

Fall 8-15-2003

## ENG 3606-001: Modern Drama

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**ENGLISH 3606 – MODERN DRAMA**

Fall 2003 / Section 001  
 MWF 11-11:50 AM  
 Coleman Hall 3160

Dr. Chris Wixson  
 Coleman Hall 3015  
 Office Hours: 8-10:00 MW  
 (Or by appointment)

Required Textbooks: *Masters of Modern Drama*, ed. Haskell Block  
                                   (*Emperor Jones, The Bald Soprano, The Seagull*)  
*Eight Plays*, Henrik Ibsen (*Rosmersholm, A Doll House*)  
*The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar Wilde  
*Private Lives*, Noel Coward  
*Theater of the Avant-Garde* (selections)  
*Four Plays*, Shaw Festival (*Peter Pan*)

E-Reserve                    *The Verge*, Susan Glaspell  
                                   *Misalliance*, George Bernard Shaw  
                                   *The Blind*, Maurice Maeterlinck

Required Supplies:    A notebook and a folder for notes, handouts, and in-class work

**Course Philosophy**

*[The study of literature can provide us with] a clue to how we live, how  
 we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our  
 language has trapped as well as liberated us.*  
 -Adrienne Rich

This course surveys modern dramatic literature with the aims of sharpening appreciation for the art form and using great plays as an opportunity to engage cultural, existential, and personal issues. The selection of primary texts will be wide-ranging to represent a number of different dramatic forms and perspectives, from the canonical "greats" of the period (Ibsen, Shaw, and Chekhov) to playwrights not ordinarily grouped with them (J.M. Barrie, Susan Glaspell, and Noel Coward) as well as avant-garde artists. Because of time constrictions, the course will only cover the period to around 1950. Our thematic inquiry will be focused around social and sexual politics and the role of theater in constructing and mediating these dynamics. We will consider these issues as they affect and are affected by factors of gender, race, class, genre, and style. The course approaches these plays as both literary \*and\* theatrical texts, discussing not only their political, historical, and modern implications but also their potential for acting, directorial, and technical choices. Toward that end, we will also be analyzing videotaped productions as well as live performances whenever possible.

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. Due to its class size, we will 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. The first meeting on each text will be grounded by the presentations of short papers while the remaining meetings will rely primarily on discussion and the occasional informal lecture. 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, Wednesday, and Friday. 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 three unexcused absences will result in your term grade being lowered by a third for each session missed beyond three.** 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.”** 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). We will discuss how to avoid it. 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 and (when noted) your typed "seed paper." Reading quizzes may happen relatively frequently to ensure the quality of our discussions. Your class participation grade includes attendance, active contributions in class and in small group work. 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. (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 any 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.
3. Complaining when everyone does talk that it's a waste of time and inefficient. Or remaining so married to ways you have been taught in other courses and disciplines that you see as 'tangent' any meaningful, principled discussion that doesn't necessarily mention the word "theme" or "symbolism." Just because the normative educational culture of a nation afraid more than anything else that its students will learn to think divides classroom activity into binaries of 'on-task' and 'off-task' doesn't mean that that is a useful or even humane way of doing things.

### **Email**

You should get into the habit of checking your email daily. There will be a class list on which I will post changes in assignments (if they arise), course-related announcements, and ideas which expand upon what happens 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.

## 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%	Creative / Scholarly	10%
Seed Papers/Quizzes:	10%	Participation (email/class)	20%
Final Exam	20%		

**\*\*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 and conduct class discussion with your question once during the semester. 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.

## Other assignments:

\*Two critical papers (4-5 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.

\*EITHER a creative activity (in this case, a staged reading of Maeterlinck’s The Blind)  
OR scholarly bibliographical assignment, depending on desires of the class

\*Final Exam

**Extra Credit Opportunities:** Unfortunately, as of now, I am not aware of any local theater doing a production of any of our plays. However, if there is interest, I will be organizing a trip later this term (late October or early November) to the Krannert Performing Arts Center at the U of I to see Moses Kaufman's award-winning play entitled Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde. This compelling drama focuses on one of the most important modern playwrights (we will be reading his masterpiece The Importance of Being Earnest) and engages a number of our key critical issues. Extra credit involves attending the performance and writing a short evaluative review (an assignment sheet will be forthcoming). In addition, EIU's theater department is doing a theatrical version of James Joyce's The Dead that promises much relevance to our course. 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	25	Introductory Comments
	27	Modern, Modernism, and Jack the Ripper
	29	Krutch's <u>The Modern Temper</u> introduction (handout)

#### Unit One: The Voyage Out

September	1	NO CLASS – HAPPY LABOR DAY!
	3	Ibsen's <u>A Doll's House</u> Seed paper due
	5	<u>A Doll's House</u>
	8	Ibsen's <u>Rosmersholm</u> Seed paper due
	10	<u>Rosmersholm</u>
	12	<u>Rosmersholm</u>
	15	Glaspell's <u>The Verge</u> Seed paper due
	17	<u>The Verge</u>
	19	<u>The Verge</u>
	22	Coward's <u>Private Lives</u> Seed paper due
	24	<u>Private Lives</u>
	26	<u>Private Lives</u>
	29	Shaw's <u>Misalliance</u> Seed paper due
October	1	<u>Misalliance</u>
	3	<u>Misalliance</u>
	6	Barrie's <u>Peter Pan</u> Seed paper due
	8	<u>Peter Pan</u>
	10	<u>Peter Pan</u>

- 13 Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest video
- 15 **Paper #1 Due** – Earnest video
- 17 NO CLASS – HAPPY FALL BREAK!

**Unit Two: Things Fall Apart**

- 20 Chekhov's The Seagull Seed paper due
- 22 The Seagull
- 24 The Seagull
  
- 27 Vitrac's The Mysteries of Love Seed paper due
- 29 The Mysteries of Love
- 31 The Mysteries of Love
  
- November 3 O'Neill's Emperor Jones Seed paper due
- 5 Cardullo, pp. 195-200 -- "Genius and Culture" / "Detonation" / "Feet"  
Seed paper due
- 7 Maeterlinck's The Blind
  
- 10 The Blind
- 12 The Blind
- 14 The Blind
  
- 17 The Blind
- 19 The Blind
- 21 **Paper #2 Due**

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- December 1 Beckett short works (handout)
- 3 Stein short works (handout)
- 5 Ionesco's "The Bald Soprano"
  
- 8 "The Bald Soprano"
- 10 Final Exam Preparation
- 12 Final Exam Review

\*\*Final exam date TBA.

## Modernism--A Working Definition

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Modernism is a cultural movement which rebelled against Victorian mores. As we have discussed in class, Victorian culture 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.

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*Prepared by Professor Catherine Lavender for Honors 502 (The American Experience--Social Sciences), The Honors College of The College of Staten Island of The City University of New York, Fall Semester 1998. Send email to [lavender@postbox.csi.cuny.edu](mailto:lavender@postbox.csi.cuny.edu)*