

**English 38105: Modern Drama II**  
**Section T, Spring 2018**  
**3 Credits / 3 Hours**  
**Tues. and Thurs., 6:30-7:45pm**  
**NAC 5-102**

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**Introduction**

Welcome to English 38105: Modern Drama II. The course description is as follows:

This course will provide a survey of the developments in modern and contemporary drama from the 1940s to the present. Beginning with absurdist drama and Brecht's epic theater, the class will explore how late twentieth- and twenty-first century playwrights experimented with inherited dramatic forms and traditions and how their work contributed and responded to such issues as globalization, technology and new media, post-structuralist theories of subjectivity, and the debate between theater as part of the mass culture entertainment industry and theater as a locus of high aesthetics and social responsibility. Our readings will be drawn from the works of playwrights and theorists such as Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, David Mamet, Sam Shepard, Wole Soyinka, Caryl Churchill, August Wilson, Sarah Kane, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Stephen Adly Guirgis.

Furthermore, this course will focus on plays as "living texts." All literature changes as readers change, but drama forces us to reckon with critical choices in a uniquely material manner. Just as we are making decisions about these texts in the classroom, actors and directors must regularly enact their own readings onstage. This is what I find most exciting about theater—and what I hope you will, too.

I have loosely organized our readings around a particular movement or style as well as a theme that I believe this movement or style exemplifies.

**Course Goals and Objectives**

- Develop a critical understanding of theatrical conventions and the ways in which our texts both adhere to and divert from those conventions
- Assess these texts in light of dominant historical, cultural, and aesthetic trends
- Hone skills of close reading, literary analysis, and critical argumentation
- Discover the pleasure of reading these texts

**Required Materials**

- There are no required books for this course. **I suggest but do not require that you print out and annotate all assigned readings, which will be posted on Blackboard.** Furthermore, you will be expected to attend two performances at City College at a cost of \$4 each

### **Recommended Materials and Resources**

- Purdue University Online Writing Lab (MLA Style Guide):  
<<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>>
- Google Scholar: <<http://libguides.ccny.cuny.edu/googlescholar>>
- William Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (Fourth Edition). ISBN-13: 978-0205309023

### **Technology**

You may bring laptops in order to take notes but **no cell phones, headphones, or portable music players.**

### **Attendance and Punctuality**

Attendance is **mandatory**. Only **three absences and three times arriving late (more than ten minutes) will be excused**. Each additional unexcused absence will result in half a letter grade dropped. (Two lates equal one unexcused absence). Six unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. **If you know you will be late or absent, please email me.**

### **Academic Integrity**

All students must adhere to City College's code of academic integrity, which reads in part:

Academic integrity is an essential part of the pursuit of truth, and of your education. We are all responsible for maintaining academic integrity at City College—it is the rock on which the value of your degree is built.

If you cheat on a test or plagiarize by using someone else's work or ideas, you defeat the purpose of your education. In addition, academic dishonesty is prohibited in the City University of New York, and is punishable by failing grades, suspension and expulsion.

For the complete policy, follow this link: <http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-procedures/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

### **Grading**

Assignments must be **emailed to abotwick@gmail.com by 11:59pm** on the day on which they are due. Assignments not handed in at all will be given failing grades. **Talk to me if you are having a serious problem completing the work**, and we will work out a plan that is agreeable to us both. Incomplete or late assignments will **lose half a letter grade per day**. This means that if you submit an A paper that is due on Monday on Wednesday, you will receive a B.

Close Reading Essays	15 points each (30 points total)
Performance Analysis	15 points
Original Play	15 points
Class Performance	10 points
Participation	30 points
Total	100 points

**Grading Scale:** 94-100 = A; 90-93 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C

### Classroom Participation

This is a **discussion-based course, not a lecture-based one**. Participation is very important and includes completing the assigned readings, turning your papers in on time, and being prepared to speak thoughtfully on whatever reading(s) we are discussing for the day. There will also be **no toleration of deliberately racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, or ableist language**. I use the word *deliberately* because **we all have gaps in knowledge and experience and part of the purpose of a college education is assisting each other in filling in those gaps**. Therefore, I encourage respectful debate when your peers or I have said something that is hurtful, insensitive, or ignorant.

### Essays/Assignments

Close Reading Essays: Two times this semester, you will be required to write a **1000-word close reading essay on an assigned text**. Details on each assignment, including prompts, will be handed out two weeks prior to each essay's due date.

