ENG 3606-001: Modern Drama

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Recommended Citation
Wixson, Chris, "ENG 3606-001: Modern Drama" (2012). Fall 2012. 97.
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English 3606: Modern Drama
fall 2012 / Section 001

Dr. Chris Wixson

syllabus

The starting point of Modernism is the crisis of belief that pervades twentieth-century western culture: loss of faith, experience of fragmentation and disintegration, and the shattering of cultural symbols and norms. -Susan Friedman

course philosophy

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. Because of time constrictons, the course will only cover the period to around 1950. After exploring two plays written by the enormously influential Henrik Ibsen, we will proceed to mainly early modern English and Irish plays and how they negotiate issues of gender, class, race, Modernism, and desire. After midterm, we will explore the work of Russian, Hungarian, American, and German playwrights. 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. Because of 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. 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 provide opportunities for reading and appreciating complex and challenging literary works for the insight they provide about the cultures that produced them as well as our own.

2. To allow each member of the class to engage with the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing and class discussion.

3. To assist in the development of skills of critical thinking, interpretive analysis, and argumentative writing.

course texts

*Chekhov: Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim
*Plays*, Oscar Wilde
*Plays*, George Bernard Shaw
*Trifles and The Verge*, Susan Glaspell
*Breath and Come and Go*, Samuel Beckett

*Eight Plays*, Henrik Ibsen
*Three Plays*, Noel Coward
*Four Plays*, Eugene Ionesco
*Woyzeck*, Georg Buchner
*The Stronger and Mother Love*, August Strindberg
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Office Hours (no office phone):
assignments
* Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called "seed papers" in which you pose a productive question grounded in a specific passage and relates to the inquiry issues of the course about the text and then attempt to answer it. You may be asked to present and conduct class discussion with your question. Because these papers are primarily for discussion, no late seed papers will be accepted.

* A critical paper that is engaged, engaging, original, and articulate. Writing guidelines will be handed out.

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

* A short Performance paper. We are lucky enough to have a campus productions this term of our two Strindberg plays. You will be required to attend and write on these shows. Details to follow.

* A Midterm and a Final Exam

**WARNING: The intellectual pre-writing work for these assignments will be challenging and time-consuming.

final grades
Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Five Seed Papers 20%
One Larger Critical Paper 20%
Performance Paper 10%
Midterm Exam 15%
Final Exam 15%
In-class Writings/ Woyzeck Project / Active Participation 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.

attendance
Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday morning. 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, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session - you are allowed two unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After two, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by half a letter. Six unexcused absences will result in a "O" for participation. More than seven unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful. 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. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.
class participation
Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities; You should come to class prepared to talk about the reading for that day. Participation in a college-level course means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. Because of the seminar size of this course, you should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials. 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). Reading quizzes may happen relatively frequently to ensure the quality of our discussions.

Coming to class and saying you are "frustrated" with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. These texts are demanding but rewarding; while there will be frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

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.

For our collaborative endeavor to succeed, there are three preconditions that must be met: everyone must have done the reading and done it critically and carefully; everyone must be willing to take intellectual risks and be open to uncertainty; and everyone must be willing to engage respectfully. Although I'm likely to talk a lot (that's my character), I won't give lectures, and the content and direction of the class is largely in your hands. In other words, I will serve as a resource and guide and occasionally cranky curmudgeon, but it's your class to shape and energize. Individually and collectively, this course carries with it a responsibility to drive the inquiry and conversation. As a consequence, class participation will count for a major part of your grade.

class preparation
In addition to your written assignments, what else you bring to share need not be written out (although you may be asked to do so) but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic. Come to class with an agenda. That means coming with lucrative questions that you think the texts are asking with their form and content, not simply questions you have about the texts. Besides preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what other seminarians share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to promote dialogue between yourself and your colleagues. I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.

