

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

DRAMA

Course Overview

This course introduces the student to dramas from five continents and many centuries (ancient Greeks to the present day). These plays have been selected not only because they are representative of their time, place, and artistic movement but also because, in most cases, they are considered great works of art in their own right.

About the Professor

David McPherson, Ph.D., is professor emeritus and former chair of the English Department, New Mexico State University. His areas of expertise include the drama of Renaissance England and comparative literature.

Course Content

Unit I	Introduction
Unit II	Ancient Drama
Unit III	Shakespeare and others
Unit IV	Classic European Drama
Unit V	Realism and Naturalism
Unit VI	Modernist / Postmodernist
Unit VII	North American / Anglo-American Drama
Unit VIII	Chinese and Indian Drama
Unit IX	Japanese Drama
Unit X	Latin American Drama

Scope

Emphasis on Live Performances and Videos

Drama, unlike poetry and fiction, has almost always been written for performance on the stage. Hence a play cannot be properly appreciated if it is studied as if it were merely a long poem or prose story. If possible, the student should attend live performances of some of the plays in this syllabus. However, since there are few live productions, the next best option is videos—which are both easily available and not very expensive. Video versions of many of the required and recommended plays will be listed below. These videos are sometimes free online; if not, they can often be rented for about \$3 or purchased as a used DVD for under \$10. Because Amazon dominates this market, prices and availability in the lists below refer to Amazon.com offerings unless otherwise noted. (Note: all prices are from 2012 and change daily)

To insure that students see at least six performances—whether on stage or on video—all six of the required short papers will be based on performances seen. Advice on how to write such papers will be provided (see under “Papers,” below).

Seeing a production, however, is not a substitute for reading the text. One must do both, because directors often change the script drastically to suit their own artistic purposes.

Requirements

Textbook: *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theater: a Global Perspective*. Compact ed., Michael L Greenwald, Roger Schultz, Roberto Romo, eds. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley, 2002. ISBN: 0-321-29138-7. Most of the book is required reading.

Readings

Readings are divided into three categories:

1. Required play of the week—always from textbook.
2. Highly recommended play of the week—if not in textbook, often available free online.
3. Also recommended—These plays are provided partly to satisfy the truly ambitious, and partly to widen the number of plays available for viewing performances and hence writing papers about those performances

Note: for nearly all older plays, there are several texts available free online. Simply enter author, title and the word “online” in search box. If the script is not available online, the current price of used paperbacks will be provided. A few of the newest

plays in the “Also Recommended” category—especially those from Latin America—are available only in large libraries.

Papers:

1. Six short papers, 1,250-1,500 words each, each reviewing a production—whether stage or video—of one of the plays in the syllabus below. These reviews should be primarily analytical rather than reactive—their main point should NOT be how well you liked the performance. Instead, focus on the director’s overall interpretation of the play, and on whether you agree with that interpretation or not, giving your reasons. For much more detailed advice, see textbook, Appendix A, pp. 809-815.

(Note: Videos listed here are suggestions only; students may write about other video versions, including any which happen to come out after 2012.)

2. Final paper, about 5,000 words, The student must choose one of the thirteen topics provided below (at the end of nearly every week’s assignments). All of these topics ask you to compare and/or contrast that week’s required play with that week’s highly recommended play.

SYLLABUS

FIRST WEEK—Introduction

Readings:

1. Required: our textbook, pp. 1-13, 39-62.
2. Highly recommended: textbook, pp. 14-34.
- 3, Also recommended: Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 163-186 and 206-233.

Study guide:

Primitive Origins of Drama (see Textbook, Ch. 1)

Drama arose because of some basic human tendencies, including the urge to imitate others (including wearing their clothes), the desire for ritual, and the love of telling stories. As for imitation, note that children love to play dress-up, and grown-ups do too. Rituals are repeated (often seasonal) communal actions with strong emotional or religious meanings which are understood by all members of the culture, though not necessarily articulated; for instance, modern Americans attending a football game are, for the most part, unaware of the fact that they are participating in a seasonal ritual. Storytelling, too, is basic to humanity, and constitutes the main difference between drama and theater: a variety show is clearly theater, but it takes a story (plot) to make a drama.

Drama as an Art Form (see Textbook, Ch. 2)

Drama as an art form arose in Western culture in ancient Athens centuries before Christianity. Their vibrant society gave birth not only to tragedies and comedies which are still read and performed today but also to intellectual discussions of these plays which codified their conventions. The most famous of these discussions is Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy in the *Poetics* (c. 335 B.C.E.). He points out that tragedy as he knew it is about a great man or woman, a leader in his or her society, who—because of *hamartia* (an error in judgment, a missing of the mark, not necessarily an inborn flaw) does something terrible and dies after having recognized his or her fatal mistake. Those witnessing a tragedy should experience pity and fear

for the protagonist, and, by vicariously doing so, rid themselves of those emotions. Aristotle called that process catharsis.

A definition of comedy later arose, clearly based on Aristotle's analysis of tragedy. Comedy is not serious (like tragedy) but funny, and deals with private citizens, not leaders. Comedy excites laughter and pleasure, not pity and fear. Comedy has a happy ending. Some comedies, especially those of Aristophanes, are loaded with satire, holding human flaws like greed and lust up to ridicule. (For discussions of tragicomedy, melodrama, and farce, see Textbook, Ch.2).

SECOND WEEK—Ancient Greek and Roman Drama

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 63-65.

Play: *Oedipus the King* (428 B.C.E.), textbook, pp. 66-81.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: textbook, p. 93.

Play: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (c. 404 B.C.E.).

Also recommended:

Euripedes, *Medea* (431 B.C.E.)

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (458 B.C.E.)

Terence, *The Brothers* (160 B.C.E.). For background, see textbook, pp. 96-97.

Recommended videos:

Oedipus, directed by Sir Tyrone Guthrie, starring Douglas Campbell (1957). Rent from Amazon Instant Video, \$2.99.

Medea. Two versions recommended: Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, starring Maria Callas (1969). Rent from \$2.99.

Kennedy Center production of the adaptation by Robinson Jeffers, directed by Mark Cullingham (TV) and Robert Whitehead (stage), starring Zoe Caldwell (1983). Buy from MediaOutlet.com, \$8.49.

Study guide:

Athenian writers of tragedy

There are three fifth-century B.C.E. Athenian tragedy writers whose plays have come down to us: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripedes.

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (428 B.C.E)

The most famous single play is Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. The mythological origins of this play are obvious: audience members knew the story well and reveled in its supernatural elements such as the curse on the kings of Thebes. They knew how the story ended, and so Sophocles' job was not to surprise anyone; instead, it was, through the poetic power of the dialogue, the chorus, music and spectacle, to excite and purge the pity and fear that Aristotle later posited as the purpose of tragedy.

