

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 3666F
American Drama: American Drama from the Playwright's Perspective
Fall 2015

Location: AHB-2R21

Time: Tuesdays, 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM;
Thursdays, 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

TA: Andrew Verboom

Email: averboom@uwo.ca

Office: AHB 2G28S; Office Hours: TBA

Instructor: George Ramos

Email: rramos2@uwo.ca

Office: AHB 2G28K

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30 - 2:30 PM;
Wednesdays, 1:30 - 3:30 PM;
and by appointment**Prerequisites**

Antirequisite: English 2460F/G. Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or both of English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

The course considers American drama from the period of the Great Depression to the present, the major themes it confronts, the artistic trends that emerge from it, and the historical and cultural contexts that determine it. Instead of treating dramatic texts as prose pieces consisting of series of dialogue lines, stage directions, and monologues, students are invited to analyze the material from a playwriting or dramaturgical perspective. Students use elements of dramatic style and technique utilized by the playwright, director, and actor (dramatic action, dramatic objective, conflict, tactics, obstacles, inciting event, previous action, tension, etc.) as tools for close reading.

Special emphasis is given to playwriting. Students will be divided into several groups or "companies." During the semester, the companies will prepare style analyses of particular plays in the syllabus, and, using these documents as bases, write short original one-act or multi-scene imitations. The student companies will then workshop their plays in class (i.e., the plays are informally performed/ produced, and the company members are given feedback). These workshop performances/ productions can range from simple staged readings (i.e., actors read from scripts with limited movement or none at all) to fuller minimalist productions with greater, but limited, degrees of polish. Each company will workshop two or three original imitations during the semester, and the roles of playwright, director, actor, production designer, dramaturge, etc. will rotate amongst the company members. While students are encouraged to try a range of roles during the course of the semester, neither taking on the role of the company playwright nor submitting an original imitation as a Shorter Written Assignment (see Methods of Evaluation) is required. Prior to their workshops, companies should be prepared to meet as a group outside of class hours for short periods of time for discussion, preparation, and rehearsal.

By writing plays inspired by the specific dramatic approaches of the playwrights they select and by helping bring these plays to life, students will be able to intensively engage with both the formal and thematic aspects of the materials. Some students will also get the opportunity to directly interact with one of the dramatists covered in the syllabus, Joe Sutton, a Pulitzer Prize nominee. He will answer questions from students electronically about his play *Voir Dire*. As a whole, the course explores the significance of the different ways American playwrights have used dramatic conflict as a strategy with which to process the profound cultural and historical struggles that concern such issues as race, gender, patriarchy, religion, politics, capitalism, and national identity.

Course Objectives

Successful students who complete the course will be better able to:

- Insightfully and persuasively analyze dramatic texts by using elements of dramatic style and technique (dramatic action, dramatic objective, conflict, tactics, obstacles, inciting event, tension, previous action, etc.) as tools for close reading
- Write, perform in, and/or help produce short, theatrically viable, original imitations in order to better understand the formal and thematic aspects of the plays in the syllabus
- Communicate analysis clearly and compellingly in written assignments and during class discussion
- Collaborate effectively with other group/ company members
- Enjoy the experience of American Theatre from both critical and creative perspectives

Course Materials

Plays (Required):

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (1938)

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (1953)

Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962)

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* (1964)

David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* (1991)

Joe Sutton, *Voir Dire* (1995)

Suzan-Lori Parks, *Venus* (1996)

Lynn Nottage, *Ruined* (2008)

Playwriting Text (Required):

David Ball. *Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983. Print.

On Reserve at Weldon (Supplementary):

Catron, Louis E. *Playwriting: Writing, Producing, and Selling Your Play*. Long Grove: Waveland, 1984. Print.

Hodge, Francis and Michael McLain. *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*. 7th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2010. Print.

Stanislavski, Konstantin. *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*. Trans. and ed. Jean Benedetti. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Methods of Evaluation

Class Participation and Attendance

10%

Playwriting and Performance Group Work

25% or 30%*

(See course description. Students will also maintain informal creative and critical journals that demonstrate their specific contributions to their company's work. Evaluation is based on the overall effort of each company's productions to achieve the pertinent course objectives. However, each student's participation as an individual artist-critic will also be a factor. In other words, each company will receive a single group mark for each workshop performance, but if there is evidence that a student has not sufficiently contributed to a company's workshop performance, that student's Individual grade for that performance will be decreased accordingly. See the attendance policy as well.)

Shorter Written Assignment

(individual work due by the third class meeting after the first or second group workshop; will be evaluated as a minor part of the Playwriting and Performance Group Work; choose one of the three options below):

- **An Original Imitation** (15-30 minutes): a short one-act or multi-scene play script that emulates two or more of the stylistic or dramaturgical aspects of one of the dramatic texts in the syllabus. Students who have served as their companies' playwrights may submit an extended or substantially revised version of their workshop plays. Alternatively, students may submit an entirely new work that has not been workshopped.
- **A Style Analysis** (800-1000 words): a short essay that will analyze two or more stylistic or technical elements of one of the plays in the syllabus. It should discuss how these formal elements help the dramatist explore a theme or themes. Students may focus on a certain scene or a selection of scenes. Students who have served as their companies' dramaturges may submit an extended or substantially revised version of their workshop style analyses. Alternatively, students may submit an entirely new work.

