

Fall 8-15-2005

## ENG 3606-001: High Society Modern Drama

Christopher Wixson  
*Eastern Illinois University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english\\_syllabi\\_fall2005](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2005)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wixson, Christopher, "ENG 3606-001: High Society Modern Drama" (2005). *Fall 2005*. 116.  
[http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english\\_syllabi\\_fall2005/116](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2005/116)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2005 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2005 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).



The complexity of these plays in terms of language, style, and thematics makes this course both reading and thinking intensive. It has a demanding assignment schedule that necessitates time and planning in order to pass this course. Because we will often be reading two plays a week, use the days between our meeting Wednesday night and the following Monday wisely; accordingly I suggest reading carefully and taking good notes on Monday's play before the weekend, leaving Saturday through Wednesday to read the second play. Despite its class size, we will try to run the course as a seminar. As such, energetic, careful, and continuous attention the course is required for every participant. I expect everyone to attend every class and to be prepared to discuss the assigned readings in detail and in depth and to write briefly and reasonably intelligently on them without notice. The format of each class will be relatively fluid, changing with regard to the material, my ideas, and your interests. Most sessions will begin with a short presentation by me, giving background on the play (not the playwright which should not be central to our conversations). As such, this course should **focus** primarily on **you**, your questions, and impressions. Remember this is not MY class but ours.

### Learning Outcomes

1. To write expository and persuasive papers in which paragraphs, sentences, and words develop a central idea that responds to reading of modern drama.
2. To read drama expressing a wide range of cultural perspectives and values and to think critically and write analytically about them.
3. To engage in reading and writing experiences about literature so as to establish a foundation for continued social, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic discovery and appreciation.

### Course Policies

#### Attendance

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Monday and Wednesday. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in discussion. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, frequent absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Thus, your regular attendance is expected; be advised that exams and paper topics will draw heavily from material discussed in class. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. **More than two unexcused absences will result in your term grade being lowered by a third for each session missed beyond two.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do not get in touch asking "for the assignment" or a "rundown of what you missed." My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class.

**\*\*If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.**

### **Late papers**

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a "0."** However, in order to pass the course, you must turn in all assignments. Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

### **Plagiarism**

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Judicial Affairs Office.

### **Class Participation**

You should come to class *prepared to talk* about the reading for that day. Each class session will be a mixture of informal lecture and discussion; thus, your own questions and comments about the plays are essential to the success of the course. You will also need to have completed the assigned reading (of the play and of the "Notes Conference") and (when noted) your typed "seed paper." Reading quizzes may happen to ensure the quality of our discussions, especially if they lag. Class participation means that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually AND that you work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and success. (This might mean, for example, moving from merely your position during class discussion to striving to promote dialogue between yourself and other students). I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.

### **If you plan on doing either of the following things, you should probably drop this class:**

1. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence by saying you are 'just the type of person who likes to sit back and listen to what everyone else has to say.' Certainly, listening is a premium in this class and is a crucial human skill. But real listening only happens in an exchange. Letting everyone else do the talking means that you're not really listening because you are busy keeping yourself safe. Of course, this 'safety' is an illusion.
2. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence because you assume that you don't know enough to participate in class and other people (especially those who talk) do. To approach the class and the work in a way that suggests that one can speak only about what is already known is not only dangerous, but it's also intellectually lazy.

### **Email**

You should get into the habit of checking your email daily for a couple reasons. There will be a class list on which I will post changes in assignments (if they arise), course-related announcements, and ideas that expand upon what happens or will happen in class. This list is also a great way for all of us to interact outside of class; that is to say, if you have a question or query (dramatic in nature), the miracle of technology offers us a way to discuss and address it. We will also conduct a "Notes Conference" of sorts via this list so, even if you are not required

to write to it, you are expected to read what others have sent and part of preparation for each class session is reading anything sent to the list.