The conventions of Greek theater were elaborate and important. Each play had to have a chorus to add a communal voice to the action and also to provide ritualized movement (dance) which added to the spectacle. Actors wore huge masks, which

added to the ritualistic power but at the same time served to remind the audience that what they were seeing was a performance.

Comedies also used a chorus and masks. Costumes and props were intentionally exaggerated; in *Lysistrata*, for example, the men—denied sex by their wives until war ceased—sport enormous phalluses.

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (c. 404 B.C.E.)

Aristophanes is the only writer of Old Comedy whose plays have survived—eleven of forty are extant. He was frequently in trouble for his trenchant satire, incurring the censure of Plato himself. He also dared to criticize public policy, including the propensity for going to war with Sparta all too often. In *Lysistrata*, the women of both cities join together to deny their husbands sex until peace is made. In the end, the women win.

Euripedes, *Medea* (431 B.C.E.)

Euripedes was the youngest of the three Athenian tragedy writers, and more of his tragedies have survived—a total of eighteen. His plays seem a bit more modern and accessible than those of the other two playwrights. *Medea*, as usual based on myth, is a horrific story of a queen who, through jealousy, murders her own children.

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (458 B.C.E.)

Aeschylus is the oldest of the tragedians, and his plays are consequently closer to myth and ritual. He is therefore less accessible to modern sensibilities. *Agamemnon* begins as that king is just returning from victory in the Trojan War. But he is a flawed hero. First, he sacrificed his own daughter Iphigenia in order for the Gods to allow him to sail off to Troy in the first place. Also he has brought home as a sex slave the Trojan princess Cassandra, expecting his wife to accept this arrangement. But his wife Clytemnestra has been burning for revenge on account of the sacrifice of their daughter, and has taken a lover Aegisthus. He helps her murder both Agamemnon and Cassandra. The Gods are important in allowing this to occur, and Aeschylus is a more deeply religious playwright than the other two tragedians.

Terence, *The Brothers* (160 B.C.E.)

Centuries after Aristophanes there developed in Greece a new type of comedy, less satiric than Aristophanes and more directed at the middle class of playgoers. Menander was the pioneer here. His plays were imitated by the Roman playwrights Plautus (254-192 B.C.E.) and Terence (c. 190-159 B.C.E.). The plots of their plays developed a typical pattern which has lasted into modern times, according to the critic Northrup Frye (see the “also recommended” reading for WEEK 1). A young man falls in love (or lust) with a young woman. There is usually a blocking character—normally an older man with more power than our young hero (often his own father)—who stands in the way of the couples’ union (whether that union is to be legal, i.e. marriage, is sometimes unclear). The efforts of the killjoy to block the couple are thwarted, usually by the amusing trickery of the young man’s clever slave. Terence uses this basic pattern, but adds a second couple, thus creating a double plot. In the end the thwarted older generation forgives the clever slave and allows the unions to take place. *The Brothers*, Terence’s last play, is a rather more sophisticated version of the typical pattern. A strict father allows one of his sons to be raised by his lenient

brother; The leniently raised son proves to be the hero of the play, and both of the young men get the girls they wanted.

Final paper topic:

Since *Oedipus* is a tragedy and *Lysistrata* a comedy, their main differences are obvious. But what about their similarities? For instance, what possible influence did the similar staging have on the relationship between actors and audience? What similar functions did comedy and tragedy serve in the culture at large?

THIRD AND FOURTH WEEKS—Shakespeare and Other English Drama, 1495-1606

(Note: because the language of Shakespeare and his contemporaries is difficult for modern readers, this unit gets two weeks rather than one.)

Readings:

Required:

Criticism; our textbook, 100-110, 132-137, 140-151

Play: *Hamlet* (c. 1601), textbook, pp. 152-210.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: textbook, p. 43.

Play: Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601).

Also recommended:

Everyman (c. 1495), textbook, 117-131.

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592).

Ben Jonson, *Volpone* (1606).

Recommended videos:

Hamlet. Five versions on Amazon Instant Video alone. Rent for \$2.99 each. They are (in chronological order):

Directed by Rodney Bennett, starring Derek Jacobi (1980).

Directed by Franco Zeffirelli, starring Mel Gibson (1990).

Directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh (1996).

Directed by Michael Almereyda, starring Ethan Hawke (2003).

Directed by Gregory Doran, starring David Tennant (2009).

Twelfth Night, directed by Trevor Nunn, starring Helena Bonham Carter (1996).

Used DVD's from \$6.45.

Doctor Faustus, starring Richard Burton (1968). Used DVD's from \$6.99.

Study guide:

English Drama in the Middle Ages

After the collapse of the Roman Empire about 500 C.E., ancient comedies and tragedies were, for about a thousand years, largely forgotten. In England drama developed in the church and among pious laymen. Each trade guild in several English towns dramatized an episode from the Bible, and when all the episodes were performed consecutively, the whole Christian scheme from the Creation to the Resurrection was on display (one such episode is in our textbook, pp. 109-118).

Priests also figured out that they could effectively teach moral and doctrinal lessons by way of drama, and thus arose the genre called the morality play, the most famous (and artistically superior) example of which is *Everyman* (c. 1495), textbook, pp. 117-131. It features allegory, the device in which characters are named for the abstract qualities which they represent; thus the central character, Everyman, has a name which tells the audience what he symbolizes.

Backgrounds for Shakespeare

But then came the Renaissance, a rebirth of interest in ancient Greek and Roman language and culture. In the schools and universities Latin, especially as written by the ancient orator Cicero, gradually replaced medieval Latin (into which many words from modern languages had crept). And the more advanced secondary schools began to require the study of ancient Greek as well as Ciceronian Latin. Such education was given not just to future priests, as in the Middle Ages, but also to the sons of noblemen and, as time went on, even to the sons of the middle class—William Shakespeare, for example. Shakespeare probably studied Latin at Stratford Grammar School, and perhaps even performed in a play by Terence given in the original Latin. If so, he doubtless learned a lot about writing comedies in that way. But he also drew on the religious plays of the Middle Ages. This double heritage helps explain the flowering of great drama in the age of Queen Elizabeth (reigned 1558-1603) and King James (1603-1625).

It can be called a flowering because Shakespeare was by no means the only fine playwright of the era. Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe were both born in 1564 and Ben Jonson in 1573. They were aided not only by the rich dramatic heritage just described but also by the enormous growth of London into the largest city (at that time) in Europe, with a population—which seems miniscule today—of about 200,000. This urbanization created a mass market for entertainment; the most successful actors and playwrights could make a living from drama alone. In short, professional theater became possible.