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 "O." Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.
cell phone and computer use
You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. You may not check email, news, or box scores, surf the web, use chat applications, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with technological devices.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner: turn them off when you come in to class. If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. Under no conditions are you allowed to text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

academic integrity
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 Student Standards Office.

special needs and situations
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.
**Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you bring it to each class meeting so as to make the appropriate revisions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 21</td>
<td>Course Introduction / Beckett’s “Breath” (handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 23</td>
<td>Reading Drama and Glaspell’s “Trifles” <em>Short Paper Due (See Prompt Below)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>August 28</td>
<td>Ibsen’s <em>A Doll’s House</em> / Acts One and Two</td>
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<td>August 30</td>
<td>Ibsen’s <em>A Doll’s House</em> / Act Three</td>
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<td>September 4</td>
<td>Ibsen’s <em>Rosmersholm</em></td>
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<td>September 6</td>
<td>Ibsen’s <em>Rosmersholm</em> / <em>Seed #1 due</em></td>
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<td>September 11</td>
<td>Shaw’s <em>Mrs. Warren’s Profession</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 13</td>
<td>Shaw’s <em>Mrs. Warren’s Profession</em> <em>Seed #1 due</em></td>
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<td>September 18</td>
<td>Strindberg’s “The Stronger” and “Mother Love” (handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 20</td>
<td>Wilde’s <em>The Importance of Being Earnest</em></td>
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<td><strong>Attend Strindberg Shorts at Doudna (Black Box) — 21st and 22nd at 7:30 / 23rd at 2:00</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2</td>
<td>Coward’s <em>Private Lives</em> <em>Seed #2 Due</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 4</td>
<td>Coward’s <em>Private Lives / Blithe Spirit</em></td>
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</table>
9 Coward's *Blithe Spirit*

11 Midterm Exam

Unit Two: Things Fall Apart

16 Chekhov's *The Seagull*

18 *The Seagull* / Seed #2 Due

23 *The Seagull*

25 Glaspell's *The Verge* (Gutenberg Project)

30 *The Verge*

November 1 *The Verge* / Seed #3 due

6 Buchner's *Woyzeck*

8 *Woyzeck* / Group Meetings

13 Woyzeck Project Due / Group Presentations

15 *Woyzeck* / Paper Due

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!!!

27 Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*

29 Ionesco's *The Lesson* / Seed #4 Due

December 4 Beckett's "Breath" and "Come and Go," / Seed #5 (Everyone)

6 Conclusion / Evaluation

**Final exam date: Monday, December 10th 10:15-12:15 PM.**
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, CUNY,

SHORT PAPER DUE 8/23 – For Thursday, please write a 2-3 page paper, addressing the following questions: What information about modern drama (and in fact modernity itself) can we gather from the following two avant-garde plays?

"Detonation Synthesis of All Modern Theater" (1915)

By Francesco Cangiullo

Character

A Bullet

Road at night, cold, deserted.

A minute of silence – A gunshot.

Curtain
“Feet” (1915)
By Filippo Marinetti

A curtain edged in black should be raised to about the height of a man’s stomach. The public sees only legs in action. The actors must try to give the greatest expression to the attitudes and movements of their lower extremities.

1.

Two Armchairs (one facing the other)

A Bachelor
A Married Woman

Him: All, all for one of your kisses! . . .
Her: No! . . . Don’t talk to me like that! . . .

2.

A Man Who is Walking Back and Forth

Man: Let’s meditate . . .

3.

A Desk

A Seated Man Who is Nervously Moving His Right Foot

Seated Man: I must find . . . To cheat, without letting myself cheat!

3A.

A Man Who is Walking Slowly with Gouty Feet

A Man Who is Walking Rapidly

The Rapid One: Hurry! Vile passeiste!**
The Slow One: Ah! What fury! There is no need to run!

**French for “backward-looker”

He who goes slowly is healthy . . .
4.

Three Women
One: Which one do you prefer?
Another: All three of them.

A Couch

Three Officials
One: Which one do you prefer?
Another: The second one...

(The second one must be the woman who shows the most leg of the three.)

5.

A Table

A Father
A Bachelor
A Young Girl

The Father: When you have the degree you will marry your cousin.

6.

A Pedal-Operated Sewing Machine

A Girl Who is Working

The Girl: I will see him on Sunday!

7.

A Man Who is Running Away
A Foot That is Kicking at Him

The Man Who is Giving the Kick: Imbecile!