Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be understood without taking just these interactions into account—and theory is a matter of understanding.

John Dewey, *Art as Experience*

"Today’s realism is tomorrow’s melodrama.

Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*

Of all the problems standing in the way of American drama being fit into the higher-education curriculum—the early extracurricular status of performance, the increasing devaluation of oratory and rhetoric, the slipperiness of the genre, the problematic cultural capital of American drama and theatre, the thick Anglophilianism of American literary study, the territorial struggle with Theatre departments, the thematic prevalence of politics at the expense of “poetry”—the most insurmountable would seem to have been the taint of emotion coloring drama in general and American drama in particular.

Susan Harris Smith, *American Drama: The Bastard Art*

Well: all that can be said is that the contrast between learning and amusing oneself is not laid down by divine rule; it is not one that has always been and must continue to be.

Bertolt Brecht, “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction”

In this course, we will read twentieth-century plays, mostly from the United States but also from Britain, France, and Germany. We will ask fundamental questions about theatrical form, the development of drama, and the popularity of performance theories. Early on, to establish a critical vocabulary, we will read Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage*. Among other matters, this play will enable us to consider how aesthetics, politics, and empathy can operate in the space of a theatre.

All our plays, the obscure and the well-known, have been described as formally experimental. I have organized our dramatic readings less by chronology than by theatrical form: epic theatre, agit-prop, surrealism, expressionism, absurdism, poststructuralist theatre, environmental theatre, documentary theatre, and tragedy. Obviously, a course could be devoted to any one of these forms. From our encounter
with several, I hope you will find new ways of thinking about this literary genre and why humans do this strange thing of pretending to be other than they are.

**PERFORMANCE TEXTS**
Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*
Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead*
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (Penguin)
Marita Bonner, *The Purple Flower* (handout)
Djuna Barnes, *At the Roots of the Stars, To the Dogs, The Dove* (handout)
Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*
Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*
Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play*
Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die*
Kenneth Brown, *The Brig* (film)
Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*
Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*
Eugene O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*
August Wilson, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*
Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*
Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart*

**GRADING**
1) Five Responses  25%
2) Participation/Performances/Reviews  15%
3) Two Essays  60%

**LEARNING GOALS**
- Knowledge of 20th-century American drama
- Understanding of major theatrical forms
- Ability to synthesize scholarly arguments and theatre reviews
- Proficiency in research methods
- Ability to collaborate on performances and contribute to discussions
- Ability to listen to one another

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**
1) Reader Responses
On ecampus, everyone will post five responses to our readings (approximately 500 words each). These informal responses are an opportunity for you to gather ideas and observations. You do not need to touch on everything we have read for any particular week. Choose one idea or question to develop. Be sure to ground your responses in the language of the dramatic texts by providing direct quotations.

You might want to use your reader response to think about how you would teach a play. You could identify strategies for introducing the material or brainstorm about how you would encourage students (at the high school or undergraduate level) to delve into complex parts of the text.

Pace your responses throughout the semester and try to post no later than 4PM on Tuesday, so we all have a chance to read the responses before we meet on Wednesday.
2) Participation, Performances, and Reviews
This is an interactive class that will ask you to get out of your seat, to work with others, and to take risks in your writing and thinking. Performance is not only our content but our method.

Participation: This class will strengthen your ability to think—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. There will be a variety of ways to participate: providing feedback to performers, asking questions of one another, and responding to our texts. If you have difficulty taking in class, please make an appointment early in the semester to speak with me.

Performance: Everyone will be in two performance groups. Each group will collaborate on a ten-minute performance that engages with our week’s reading. Performances are ungraded (but count toward participation), informal, and great fun. Usually groups meet at least once outside of class to prepare. Feel free to rearrange the classroom, incorporate the audience, bring in props, costumes, music, etc. You do not need to memorize anything (though we’ll all be impressed if you do). Your performance should provide us with an interpretive take on a play. At the end of the performance, the audience will have a chance to respond, and the performers can say a few words about their process and intent. (Also see handout for ideas.)

Reviews: In addition to the performing groups, you will sign up for one day on which you will bring in a review of a play from a newspaper, magazine, or other reliable source. Be prepared to provide us with the time and place of the reviewed performance and to summarize the critic’s response to the play. The review might be from the first run of a play or its revival; it might be from its country of origin or not. The point of the review summary is simply to share with us a particular production of the play under discussion. You can find reviews through the library’s databases or through an Internet search.

3) Writing Projects
Your major writing projects will be two research essays (approx. 10 pp) that develop a critical or theoretical argument based on course material. I will collect proposals two weeks before the due date, and we will have an in-class writing workshop the week before the final essay is due.