William Shakespeare *Hamlet* (c. 1601)

Shakespeare's early tragedies were successful, especially *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*. But it was really *Hamlet* that made him a star in the firmament of tragedy. Young Hamlet has become, over the intervening centuries, probably the most fascinating character in Western theater; millions of words have been written in the (futile?) effort to understand him. He has incredible complexity: sometimes he seems morose and at other times vivacious and wickedly funny; he can seem indecisive when he could have killed Claudius at prayer, yet seem quite decisive when he leaps into Ophelia's grave. He makes fun of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for presuming that they can "pluck out the heart of my mystery." Is this Shakespeare's way of warning us all that we too are not going to be able to do so? Perhaps. But that does not mean we should quit trying.

Shakespeare's variety

Most of Shakespeare's plays are not tragedies. His fellow-actors, when they published all of his plays that they could find copies of (seven years after his death), divided his output into fourteen comedies, ten histories (by which they clearly meant plays about fairly recent English history), and eleven tragedies.

Twelfth Night (c. 1601)

Twelfth Night is an example of what some critics call a romantic comedy, by which they seem to mean that the story features young lovers who get together in the end. And we do indeed get a great deal of pairing up: the Duke gets Viola, Sebastian gets Olivia, and Sir Toby gets Maria. But what of the whole Malvolio sub-plot? It is satiric, not romantic. There are, in addition, other departures from the New Comedy pattern of Terence: for instance, we have no blocking character, no mean old man keeping the lovers apart. Instead, they are temporarily separated by their own erroneous perceptions about gender and identity.

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592)

Marlowe wrote all six of his plays as a young man (he was murdered, probably as part of an espionage intrigue, in 1593, when he was only twenty-nine). Shakespeare, by contrast, had written very few, if any, of his plays by 1593. So if one playwright learned from the other, it was Shakespeare learning from Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus* is a play which shows clear traces of the medieval morality plays, e.g. the Good and Bad Angels. Was Faustus a mere fool, a dupe of Satan, or a courageous Renaissance seeker after knowledge (even if that knowledge is forbidden)? Critics are still debating that one.

Ben Jonson, *Volpone* (1606)

Ben Jonson was the premier writer of satiric comedy in Shakespeare's age. The excoriation of human greed in *Volpone* is very powerful. We do not get the usual happy ending which we expect from a comedy, although evildoers are in fact punished. The characters are named for animals (in Italian), so that the play becomes a kind of gigantic beast fable.

Final paper topic:

Shakespeare mixes comedy and tragedy freely. *Hamlet* clearly has some very funny scenes, and many directors find darker elements in *Twelfth Night* (e. g. the potential for extreme cruelty in the Duke or the imprisoning of Malvolio). Are the funny scenes more important to *Hamlet* than the darker elements are to *Twelfth Night*?

First short paper due

FIFTH WEEK—Classic European Drama, 1600-1900

Readings

Required:

Criticism: textbook, 224-228, 258-26

Play: Moliere, *Tartuffe* (1669), textbook, pp. 229-257.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: Early Spanish Drama, textbook, pp. 218-223.

Play: Edmund Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897)

Also recommended:

Pedro Calderon de la Barca, *Life Is a Dream* (1673)

Lope de Vega, *Fuente Ovejuna* (1619).

Both in *Great Spanish Plays in Translation*, ed. Angel Flores. Used from \$0.01 (Amazon).

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

Recommended videos:

Tartuffe, directed by Kirk Browning, starring Donald Moffat Broadway Theater Archive. Used from \$13.75

Cyrano de Bergerac. Three versions recommended(chronological order):

Directed by Michael Gordon, starring Jose Ferrer (1950). Used from \$7.00.

Directed by Jean Paul Rappeneau, starring Gerard Depardieu (1990). Used from \$7.96.

Directed by David Leveaux, starring Kevin Kline. Used from \$5.35

The Importance of Being Earnest, directed by Oliver Parker, starring Colin Firth (2002). Rent for \$1.99.

Study Guide:

This week is devoted to European plays which, though written as late in time as the end of the nineteenth century, are still basically "old school," not materially affected by new movements like realism and naturalism.

Moliere, *Tartuffe* (1669)

Moliere was a daring and skillful playwright at the court of the French king Louis XIV. *Tartuffe* has many traces of the New Comedy pattern established by Plautus and Terence. We have the young lovers Mariane and Valere, whose union is being blocked by Orgon, Mariane's father. Dorine is the clever "slave" (now a servant) figure, and boy gets girl at the end. But the play is not a romantic comedy by any stretch of the imagination. It turns satiric when Moliere puts the focus on Tartuffe, a charlatan who also wants Mariane and fools her father by hiding his lust and greed under the cloak of the Christian religion. In an era when religion was still extremely powerful, Moliere took a large and courageous chance when he created Tartuffe.

Edmund Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897)

The French created not only some fine satiric comedies but also (much later) a play that could well be called a romantic tragedy. Cyrano, the central character, is a larger-than-life (especially his nose!) figure who comes to a sad end because of his own excessive nobility. This play was written when the movement for realism in drama was already in full swing, but it largely ignores that movement. Cyrano is like a romantic hero of old, ever extreme—and all the more charming for the lack of realism seen in his character.

Pedro Calderon de la Barca, *Life is a Dream* (1673)

Calderon was a prolific and profound Spanish dramatist in an era when that drama was flourishing. He is remembered principally for *Life is a Dream*, a highly complex drama which has us asking age-old questions about the sometimes hazy line between dream and reality, questions about the nature of reality itself. It has high seriousness, then, but differs from classical tragedy in that it has a happy ending. That ending is a good example of the fact that, like Shakespeare, Spanish dramatists in their Golden Age, mixed comedy and tragedy in ways disapproved of by critics of their own time—most of whom thought plays should be one or the other, as ancient Greek and Roman plays had been.

Lope de Vega, *Fuente Ovejuna* (1619)

Lope de Vega, a playwright well before Calderon, was also prolific, having been credited with about 1,800 plays. He is also known for his dramatic criticism, helping establish norms and defending the mixing of comedy and tragedy. "Fuente Ovejuna" is the name of a real village in Spain, and the play is based on an actual event in Spanish history which happened more than a century before the play was written. The King had appointed an Army official to rule over the village, and he oppressed the people viciously. He was murdered, and at the official inquiry, when asked who did it, the villagers (despite the threat of torture) all claimed, " Fuente Ovejuna did it."