The "Notes Conference" serves as a preparation for class discussion--a "pre-talking" analogous to the "pre-writing" or "free-writing" that I hope you'll do for your papers. Free writing allows you to let your thoughts wander, permitting liberties, lapses, and discoveries that wouldn't be possible in a finished, formal paper. Like a formal paper, classroom discussions set limits on what you can say (You can't get a word in edgewise because the guy across the room is monopolizing the discussion; the professor ignores your hand; by the time you've formulated your brilliant idea, the discussion has moved on to a whole new topic). "Pre-talking" on the notes conference will allow you to speak your mind (or, more accurately, to "write" your mind) without these frustrating limitations. Remember that the notes conference is a conversation in writing, not a solo performance.

You will each have unlimited opportunities to participate in the notes conference by emailing the class email list any time you wish (which counts as class participation). However, you are mandated to be the "initiator" once and the "respondent" (on a different play) once during the semester. Beyond these two instances, if you send questions or respond to other's questions on three other plays, you will receive extra credit. Your assigned days are as follows:

	Initiator / Respondent	
A-D	8/29	10/17
E-J	10/17	10/24
K-O	10/24	8/29
P-S	9/12	10/3
T-Z	10/3	9/12

As the "initiator," you will read the assigned texts and post 2 clear, concise questions designed to stimulate thought, discussion, and controversy. You should frame these questions with a few sentences of insight (why you find the question valuable, how you see it playing out in the play etc.) so that your contribution amounts to an *interesting* paragraph or two. Questions must be sent by midnight *two* calendar days before "Notes Conference/Response" appears on the syllabus. It is VERY important to plan ahead and not leave writing to the last minute, especially considering that technology issues arise frequently.

As a "respondent," your goal is not to produce expertly crafted individual treatises, but to develop the facility to think, respond, and communicate in writing. Your contributions can and should be informal, spontaneous, informed, and impassioned. Don't worry about typos. Do worry about supporting all your points with examples from the texts. Keep in mind though that we should be engaged in dialogue, not merely posting in isolation. Read your classmates' responses and endorse, contradict, or build upon them. Your responses are due by *10 a.m.* on the day when "Notes Conference/Response" appears on the syllabus.

## Conferences

I am regularly available to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or by appointment. To make an appointment, speak to me after class or contact me via email.

## Grading

2 Papers	40%	<u>Woyzeck</u> Project	10%
2 Seed Papers:	10%	Participation ("NC")	5%
Final Exam	15%	Participation (class)	10%
Performance	10%		

\*\*You must complete all written assignments and exams to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.

## Shorter Written Assignments

\*Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called "seed papers" in which you pose a productive question which relates to the inquiry issues of the course about the text and then attempt to answer it. You will be asked to present your questions in class. However, you will be required to write **two** seed essays total that may explore issues of character, style, language, symbolism in props or setting, and/or thematic point. *No* late seed papers will be accepted.

\*A short paper on Woyzeck

### Other assignments:

\*Two critical papers (5-7 pages) that focus on a particular issue that has provoked, challenged, or disturbed your thinking during the course and can be generated from seed papers. Writing guidelines will be handed out in advance.

\*Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion --- defined as TALKING productively.

\*Group Presentation

\*Performance Assignment

\*Final Exam

## Performance Requirement:

We are lucky enough to have two campus productions this semester that relate to our course, Cole! and The Little Foxes. You will be required to attend and write on at least one of these shows. If there is interest and another production close by, extra credit opportunities may arise to travel to them as a group. Details to follow as the dates get closer.

## Schedule of Assignments

THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AT ANY TIME ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE CLASS. MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS BRING IT WITH YOU FOR MODIFICATION.

