

LITT 3240: American Drama
Fall 2011
MWF 2:10-3:25
F203

Dr. Deborah Gussman

Office Hours: MWF 1:00-2:00 pm and by appointment

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Course Description and Objectives:

This course examines American theater history as a significant part of American cultural history and considers the ways in which theater has contributed to the construction of an American identity. Representative dramatists from the 19th through the 21st centuries and a range of dramatic styles will be covered, with the emphasis on modern drama. This course intends to familiarize you with the major figures and events in American theatrical history, as well as to introduce some newly recovered and contemporary figures and works. By the end of the term, you should have a clear sense of the significant themes, dramatic styles, and concerns of American dramatists. You should also be able to generalize meaningfully about continuity and change in American drama.

Course Prerequisite: LITT 2123, or permission of instructor.

This is a W2 course.

This course meets the American Literature and 20th/21st century requirement for LITT majors.

Required Texts:

Barlow, Judith E.	<i>Plays by American Women, 1900-1930.</i> Applause Press, 2000
Odets, Clifford	<i>Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays.</i> Grove Press, 1994
Hellman, Lillian	<i>Six Plays by Lillian Hellman.</i> Vintage, 1979
Wilder, Thornton	<i>The Skin of Our Teeth.</i> Harper Perennial, 2003
Miller, Arthur	<i>All My Sons.</i> Penguin, 2000
O'Neill, Eugene	<i>Three Plays.</i> Vintage, 1995
Williams, Tennessee	<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.</i> New Directions, 2004
Hansberry, Lorraine	<i>A Raisin in the Sun.</i> Knopf/Vintage, 2004
Albee, Edward	<i>The American Dream and the Zoo Story.</i> Plume, 1997
Hwang, David H.	<i>M. Butterfly.</i> Plume, 1993
Nottage, Lynn	<i>Ruined.</i> Dramatists Play Service, 2010
Norman, Marsha	<i>Four Plays,</i> Theatre Communications Group, 1993

Additional assigned texts will be available on-line or on Blackboard.

Course Requirements:

(1) Class participation and preparation. You are expected to do the assigned reading, to attend class, and to make informed contributions to class and performance discussions. Absences will be limited to 4. Each absence beyond the 4th will result in the lowering of your grade by 1/2. Please use your absences wisely.

(2) Group performance of a scene from a play (20%). Groups will be arranged during the first week of class. Each group is responsible for the following:

- Choose the section of the play that you plan to perform (approximately 20 minutes)
- Choose roles. (Two people might split the lines for any one role; someone might combine a small acting role with non-acting work or just opt for non-acting work like planning costumes, creating set design, stage management, creating a program.)
- Make a list of everyone in the group and the role or assigned tasks he or she has taken on.
- Exchange phone numbers and email addresses for follow-up conversations. You will need to meet outside of class to plan this performance.
- Prepare a program to be photocopied and handed out to the class on the day of your performance. The program can take any form, but must include the names of everyone in the group and the roles/tasks each person performed.

Additionally, each member of the group will write an individual post-performance evaluation (due no later than one week after performance; guidelines posted on Blackboard.)

Your goal is to interpret some portion of the play -- to reveal some significant meaning and to contribute to that meaning. Be as inventive as you like.

(3) 8 page paper, due Friday, 12/2 (30%). For this paper you will need to select and read another play written by **one** of the writers we've read this semester from either earlier or later in his/her career, and to write an interpretive research essay (one that incorporates scholarly sources) analyzing the continuities and changes in that writer's style, themes, and concerns. Since you'll need to find and read an additional play, you'll want to start thinking about this no later than mid-semester. Some of the texts I ordered for the class include additional plays; others may be available in our library collection or through interlibrary loan. Databases and other resources for scholarly sources can be found on the library' subject page for Performing Arts:
<http://libguides.stockton.edu/content.php?pid=147670>

(4) Attendance at a performance of a play written by an American playwright, and 3-page review (10%). I will provide information about possible performances at Stockton and in the surrounding areas. I will also try to arrange a group event if there is sufficient interest in a particular play off-campus. Reviews must be submitted no later than one week after the performance. Specific guidelines will be posted on Blackboard.

(5) Two examinations (15% each). These exams may include identifications, short answers, and essay questions.

(6) Extra-credit opportunities: you may choose ONE of the following for an additional 5 points on your lowest graded assignment:

- Attend a second theatrical performance and write another review
- Record a monologue or scene from a play, and discuss the piece you have chosen with Dr. Cindy King, who is hosting a LITT program radio show on WLFR

- Participate in a second class group performance

Other grading policies:

- ♣ Grades will be lowered for late papers unless prior arrangements have been made with me.
- ♣ All assignments are required and must be completed in order to earn a passing grade for the course.
- ♣ A "C" or better is needed for program courses in Literature (a "C-" will not fulfill program requirements).
- ♣ In accordance with the College's policy, I do not give incomplete grades unless there are extremely serious circumstances, and then, only by prior arrangement.

Academic Honesty

The Literature program expects all the work you turn in to be your own. If you are found to have represented the work or ideas of others as your own, intentionally, or unintentionally, you will face serious consequences, as follows:

- 1. Any student who is found to have plagiarized a paper or assignment, in full or in part, must meet with the professor of the class for which the paper is written.**
 2. The professor will review the suspect work with the student.
 3. If this is the first time the student has been found to have plagiarized, he/she will receive an "F" for that paper or assignment and/or the course.
 - 4. For second offenses of plagiarism, the student will receive an F for the course.**
- Additionally, and in accordance with Stockton College policy, the Literature Program faculty will report all instances of plagiarism to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Students may be subject to discipline by the college, such as being placed on academic probation or expelled.
<http://www2.stockton.edu/bulletin/undergrad/chap7.pdf>

Schedule (may be revised-changes will be posted on Blackboard)

Wednesday, September 7

Introductions, review of course and policies.

