Drama 401.3

Dramatic Theory and Criticism

An examination of significant theories of major critics, theorists and writers of the theatre from ancient to modern.

Instructor

Moira Day
Room 187
John Mitchell Building
Office: 966-5193
Home: 653-4729
1-780-466-8957 (emergency only)
moira.day@usask.ca
http://www.ualberta.ca/~normang/Pika.html

Office Hours: MW 11:00-1:00

Booklist

Drama 401 Readings Package. Part I (Readings); Part II (Plays)

Recommended extra reading


Theatre History Notes Package. Bookstore

Grades and Course Information

Class Contribution 10%
General Critiques 10%
Seminar presentation 20%
Mid-term 10%
Classical Topic response papers 5% x 2  % 10%
Essay 10%
Final exam 30%

100%
Schedule

Jan 3  Introduction

---

Classicism
8  Plato (Dukore 1-10)
10  *Aristotle (10-27)
---
15  Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)

Neo-classicism
17  Roman and Renaissance - *Horace (28-33), Sidney
---
22  French Baroque - *Aubignac (34-39), *Saint Evremond (40-43)
24  *Phaedra (Racine)
---

The Enlightenment – France and Germany
31  *Miss Sara Sampson (Lessing)
---

Romanticism – France and Germany
Feb 5  *Hugo (56-61), *Schlegel (62-73)
7  *William Tell (Schiller)
---

The Closing of the Classical Tradition
12  Hegel
14  ***Mid-term exam****
---

***Reading Week

Realism and Naturalism
26Hebbel (74-75), *Zola (76-89)

On the Threshold of The Twentieth Century
28  Maeterlinck (90-95), *Krutch (96-102)
---

Surrealism and the Theatre of the Absurd
Mar 4  *Apollinaire (103-04), *Ionesco (105-08), *Esslin (109-11)
6  Endgame (Beckett)
---

Archetypal Theatre
11  *Nietzsche (112-15)
13  Frye
---

Theatre of Social Action
18  Brecht
20  Boal
---

Semiotics
25  Semiotics
27  M.Butterfly (Hwang)
---

Feminism
Apr 1  **"Towards a New Poetic" Sue Ellen Case (Barranger)
3  Good Night Desdemona, Good Night Juliet (Macdonald)
---
**Class Participation**

Class participation requires regular attendance. A student who misses for more than three unexcused absences a term will be docked 50% of the participation grade for that term. If you miss more than 1/3 of the classes in any term for any reason other than certifiable illness you will, at minimum, lose the 10% participation grade for that term. (Please review the Attendance Requirement in All Drama Courses.) Class participation requires regular attendance. Please phone or e-mail if you are unable to attend, preferably in advance of the absence.

Attendance at student class seminars is compulsory because these are graded "live" performances that can be negatively affected by poor audience attendance and participation. For this reason, **1% OF YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE WILL BE DOCKED FOR EVERY UNEXCUSED ABSENCE FROM A STUDENT SEMINAR.**

I will be in class five minutes ahead of time for consultation, and begin and end lectures on time.

**Assignments**

Students are expected to be punctual and to submit all class work on time. I will ordinarily return major assignments within TWO WEEKS after receiving them, quizzes within a WEEK. Assignments and quizzes not picked up at that class time can be picked up during office hours.

Any requests for an extension must be submitted at least one week in advance of the formal deadline. Unexcused late assignments, except in the case of certifiable illness or death in the family, will be heavily penalized (10% per day deducted). NO CLASS WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED BEYOND THE FINAL EXAM EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF AN OFFICIAL INCOMPLETE GRANTED BECAUSE OF ILLNESS OR DEATH IN THE FAMILY.

**General Critiques**

General critiques will be written by all class members on the designated readings (Aristotle, Horace, Zola, The Absurdist, Nietzsche, Feminism) and submitted on the dates below. **UNEXCUSED LATE CRITIQUES WILL NOT ORDINARILY BE ACCEPTED.** See the General Critique for guidelines.

**Classical Topic Response Papers**

Students will write **2 critiques** each about 500-750 words (2-3) pages in length each on **ONE of the following topics** (1. The French Baroque and Phaedra 2. The Enlightenment and Miss Sara Sampson 3. The Romantics and William Tell). The first critique will deal with the aesthetic readings, the second with the assigned play. While many of the same guidelines apply as for the general critique, the topics are more focused in nature and intended to be explored in greater depth. Formal style and mechanics are important.

The critiques must be typed and submitted the class either before or the same day they are to be dealt with in class. (See due dates below) Proper bibliographic and footnote formatting required. **LATE CRITIQUES WILL NOT ORDINARILY BE ACCEPTED EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF CERTIFIABLE ILLNESS or SERIOUS ILLNESS IN THE FAMILY.** See Classical Topics for further information.