August            22    Introductory Comments  
                     24    Modernism(s) / "Feet" and "Detonation" (handouts) / Seed Paper Due (All)

### Unit One: The Voyage Out

                     29    Ibsen's A Doll's House (Notes Conference / .Response)  
                     31    Ibsen's Rosmersholm

September       5    NO CLASS – HAPPY LABOR DAY!  
                     7    Wilde's A Woman of No Importance Seed Paper E-J

                     12    Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession (Notes Conference / Response)  
                     14    Chekhov's Uncle Vanya

                     19    Barrie's Peter Pan  
                     21    Hankin's The Return of the Prodigal

                     26    Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest video  
                     28    **Paper #1 Due** – Earnest video/discussion

October            3    Coward's Private Lives (Notes Conference / Response)  
                     5    Coward's Blithe Spirit (Notes Conference / Response)

                     10    Coward's Shadow Play (handout) Seed paper T-Z  
                     12    Cole Porter (handouts)

**\*\*Cole!** at the Village Theater, October 14-18<sup>th</sup>

                     17    Glaspell's The Verge (Notes Conference / Response)  
                     19    The Verge Seed Paper P-S

                     24    Hellman's The Little Foxes (Notes Conference / Response)  
                     26    Foxes Seed paper A-D

### Unit Two: Things Fall Apart

November        31    Buchner's Woyzeck  
                     2    Woyzeck Group Meetings

                     7    Woyzeck project due / presentations

9 Woyzeck presentations / video

\*\*Little Foxes at the Village Theater, November 11-15<sup>th</sup>

14 O'Neill's Emperor Jones (video) / Childs 118-20 "Expressionism"

16 **Paper #2 Due / Abstract Presentation**

#### THANKSGIVING BREAK

28 Chekhov's The Seagull

30 The Seagull Seed Paper K-O

December 5 Beckett's "Breath", "Play", and "Come and Go" (video)

7 Final Exam Preparation and Review

\*\*Final exam date: Wednesday, December 15 / 12:30-2:30

#### **Modernism--A Working Definition**

---

Modernism is a cultural movement that rebelled against Victorian mores, a culture that emphasized nationalism and cultural absolutism. Victorians placed humans over and outside of nature. They believed in a single way of looking at the world, and in absolute and clear-cut dichotomies between right and wrong, good and bad, and hero and villain. Further, they saw the world as being governed by God's will, and that each person and thing in this world had a specific use. Finally, they saw the world as neatly divided between "civilized" and "savage" peoples. According to Victorians, the "civilized" were those from industrialized nations, cash-based economies, Protestant Christian traditions, and patriarchal societies; the "savage" were those from agrarian or hunter-gatherer tribes, barter-based economies, "pagan" or "totemistic" traditions, and matriarchal (or at least "unmanly" societies).

In contrast, Modernists rebelled against Victorian ideals. Blaming Victorianism for such evils as slavery, racism, and imperialism--and later for World War I--Modernists emphasized humanism over nationalism, and argued for cultural relativism. Modernists emphasized the ways in which humans were part of and responsible to nature. They argued for multiple ways of looking at the world, and blurred the Victorian dichotomies by presenting antiheroes, uncategorizable persons, and anti-art movements like Dada. Further, they challenged the idea that God played an active role in the world, which led them to challenge the Victorian assumption that there was meaning and purpose behind world events. Instead, Modernists argued that no thing or person was born for a specific use; instead, they found or made their own meaning in the world. Challenging the Victorian dichotomy between "civilized" and "savage," Modernists reversed the values associated with each kind of culture. Modernists presented the Victorian "civilized" as greedy and warmongering (instead of being industrialized nations and cash-based economies), as hypocrites (rather than Christians), and as enemies of freedom and self-realization (instead of good patriarchs). Those that the Victorians had dismissed (and subjugated) as "savages" the Modernists saw as being the truly civilized--responsible users of their environments, unselfish and family-oriented, generous, creative, mystical and full of wonder, and egalitarian. These "savages," post-WWI Modernists pointed out, did not kill millions with mustard gas, machine-guns, barbed wire, and genocidal starvation.

---

---Dr. Catherine Lavender, The City University of New York,