

American Drama: Theatre of Work and Protest

ENG 342W: American Drama (Fall 2012)

Katy Ryan kohearnr@mail.wvu.edu

293.9729; Colson 221

Office Hours: Tues and Thurs: 1:00-2:00 and by appointment

In this twentieth-century US American drama course, we will study plays that encourage audiences to think about the role of work in people's lives. Our plays explore the significance of money, family, meaningful relationships, low wages, long hours, unemployment, organizing, and economic corruption.

Moving chronologically through the twentieth century, we will encounter several dramatic forms—expressionist, agit-prop, social realist, tragedy, and comedy. We will consider if one form seems particularly well-suited for moving audiences politically or if, as Tony Kushner suggests, there is not a theatrical "hierarchy to political efficaciousness." As we study the public character of performance, we will address its marginalized status in English departments and a longstanding British and US American "antitheatrical prejudice." If drama is a neglected genre in literary studies, American drama is particularly sidelined. Why?

Our course is organized around three modes of inquiry: reading, writing, and performing. We will be reading plays, theatre reviews, and scholarly articles; writing brief responses and formal essays; and collaborating to create performances for the class. It will require a good amount of work and will be a great deal of fun.

Goals: *By the end of the semester you should be able to demonstrate*

- awareness of academic discourse and research on a topic in drama studies
- skills of research, analysis, development, and critical thinking
- familiarity with the history of 20th-century American drama
- an ability to work productively with others
- an ability to contribute to class discussions

Required Texts (available at WVU bookstore)

Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (1928)

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)

Theodore Ward, *Big White Fog* (1938)

Lorraine Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Marsha Norman, *Getting Out* (1979)

August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984)

Josefina López, *Real Women Have Curves* (1990)

Requirements (explained in full below)

Three Essays (6 pages)	60%
Includes drafts and revisions	
Participation + Attendance	25%
Includes performing groups	
Three Reader Responses	15%

WRITTEN REQUIREMENTS

Essays (60 points)

You will compose three research essays (double-spaced, approx. 6 pages), each with a full draft that you will revise after receiving feedback.

Revision Option

You will have the opportunity to revise one graded paper, which must be turned in within ten days of receiving your graded essay. In order to receive credit for a revision, the essay must be substantially changed, and you must make an appointment with me to discuss your plan.

My **criteria** for evaluating analytical essays will be the following:

- A complete draft that engages with a difficult, original, or complex question
- A revision that clearly demonstrates a reworking of the draft in terms of argument, content, and organization.
- A clear thesis or insight, which is suitably complex and provides a blueprint for the essay
- Smooth and grammatical integration of scholarly sources
- Solid evidence from the plays (in the form of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries) to support your interpretations
- Strong transitions that move the essay forward logically and thoughtfully
- A polished, clean final essay free of grammatical and surface errors. **Proofread several times.** Read your essay outloud. You will *hear* mistakes that you do not see.
- Consistent use of MLA style for documentation. Purdue has a useful website on this at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>. You can find “Basic in-text citation” at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/> and “Basic Works Cited” at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/>.

Doing Research

Here are basic ways to find scholarly articles on your subject:

- 1) The WVU Library Mountainlynx catalogue will locate books available in our library.
- 2) Project Muse, EBSCO Host, and JSTOR are useful databases of humanities, arts, and social science journals. You will find them on the library’s webpage under Databases.
- 3) The MLA (Modern Language Association) International Bibliography database will locate books and articles on your author or text that may be available in our library or through interlibrary loan.

The Writing Center -- a free tutoring service for WVU students -- is located in G02 Colson Hall. Tutors are available to help with any writing project in any course. The Center specializes in helping students with brainstorming, drafting, and revising their work.