**Seminars**

These will be conducted by students working in pairs and cover material in the contemporary area. See Seminar Topics, Guidelines for Oral Presentations.

**Essay**

The individual student is required to submit a 4-6 (750-1,250) page TYPED essay based on his/her own area of research in the seminar or developing the critical question are greater length. Unless arranged otherwise, it will be due the same day as the seminar presentation. See Guidelines for the Essay.

**Due dates**
Aristotle
Horace
French Baroque
Phaedra
The Enlightenment
Miss Sara Sampson
The Romantics
William Tell
Zola
Krutch
The Absurdists
Endgame
Nietzsche
M. Butterfly
Feminism
GN, Des/GM Jul

Jan 10
Jan 17
Jan 22
Jan 24
Jan 29
Jan 31
Feb 5
Feb 7
Feb 26
Feb 28
Mar 4
Mar 6
Mar 11
Mar 26
Apr 1

Exams
Exams will be essay format. They will be based on the assigned readings in the packages and on class discussions arising from them. Check schedule for due date of readings. Students who purchase second-hand copies of Dukore may need to refer to the Reserve Reading Room in the library for the Semiotics and Feminism Readings. Phaedra, Miss Sara Sampson and William Tell are in Readings Package Part II. Oedipus Rex, Endgame and M. Butterfly are in the anthology, Stages of Drama, used in Theatre History. Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet is on reserve in separate copy. All readings and plays outside of those in Stages of the Drama are also on reserve.

Fees
Students should be aware that there is a $3.00 photocopy fee per term to be paid to the instructor by the end of the September.

Important Deadlines
If you decide to drop the course, please come and notify me so I can take your name off my record book. (Jan 16. Last day to withdraw without financial penalty. March 15 Last day to withdraw without academic penalty). If you find yourself in difficulties and are considering dropping the course late in the term, please come and talk to me first.

Be aware that instructors are NOT permitted to reschedule final exams at their own discretion. Please take heed of the final exam dates (April 10-30) and do not schedule other activities at that time.

Accessibility Outside Class
If there is a time conflict with my office hours, then feel free to make an appointment or leave me a message on my voice mail. I am also very accessible by e-mail. (See above) I can't give you heavy-duty, on-going counselling, but I'd be delighted to help you with any immediate problem I feel is within my power to handle, and if I feel it isn't, I'll try to refer you to people or places that can help you with it.

Welcome on board!
The Essay

The essay should not be a summary of the presentation, but elaborate on it or develop some aspect or angle of the topic you want to explore further than you were able to in the talk. You can also write on another topic, but clear it with me first. For specifics of style check the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (6th edition), or the Department of English Requirements for Essays. (Available in bookstore for .55) 50% of the grade is assigned for Content (breadth of ideas, depth of treatment, astuteness of analysis, accuracy and effective use of substantiating evidence.) 40% for style (coherence and organization, clarity of expression, spelling and grammar, proper documenting and referencing of sources) and 10% for overall effect. ESSAYS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED BEYOND THE FINAL EXAM EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF AN OFFICIAL INCOMPLETE GRANTED BECAUSE OF ILLNESS OR DEATH IN THE FAMILY

The General Critique

The critique should serve as a considered response to the material you are reading for class. It is meant to (a) clarify and focus your own thinking about the material you have read (b) help initiate class discussion (c) give the instructor feedback on areas of information you would like to know more about or feel require further explanation and clarification before you are ready to be examined on them and (d) give the instructor feedback on what issues and areas of information you would like to be tested on since you view them as key to understanding the period and the theatre that comes out of it.

It should about 250-300 words long and not exceed one page in length. It can expand on one point at length or deal with two or three smaller ones (much more than that and you may be spreading yourself too thin.) It should be submitted at the end of the class when it is due, and will be returned at the time of the next class. In the case of multiple authors in an area (i.e.: The Enlightenment, Absurdism), you may want to write on one author at depth with passing reference to the others, or write on themes or characteristics that distinguish the writers as a group.

Things you may want to comment on:

(1) how the reading illuminates or clarifies for you certain historical, literary or social themes and concerns we have raised in class.

(2) where you find interesting comparisons or contrasts between what you see here and what you have discovered in other of your areas of study or experience.

(3) how this reading sheds a new light on other literary material we have studied in the class.

(4) something about the reading that particularly excited or interested you and you would like to share with others.