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

Oscar Wilde, one of the wittiest and most controversial men in late Victorian England, has left us this delightful play which simultaneously follows and yet makes fun of the New Comedy pattern. We have the two pairs of young lovers whose union is being blocked not by a "heavy father" but by a "heavy mother," Lady Bracknell. But the impediments are removed not by a clever servant but by outrageous and hilarious discoveries of true parentage. Like *Cyrano*, this play is chronologically in the Age of Realism, but is having none of it.

Final Paper Topic:

Contrast the characters of Tartuffe and Cyrano. What are their principal differences, and how striking are these differences?

SIXTH WEEK—Realism and Naturalism

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 282-294.

Play: Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (1879), textbook, pp. 295-323.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: our textbook, pp. 324-326.

Play: Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), textbook, pp. 327-347.

Also recommended:

George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man* (1894).

August Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (1906).

John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1912).

Recommended Videos:

A Doll's House, directed by Patrick Garland, starring Claire Bloom (1973). Used from \$8.49.

The Cherry Orchard, directed by Mikalis Kakogiannis, starring Charlotte Rampling (1999). Rent for \$2.99.

Arms and the Man, directed by James Cellan Jones, starring Helena Bonham Carter. Used from \$3.75.

Miss Julie, directed by Mike Figgis, starring Saffron Burrows (1999). Rent for \$2.99.

Study guide:

Definitions:

Realism means that the action onstage is ideally a “slice of life,” an imitation of daily life outside the theater. Yes, the characters, who are usually not nobility, undergo some kind of crisis, but all according to the laws of probability; there are no supernatural influences (such as the curse on the house of Thebes) here. The staging convention associated with realism is the so-called “fourth wall,” a curtain all the way across the front of a recessed stage which, when lifted, lets the audience see into a space which usually represents a drawing room. There the actors interact with one another but pretend that there is no audience present. This is in sharp contrast to, say, Shakespearean drama in which actors sometimes address the audience directly, as in asides and soliloquies, and the stage thrusts out so that spectators are on three sides of the actors.

Naturalism is similar to realism except for an added emphasis on the sordid and/or pessimistic.

Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (1879)

The pioneer in realism was the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Many later dramatists, e.g. George Bernard Shaw, regarded him as the father of their movement. *A Doll's House*, like many plays of realism, is built around a specific social problem—in this case, the rights of women. That Nora in the end leaves her domestic life for a life of independence was a very bold course of action considering the European customs of Ibsen's time.

Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* (1899)

Chekhov captures both the humor and the sadness in the decline of Russia's lower aristocracy. The cutting down of the orchard is of course symbolic of the passing of the feudal way of life. Many of the characters manage to be primarily pitiable but also, in some cases, rather admirable. Therefore it is difficult to decide whether Chekhov's plays are comedies or tragedies. Hence we call them tragicomedies.

George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man* (1894)

Shaw, always the iconoclast, manages in *Arms and the Man* to make war seem much less heroic than we usually think. It might not be too strong to call it an early example of an anti-war play (like *Lysistrata*—see Week 2). It features a lively heroine (Raina) and hero (Bluntschli).

August Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (1906)

Strindberg's *Miss Julie* is an example of naturalism: the respectable title character enters into a sexual liaison, which was very unusual in a play of this era., and her lover is from a lower social class. The class conflict ends up destroying her. Unlike classical tragedy, the play does not see Miss Julie as larger than life, nor does her demise have calamitous consequences for her culture.

John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1912)

Ireland in the early twentieth century was the original home of both Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. But they did not write about the Irish; Synge decidedly did. “Playboy” means smooth talker and con artist, and “Western World” refers to western

parts of Ireland (i.e. the most Gaelic parts). *Playboy* is a fine example of local color done up so as to attain wide, if not universal, significance. Christy Mahon, the playboy, has verve and complexity.

Final paper topic:

Are any of the women in *The Cherry Orchard* as liberated (in the modern sense) as Nora in *A Doll's House*?

Second short paper due

SEVENTH WEEK—Modern American Drama

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 388-391, 429-434.

Play: Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), textbook, pp. 392-428

Highly recommended:

Criticism: "Eugene O'Neill" in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.

Play: Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956). Script online (but not free) at books.google.com. Used books from \$7.09.

Also recommended:

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (1938). Available (but not free) online. Used books from \$3.89.

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). Available (but not free) online. Used books from \$2.78.

Edward Albee, *The American Dream* (1959-1960), textbook, pp. 444-458.

Recommended videos: *Death of a Salesman*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff, starring Dustin Hoffman (1985). Rent for \$2.99.

Long Day's Journey into Night, directed by Jonathan Miller, starring Kevin Spacey (1987). Rent for \$2.99.

Our Town, directed by Sam Wood, starring William Holden (1940). Free online at Internet Archive.

A Streetcar Named Desire, directed by Elia Kazan, starring Vivien Leigh (1951). Rent for \$2.99.

Study Guide:

Definitions:

The term "modern" here refers to plays written in the United States from about 1940 to about 1960, plays more recent than that being classified as "contemporary." The plays from the two decades in question owe a great deal to realism and naturalism, but also use what many call expressionism, which attempts to create dream-like states onstage.

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

The debate continues about whether this deeply affecting play should be considered a tragedy. Miller captures the courageous optimism—or is it delusion?—of a man who, by most measurements, ends up a failure in business and a failure in family life. Can

a mere salesman be considered in the same category as Oedipus? Miller certainly produces pity for the protagonist and perhaps fear induced by the shallow values in our world which form a man like Willy Lowman.

Eugene O'Neill, *Lon Day's Journey into Night* (1956)

O'Neill was one of the first American playwrights to gain an international reputation. Influenced by modern psychology, he produced haunting studies of tormented characters. Like *Death of a Salesman*, *Long Day's Journey* is a family drama which features conflict between an overpowering father and two sons who simultaneously love and hate him. But in O'Neill one also gets the terrifying drug addiction of the mother. *Long Day's Journey* is a harrowing play.

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (1938)

Modern American theater is not all tragic. Wilder in *Our Town* lets us see into the warm hearts and kindness of small-town America. The device of the Stage Manager, really a narrator who addresses the audience directly, goes against the conventions of realism, and hence was reasonably innovative technique for its time.

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

Williams, though he uses the American South to his great advantage, is still not considered a regional playwright. The atmosphere of New Orleans, both meteorological and cultural, is vital to *Streetcar*, but Blanche's delusions of grandeur are universal. Indeed, her self-delusion is as strong as that of Willy Loman, though built of very different materials.

