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ENG 4752-001: Drama and Trauma

Chris Wixson
Eastern Illinois University

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ENGLISH 4752 – DRAMA AND TRAUMA

Spring 2004 / Section 001
MWF 9-9:50 PM
Coleman Hall 3160

Dr. Chris Wixson
Coleman Hall 3015
Office Hours: 11-1:00 MWF
(Or by appointment)

Required Textbooks:  Suddenly, Last Summer, Tennessee Williams
Ashes to Ashes, Harold Pinter
Blasted, Cleansed Sarah Kane
Closer, Patrick Marber
Death and the Maiden, Ariel Dorfman
Mary Rose, J.M. Barrie
Five Lectures, Sigmund Freud

E-Reserve:  The Secret Life. Harley Granville Barker

Handouts:  The America Play, Suzan-Lori Parks
Oleanna, David Mamet
“The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity”,
Lawrence L. Langer
“Women and Madness” Shoshonna Fellman
“Pain and Imagining”, Elaine Scarry

Films: Titus, Juliet Taymor

Productions:  The Goat, Station Theatre, Champaign
The Glass Menagerie, EIU Village Theater, Charleston

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

Course Description

Wounded psyches, emotional shocks, and damaged goods --- the stuff that great drama is made of. Playwrights struggle with how to represent their characters’ personal, professional, and cultural disasters, and simultaneously provide us with ways of understanding, explaining, and avoiding catastrophe ourselves. How has trauma been represented on the stage? How do playwrights use elements of dramatic time, space, genre, and language to explore the ways in which trauma fractures our understandings of ourselves, our culture, and our existence? The course will study plays by canonical playwrights such as William Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Harold Pinter. Since we will also include equally brilliant but lesser known contemporary playwrights such as Patrick Marber, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Sarah Kane, be advised that some of the plays will contain language and subject material that, while understood as a viable political strategy in modern realism, may be unexpected and traumatizing in and of themselves.

Our course will be grounded in a number of traumatic historical events that will require some understanding, including World War One, the Holocaust, the African-American
experience, and assorted acts of atrocities and military conflicts around the world. We will begin with some trauma theory and a discussion of Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus to lay the foundation for the semester’s inquiry. We will be discussing issues of gender, race, sexuality, class, nation, and existence. 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. 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 significant dramatic texts.

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 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 participation 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. 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 a '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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seed Papers/Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper (Final Exam)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation (email/class)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Component</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**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 question for discussion. Topics should be anything you feel is significant to bring to the class’ attention and 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.

*Historical Context Presentation

*Performance Component

*Final Paper

Graduate Students: In addition to the above assignments, you will be required to complete an independent research project (due the last week of the course) on a topic to be developed in close consultation with me. This project (12-15 pages in length) will count as “Critical paper #2”. You
will present your research/paper to the rest of the class during the week of April 26th. I strongly encourage you to bring interests and expertise in other genres and critical contexts to your work in this course. You will need to meet with me before March 1st to discuss your topic; I will handout an assignment sheet outlining the parameters a few weeks into the term as well.

**Performance Component:** Since this is a course in drama, one requirement is to attend one of two local theatrical productions. The first will be a trip early this term to the Station Theater in Champaign’s production of Edward Albee’s *The Goat* (January 22-February 7). One of the most highly acclaimed of recent American plays, the traumatic experience of witnessing a performance of *The Goat* will connect to many of our class discussions. You will need to write a 2-3 page account of your experience seeing it. (While it contains no nudity, *The Goat* contains strong language and mature subject matter.) The second opportunity is the EIU production of Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* that promises much relevance to our course as well. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Introductory Comments</td>
<td>2 Williams’ “Suddenly, Last Summer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Winterson’s “Art Objects” (handout)</td>
<td>4 “Summer” and Fellman essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Scarry’s “Pain and Imagining”/ Shakespeare’s <em>Titus Andronicus</em> (handout)</td>
<td>6 “Summer”</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY</td>
<td>9 Mamet’s “Oleanna”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Freud’s first and second lectures</td>
<td>11 Mamet’s “Oleanna”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Freud’s third, fourth, and fifth lectures</td>
<td>13 NO CLASS – LINCOLN’S BIRTHDAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Pinter’s <em>Ashes to Ashes</em></td>
<td>16 Abstract Presentations / <strong>Critical Paper #1 Due</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 <em>Ashes</em> and handouts (Langer essay)</td>
<td>18 Dorfman’s <em>Death and the Maiden</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 <em>Ashes</em></td>
<td>20 <em>Maiden</em> (film)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 <em>Maiden</em> (film)</td>
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March

1

Parks’ The America Play

3

The America Play

5

The America Play

8

Case Study: WWI / Presentation

10

Barrie’s Mary Rose

12

Mary Rose Seed Paper B, C, M

HAPPY SPRING BREAK!!!!!!

April

2

Kane’s Blasted

5

Blasted Seed Paper C

7

Blasted

9

Abstract Presentations (Undergraduates) / Second Critical Paper Due

12

Kane’s Cleansed

14

Cleansed Seed Paper B

16

Cleansed

19

Closer Act One

21

Closer – Seed Paper M, H, T

23

Closer

26

Project Presentations (Graduate Students)

28

Project Presentations (Graduate Students)

30

Final paper discussed / course evaluations