Phone: (304) 293-5788

Call for Evansdale and evening hours.

http://english.wvu.edu/centers_and_projects/wcenter/writing_center_home

PERFORMANCE, ATTENDANCE, AND PARTICIPATION (25 points)

Performance Groups

Everyone will be in two performance groups. Your group will collaborate on ten-minute performances, which do not have to be professionally acted or memorized. Think of them as a gift to the class. You will have in-class time to prepare. Groups might choose to:

- Act a brief, important scene -- and then re-enact it with a different interpretation
- Adapt a section of the play to highlight its relevance to current events
- Perform an interview with the characters and/or the playwright
- Change the setting, or one of the characters, to make a particular point
- Incorporate music, props, lighting, costumes
- Translate a moment from the play into a visual: a painting, a drawing, a handout
- Break the fourth wall and include audience members in the performance

Attendance and Participation

My attendance policy is simple. If you miss more than three classes, you will fail the class (unless there is a documented emergency. See policy below.)

If this course were only about reading plays, we could all go off and do that by ourselves. If it were only about listening to what one person has to say about literature, we could all find a great lecture. But English courses are about more than the act of reading and the acquisition of information. Literature classes are also about learning how to think.

I understand the pressure, uncertainty, and boredom that can lead to silence. I will do my best to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and intellectual inquiry.

There are many ways that you can contribute to discussion: you can ask questions about our readings; you can make observations; you can read aloud your written responses; you can write a brief response to a live performance that you attend this semester. **You are encouraged to attend theatre performances by the College of Creative Arts.**

Please note the following policies with regard to participation and attendance.

- If you participate fully in your performance groups, you will receive 10 points. If you do not, you receive 0. In other words, I do not grade your performances. These points are Pass/Fail.
- If you participate regularly in class discussions, which means about once a week, offering substantive comments or questions, you will receive 15 points. If you speak occasionally (say, one comment every 2 weeks, for instance) you will receive 10 points for discussion. If you never speak but attend regularly, you will receive 5 points.

Three Reader Responses (5 points each)

You will write three 500-word, single-spaced responses to plays. This mini-essay should begin with a real question that you have about the material. Make it hard. Given the brevity of these responses, you should choose one scene, one character, or one idea to analyze closely, rather than attempting to explicate an entire play. **Be sure to ground your interpretation in the language of the literary text by quoting directly from the play or poem.** Put the page number in parenthesis at the end of your sentence. (See handout on how to quote literary texts.)

For one of these responses, you can write a creative scene instead of an analysis. Your new scene should illuminate an important aspect of the original.

***Each time you turn in a response, you should also turn in your previous *graded* responses. Please staple them together. This will help me to comment on your development as a writer.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

Plagiarism/Cheating. The following definitions are from the *West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog*. Please see the section on Academic Integrity and Dishonesty for the full definition and discussion of procedures.

Plagiarism: material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others . . . including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition.

Cheating: doing academic work for another student, or providing one's own work for another student to copy and submit as his / her own.

Scholastic dishonesty: involves misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; interfering with another's work.

If you have any question about how to document sources, please talk to me.

Cell Phone Courtesy. Before class, please turn off cell phones and other gadgets.

Social Justice. Please let me know if there is any way to create a more inclusive environment that is free of discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, age, disability, veteran status, religion, or national origin.

Disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation, please let me know. You might also want to contact Disability Services 293-6700.

Emergencies or Health Crises. If you have an emergency or serious health problem in the course of the semester, you or your family should contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me and authorize me to make arrangements for you. Please reserve the Dean's services for serious circumstances or emergencies.

GRADING SCALE

A+ (98-100) ; A (97-94); A- (93-91); B+ (90-88); B (87-84); B- (83-81); C+ (80-78); C (77-74); C- (73-71); D+ (70-68); D (67-64); D- (63-61); F (60 or below)

SCHEDULE

Tues. Aug 21	Introductions
Thurs. Aug 23	Sophie Treadwell, <i>Machinal</i> Episode 1-4 Handout on writing responses Sign Up for Performance Groups
Tues. Aug 28	<i>Machinal</i> (entire play) Introduction by Judith E. Barlow
Thurs. Aug 30	<i>Machinal</i> Handout: Sara Freeman, Review of The Hypocrites at Chicago Dramatists. 1 February 2003. <i>Theatre Journal</i> 55.3 (2003): 532-533. Essay Assignment
Tues. Sept 4	Clifford Odets, <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> (entire play) First reader response due (either <i>Machinal</i> or <i>Lefty</i>)