(5) something that particularly intrigued or puzzled you and you would like to know more about

(6) something that particularly bothered you or that you disagreed with, and would like to see addressed by the class as a group.
At its best, it should read as an informal but short personal essay that develops your idea, thesis, argument, query or quibble in a clear, articulate and concise fashion. Humor and poetic or metaphoric personal touches are fine - it is a personal essay after all - but only as long as they support and advance the ideas you are trying to express and do not become a substitute for them. As with an exam or quiz, I will not be putting a high premium on formal style and mechanics, but I do expect the critique to be clear, neat and legible, and will be paying close attention to how well you express, develop and argue your thoughts in writing.
Oral Presentations

Organization:

The formal part of the presentation should occupy about two-thirds of the period. (Approximately 25-30 minutes per speaker.) The presenter should then be prepared to answer questions from the instructor and class, and lead discussion afterwards. The presenter should also distribute a handout including an outline of the talk, a bibliography and any other information (statistics, names, dates) he or she feels would help the presentation.

The emphasis of the presentation should be on the application of the aesthetic to the play or theoretical readings involved in light of the critical issues raised in the seminar question. Debate formats where both sides of the issue are raised and argued with supporting evidence are welcome. If you feel a demonstration (video, tapes, slides, pictures, comparative readings) will help illustrate points you are trying to make in your talk please feel free to use them. How well does the play or reading examined illustrate the aesthetic discussed in the previous class? Where does it fail to illustrate the aesthetic? What does the play or reading, taken in conjunction with relevant information about the play’s production record or the writer’s career, times and history, reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of the aesthetic itself when it is practically applied? What does the aesthetic allow the play or reading to do well? Where does it impose limitations and boundaries on the play or reading?

Grading:

50% of the grade will be assigned to content (accuracy, depth and comprehensiveness of material presented, ability to address questions well), 40% to presentation (effective organizing and structuring of the material, pacing of the presentation, and clarity, variety and expressiveness of delivery), and 10% to the handout (content, clarity, organization, form.)

Practical Tips:

1. Practice READING your talk OUT LOUD (preferably before a sympathetic audience) before you give it, and be careful that you time it. Inexperienced presenters are often surprised at how fast the time goes. Also, let people know if questions are welcome during the talk, or if you would prefer them to wait until afterwards.

2. A "live" audience often has to be "cued" more clearly and more often as to where the presentation is going, than a reading audience. A reader can return to puzzle out obscure or difficult passages he/she missed on the first read-through, or was too hurried to absorb properly; a "live" audience has to "get it" the first time or it's gone. So organize well, making your key points or thesis clear early on in the talk, and don't be afraid to highlight or reinforce them as you go on.

3. Humor is fine, but avoid flippancy; if you don't appear to take your subject and yourself seriously and with some enthusiasm, your audience won't take it and you seriously either.

4. The same plethora of facts, figures, statistics, dates and names that may delight a reader, may leave a listener numb and reeling. These are often better included in the handout for quick reference, or chalked up on the board.

The instructor will:

- provide additional guidance and direction as necessary before the presentation
- give each student a written critique and a letter grade within a week of the presentation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90-100%</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Content and Method consistently exceed the Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85-89%</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Content and Method consistently meet the Standard at a superior level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-84%</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Content and Method consistently meet the standard at a very high level. Quality generally excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>Good/Very good</td>
<td>Much of the Content and Method meet the standard at a very high level. Quality generally very good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Content and Method consistently meet the standard at a high level. Quality generally good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Much of the Content and Method meets the standard at a fairly high level. Quality generally higher than average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Content and Method consistently meet the standard at an acceptable level. Quality average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Fair/Poor</td>
<td>Much of the Content and Method meet the standard at an acceptable level. Some elements fail to meet the standard. Quality generally below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Poor/Pass</td>
<td>Content and Method meet the minimum standard for a pass. Serious deficiencies in content and/or method. Quality generally poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Poor/Fail</td>
<td>Content and Method have some merit but either or both substantially fail to meet the standard. Quality poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Under 45%</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Content and Method both substantially fail to meet the standard. Quality very poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Response Papers

Topic 1  Jan 22 and 24
1 17th Century France saw neoclassicism at its most powerful and dogmatic as a virtual “state” aesthetic. While Saint-Evremond and Aubignac upheld the authority of Aristotle as the “king” of Dramatic Aesthetics, their understanding of how his “rules” apply to the Baroque French theatre of their time also reflect an almost Platonic understanding of how a contemporary “philosopher-king” should use art in an enlightened absolute monarchy under the rule of a benevolent “King of Heaven” who works in mysterious ways in the world. Discuss.

Like many neoclassical playwrights, Racine argued that his work at its best, exceeded the Greek original (Euripides' Hippolytus) in observing Aristotle’s unities and “decorum” of character, and in organizing the plot to better reward moral virtue while more severely punishing moral frailty and error. To what extent do you agree with Racine that his play achieves its greatest power in adhering faithfully to “the rules.” To what extent, does it achieve its greatest power as drama by bending or moving beyond “the rules.”

