

Department of English & Writing Studies
Theatre Studies Program

Theatre Studies 2205G (001)
Forms and Genres: The Modern Context
Winter 2024

Course Description

This course traces developments in playwriting, acting, and playhouse design from the Restoration to the present day. This introductory course will explore the theatrical innovations and political interventions of the work of such dramatists as Henrik Ibsen, Sophie Treadwell, Lorraine Hansberry, Harold Pinter, and Suzan-Lori Parks.

Objectives:

This course aims to:

- 1) give students an opportunity to consider modern theatre in its historic, local, and global contexts
- 2) foreground gender, sexuality, intersectionality, race, colonization, etc. as they relate to key texts studied
- 3) give students the opportunity to reflect on their own varied and intersecting positionalities and/or to think critically about ways in which the discipline reproduces existing power structures

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) analyze a range of mainstream and alternative theatrical forms and genres in terms of their cultural production
- 2) assess the aesthetic, ethical, social, economic, and political dimensions of modern theatrical works using a range of critical approaches
- 3) conceptualize, design, communicate, and implement creative academic projects, both alone and in collaboration with diverse others

Course Ethos:

Our class will honour the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will use each other's preferred and chosen names and pronouns; we will engage in respectful and generous conversation with each other; we will avoid language that is hurtful, violent, or exclusive. We will also acknowledge that we may make mistakes, and that learning from each other and questioning ourselves is part of the EDI process.

Course Materials

Required Texts:

The Norton Anthology of Drama, Shorter Third Edition, edited by J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner, Norton, 2017.
Drew Hayden Taylor, *In a World Created by a Drunken God*, Talonbooks, 2006.

Plays to be studied (10 plays. All except Hayden Taylor* are in *The Norton Anthology of Drama*.)

Nottage, *Ruined* (2007)

*Hayden Taylor, *In a World Created by a Drunken God* (2006)

Parks, *The America Play* (1994)

Wilson, *Fences* (1985)

Pinter, *The Homecoming* (1964)

Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

Treadwell, *Machinal* (1928)

Glaspell, *Trifles* (1916)

Ibsen, *A Doll House* (1879)

Methods of Evaluation

Essay 1, due Feb.15, 2024: 15%

Essay 2, due April 4, 2024: 25%

Two group scenes, each worth 10%, for a total of 20%, see below for dates

Attendance: 5%

Final Exam, April 2024: 35%

Academic Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade 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 Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

The full policy is set out here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

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.

Course Information

Attendance

Regular attendance is expected for all classes. Absenteeism may result in debarment from the final exam and, thus, failure of the course.

Here is the sliding scale that will make up the attendance marking for the course:

Days missed	Grade.
0-2	5/5
3-5	4/5
6-7	3/5
8-9	2/5
10	1/5
>10	0/5

Essay Due dates, Late policy, Extensions, Plagiarism

All overdue essays will receive a penalty of 1% per day late.

Essays must follow current MLA format and must include a list of Works Cited at the end (see *MLA Handbook* for details).

Essays must be on works studied in **this** section of the course.

IT IS ADVISABLE TO RETAIN AT LEAST ONE COPY OF THE ESSAY IN THE EVENT OF LOSS OR DAMAGE TO THE ORIGINAL.

Method of Submission: attachments in Word (**NOT PDF**) via OWL

Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a 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 (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

Email Policy

Email is meant for brief inquiries only. Please allow a day or two for a response. Email received over the weekend will be answered the following week.

Participation/Performance Work (20%)

Each Thursday, starting Feb.1, we will forgo the formalities of a traditional university lecture and get down to the business of performance. I will be dividing the class into four groups, and each week you, the students, will run the first hour.

Our performance hour will begin with a scene study presentation by the group designated, for that week, as THE COMPANY.

- It will be the Company's job to stage a scene based on one from the week's play, and to take up roles such as actors, director, dramaturge, and designers. The scenes you perform will be "poor" theatre in the best sense of the word: not a formal, heavily rehearsed performance, although you are free to bring props and costumes as you choose. Your primary task will be to work together to select a specific approach to

the scene/play, and then be prepared to defend and explore your choices in class. This “thought work” is *the most important* component of your presentation!

