

# English 234

ENGL 234, Ryan Claycomb, Fall 2007

## English 234:

Drama and its Theories

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304-293-3107 x33430 (office)  
Class meets MWF 12:30-1:20  
Office Hours: MWF 1:30-2:30  
or by appointment

## Course Description:

“To delight and to instruct”

--*Horace, "Ars Poetica"*

“They did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God.”

--*Sir Phillip Sidney, An Apology for Poetry*

“The artist is the creator of beautiful things . . . All art is quite useless.”

--*Oscar Wilde, Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray*

“Such art demands effort from its audience, and effort is precisely what we are used to avoiding in the theater. Difficult Art needs to be assembled in collaboration with the spectator; it doesn't come prepackaged by the artist. It insists on spectators doing some of the work. In making these demands, Difficult Art seeks to teach a posture to its audience, a stance. And I deliberately write that the art, rather than the artist seeks to teach, for this is instruction by example, not by preachment.”

--*Tony Kushner, "The Art of the Difficult"*

Throughout most secondary education, we are taught to identify *what is happening* in a work of literature, but we are seldom taught to ask \*why it's happening\*. This course hopes to ask just that question—Why drama? It's a question we ask all the time, “Why do we study this stuff? Why is it important?” As the surrounding quotes illustrate, the function of drama, theatre, literature, indeed any art, is a matter of debate from Kushner's challenging definition, through Horace's landmark catch-all, to Wilde's famously frivolous quip.

This semester, we will be reading plays from the Greeks to the present to ask the same questions that Horace, Sidney, Wilde, and Kushner ask—**what is the purpose of drama and theatre?** We can identify what is going on in the plays, but **why is it going on? What is its function in society at large?** With those larger questions in mind, I hope we can collectively come to a

greater understanding of how art, particularly theatre and drama function in our contemporary lives.

### **Objectives:**

Over the course of the semester, we will:

- Learn to read drama as a unique literary genre, one that requires different reading tactics than prose or poetry.
- Examine playscripts as works of literary significance, as texts toward performance, and as artifacts of the cultural fabric in which they were produced;
- Explore the relationship of text to performance;
- Consider some basic theatre history alongside trends of literary history;
- Consider works of dramatic theory for their understanding of the function of drama, particularly as it applies to the texts in question, and generally as it applies to the production of any work of art;
- Hone writing skills for literary analysis and more specifically for literature in performance.

### **Textbooks:**

Our primary text will be *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, 5th edition, edited by W.B. Worthen. Please bring this text (mammoth though it may be) to every class with you. Having your text in class is part of your class participation grade, and coming unprepared will negatively impact your grade. From time to time, an additional reading will be made available in PDF format, likely through the course's eCampus page. Those readings are marked on the schedule of readings with asterisks\*\*\*\*.

### **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. There is a LOT of reading 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 (55%).
  - Work handed in more than 2 weeks past the due date will earn a zero.
  - A paper is not considered turned until I have a hard copy in my hand.
  - Electronic versions via email or disk are unacceptable unless I give explicit permission beforehand.
3. Participate in class activities in such a way that enhances learning for both yourself and your classmates.

### **Assignments and Grading:**

10% - Quizzes - Throughout the semester, I will give unannounced quizzes to 1) determine the degree to which you have been reading both primary and secondary texts, and the degree to which you've absorbed in-class material, and 2) highlight important material in the reading. They will happen as necessary, so keep up with the reading. Quizzes that are missed for any reason will earn a zero, although at the end of the semester, you may drop your lowest quiz grade. Quizzes will be factored together with participation depending on the number given. Typically, quizzes will take 2 forms: the Quote ID quiz, which asks you to identify the thematic significance of a single given passage, and the Plot quiz, which asks you to answer several questions about the basic plot of the entire play.

10% - Participation - See course requirement #3. Attendance will also factor into this grade, so please see the attendance policy. I will assign a class participation grade every three weeks based on attendance, preparation, meaningful contribution to classroom discussion and in-class activities, and absence of disruptive behavior.

15% - Critical Paper - One paper of 4-6 pages will be due in the sixth week of classes. I will assign several possible topics which will each give you plenty of room to develop independent thinking about the texts we will have considered. You will be measured here on your ability to generate an independent argument that goes beyond our classroom discussions, frame that argument in a well-organized, well-written essay, and thoroughly support that argument with ample textual evidence.

15% - Director's Paper - This paper of 5-7 pages will ask you to think like a director. Choose any play in the textbook not discussed in class, 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.

15% - Group 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 20-30 minute discussion on the scene, the choices made, and how those choices reflect a larger interpretation of the play. Please examine the syllabus for the five possible plays to participate in, and be prepared to list your top three choices by next Monday.

15% - Midterm - The midterm will follow the form of quote ID quizzes and will cover the first half of the semester.

20% - Final Exam - The final will include quote IDs and an essay. The exam will cover the entire semester, but will be weighted toward the second half.