Performance Analysis: Twice during the semester, we will be attending a production at City College. After the first performance, I will ask you to write a **1000-word essay in which you will use the text to analyze a choice made by the cast or crew**—in other words, I'm asking you to infer that a member of the creative team has a particular reading of the text, and then to show me how they have *enacted* that reading onstage.

Original Play: For your final, you will be asked to **write a ten-page play**. If you wish, you may **mimic the style of one of the playwrights we have read, add a new scene to one of our plays, or rewrite a scene in the style of a different playwright**.

Class Performance: Once during the semester, each of you will be required to **perform approximately 15 lines from one of our texts**. This will be done in groups, unless you feel passionate about performing a monologue. As our texts are meant to be heard and seen in addition to being read, this will be crucial to our understanding of the plays' relationship to performance.

You will turn in first and final drafts of your essays and your play, **but you are welcome to submit multiple drafts for comments before each assignment is due**.

### Accommodating Disabilities

Lehman College is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula to all students. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations are encouraged to register with the Access Ability Center/Student Disability Services. For more information, please contact the Access Ability Center/Student Disability Services, North Academic Center, Room 1-218, phone number (212) 650-5913.

## Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects individuals from discrimination based on sex in any educational program receiving federal financial assistance. Sexual harassment, which includes acts of sexual violence, is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX, and is considered a Civil Rights offense. City College encourages anyone experiencing harassment, discrimination or sexual misconduct to talk to a faculty member, counselor, or staff; confidential resources are available through the City College Counseling Center at (212) 650-8222.

### Classmate Contacts

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Reading and Assignment Schedule

#### Introduction: The Well-Made Play Continuity with the Past

Th. 2/1 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Tu. 2/6 Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (cont'd)

Th. 2/8 Moira Buffini, *Dinner* (2002)

Tu. 2/13 Buffini, *Dinner* (cont'd)

### Part One: Epic Theater

#### Theater as Politics and the Politics of Theater

Th. 2/15 Bertolt Brecht and Elisabeth Hauptmann, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928)  
Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" (c.1936)

**Su. 2/18 First Draft of First Close Reading Essay Due**

Tu. 2/20 Classes Follow a Monday Schedule

Th. 2/22 Brecht and Hauptmann, *The Threepenny Opera* (cont'd)

**Su. 2/25 Final Draft of First Close Reading Due**

Tu. 2/27 Caryl Churchill, *Serious Money* (1987)

Th. 3/1 Churchill, *Serious Money* (cont'd)

**Part Two: Theater of the Absurd  
Time and Memory**

Tu. 3/6 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1953)  
Martin Esslin, from *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961)

Th. 3/8 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (cont'd)

Tu. 3/13 Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play* (1993)

Th. 3/15 Parks, *The America Play* (cont'd)

**Su. 3/18 First Draft of Second Close Reading Essay Due**

**Part Three: Theater of Reduction  
Intimacy and Mystery**

Tu. 3/20 Harold Pinter, *Betrayal* (1978)

Th. 3/22 Pinter, *Betrayal* (cont'd)

**Su. 3/25 Final Draft of Second Close Reading Essay Due**

Tu. 3/27 David Mamet, *Oleanna* (1992)

Th. 3/29 Mamet, *Oleanna* (cont'd)

**Part Four: Breaking the Linear Narrative  
The Individual in the Community**

Tu. 4/10 Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1992)

Th. 4/12 Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* (cont'd)

**4/12 – 4/14      Performance of *Fires in the Mirror* at City College, Aaron Davis Hall, Theater B**

Tu. 4/17      Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1974)

Th. 4/19      Shange, *for colored girls* (cont'd)

**Su. 4/22      First Draft of Performance Analysis Due**

**Part Five: Contemporary Drama  
Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?**

Tu. 4/24      Annie Baker, *The Flick* (2013)

Th. 4/26      Baker, *The Flick* (cont'd)

**Su. 4/29      Final Draft of Performance Analysis Due**

Tu. 5/1      Playwriting Workshop

Th. 5/3      Bruce Norris, *Clybourne Park* (2010)

**5/3 – 5/5      Performance of *Clybourne Park* at City College, Aaron Davis Hall, Theater B**

Tu. 5/8      Norris, *Clybourne Park* (cont'd)

**Part Six: The Musical  
“High” and “Low” Culture**

Th. 5/10      Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Into the Woods* (1986)

**Su. 5/13      First Draft of Original Play Due**

Tu. 5/15      Sondheim and Lapine, *Into the Woods* (cont'd)

**Su. 5/20      Final Draft of Original Play Due**