- Those who aren’t acting or directing in any given week must contribute behind the scenes, by helping to imagine potential visions for the scene, by imagining a design (be prepared to explain and discuss it!), or by applying dramaturgical (that is, critical, close-reading) skills to the text and then offering options to the actors and/or director.
- I would like each of you to try different roles over the course of the term: if you are shy, challenge yourself to try acting once; if you’re a raging extrovert, challenge yourself to pull back a bit and let the quieter members of your group shine.
- The Company will need to read ahead and agree on a scene (or scenes) to perform in advance of their scheduled Wednesdays. You need not clear your scene selection with me in advance, but please choose something that will take approximately 10 minutes to perform.
- Be prepared to meet outside of class for an hour or two, at least a couple of times, before each performance, and establish an informal email discussion list among yourselves in order to hammer out your basic choices and ensure everyone knows their jobs.
- Coordinating your schedules will not be easy. In fact, it’s part of the challenge. But your groups are large because performance cannot happen with just a couple of people: theatre is made in the messy coordination between different personalities with different schedules and different needs. Do your best to accommodate everyone, to get to know one another, and to support one another; by the end of the term, you’ll be glad these people are your colleagues; they may even be your friends!
- After each performance, and a short break, the Company will be asked to get back on stage and participate in a question-and-answer period. Each member of the Company should try to contribute something during the Q&A, especially those whose work has been primarily behind the scenes. This is the time for you to explore in depth, with your colleagues, the terrific thought work that has gone into your presentation!
- The final part of the class will involve a post-performance “talk-back” or discussion.
- When the week’s performance is over, the Company will take their break while the rest of us get into our designated groups. You will be given 10-15 minutes in your group to discuss the performance you’ve just seen, and to prepare two or three good challenging questions about the Company’s performance choices.
- In order to ensure that your group’s discussion runs smoothly, each of you will need to take some notes during the Company’s performance, bring those notes with you to your group’s “huddle,” and be prepared to talk about them.
- NOTE that the questions you develop must delve below the surface of what the Company is doing. Colleague-critics are reviewers with a difference: your task is to explore what worked and what didn’t, to probe the critical effects of the Company’s choices, to offer alternative readings, and to examine how others in the class received the performance (it’s a good idea to address some questions to your fellow audience members as well!). One important proviso: colleague criticism is designed to be helpful and respectful, not hurtful and derogatory.
- We hope to get a lively discussion going and will bounce from group to group until either our time or your notes are exhausted. Support a strong, engaged class discussion!

Assessment:

- Your group work is the core component of your participation grade; you will be judged on the amount of effort you put into the work—NOT on your acting skills—and on your willingness to push yourself in new directions, beyond your comfort zone. Note that you need not play a major role in each presentation: balance your commitments to the group work as needed, but ensure that you are contributing helpfully in some way each time your group is The Company, and that you challenge yourself to contribute during your group's discussions.
- Attendance. One of the keys to doing well at this assignment is attending regularly; the other key is being engaged when you attend. Attendance will be taken. Even if your group is not performing, your attendance is still required and appreciated.

Essay 1: Choose ONE play and write an argumentative essay that focuses on one of the following ten topics listed below. Be sure to narrow and refine your topic so that it is very specific and clear. Do early research on the topic so that you can develop your essay gradually, rather than writing it at the last minute. Engage with at least three secondary sources to help contextualize your argument.

Length: 1500 words

Format: MLA 8th edition for undergraduate research essays

Worth: 15%

Due: Feb. 15, 2024

Possible Topics:

Gender

Race

Historical context

Staging technique (be specific)

Performance history

Acting style or technique

Set pieces

Props or costumes

Audience response

Political influences

Method of Submission: OWL: one attachment in Word (NOT a PDF)

Essay 2: Choose TWO different plays from the one you examined in Essay 1. As with the first essay, choose ONE of the broad topics listed above (which you must narrow down very specifically to construct a clear argument). Engage with at least five secondary sources.

Again: do some preliminary research on this topic with reference to the play you are exploring. You may write more than once on the same topic (for example, Gender), but **make sure you cover TWO different plays from the one you examined in Essay 1.**

Length: 2500 words

Format: MLA 8 for undergraduate research essays

Worth: 25%

Due: April 4, 2024

Method of Submission: OWL: one attachment in Word (NOT a PDF)

Schedule Winter Term 2024

(G = Group, P = Performance)

Jan.9-11	Introduction
Jan.16-18	Nottage, <i>Ruined</i> (2007)
Jan.23-25	Hayden Taylor, <i>In a World Created by a Drunken God</i> (2006)
Jan.30-Feb.1	Parks, <i>The America Play</i> (1994): G1, P1
Feb.6-8	Wilson, <i>Fences</i> (1985): G2, P1
Feb.13-15	Pinter, <i>The Homecoming</i> (1964): G3, P1; Essay 1 Due Feb.15
Feb.20-22	READING WEEK
Feb.27-29	Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (1959): G4, P1
Mar.5-7	Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> (1949): G1, P2
Mar.12-14	Treadwell, <i>Machinal</i> (1928): G2, P2
Mar.19-21	Glaspell, <i>Trifles</i> (1916): G3, P2
Mar.26-28	Ibsen, <i>A Doll's House</i> (1879): G4, P2
Apr.2-4	Conclusion; Essay 2 Due Apr.4
Apr.TBA	Final Exam (2 hours)