Edward Albee, *The American Dream* (1960)

Albee counts as a modern American playwright from a chronological point of view, but he is actually an example of the theatrical movement called absurdism, which was led by such writers as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. These writers threw realism out the window in the effort to jar audiences out of their complacency. They lead us to experience emotionally what they see as the utter absurdity of human existence. *The American Dream* features shallow, inane characters like Mommy and Daddy whose conversation is incredibly banal. The Young Man is clearly symbolic, but of what? Albee leaves us guessing.

Final paper topic:

Willy Loman is a salesman and James Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey* an actor. Yet they have some striking similarities. What are some of them?

EIGHTH WEEK—Drama and Politics in Recent Times

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 276-278, 348-357.

Play: Bertold Brecht, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1938-39), textbook, pp. 358-387.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 761-763.

Play: Luis Valdez, *No Saco Nada de la Escuela [I Don't Get Nothin' from School]* (1969), textbook, pp.764-772.

Also recommended:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 276-278.

Play: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, adapted by George Aiken from the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852). Free online at www.utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/scripts/aikenhp.html.
Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (1952). Used from \$.84.

Recommended video:

The Crucible, movie script by Arthur Miller himself, directed by Nicholas Hytner, starring Daniel Day Lewis (1996).

Study Guide:

This unit features five plays which are strongly political in their implications, though often not in explicit terms. As we have seen, the idea of using the content of a drama to make a political argument goes all the way back to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. Political drama has flourished ever since--when censorship has permitted.

Bertold Brecht, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1938-39)

Brecht, a Communist, wrote plays which attacked the excessive greed of capitalism and championed the cause of the poor. In *The Good Woman* the story's main implication is clearly that the inordinate love of money is the root of all evil. Setting the story in China allows Brecht to distance Westerners from the problem and, he hopes, make us step back and think about economic systems.

Luis Valdez, *No Saco Nada de la Escuela* (1969) [I Don't Get Nothing from School]

Valdez has created a play which is political not by implication but by direct presentation. Here the discrimination felt by most current Mexican-Americans is put on stage forthrightly. There is little attempt at literary finesse or at complexity in presenting the issues—this is straight-out advocacy of equal rights for an oppressed minority.

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852)

As our textbook points out, Harriett Beecher Stowe's novel was adapted for the stage shortly after it was published and proved to be powerful political theater. The cause which it advocates is of course the abolition of slavery. George Aiken's was the most popular of several adaptations. It is an excellent example of how influential a political play turned out to be in an era before movies and television.

The Crucible (1952)

Arthur Miller is remembered not only for *Death of a Salesman* but also for this play--which indirectly makes a political statement. A Congressional committee, the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC) was using excessive zeal and questionable methods to root out Communism in the United States. Miller's play, the story of the witch hunts in Salem, Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century, does not say a word about HUAC, but the parallels were, and still are, quite clear.

Final Paper Topic:

What ideas is Brecht trying to push in *The Good Woman*?
What ideas is Luis Valdez trying to push in *No Saco Nada*?
Are the aims of the two playwrights primarily similar or primarily different?

Third short paper due

NINTH WEEK—Modern African-American and Caribbean Plays

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: text, 607, 670-678.

Play: August Wilson, *Fences* (1987), textbook, pp. 679-706.

Highly recommended:

Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975), Used from \$3.97.

Also recommended:

Derek Walcott, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1958), textbook, pp. 708-737.

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). Used from \$3.97.

August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988). Used from \$4.93.

Recommended videos:

For Colored Girls, adapted and directed by Tyler Perry, starring Janet Jackson (2010), Rent for \$2.99.

A Raisin in the Sun, directed by Daniel Petrie, starring Sidney Poitier (1961, reissued 2000). Used from \$7.90.

A Raisin in the Sun, directed by Kenny Leon, starring Sean Combs (2008). Used from \$3.43.

Study Guide:

Beyond the Political

Like the political theater of Valdez, plays by African-American and Caribbean authors often show the harm done by racial discrimination. But many of the efforts of Black playwrights have been acclaimed as the best plays being written in our day; they often go well beyond the political.

August Wilson, *Fences* (1987)

August Wilson is the premier example of a playwright whose scripts soar far beyond any political tract. They make the audience feel the very texture of the daily life of African-Americans in Northern cities in the twentieth century. Wilson has projected an ambitious plan for writing a play about the life of that community in Pittsburgh in each decade of that century, and he is well on his way toward achieving that goal. *Fences* is his play about the 1950's, and uses professional baseball (from which African-Americans were excluded until 1947) as a metaphor to embody how discrimination warps the lives of people. Also at the heart of the play is a father-son

relationship which reminds one of the conflicts in *Death of a Salesman* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls* (1975)

Born in 1948, Ntozake Shange was one of the first prominent Black feminists, winning an Obie award for her play *For Colored Girls*. She makes extensive use of music and poetry in that script. August Wilson has created some fascinating female characters, but most of his plays give greater prominence to the men's roles. *For Colored Girls* provides a good balance by using its feminist perspective to portray African-American experience. *For Colored Girls* has recently been revived with outstanding entertainers in the cast (Janet Jackson, Whoopi Goldberg)—see "Recommended videos," above.

Derek Walcott, *Ti-Jean And His Brothers* (1958)

Derek Walcott from the Caribbean island of Trinidad brought honor to his region by winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1959. In addition to plays he has written extensively in other genres such as essays and novels. *Ti-Jean* makes its political points subtly by using a folk tale from the area—charming, funny, and effective.

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

Lorraine Hansberry was the first African-American playwright to gain general attention, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1959. *A Raisin in the Sun* has been criticized by some twenty-first century Black activists for not being militant enough for the new century, but there was enough interest in it to prompt a new movie version in 2008 (see "recommended videos," above).

August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988)

August Wilson has a stature so high that he deserves to be on both the required and recommended lists in this category. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is about the decade 1910-1920 and shows the children of freed slaves as closer to their African heritage. Voodoo is a factor, for instance, though not onstage. The central metaphor is that each character must find his or her own "song," which means very roughly finding one's true passion or unique way of looking at life.

Final paper topic

While *Fences* is primarily about the men in the cast, *For Colored Girls* is primarily about the women. Does Wilson nevertheless show some sympathy and understanding of women, and does Shange show some sympathy and understanding of men? Which playwright is best at portraying the opposite sex?

TENTH WEEK—Contemporary Anglo-American Drama

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp.460-475.

Play: Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (1982), textbook, pp. 476-503.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 504-506.

Play: Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* (1992), textbook, pp. 507-539.

Also recommended:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 438-439.

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Used from \$3.24.

Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966). Used from \$1.40.

Sue Townsend, *The Great Celestial Cow* (1983). Used from \$.74.

Recommended videos:

Rosencrantz written and directed by Stoppard himself, starring Gary Oldman (1990, 2001). Used from \$5.99.