REQUIRED READING (available on ecampus; click “View” clockwise or counterclockwise)
Erika Munk, “Only Connect: The Living Theatre and its Audiences.” Restaging the Sixties:


Recommended Reading


SCHEDULE

January 16: Thinking about Performance
Rectangle game. Circle game
Introductions
Eric Bentley: Theatre = “A performs B for C”
Aristotle, Poetics
Sign up for Performances and Review Days

January 23: Agit-Prop / Strike Plays
Clifford Odets, Waiting for Lefty (1935)
Irwin Shaw, Bury the Dead (1936)

Michael Denning, Chapter 5, “‘The Literary Class War’: Rethinking Proletarian Literature” in The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. 200-229. (ecampus)


January 30: Epic Theatre:
Plato: “Only the dead have seen the end to war”

Bertolt Brecht, Mother Courage (1941, 1949)
All the introductory material to the Penguin edition
Selections from Brecht on Theatre: “Theatre for Pleasure, or Theatre for Instruction”; “The Street Scene”; “From the Mother Courage Model” (ecampus)

Recommended:
From Brecht to Beckett [documentary film]
More from Brecht on Theatre: “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre”; “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting”; “Interview with an Exile”
February 6: Expressionism
Djuna Barnes, Introduction to At the Roots of the Stars: The Short Plays: At the Roots of the Stars. To the Dogs, The Dove (1920s) (handout)
Marita Bonner, The Purple Flower (1929) (handout)

Douglas Messerli, “Djuna Barnes’s Roots”
http://www.writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/messerli/essays/messerli_barnes_roots.html

February 13: Surrealism, or the Memory Play
Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (1944)
Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, Sleep Deprivation Chamber (1996)

Bert States, “Expressionism and After,” from Great Reckonings (ecampus)
Susan Harris Smith, Chapter 4, “Did She Jump or Was She Pushed?” in American Drama: The Bastard Art 114-138; 149-158 (ecampus)

***Due: Proposal for First Essay due—750 words

February 20: The Autobiographical (and Not to be Published)
Eugene O’Neill, Long Day’s Journey into Night (publ 1956)

http://www.hotreview.org/articles/nativeeloquence.htm
Terry Teachout, “America’s Greatest Playwright?” Commentary 1 Mar 2011: 75-78. (EBSCOHost)

***Due: Draft of Essay to writing partner by Sunday, Feb 24 at 4PM

February 27: Meta-Theatre
Philip Kan Gotanda, Yankee Dawg You Die (1989)
Langston Hughes, “Trouble with the Angels” (1935) (handout)


Writing Workshop
March 6: Documentary Theatre (or Blowtorch Realism)
Kenneth Brown, *The Brig* (1963) – watch in class

Arnold Aronson, Chapter 3 in *American Avante-Garde Theatre* (ecampus)
Erika Munk, “Only Connect: The Living Theatre and its Audiences.” (ecampus)

***Final Essay Due***

March 13: Parliament Funkadelic

Dwight Conquergood. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *Performance Studies Reader*. 311-322. [http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/301/psinterventions-tdr.pdf](http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/301/psinterventions-tdr.pdf)

March 20: Environmental Theatre
Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977)


Spring Break

April 3: Epic Theatre (and Angels)


April 10: Tragedy


April 17: the Absurd, or Poststructuralism?


http://books.google.com/books?id=J7iQNBOp7Q4C&pg=PP1&lpg=PP1&dq=esslin+theatre+of+the+absurd&source=bl&ots=xFEcfk7DDd&sig=kJ0-cqY7E9PSc7rfjFRoiKiR7IE&hl=en#


***Proposal for Final Essay due

April 24: Surreal Structuralism

Toril Moi, "They practice their trades in different worlds: Concepts in Poststructuralism and Ordinary Language Philosophy.” *New Literary History* 40.4 (2009): 801-824. (ProjectMUSE)

***Due: Draft of Essay to writing partner by Sunday, April 28

May 1: Final Thoughts
Writing Workshop

***Final essay due by May 8 at noon

WVU Creative Arts Center Schedule

*Carmen* by Georges Bizet Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre February 8 – 10, 2013

*Dance Now!* Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre March 14 – 16, 2013

*The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov Gladys G. Davis Theatre April 19 – 28, 2013
Performance Schedule

**January 23: Agit-Prop / Strike Plays**
Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (1936)

**January 30: Epic Theatre**
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (1941, 1949)

**February 13: Surrealism, or the Memory Play**
Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)

**February 20: Autobiographical**
February 27: Meta-Theatre
Philip Kan Gotanda, Yankee Dawg You Die (1989)
Langston Hughes, “Trouble with the Angels” (1935) (ecampus)

March 13: Parliament Funkadelic

March 20: Environmental Theatre
Maria Irene Fornes, Fefu and Her Friends (1977)
April 3: Epic Theatre

April 10: Tragedy

April 17: the Absurd, or Poststructuralism?
Review Days

January 23: Agit-Prop / Strike Plays

Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (1936)

January 30: Epic Theatre:
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (1941, 1949)

February 6: Expressionism
Djuna Barnes, Introduction to *At the Roots of the Stars: The Short Plays: At the Roots of the Stars, To the Dogs, The Dove* (1920s)

Marita Bonner, *The Purple Flower* (1929)

February 13: Surrealism, or the Memory Play
Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)


February 20: The Autobiographical (and Not to be Published)
February 27: Meta-Theatre
Philip Kan Gotanda, Yankee Dawg You Die (1989)

March 13: Parliament Funkadelic

March 20: Environmental Theatre
Maria Irene Fornes, Fefu and Her Friends (1977)

April 3: Epic Theatre (and Angels)

April 10: Tragedy
August Wilson, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (1982)

April 17: the Absurd, or Poststructuralism?
Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (1961)

April 24: Surreal Structuralism
Caryl Churchill, Blue Heart (1997)