### **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 9 or more absences (three full weeks of class) 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 Dr. Thomas Sloane, Sr. Associate Dean of Students, at 293-5611 or [Tom.Sloane@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Tom.Sloane@mail.wvu.edu).

Excessive tardiness is also a problem. Late entrance into class is disruptive to the workings of the class, assignments are collected at the beginning of class, and quizzes will be administered in the first 15 minutes of class. Quizzes will not be made up, and assignments turned in late because of tardiness will be considered late. A consistent problem will negatively affect your class participation grade.

### **Format For Papers:**

All out-of-class assignments must adhere to the following criteria: typed or word-processed, Times New Roman 12-point font double-spaced, 1 inch to 1.25 inch margins, spell-checked, page-numbered, and finally, stapled or paper-clipped.

Submissions that do not meet these requirements will be dropped as much as a letter grade. Please note: I am seriously troubled by students who fiddle with the physical appearance of the paper so as to achieve the illusion of length. This belief assumes that I cannot tell the difference between quantity and quality, and I find that personally offensive. A paper that is shorter than the assigned length but presented in an honest way will earn far more respect.

### **Writing Groups**

While we will not have time to do writing workshops in class, I would *highly* recommend that you collaborate with your group presentation groups, or another group/pair of classmates to workshop your papers before they are due.

### **A Special Note about the Bard and his Absence from Our Illustrious Syllabus:**

The curious onlooker will note, perhaps with some consternation, perhaps with relief and glee, that the word *Shakespeare* does not appear on the list of readings below. Don't get me wrong—I love the guy; think he's the greatest playwright to use our language. I have a facsimile copy of the first folio of his works by the table at my front door, just in case guests entering our home should want to glance through the hallowed works. I have a huge poster with the full text of *Hamlet* above the fireplace in the livingroom and no fewer than five different film versions of that play in my collection. And no, I am not making any of this up. BUT! The madness has to stop somewhere: the man's work is so popular that he is taught anywhere people can squeeze him in: a whole course on this one person is a requirement in the major, and no doubt most of you read at least one of his plays already. Sadly a whole host of other *completely fabulous* Elizabethan playwrights—Marlowe, Kyd, Fletcher and Beaumont, Jonson, Middleton—the list goes on and on... So this semester, we'll give Will a seat on the bench for a bit to let Kit Marlowe have a little fun...

### **A More Serious Special Note about Explicit Content**

For a few of the works later in the semester, notably Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, you will encounter some images that you may find shocking or even disturbing. Both plays contain some explicit sexuality (although they treat it differently), and *Blasted* in particular contains some very graphic violence. As you approach these texts, I ask that you do your best to first try them out with an open mind. The point of including them on the syllabus is in part to

explore how such material functions on the page vs. on the stage, and we'll need to work toward having as open a conversation about these pieces as possible.

**Special Circumstances:**

If you have a registered physical or learning disability that might affect your performance in this course, let me know as soon as possible and I will make whatever accommodations are warranted. If you have a disability that is not registered, please contact the Office of Disability Services (G30 Mountainlair, 3-6700, TDD3-7740) as soon as possible in order to get the documentation to me. While I always want to accommodate disabilities, getting help is your responsibility, and until I have documentation, my hands are tied. If you suspect that some other circumstance may affect your performance this semester (University Athletics, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Because the various forms of academic dishonesty have proliferated online and elsewhere, I take this problem very seriously, and will aggressively pursue full punishment (an unforgiveable F for the course) if I find significant evidence of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty cheats you out of your education. Moreover, there is an underlying assumption of absolute disrespect for your classmates, your instructor and your institution. If you are panicking and feel like you might be forced to rely on academic dishonesty, **please please please** try to see me about other options.

It is your responsibility to be informed about your responsibilities. For more information on the University's Code of Academic Integrity, visit <http://www.arc.wvu.edu/admissions/integrity.html>

**Class Schedule/ Syllabus  
English 234; Fall 2007**

<b>Wk</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Schedule, Readings, Assignments</b>
1	M	8/20	<b>Introduction to the course:</b> Why drama?
	W	8/22	<b>Trifles</b> To Read: Introduction 1-8 Susan Glaspell, "Trifles" 1013-1019 Due: Diagnostic Writing
	F	8/24	<b>Writing about Drama</b>
2	M	8/27	<b>Introduction to the Greek Theatre</b> To Read: "Classical Athens" 9-22 Aristotle, from <i>The Poetics</i> 123-131 Due: Performance Group preferences
	W	8/29	<b>Oedipus Rex</b> To Read: Sophocles, <i>Oedipus the King</i> 69-89
	F	8/31	<b>Oedipus Rex</b>

