



ELL 401 – Contemporary Drama

Asst. Prof. Michael D. Sheridan

Tuesday 09⁰⁰–11⁰⁰ (H203)

Thursday 16⁰⁰–17⁰⁰ (G005)

Office Hours: Held online, made by email appointment

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Course Description

This course will examine texts, performances, adaptations, and developments in contemporary drama in the English language. Though we will look at some plays from the first half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the main focus will be on plays produced in the second half of the 20th century, presented in chronological order. Not only will the plays we read cover a variety of genres (comedy, farce, verbatim theater, tragicomedy, etc.), but we will also look at film or filmed stage versions of many of the texts. In our readings and viewings, the aim will be to develop an understanding of the choices made by playwrights in terms of structure, dramaturgy, staging, and other dramatic and theatrical elements, within the context of the historical and sociocultural background of the time of production.

Course Format

Although there will be occasional lectures or mini-lectures outlining, for example, the historical and sociocultural background of the texts that we will read, for the most part this course is a reading/viewing- and discussion-based course. Therefore, you will be expected to come to each class having read, thought about, taken notes on, and prepared questions or comments relating to the assigned texts. In many cases, viewing of film versions or filmed stage versions of the plays is also assigned, and you are expected to have watched these versions and included your viewing as part of that preparation. The class will then proceed according to your preparations as we discuss, debate, and (hopefully) clarify your thoughts and ideas.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- ✓ articulate some of the predominant trends of modern English-language drama
- ✓ draw connections among various works and trends in terms of thematic, dramaturgical, and theatrical elements
- ✓ situate various works and trends within their historical and sociocultural context
- ✓ understand how dramaturgical and theatrical elements may require alteration when adapted to other media (*e.g.*, film)
- ✓ conduct research independently and utilize the results of that research to produce analytical and critical work

Readings and Course Materials

All texts for the course will be provided for you via the course Moodle page in PDF format. You will be responsible for regularly checking the course Moodle page before class for assigned readings, updates, and announcements.

While this is a reading-heavy course (with approximately one play focused on per week), our readings and viewings will consist mainly of primary sources (*e.g.*, plays and filmed versions of plays). Introductory or analytical/critical secondary sources (*e.g.*, book chapters, journal articles, etc.) may also be occasionally assigned; however, for the most part, you yourself will be responsible for seeking out additional introductory and/or analytical/critical works to help you understand or interpret each play. I am, of course, ready and willing and happy to point you in the direction of such sources; one especially good online source is Drama Online (<https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/home>), though unfortunately many of its resources require a subscription.

Grading

Your final grade will be determined according to the following criteria:

Ongoing (formative) assessment (30%)

- **Attendance and participation (15% of total grade)**

Because, as noted above, this is a reading/viewing- and discussion-based course, regular attendance at and active participation in class (and, if applicable, on Moodle forums) are expected and required. The attendance portion of your grade counts for 5% of your total grade (determined based directly on the percentage of class hours attended), while the participation portion of your grade counts for 10% of your total grade

- **Reading/viewing responses (15% of total grade)**

Over the course of the semester, you will write a total of three (3) short (approximately 500 to 750 words) reading/viewing responses to an assigned play; each response will be worth 5% of your total grade. Some of these responses may be submitted separately, while others may be posted in an open forum on the course Moodle page; in any case, the content of and approach to adopt with each response will vary, and may also include audiovisual and/or performative elements. More details about these reading/viewing responses will be provided in the first week of class, and periodically in class throughout the semester.

Summative assessment (70%)

- **Midterm essay (30% of total grade)**

You will be expected to write a midterm essay of approximately 1,000–1,500 words focusing on a play and/or filmed play of your choice; this may be a play that was not assigned for class, so long as it meets with my approval and suits the time period and basic themes and issues of the assigned plays and our discussion of them. More details will be provided via Moodle, email, and/or in class. Your midterm essay will be due no later than Friday, November 26.

- **Final project (40% of total grade)**

You will be expected to prepare a final project focusing on one (or more) of the plays assigned for the course. This may be either a written essay of approximately 2,000–2,500 words, or a creative project, such as (to give an example) your own staged and recorded version of a scene from one of the plays. In either case, if you wish, you can potentially view this final assignment as preparatory for the graduation project you will pursue in ELL 406. More details will be provided via Moodle, email, and/or in class. Your final project will be due no later than Friday, January 14.