Study Guide:

Definitions:

Contemporary" here means, for the most part, plays since about 1960, but with one notable exception: *Waiting for Godot* (1953) was so far ahead of its time in radically rejecting the conventions of realism and naturalism that it is included in this section.

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (1982)

Like Ntozake Shange before her, Caryl Churchill was a pioneer feminist, but on the other side of the Atlantic. Her plays were notable in that from the beginning they were enjoyed by men as well as women. *Top Girls* makes extensive use of humor, so much so that the messages about gender equality never seem preachy or tendentious.

Tony Kushner, *Angels In America, Part One: Millinneum Approaches* (1992)

Though several prominent modern playwrights were themselves homosexuals, they did not write explicitly about sexual orientation or about the struggle to gain equal rights for gay people. That changed as the movement became more prominent and successful after about 1980. Tony Kushner has emerged as the most powerful of the gay playwrights. He makes heart-rending use of the AIDS crisis in *Angels in America*. From the standpoint of technique he departs radically from realism, featuring (for instance) angels that descend upon the stage.

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1953)

Samuel Beckett deserves credit for establishing a strong trend toward post-modernism in the drama of English-speaking countries. Life, he seems to have felt, is absurd, and so drama should be so too. Accordingly he wrote bleak plays where nothing much happens, and things do not make much sense, and yet the atmosphere is convincingly tense. *Waiting for Godot* is an example. The characters are waiting for a mysterious Godot—who, in the end, never comes.

Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966)

Beckett's influence can be seen in the work of Tom Stoppard, who was born in Czechoslovakia but mastered English to an astonishing degree. He is a very intellectual playwright who nevertheless manages to reach popular audiences. *Rosencranz* uses Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a springboard to leap towards absurdity. *Rosencranz and Guildenstern*, it will be recalled, are minor courtiers who spy for Claudius, betraying their former fellow-student Hamlet. He sends them to their death without a qualm. Stoppard experiments with what happens when they become the major characters in the play, reducing Hamlet's heroic world to meaningless babble.

Sue Townsend, *The Great Celestial Cow* (1984)

Sue Townsend, though not as high in reputation as the other playwrights in this unit, has nevertheless gained esteem for her wit and imagination. She has published critically acclaimed works in several genres besides drama. The cow in the title of this play refers to a constellation which guides a family of immigrants during their journey from India to England. The play concerns how they fit in, or do not fit in, to life in their new country.

Final Paper topic:

Caryl Churchill is known as a feminist and Tony Kushner as a gay rights advocate. Which of the two pushes his or her cause more openly? Which of the two is more effective in promoting that cause?

Fourth short paper due

ELEVENTH WEEK--Drama of China and India

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 546-570.

Play: Anonymous, *The Qing Ding Pearl [The Lucky Pearl]* (c. 960-1279 A.D.)

Textbook, pp.573-578.

Highly recommended:

Kalidasa, *The Recognition of Sakuntala* (c. 400 A.D.), trans. W.J. Johnson. Oxford World Classics, 2001. Used from \$.36.

Also recommended:

Rabindranath Tagore, *Dak Ghar [The Post Office]* (1912), trans. from Bengali by Devabrata Mukherjee. Free online at www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6523.

Ma Chih-yuan, *Autumn in the Palace of the Han* (1280-1368) in Charles F. Horne, ed., *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East* (New York: Parke, Austin, and Lipscomb, 1917, reprinted (and free) online at

www.fordham.edu/halsall/eastasia/hankoongtsu.html (1998).

The White-haired Girl (1945), an opera written collectively by members of the Yan'an Lu Xun Academy of Literature and Art, adapted for film and directed by Shui Hua and Wang Bin. Film script (1950) trans. Pete Nestor and Tom Moran. free online at mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/moran2/html.

Recommended videos: none.

Study Guide:

East versus West

Asian drama is closer to ritual than Western drama. Acting is highly stylized and usually eschews any sort of realism in the "slice of life" meaning of the word. Music and dance are quite prominent, so that in a way every play is a "musical"-- though not in the Western sense of the term. Plays are often strongly tied to tradition, so that a given stage gesture at a given point in the play may go back centuries and have meanings for the audience that Westerners sometimes do not apprehend.

The Qing-Ding Pearl (c. 960-1279 C.E.)

This anonymous and ancient play is clearly based on a folk tale. It features a character of lower social status who is in the right (morally) and triumphs over the wicked schemers who are of higher social status. Magic is definitely involved. The happy ending makes the story line somewhat resemble a Western comedy, but the differences in acting style make the total effect quite different.

Kalidasa, *The Recognition of Sakuntala* (c. 400 C.E.)

That this Sanskrit play from so long ago is still as accessible to us as those of the ancient Greeks is a tribute to the universality of the themes employed here. Little is known of the legendary author, but the play itself is clear. It is a kind of ritualized Hindu tragicomedy in which a noble king seduces a magical maiden but, later, does not at first recognize her. He learns through suffering and eventually becomes a great king for his people. Much of the meaning is conveyed by actors' hand movements, the meanings of which are already known to the audience.

Rabindranath Tagore, *The Post Office* (1912)

Tagore, whose first language was Bengali, wrote in that tongue with great success but also in English—with even greater success, becoming the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Although not known primarily as a playwright, he wrote well enough in that genre to attract the admiration of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats. Yeats' endorsement caused the play to be translated from Bengali into English and other languages. The central character, the boy Amil, is strong despite his incurable disease, and his death (or is it merely sleeping?) at the end of the play is both pitiful and intriguing.

Ma Chih-Yuan, *Autumn in the Palace of the Han* (c. 1300 C.E.)

This ancient Yuan-dynasty drama is worthy of attention despite the fact that little is known of its author. The story is tragic, though evil is punished at the end. The Han emperor falls in love with a beauty, but through the machinations of a wicked courtier, is forced to give her up to the more powerful Khan as the price of peace. She drowns herself, and the most powerful part of the play is the songs sung as if from a wild goose, a symbol of her soul. In the end the Khan delivers the wicked courtier to the Han emperor for well-deserved execution.

The White-haired Girl (1945, 1950)

So many hands went into the creation of this work of art that it is difficult to assign authorship. The story of several real-life peasant women who suffered terribly at the hands of the government in the period 1920-1940, it was first an opera (1945), then a

film (1950) by Yan Jinxuan, much later still a staple in the repertory of the prestigious Beijing Opera (1965). The Communist propaganda in it is somewhat obtrusive, but it has had remarkable staying power in modern Chinese theater.