OR

- **A Performance/ Production Essay** (800-1000 words): a short essay that analyzes your participation in a workshop imitation play, whether you served as an actor, director, or production designer. It will discuss how your artistic participation utilized two or more elements of dramatic style and technique to help bring the play and its themes to life. Students may compare the student playwright's approach and themes to those of the syllabus dramatist being emulated. The material for this essay must be from a workshop production.

Research Paper (1800-2400 words, due Nov. 24)

25% or 30%*

Final Exam

35%

** For the Playwriting and Performance Group Work and Research Paper requirements, the requirement for which a student receives the higher mark will receive the greater relative weight (25% or 30%). For example, if a student receives an 85% mark for his or her Playwriting and Performance Group Work and 80% for the Research Paper, the Playwriting and Performance Group Work in this student's case will have a relative weight of 30% and the Research Paper, that of 25%.*

Note: 800-1000 words is about 3 pages; 1800-2400 words is about 6-8 pages.

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. If a student earns term and final exam grades that combine to result in a grade of 50% or above, but either the term grade or the final exam grade is a failure, he or she shall receive a default grade of 48% for the entire course. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the office of the registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grad>

Timetable (Tentative)

Unit 1: The American Dream: Economics, Ideology, and National Identity

Sep. 10, Thursday	Introduction
Sep. 15, Tuesday	Wilder, <i>Our Town</i> (1938); Ball 1-31, 76-78, 87-88: Dramatic Action, Tactics, Inciting Event, Obstacles, Conflict, and Theme
Sep. 17, Thursday	Wilder, <i>Our Town</i> (1938)
Sep. 22, Tuesday	Mamet, <i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i> (1983); Ball 32-75, 79-86, 89-96: Tension, Theatricality, Forwards, Previous Action, Polar Attitudes, Climax, Context, Image, and Mood
Sep. 24, Thursday	Mamet, <i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i> (1983)

Unit 2: Gender and Trauma

Sep. 29, Tuesday	Williams, <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> (1947)
Oct. 1, Thursday	Williams, <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> (1947)
	Workshop 1
Oct. 6, Tuesday	Nottage, <i>Ruined</i> (2008)
Oct. 8, Thursday	Nottage, <i>Ruined</i> (2008)
	Workshop 2

Unit 3: Race and Desire

Oct. 13, Tuesday	Jones, <i>Dutchman</i> (1964)
Oct. 15, Thursday	Talk on Writing the Research Paper Company Meetings/ Rehearsals (Instructor away at a conference; TA to lead class)
Oct. 20, Tuesday	Parks, <i>Venus</i> (1996)
Oct. 22, Thursday	Parks, <i>Venus</i> (1996)
	Workshop 3
Oct. 27, Tuesday	Workshop 4
Oct. 29, Thursday	Fall Study Break

Unit 4: Disillusionment and the *Games People Play* (Berne)

Nov. 3, Tuesday	Albee, <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> (1962)
Nov. 5, Thursday	Albee, <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> (1962)
	Workshop 5
Nov. 10, Tuesday	Sutton, <i>Voir Dire</i> (1995)
Nov. 12, Thursday	Workshop 6-7
Nov. 17, Tuesday	Workshop 8
Nov. 19, Thursday	Workshop 9-10
Nov. 24, Tuesday	Workshop 11 Research Paper Due

Unit 5: Politics, Ideology, and National Identity

Nov. 26, Thursday	Miller, <i>The Crucible</i> (1953)
	Workshop 12
Dec. 1, Tuesday	Miller, <i>The Crucible</i> (1953)
Dec. 3, Thursday	Kushner, <i>Angels in America, Part One</i> (1991)
Dec. 8, Tuesday	Kushner, <i>Angels in America, Part One</i> (1991); Exam Review

Submission and Late Policy

Written assignments are due in class on the due date. Students should submit a paper copy and email an electronic one to the course instructor. Students should staple all essay pages together and, for the duration of the term, keep the electronic copies of all their work. The instructor and TA reserve the right to provide only limited specific written feedback, or no feedback at all, besides the mark if a student submits a written assignment late. The last day of scheduled classes will be the last day on which assignments will be accepted for credit.

Attendance

Regular attendance at lectures, and particularly during your company workshop performances/ productions, is essential. Students will sign an attendance sheet at the beginning of each class. Unless you have special permission from the instructor or academic accommodation, you will be penalized 5% of the possible 20% that may be earned from the Playwriting and Performance Group Work for each workshop that you fail to attend wherein your own company performs an imitation. Unless you have special permission from the instructor or academic accommodation, you will be penalized 1% of the possible 20% that may be earned from the Playwriting and Performance Group Work for each workshop that you fail to attend wherein another company performs an imitation. Absenteeism can result in debarment from writing the final examination, which in the Department of English & Writing Studies results in failure of the course.

Computers and Electronic Devices

Students may use laptops during class for note taking purposes only. Please respect your classmates, the instructor, and the learning environment. Recording (audio or video) lectures, discussions, and workshops is prohibited. No student may have any electronic device on his or her person while taking the final exam. Electronic devices and laptops must be kept inside students' bags or jackets, which will all be placed to one side of the final examination room.

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The necessary form and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. (We will be discussing plagiarism later in the term.)

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:
<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.