Topic 2  Jan 29 and 31
The “philosophes” of the Enlightenment often created a body of writing reflecting the importance of radically recreating the world and the human being in the image of an enlightened Reason that would sweep away the limitations and injustices of a human order based blindly on old blood, privilege, and outmoded religious, social and cultural traditions. Discuss the dramatic aesthetics and “reforms” of Rousseau, Beaumarchais and Diderot as a manifestation of Enlightenment Utopianism.

Miss Sara Sampson constituted an ambitious attempt on Lessing’s side to reconcile neoclassical form with contemporary subject matter and radical new Enlightenment thought on society, morality and the changing “social contract” between the classes and genders. To what extent does the play constitute a considerable ideological advance over the French neoclassicism of Racine’s Phaedra? To what extent does the play function less well as drama despite its ambition to create a new form of theatre that combines the best of the old and new world?

Topic 3  Feb 5 and 7
Romanticism marked a radical break from the empirical rationalism and moral restraint and precise stylistic categorization of the Classical and Enlightenment tradition. Discuss the extent to which Hugo and Schlegel’s aesthetics pave the way for “a new School of Poetry” for a “new civilization.” marked by profound human, social and political Revolution.

Schiller felt his later plays constituted a return to the aspiring, transcendent spirit of classicism in contrast to the naturalism of bourgeois comedy/ tragedy or the morbid emotional and stylistic excesses of sturm- und-drang Romanticism. Yet despite his and Goethe’s insistence that Weimar Classicism constituted a further revitalization and reformation of the classical spirit for a contemporary age, Schiller’s William Tell - in form, theme, set design and characterization - has much more in common with a consciously Romantic play such as Hugo’s Hernani, than the Enlightenment classicism of Miss Sara Sampson. Do you agree with Schiller that the play works predominantly within the classical tradition as defined by Plato and Aristotle? Or does it work predominantly as a Romantic work as defined by Hugo and Schlegel?
Seminar Topics

1. **Mar 6**  
   **Absurdism** - The ultimate mysticism or the ultimate repudiation of a metaphysical order? A radical rebirth of human meaning or a danse macabre upon the grave of human meaning? To what extent does absurdism confirm Krutch’s assertion that drama, humanism and perhaps the universe itself are on the verge of succumbing to an entropy and dissolution from which there is no recovery? To what extent does absurdism reveal the essential human spirit that endures beyond the destruction of all? Discuss in particular reference to Beckett’s *Endgame*.

2. **Mar 11**  
   **Nietzsche** - Genius or madman? Is his *The Birth of Tragedy* a final radical attempt to redeem and recover the classical tradition from outmoded moral and social construction and return it to its original sacred essence? Or does the essay’s celebration of the irrational and emotional anticipate a madness, cruelty and amorality that will eventually undermine moral and social construction altogether. Was Nietzsche the master sorcerer remaking the world anew in striking new images of liberation - or simply the “sorcerer’s apprentice” wielding a darker and dangerous ideological “magic” than he realized?

3. **Mar 13**  
   **Frye** – Confronted as a young clergyman with the existential barrenness of the Depression Saskatchewan landscape and existential barrenness of the modern metaphysical landscape – Frye was moved to find a redemptive, comprehensive aesthetic and metaphysical system that would comfortably reconcile the conflicting dictates of religion, humanism and science. Discuss the extent to which Frye both succeeded and failed in achieving in this ambitious goal.

4. **March 20**  
   **Boal** – Like Brecht, Boal begins with the assumption that any significant reform of the Western Theatre to make it a more flexible instrument of social action begins with the repudiation of the Aristotelian tradition of theatre and the world view that supports it. However, he believes that Brecht errs in not returning directly to Aristotle and understanding the Greek philosopher as well as he needs to be understood, leading to “flaws” in Brecht’s own contemporary concept of epic theatre. To what extent is Boal’s own analysis of Aristotle different from Brecht’s, leading him to a radically different aesthetic of social action theatre?

5. **March 27**  
   **Semiotics** - Another attempt to find a universal approach to dramatic analysis that allows for the precision, comprehensiveness and consistency of the scientific method by concentrating on the communication systems by which we know and comprehend meaning rather than on the objects of observation themselves. To what extent does semiotics function as a cold cerebral abstract approach to the humanities that denies the holistic, empathetic spirit of the humanist tradition? To what extent does it expand the potential of the humanist tradition to become more holistic and empathetic? Discuss with particular reference to Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*.

6. **April 3**  
   **Feminism** - Like Boal, Sue Ellen Case argues that a radical reworking of Aristotle’s basic assumptions of drama is necessary to produce a radical new theatre to radically liberate the marginalized. To what extent is her “New Poetics” reactionary in nature – that is to say, it simply functions as an inverse image of the older humanism – and to what extent is it truly revolutionary? Discuss in particular reference to Ann Marie Macdonald’s *Good Morning Desdemona, Good Night Juliet*. 