Final paper topic:

Both *The Qing Ding Pearl* and *The Recognition of Sakuntala* use supernatural and mythological events. In which play are these events more important?

TWELFTH WEEK—Japanese Drama

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 580-594.

Play: Namiki Gohei III, *Kanjincho* [*The Subscription List*] (1841), adapted by James R. Brandon and Tamako Niwa, textbook, pp. 595-604.

Highly recommended:

Zeami Motokiyo, *Sekidera Komachi* [*Komachi at Sekidera*] (c. 1400 A.D.), trans. Karen Brazell, free online at www.etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/KeeSek/htm1.

Also recommended:

Kobo Abe, *The Man Who Turned into a Stick* (1967), trans. Donald Keene (Tokyo: Univ. of Tokyo Press, 1975). Some university libraries have it

Recommended videos: none.

Study Guide:

Importance of Tradition

Tradition is all-powerful in most Japanese theater, and productions are generally judged not by their innovation but by artistic achievement within the boundaries provided by tradition. Noh plays are ancient and they appeal to an elite audience. Kabuki plays are more recent, less traditional, and they appeal to a wider audience.

Namiki Gohei III, *Kanjincho* (1841)

As in the case of several of these Asian plays, we know little about the author. Here, however, we do know that he was the third playwright to bear this name (though unrelated by blood to the previous two). He has skillfully refashioned an old and revered Noh play into an exquisite Kabuki play. *Kanjincho* is the story of a warrior servant who protects his master by trickery, trickery so elaborate that it involves the servant actually beating his master onstage—even though, as a deeply loyal retainer, he suffers great pain in administering the beating.

Zeami Motokiyo, *Komachi at Sekider* (c. 1400 C.E.)

Zeami was not only an outstanding ancient Noh playwright but also a theorist who helped codify the rules of the art. The title character, Komachi, is a poetess of great art and great personal beauty who, her beauty lost to aging, falls upon hard times. She is visited by an abbot whose entourage includes a child. The dancing of the child

so inspires Komachi that she herself dances until dawn, then reflects upon the brevity of life. This, then, is a Noh play of the third kind—plays about women.

Kobo Abe, *The Man Who Turned into a Stick: Three Related Plays* (1957-1969)

Kobo Abe is a recent Japanese playwright who, though steeped in Noh and Kabuki, wrote modern plays which are neither. His plays are purposely enigmatic, and the audience members are expected to fill in the meaning for themselves. Among his best-known works are three related plays meant to symbolize three stages in human life: birth, life itself, and death. The collection, usually performed together, is known by the title of the third one-act, *The Man Who Turned into a Stick*. The unconventionality of Abe's work is illustrated by the fact that at the end of the third play, an actor confronts the audience and accuses them of resembling sticks.

Final paper topic:

Why does *Komachi* seem more centered on ancient tradition than *Kanjincho*?

Fifth short paper due

THIRTEENTH WEEK—African Drama

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 608-615, 668.

Play: Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), textbook, 642-667.

Highly recommended:

Athol Fugard, *Master Harold. . .and the boys* (1982), textbook, pp. 620-637.

Also recommended:

Mbongeni Ngema, *Sarafina!* (1992), used from \$2.73.

Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barry Simon, *Woza Albert* (1981). Used from \$.57.

Ngugiwa Thiong'o, *The Black Hermit* (1963), Download script free at www.go-downloads.com/ffy or purchase used from \$4.66.

Recommended videos:

Master Harold, directed by Lonny Price starring Freddie Highmore (2011). Rent for \$2.99. *Sarafina!*, *The Sound of Freedom*, directed by Darrell Roodt, starring Whoopi Goldberg (2011). Used from \$1.99.

Study Guide:

Colonialism and Drama

The African drama most accessible to Westerners is of recent origins, and tends to have been written in English (though there is a distinct movement towards drama written in indigenous languages). Given Africa's history of colonialism, one is not surprised to note that most of these plays in English deal with racial and cultural conflict, or—at the very least—racial and cultural tension.

Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975)

Wole Soyinka is the first African to have received the Nobel Prize for Literature (1986). Of the Yoruban culture in Nigeria, he is an all-around man of literature. *Death and the King's Horseman* deals with the cultural obligation of a high servant of the King's to die soon after his master dies. From his own point of view Elisin, the King's Horseman, is trying to fulfill a sacred duty, but to the British overlords he is merely trying to commit suicide and should be prevented from doing so. In the end he is in fact prevented, but the results are worse than if he had been allowed to be true to his culture. He is a ruined man.

Athol Fugard, *Master Harold . . . and the boys* (1982)

Fugard is a white South African whose plays have helped end apartheid. He has gained world renown. The unusual title of *Master Harold . . . and the boys* is shorthand for the entire play. The word "Master" is ironic in that it here means a teenage boy of moderate privilege; but in the background are slave/master implications. The dots in the title perhaps indicate the distance between Harold and his mother's employees in the tea room, who are enough older than Harold to have served as father figures, and they have clearly been just that—especially Sam. The lower-case "boys" ironically indicates that, in turning on them and rejecting them for racial reasons, Harold is betraying his "fathers"—who are not boys at all.

Mbongeni Ngema, *Sarafina!* (1988)

Ngema is a versatile South African artist, having composed book, music, and lyrics for this musical--which was nominated for a Tony award in 1988. It features Black students who rise up against apartheid. It was made into a film in 1992 starring Ngema's wife Leleli Khumalo and Whoopi Goldberg.

Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon, *Woza Albert* (1981)

The title means "Rise, Albert!" It is a play written by several actors and writers, its premise being that Christ returns to South Africa and the government drops a nuclear bomb to halt the peacemaker. This political satire rallied many around the anti-apartheid cause.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The Black Hermit* (1963)

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is a prominent Kenyan man of letters, now a professor at the University of California, Irvine. Despite having written this play in English, he is an advocate of African-language literature. *The Black Hermit* features a young man who goes off to the city (Nairobi) even though his mother thinks he should stay in the village and be true to traditional ways. Religion enters in, because she suspects that Christianity has turned her son against his native heritage.

Final paper topic:

Both *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Master Harold* feature white characters who misunderstand and mistreat black characters. Yet the former play is by a black playwright and the latter by a white. Which is more effective at promoting racial understanding and equality?

FOURTEENTH WEEK—Focus on Mexico

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 740-749, 773, 782.

Play: Elena Garro, *Un Hogar Solido [A Solid Home]*(1957), trans. Francesca Colecchia and Julio Matas (1973), textbook, pp. 776-781.

Highly recommended:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 750-751.

Play: Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, *The Divine Narcissus* (1690), trans. and adapted by Roberto D. Romo, textbook, pp. 753-759.