Thurs. Sept 6	<i>Waiting for Lefty</i> Scholarly article on <i>Waiting</i>
Tues. Sept 11	Rehearsal: Performance Group for <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> Members – arrive at class with specific ideas for your group
Thurs. Sept 13	Performance of <i>Waiting</i>
Tues. Sept 18	Theodore Ward, <i>Big White Fog</i> Act One
Thurs. Sept 20	<i>Big White Fog</i> (entire play) Essay drafts due
Tues Sept. 25	<i>Big White Fog</i> Writing Workshop
Thurs. Sept. 27	<i>Big White Fog</i> Final essays due
Tues. Oct 2	Lorraine Hansberry, <i>Raisin in the Sun</i> Act One
Thurs. Oct 4	<i>Raisin in the Sun</i> (entire play) Introduction by Robert Nemiroff
Tues. Oct 9	<i>Raisin in the Sun</i> Susan Harris Smith, <i>American Drama: The Bastard Art</i> , “The Problem of American Drama” 1-8 Essay Assignment
Thurs. Oct 11	Rehearsal: Performance Groups for <i>Raisin</i> and <i>Big White Fog</i> Members – arrive at class with specific ideas for your group
Tues. Oct 16	Performances of <i>Raisin</i> and <i>Big White Fog</i> Second reader response due (either <i>Big White Fog</i> or <i>Raisin</i>)
Thurs. Oct 18	Marsha Norman, <i>Getting Out</i> Act One
Tues. Oct 23	<i>Getting Out</i> (entire play)
Thurs. Oct 25	<i>Getting Out</i>
[Oct 16 last day to drop classes]	
Tues. Oct. 30	August Wilson, <i>Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom</i> Act 1 + “The Play,” xv-xvi Essay drafts due
Thurs. Nov 1	<i>Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom</i> (entire play) Writing Workshop

Tues. Nov 6 NO CLASS

Thurs. Nov 8 *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
Final essays due

Tues. Nov. 13 Rehearsal: Performance Groups for *Ma Rainey* and *Getting Out*
Members – arrive at class with specific ideas for your group

Thurs. Nov. 15 Performances of *Getting Out* and *Ma Rainey*
Essay Assignment

THANKSGIVING

Tues. Nov 27 Josefina Lopez, *Real Women Have Curves* (entire play)
Third reader response due (*Real Women*)

Thurs. Nov 29 *Real Women Have Curves*

Tues. Dec. 4 Rehearsal: Performance Group for *Real Women*
Members – arrive at class with specific ideas for your group
Essay drafts due

Thurs. Dec. 6 Performance of *Real Women*
Writing Workshop

Final essay due by Tuesday noon in Colson 221

WVU Creative Arts – Fall Theatre Schedule

[The Shape of Things](#) by Neil LaBute in [Gladys G. Davis Theatre](#), WVU Creative Arts Center
September 28 – October 7, 2012

[Lend Me a Tenor](#) by Ken Ludwig in [Metropolitan Theatre](#), 369 High Street
October 25-28, 2012

[Blood Wedding](#) by Federico Garcia Lorca in [Gladys G. Davis Theatre](#), WVU Creative Arts Center
November 15 – December 2, 2012

PERFORMANCE SIGN UP – Sign up for TWO performances. Please make a note of the title of your play, the date for your rehearsal, and the date for the performance

1) *Waiting for Lefty*

Rehearsal Day Sept 11
Performance Day Sept 13

2) *Big White Fog*

Rehearsal Oct 11
Performance Oct 16

3) *Raisin in the Sun*

Rehearsal Oct 11
Performance Oct 16

4) *Getting Out*

Rehearsal Nov. 13
Performance Nov. 15

5) *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Rehearsal Nov. 13
Performance Nov. 15

6) *Real Women Have Curves*

Rehearsal Dec 4
Performance Dec 6