3	M	9/3	<b>Labor Day—No Class</b>
	W	9/5	<b>From Classical to Medieval: The Surviving Tradition</b> To Read: Intro to Medieval Theatre 205-212 Horace “Ars Poetica”**** Anon. “Quaem Queritis”****
	F	9/7	<b>The Wakefield Cycle</b> To Read: Anon. <i>The Wakefield Second Shepherd’s Play</i> 232-243
4	M	9/10	<b>The Wakefield Cycle</b>
	W	9/12	<b>Anti-Theatricality: Dark Ages to the Media Age</b> To Read: Anti-Theatrical Readings *** Sir Philip Sydney, From <i>Apology for Poetry</i> 359-360
	F	9/14	<b>The Renaissance Stage</b> To Read: Intro to Renaissance England, 213-231
5	M	9/17	<b>Doctor Faustus</b> To read: Christopher Marlowe, <i>Doctor Faustus</i> Acts 1-3, 255-271
	W	9/19	<b>Doctor Faustus</b> To read: Christopher Marlowe, <i>Doctor Faustus</i> Acts 4-5, 271-281
	F	9/21	<b>Doctor Faustus</b>  ***Group One Performs!***
6	M	9/24	<b>Doctor Faustus</b>
	W	9/26	<b>Draft Workshop</b> Due: Complete Draft of Critical Paper
	F	9/28	<b>Early Modern Theatre</b> To Read: Introduction to Early Modern Europe 371-382 Behn, Preface to “The Lucky Chance” *** Due: Paper #1
7	M	10/1	<b>The Rover</b> To Read: Aphra Behn, “The Rover” Acts I-III 464-483
	W	10/3	<b>The Rover</b> To Read: Aphra Behn, “The Rover” Acts IV-V 483-498
	F	10/5	<b>Le Midterm</b>
8	M	10/8	<b>Oscar Wilde and the Beginnings of Modern Drama</b> To Read: Introduction to Modern European Theatre to 1950, 523-531 Oscar Wilde: Preface to <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> ****
	W	10/10	<b>The Importance of Being Earnest</b> To Read: Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> , 596-617
	F	10/12	<b>The Importance of Being Earnest</b>  ***GROUP 2 Performs!***
9	M	10/15	<b>Contemporary Drama and the Theatre of the Absurd</b> To Read: Introduction to Modern European Theatre since 1950, 535-544) Martin Esslin, from <i>The Theatre of the Absurd</i> Samuel Beckett, <i>Endgame</i> , 786-809

	W	10/17	<b>Endgame</b> To Read: <i>Endgame</i> , again. Seriously. Start over and try it again.
	F	10/19	<b>Endgame</b>  ***Group 3 Performs!***
10	M	10/22	<b>Postcolonial Theatre; African Theatre</b> To Read: Introduction to World Stages, 1315-1318, “Nigeria” section 1334-1335, 1340-1341 Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, “The Language of African Theatre”**** Andrew Byam, “Communal Space and Performance in Africa”***** Homi Babha, “Of Mimicry and Man” 1616-1619 Gilbert and Thompkins, from <i>PostColonial Drama</i> 1620-1627 Schechner, on ritual*****
	W	10/24	<b>Death and The King’s Horseman</b> To Read: Wole Soyinka, <i>Death and the King’s Horseman</i> , 1383-1407
	F	10/26	<b>Death and The King’s Horseman</b>
11	M	10/29	<b>Political Theatre</b> To Read: Bertolt Brecht, “Theatre for Pleasure of Theatre for Instruction” 938-941 Brecht, “Street Scene”***** Brecht, <u>any single scene</u> from <i>Mother Courage</i> , 725-753
	W	10/31	<b>Cloud 9</b> To Read: Caryl Churchill, <i>Cloud 9</i> , Act I 842-859 (See note on explicit content, above)
		11/2	<b>Cloud 9</b> To Read: Caryl Churchill, <i>Cloud 9</i> , Act II 859-870
12	M	11/5	<b>Cloud 9</b>  ***Group 4 Performs!***
	W	11/7	<b>Draft Workshop</b> Due: Complete Draft of Director’s Paper
	F	11/9	<b>Theatre and Confrontation</b> To Read: Tony Kushner, “The Art of the Difficult” **** Antonin Artaud, from <i>The Theatre and its Double</i> , 941-946 Due: Director’s Paper
13	M	11/12	<b>Blasted</b> To Read: Sarah Kane, <i>Blasted</i> 871-887 (See note on explicit content, above)
	W	11/14	<b>Blasted</b>
	F	11/16	<b><u>Class Canceled</u></b> Take a break after <i>Blasted</i> !
<b><u>11/19-11/25 Thanksgiving Break</u></b>			
14	M	11/26	<b>American Theatre</b> To Read: Introduction to American Theatre, 969-981

	W	11/28	<b><i>Fires In the Mirror</i></b> To Read: Anna Deavere Smith, <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> (942-972)
	F	11/30	<b><i>Fires In the Mirror</i></b> To Read: Ryan Claycomb, “(Ch)Oral History” *****
15	M	12/3	<b><i>Fires In the Mirror</i></b>  <b>***Group 5 Performs!***</b>
	W	12/5	<b><i>Fires In the Mirror</i></b>
	F	12/7	<b>Exam Review</b>
16			<b><u>FINAL EXAMNATION</u></b>