policies

Office Hours:

- My office hours are times that I am committed to being available to consult with students. Please note that I am always willing to review drafts with students in office hours, as well as to discuss any other concerns you may have about the class, its content, and its procedures. I am also around campus outside my stated office hours if you would like to make an appointment.
- Research suggests that students who are in the habit of seeking out additional contact with their teachers tend to do better, even if you're just coming by to discuss Oprah's Golden Globes speech, or a good recipe for hamburgers. Point is: come by, have a cup of coffee, chat. It'll be good.
- Specifically: please stop by my office at least one time between now and February 1 to introduce yourself. If you cannot make the stated office hours, email me for an appointment. Accomplishing this will contribute to class participation points.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance for this class is required.

- If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to gather notes or make up any material.
- If you accumulate 5 absences for any reason, you will forfeit your entire class participation grade (100 points).
- If you accumulate 9 absences for any reason, you will fail the course.
- If a circumstance arises that drastically impacts your attendance, perhaps in all of your classes (serious illness, family tragedy, etc.), I'd strongly encourage you to contact Kimberly Mosby, Sr. Associate Dean of Students, at 293-5611 or Kim.Mosby@mail.wvu.edu.

Tardiness:

Excessive tardiness is also a problem and will negatively affect your class participation grade. Assignments turned in late because of tardiness will be considered one day late.

Format for Papers:

All out-of-class assignments must adhere to the following criteria:

- typed or word-processed, Times New Roman 12-point font (or equivalent), double-spaced, 1-1.25-inch margins, page-numbered, and finally, stapled or paper-clipped.
- Please head your papers with your name, the date, the course, my name, and the word count, followed by a (creative) title that is centered above your essay.

Submissions that do not meet these requirements may be returned to the student to be resubmitted.

Please note: don't fiddle with the physical appearance of the paper just to achieve the illusion of length. There is an important difference between quantity of writing and quality of writing. A paper that is presented in an honest way will earn far more respect.

Draft Workshops and Feedback

- One week before the due date for each major paper, students will bring to class a complete draft of the paper—by complete I mean that it meets the minimum page requirements, and makes a complete argument, including conclusion. Peer Review will be conducted in the following way: in class, students will meet in pairs or small groups, read one another's papers, and give feedback guided by a worksheet distributed in class. The written feedback from the worksheet and oral feedback from discussion should provide a direction for revisions.
- Because draft workshops are an integral part of the writing process, you are required to come prepared and to participate. Not only do you get feedback on your own writing, but you also learn more about the revision process itself, learn by reading others' work, help others polish their writing, and teach others by sharing your work with them. These are crucial to the writing community of the class. Accordingly, students who do not come prepared to workshop a complete draft will be assessed a one-letter grade penalty on the final draft of that paper.

In addition to participating in the peer workshops, students can also receive feedback on writing by visiting office hours, or making an appointment with the Eberly Writing Studio,. For all written work up until the final project, students will receive substantial written feedback within two weeks of the due date.

Social Justice:

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Center for Excellence in Disabilities (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Academic Dishonesty:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, see the West Virginia University Academic Catalog at: <http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification/#academicintegritytext> Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Sexual Misconduct and Resources:

West Virginia University (WVU) does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence [BOG Policy 44]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff, but keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator. If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the Carruth Center, 304-293-9355 or 304-293-4431 (24-hour hotline), and locally within the community at the Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center (RDVIC), 304-292-5100 or 304-292-4431 (24-hour hotline). For more information please consult WVU policies at <http://titleix.wvu.edu>.

Grading Written Work

Grades on written work will follow the guidelines laid out below, guidelines used by the University's writing program:

C (70-79.99% of available points): This is a standard, satisfactory essay that fulfills the assignment and is adequately developed. This is the basic grade from which all others are derived. Higher grades than this exceed the expectations for the assignment, and grades lower than this fail to meet some major component of the assignment. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength that would distinguish an above-average essay.

B (80-89.99% of available points): This is a very good essay that fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing that do not interfere with reading the essay.

A (90-100% of available points): This is an outstanding essay that reflects a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. It is well organized with excellent development of its ideas. It reflects the writer's command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.

D (60-69.99% of available points): This is a below-average essay that fulfills many components of the assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. It may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

F (less than 60% of available points): This is an essay that relates to the topic but is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard American usage. Such an essay may have sentence boundary problems, poor use of idiom, inappropriate diction (words used incorrectly), agreement errors, or verb tense problems.

0: This is an essay that is either completely unrelated to the assignment, or that represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not one's own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

Class Participation Grading Scale

Since a major component of your grade is participation and one of the course requirements is that you participate in class discussions and activities in such a way that enhances learning for both yourself and your classmates. Here are some additional guidelines for what that means, and how your grade will reflect that.

C

You are on time, you have your books, and you have done all of the reading and assignments or homework for that day. In general, you are prepared for class. When called upon, you usually answer questions. You rarely participate in the discussion without my having to ask you to do so. During group work, you participate rather than being passive, or leaving work for your group members.

B

You have fulfilled all of the obligations of a C grade. You speak regularly in class without being overbearing. You occasionally offer intelligent insights to the discussion that are more thought provoking than the average response. You are not disruptive or rude in class.

A

You have fulfilled all of the obligations for a B grade. The insights you offer are frequently intelligent, thought-provoking comments, which demonstrate that you have thoroughly digested the reading for that day and have spent some time thinking about it. You ask intelligent questions that don't pertain merely to your own work. You are never disruptive or rude in class.

D

You have not, in some way, fulfilled all of the obligations for earning a C grade. You rarely speak in class. You have probably done something to earn negative class participation.

F

You have fallen far below what is expected of a student in this class. You are frequently late, don't have your books, or the assignments that are due, and you never speak in class. You likely have done much to earn negative class participation.

Negative Class Participation

Hopefully this will not even be a consideration for you. Doing any of the following, especially more than one, will ensure that you earn a negative class participation grade:

- Talking to someone next to you
- Sleeping in class
- Arriving late
- Offering inappropriate comments that do not further discussion or the goals of this course
- Packing up early
- In general, showing disrespect toward the professor or toward any of your fellow classmates.