Also recommended:

Rudolfo Usigli, *Una Corona de la Luz* (1964) in *Two Plays*, trans. Thomas Bledsoe (1971), used from \$3.

Emilio Carballido, *La Hebra de Oro [The Golden Thread]*(1957), trans. Margaret Sayers Peden in *The Golden Thread and Other Plays* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1970). In some libraries.

Josefina Niggli, *Soldaderas* (1936) in *The Plays of Josefina Niggli* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2007). In some libraries.

Recommended videos: none.

Study Guide:

Why Focus on Mexico?

Because Mexico is a large and important country in Latin America—and a neighbor to the United States—and has produced and inspired some fine plays, this entire week will be devoted to plays from or about that country. Its drama shows some influence from the Latin-American literary movement called magical realism. The supernatural is treated matter-of-factly.

Elena Garro, *A Solid Home* (1957)

Elena Garro initially gained fame as the wife of the Mexican Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz. They were later divorced, and she enjoyed a successful career as a writer independent of her ex-husband. *A Solid Home* is a one-act play about a family apparently discussing mundane matters; only gradually does the audience become aware of the fact that the “solid home” of the title is a tomb, and all of the characters are dead people. This is in line with Mexican custom, since the Day of the Dead is a major annual holiday.

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, *The Divine Narcissus* (1690)

Sister Juana was a prominent literary figure. For a woman to have attained that kind of status in her era is testimony to the magnitude of her achievement. Her play *The Divine Narcissus* is a good example of the religious and didactic drama that was prominent in Spain throughout its Golden Age and beyond. It is allegorical (like the English morality play *Everyman*) in that the characters have names representing abstractions. Here the character Occident and his wife America stand for all the native peoples who greeted the Spanish arrival. The play depicts their conversion to Christianity.

Rodolfo Usigli, *A Crown of Light* (1964)

Usigli, son of an Italian father and Polish mother, was born in Mexico City in 1905. He had a varied career as a writer; for instance, he collaborated with the famed movie director Luis Bunuel on two filmscripts. He was a controversial playwright because of his social and political satire, and one of his radio scripts was actually censored by the Mexican government. *A Crown of Light* is controversial because of its skeptical view of miracles.

Emilio Carbalillo, *The Golden Thread* (1957)

Carbalillo (1925-2008) was a member of a group of writers known as Generacion de los 50. He and his male partner were among the first couples to apply for marital status under Mexico's recent pro-gay legislation. His English translator Margaret Peden considered *The Golden Thread* a turning point in Mexican theater because it blended realistic techniques with an exploration of dream worlds.

Josefina Niggli, *Soldaderas* (1936)

Born in Mexico of European parents in 1910, she was taken to San Antonio, Texas to avoid the violence of the Mexican Revolution, and she remained in the United States. Writing before the Chicano movement was really launched, she was a pioneer among Mexican-American women writers. Her plays are about the land of her birth, however. *Soldaderas* is about women, particularly La Adelita, who fought in the Mexican Revolution alongside of the men.

Final Paper Topic:

In a country renowned for *machismo*, how have two women (Garro and Sor Juana) gained such fame? Which should be considered the greater artist? Why?

Sixth short paper due

FIFTEENTH WEEK—Other Latin-American Plays

Readings:

Required:

Criticism: textbook, pp. 783-785.

Play: Egon Wolff, *Flores de Papel [Paper Flowers]* (1970), trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (1971), textbook, pp. 786-808.

Highly recommended:

Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* [1990] (New York: Penguin, 1994). Used from \$.10.

Also recommended:

Roberto Ramos-Perea, *Miles: La Otra Historia de la Guerra de 1898 [The Other Story of the Spanish-American War of '98]* (2003) in Charles Philip Thomas, ed. and trans., *The Empire Trilogy: Three Plays of the Spanish American War of 1898* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Gallo Gallante, 2003). In some libraries.

Eduardo Rovner, *Volvio una Noche [She Returned One Night]* (2003), trans. Charles Philip Thomas (N.Y.: Aventine Press, 2003). In some libraries.

Griselda Gambaro and Marguerite Feitlowitz, *Information for Foreigners* (1973), Reprinted Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1992. In some libraries.

Recommended videos:

Death and the Maiden, directed by Roman Polanski, starring Sigourney Weaver (1995). Rent for \$2.99.

Study Guide:

Chile's Preeminence

Chile has produced some outstanding drama. Students will note that both the required and the highly recommended plays for this week are from that country. But several other Latin-American countries have also excelled—especially Argentina.

Egon Wolff, *Paper Flowers* (1970)

Egon Wolff was trained as a chemical engineer but turned to playwrighting to have his say on national affairs in Chile. *Paper Flowers* is an intriguing play. Eva (the name is probably a reference to the Biblical mother of humanity) takes in a transient as an act of mercy and he then menaces her—which is especially terrifying because she has no idea what his motives are. Yet she also seems to fall in love with him after a fashion. Wolff is especially successful at creating an atmosphere of terror.

Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden* (1990)

Dorfman is another Chilean playwright of German ancestry who, remarkably, also writes about women and menace. But in *Death and the Maiden* the female victim has power, at least temporarily, over the man who (she says) raped her when she was a political prisoner. But is she telling the truth about what happened in the past? The partial truth? A big lie? The playwright never gives us a definitive answer.

Roberto Ramos-Perea, *Miles: the Other Side of the Spanish-American War* (2003)

Born in 1959, Robert Ramos-Perea is a leading dramatist and critic in Puerto Rico. The “Miles” in the title of the play is General Nelson Miles, who led the successful American invasion force into Puerto Rico. The play is based on extensive historical research.

Eduardo Rovner, *She Returned One Night* (2003)

Rovner is an Argentine playwright whose plays have been successful not only in his native land but also in Uruguay. Unlike most of the Latin-American plays in the course, *She Returned One Night* is a hilarious comedy. Yes, it deals with dead people who come back to life; but the context makes these “returns” funny, not menacing. One of these “returnees” is the main character’s Jewish mother, who wants her say on his plan to get married. Only her son can see her, so comedy reigns supreme.

Griselda Gambaro and Marguerite Feitlowitz, *Information for Foreigners* (1973)

Gambaro is another Argentine, but this play is anything but a comedy. She is known for her opposition to autocratic regimes, and this play is based on the terrifying disappearance of dissidents both in Argentina and throughout Latin America. The

"Foreigners" in the title are members of the audience, who are issued flashlights and taken in groups through dark corridors to witness frightening scenes.

Final Paper Topic:

Both Wolff and Dorfman present us with terrifying and puzzling worlds. Which world is the more terrifying? Which is the more puzzling? Why?