Statement on Academic Integrity

TED University is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct. Such a level of ethical behavior and academic integrity will be expected in this course. Participating in behavior that violates academic integrity—e.g., unauthorized collaboration on homework assignments, plagiarism, multiple submissions of the same assignment and paper, cheating on examinations, fabricating information, helping another person to cheat, having unauthorized advance access to examinations, altering or destroying the work of others, or any other action deemed as giving an unfair academic advantage—will result in disciplinary action. For more information on what constitutes ethical academic integrity at TED University, please see the following page: <https://student.tedu.edu.tr/en/student/principles-of-academic-integrity>.

Also please note that, in this course, any form of discrimination and/or harassment based on race, color, religion, creed, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, sexual orientation, age, or disability, among other personal characteristics or choices, are strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated.

Attendance, Make-up, and Late Submission Policies

You are required to attend class regularly: as noted above, simple attendance counts for 5% of your total grade, but please note that more than 12 class hours of absence will result in failure of the course.

Except in cases of documented illness or emergency, there will be no make-ups for any of the assessments listed above. Late submissions (again, with the exception of documented illness or emergency) will be accepted, but at a penalty of 10% of the relevant assessment's overall grade per 24-hour period.

Tentative Course Schedule

Below you will find a schedule containing the plays that we will be reading each week, together with film versions or filmed stage versions of each play where available; in some cases, a YouTube link to the film is provided, while in other cases another means of viewing the film will be arranged in due time. Please do not use the films as substitutes for reading the text of the play, but feel free to watch the film before or simultaneously with reading the text. Please note that the name and date beside the name of each play are the place and date on which the play premiered on the stage.

As mentioned earlier, there may occasionally be secondary source readings (*e.g.*, book chapters, journal articles, etc.) assigned, and any such assigned readings will be made available on Moodle and announced via Moodle, email, and/or in class. However, for the most part, you yourself will be responsible for seeking out additional introductory or analytical/critical works to help you understand or interpret each play, though I will of course always be ready and willing and happy to assist you in doing so.

Please note that, as indicated by the word “tentative” above, the schedule below is subject to change, with any changes to be announced via Moodle, email, and/or in class.

Week 1 (Oct. 5 + 7): Introduction to Modern Drama

Week 2 (Oct. 12 + 14)

- J.M. Synge, *The Tinker's Wedding* (His Majesty's Theatre, London; Nov. 11, 1909)
- W.B. Yeats, *Purgatory* (Abbey Theatre, Dublin; Aug. 19, 1938)
 - Filmed stage version of *Purgatory*:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJe2IXlJZWw> (Part 1),
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npKzRi50uds> (Part 2)

Week 3 (Oct. 19 + 21)

- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (French: Théâtre de Babylone, Paris, Jan. 5, 1953; English: Arts Theatre, London, Aug. 3, 1955)
 - Film (2001): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuxISg9tjHk>

Week 4 (Oct. 26)

- Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (Civic Theatre, Chicago; Dec. 26, 1944)
 - Film (1973): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eizufqTgQ2k> (Part 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCd8yCBEYwE> (Part 2)
- Please note that we will not have class on Thursday, October 28 due to the celebration of Republic Day.

Week 5 (Nov. 2 + 4)

- Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (Theatre Royal Stratford East, London; May 27, 1958)
 - Film (1961)

Week 6 (Nov. 9 + 11)

- Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Ethel Barrymore Theatre [Broadway], New York; Mar. 11, 1959)
 - Film (1961)

Week 7 (Nov. 16 + 18)

- Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming* (Aldwych Theatre [West End], London; June 3, 1965)

Week 8 (Nov. 23 + 25)

- Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (University of Ife, Ife-Ife; March 1, 1976)
- Please note that your midterm essay will be due no later than Friday, November 26.

Week 9 (Nov. 30 + Dec. 2)

- David Mamet, *American Buffalo* (Goodman Theatre, Chicago; Nov. 23, 1975)
 - Film (1996)

Week 10 (Dec. 7 + 9)

- Philip Ridley, *The Pitchfork Disney* (Bush Theatre, London; Jan. 2, 1991)
 - Filmed stage version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dVcLHRusR8>

Week 11 (Dec. 14 + 16)

- Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project* (Ricketson Theatre, Denver; Feb. 26, 2000)
 - Film (2002)

Week 12 (Dec. 21 + 23)

- Martin McDonagh, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon; April 2000)

Week 13 (Dec. 28 + 30)

- Caryl Churchill, *A Number* (Royal Court Theatre [West End], London; Sept. 23, 2002)

Week 14 (Jan. 4 + 6): Review and Prep for Final Project

- Please note that your final project will be due no later than Friday, January 14.