Friday, September 9

Background/history of American drama; organize performance groups

Read: "A Brief History of American Theatre": <http://www.stagebeauty.net/th-frames.html?http&&www.stagebeauty.net/th-ushist.html>

Monday, September 12

Read: Anna Cora Mowatt, *Fashion* (1845) (online) -- Dramatis Personae, Preface, and Acts I-II

Complete text: <http://library.marist.edu/diglib/english/americanliterature/19c-20c%20play%20archive/fashion-index.htm>

"Comedy of Manners":

<http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/comedydi.htm#Comedy%20of%20Manners>:

Wednesday, September 14

Read: Anna Cora Mowatt, *Fashion* (1845), Acts IV-V

"American History through Literature": <http://www.enotes.com/american-history-literature-cc/theater>

Biography of Mowatt:

<http://www.wayneturney.20m.com/mowatt.htm>

Friday, September 16

Read: Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (1916) and Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Plumes* (1927) (in *Plays by American Women*)

Characteristics of a Well-Made play (online):

<http://faculty.pittstate.edu/~knichols/dramaterms.html#wellmade>

Naturalism in American Literature: <http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/natural.htm>

Monday, September 19

Read: Eugene O'Neill, *Desire Under the Elms* (1924): Part I

Browse background on O'Neill: <http://www.eoneill.com/index.htm>

O'Neill chronology: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/oneill/timeline/index.html>

Definition of tragedy:

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/tragedy.html>

Wednesday, September 21

Read: O'Neill, *Desire Under the Elms*: Part II

Friday, September 23

Read: O'Neill, *Desire Under the Elms*: Part III

Read Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man": <http://theliterarylink.com/miller1.html>

Monday, September 26

Read: Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (1928) (in *Plays by American Women*)

Introduction; Characters; Episodes 1-3.

Browse Kathleen Nichols' "Expressionist Art Gallery":

<http://faculty.pittstate.edu/~knichols/drindex4.html>

Note definition of "expressionism."

Wednesday, September 28

Read: Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal*, Episodes 4-6.

Friday, September 30

Read: Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal*, Episodes 7-9.

Monday, October 3

Read: Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* (1934)
Gilroy, "The Bigger the Lie" (1952) (On Blackboard)

Wednesday, October 5

Read: *The Children's Hour*
Hollywood and *The Children's Hour*:
<http://www.nyu.edu/classes/jeffreys/gaybway/gayhollywood/ChildrensHour.htm>
"The Lesbian Vanishes": <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/28/thesethree1.html>
Hellman group performance

Friday, October 7

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)
Background: Group Theatre (online):
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/group-theatre/about-the-group-theatre/622/>.

Monday, October 10

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*
Odets group performance

Wednesday, October 12

Read: Thornton Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Act I
Synopsis: <http://www.jonasarmstrong.net/skinofourteeth.html>
Epic theatre: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/189683/epic-theatre>

Friday, October 14

Read: Thornton Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Act II

Monday, October 17

Read: Thornton Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Act III

Wednesday, October 19

View clips from the film. Review for mid-term.

Friday, October 21

Midterm exam in class.

Monday, October 24 [class cancelled]

[Tuesday, October 25 – Preceptorial advising day]

Wednesday, October 26

Read: *All My Sons*, Act I

Friday, October 28

All My Sons, Act II

Monday, October 31

All My Sons, Act III

Miller group performance

Wednesday, November 2 – Preceptorial advising day

Friday, November 4

Read Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955): Intro by Edward Albee, Act I

Background on Tennessee Williams: <http://kirjasto.sci.fi/williams.htm>

Synopsis: <http://www.shmoop.com/cat-hot-tin-roof/>

Discuss final papers

Monday, November 7

Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act II

Wednesday, November 9

Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act III

Williams group performance

Friday, November 11

Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Act I

Monday, November 14

Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Acts II and III

Hansberry group performance

Wednesday, November 16

Albee, *The Zoo Story* (1959)

Theatre of the Absurd:

http://www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/theatre_of_the_absurd.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_the_Absurd

Friday, November 18

Norman, *Getting Out* (1977), Prologue and Act I

Monday, November 21

Norman, *Getting Out*, Prologue and Act II

Norman group performance

Wednesday, November 23 thru Sunday, November 27

- Thanksgiving Break

Monday, November 28

Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (1988), Act I

Cultural Collision: Puccini's Madame Butterfly:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14391932>

Wednesday, November 30

Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, Act II and III

Hwang group performance

Friday, December 2

8 page paper due

Review for final

Monday, December 5

Nottage, *Ruined* (2008)

"Approaching Brecht": <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/theater/25McGee.html>

Wednesday, December 7

Nottage, *Ruined*

Friday, December 9

Final exam: 2:30-5:00 pm (exam module)

Secondary Sources

<http://library.ucf.edu/Reference/Guides/Theatre.asp> [Stockton's collection is not as extensive, but many good sources can be borrowed if we don't have them]

Theatre Reviews

International Index to the Performing Arts

Identifies articles in nearly all aspects of the performing arts, from scholarly studies to snapshots of popular culture. To search for theater reviews, enter Theater Review as document type.

New York Times Theater Reviews

Good historical source for theater reviews, particularly for original New York openings of productions.

A Guide to Critical Reviews

Lists opening dates, runs, and indexes reviews for plays.