

Fall 8-15-2007

## ENG 3606-001: Modern Drama

Chis Wixson  
*Eastern Illinois University*

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**ENGLISH 3606 – MODERN DRAMA**

Fall 2007 / Section 001  
 MWF 1-1:50 PM  
 Coleman Hall 3290

Dr. Chris Wixson  
 Coleman Hall 3871  
 Office Hours: TBA  
 (Or by appointment)

Required Textbooks: *Chekhov: Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim  
*Eight Plays*, Henrik Ibsen  
*Pygmalion and Three Other Plays*, George Bernard Shaw  
*Three Plays*, Noel Coward  
*Plays*, George Bernard Shaw  
*Shaw and His Contemporaries*, ed. Johnston  
*Four Plays*, Eugene Ionesco  
*The Little Foxes*, Lillian Hellman  
*Ashes to Ashes*, Harold Pinter  
*The Zoo Story*, Edward Albee

The Gutenberg Project      *The Emperor Jones*, Eugene O'Neill

Handouts:                    *Woyzeck*, Georg Buchner  
*Breath, Play, and Come and Go*, Samuel Beckett  
*Feet, Detonation*

Required Supplies:      A notebook and a folder for notes, handouts, and in-class work

**Course Philosophy**

*The starting point of Modernism is the crisis of belief that pervades twentieth-century western culture: loss of faith, experience of fragmentation and disintegration, and the shattering of cultural symbols and norms. –Susan Friedman*

This course surveys modern dramatic literature with the aims of sharpening appreciation for the art form and using great plays as an opportunity to engage cultural, existential, and personal issues. In particular, this semester, we will be examining plays set in high society. The selection of primary texts will be wide-ranging to represent a number of different dramatic forms and perspectives, from the canonical "greats" of the period (Ibsen, Wilde, Shaw, Chekhov etc.) to playwrights not ordinarily grouped with them (J.M Barrie, Lillian Hellman, and Noel Coward) as well as avant-garde artists. Because of time constrictions, the course will only cover the period to around 1950. After exploring two plays written by the enormously influential Henrik Ibsen, we will proceed to mainly early modern English and American plays and how they negotiate issues of gender, class, race, Modernism, and desire. The course approaches these plays as both literary \*and\* theatrical texts, discussing not only their political, historical, and modern implications but also their potential for acting, directorial, and technical choices. Toward that end, we will also be analyzing videotaped productions as well as live performances whenever possible.

The complexity of these plays in terms of language, style, and thematics makes this course both reading and thinking intensive. It has a demanding assignment schedule that necessitates time and planning in order to pass this course. Because we will often be reading two plays a week, use the days between our meeting Wednesday night and the following Monday wisely; accordingly I suggest reading carefully and taking good notes on Monday's play before the weekend, leaving Saturday through Wednesday to read the second play. Despite its class size, we will try to run the course as a seminar. As such, energetic, careful, and continuous attention the course is required for every participant. I expect everyone to attend every class and to be prepared to discuss the assigned readings in detail and in depth and to write briefly and reasonably intelligently on them without notice. The format of each class will be relatively fluid, changing with regard to the material, my ideas, and your interests. Most sessions will begin with a short presentation by me, giving background on the play (not the playwright which should not be central to our conversations). As such, this course should **focus** primarily on **you**, your questions, and impressions. Remember this is not MY class but ours.

### Learning Outcomes

1. To write expository and persuasive papers in which paragraphs, sentences, and words develop a central idea that responds to reading of modern drama.
2. To read drama expressing a wide range of cultural perspectives and values and to think critically and write analytically about them.
3. To engage in reading and writing experiences about literature so as to establish a foundation for continued social, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic discovery and appreciation.

### Course Policies

#### Attendance

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in discussion. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, frequent absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After two, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by a letter. **More than four unexcused absences will result in a “0” for participation. More than six unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking “for the assignment” or a “rundown of what you missed.” My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class.

**\*\*If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.**

### **Late papers**

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a "0."** However, in order to pass the course, you must turn in all assignments. Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

### **Plagiarism**

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author--that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Judicial Affairs Office.

### **Class Participation**

You should come to class *prepared to talk* about the reading for that day. Each class session will be a mixture of informal lecture and discussion; thus, your own questions and comments about the plays are essential to the success of the course. You will also need to have completed the assigned reading (of the play and of the "Notes Conference") and (when noted) your typed "seed paper." Reading quizzes may happen to ensure the quality of our discussions, especially if they lag. Class participation means that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually AND that you work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and success. (This might mean, for example, moving from merely your position during class discussion to striving to promote dialogue between yourself and other students). I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.

### **Cell Phones and Computers**

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** email, news, or box scores, surf the web, use chat applications, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with your computer.

You are likewise expected to use cellphones in a responsible manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate.

**Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cellphone in any other manner during class. The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

## Email

You should get into the habit of checking your email daily for a couple reasons. There will be a class list on which I will post changes in assignments (if they arise), course-related announcements, and ideas that expand upon what happens or will happen in class. This list is also a great way for all of us to interact outside of class; that is to say, if you have a question or query (dramatic in nature), the miracle of technology offers us a way to discuss and address it. We will also conduct a "Notes Conference" of sorts via this list so, even if you are not required to write to it, you are expected to read what others have sent and part of preparation for each class session is reading anything sent to the list.

The "Notes Conference" serves as a preparation for class discussion--a "pre-talking" analogous to the "pre-writing" or "free-writing" that I hope you'll do for your papers. Free writing allows you to let your thoughts wander, permitting liberties, lapses, and discoveries that wouldn't be possible in a finished, formal paper. Like a formal paper, classroom discussions set limits on what you can say (You can't get a word in edgewise because the guy across the room is monopolizing the discussion; the professor ignores your hand; by the time you've formulated your brilliant idea, the discussion has moved on to a whole new topic). "Pre-talking" on the notes conference will allow you to speak your mind (or, more accurately, to "write" your mind) without these frustrating limitations. Remember that the notes conference is a conversation in writing, not a solo performance.

You will each have unlimited opportunities to participate in the notes conference by emailing the class email list any time you wish (which counts as class participation). However, you are mandated to be the "initiator" once and the "respondent" (on a different play) once during the semester. Beyond these two instances, if you send questions or respond to other's questions on three other plays, you will receive extra credit. Your assigned days are as follows:

	Initiator / Respondent	
A-D	8/29	10/15
E-J	10/15	10/22
K-O	10/22	8/29
P-S	9/19	10/1
T-Z	10/1	9/19

As the "initiator," you will read the assigned texts and post 2 clear, concise questions designed to stimulate thought, discussion, and controversy. You should frame these questions with a few sentences of insight (why you find the question valuable, how you see it playing out in the play etc.) so that your contribution amounts to an *interesting* paragraph or two. Questions must be sent by midnight *two* calendar days before "Notes Conference/Response" appears on the syllabus. It is VERY important to plan ahead and not leave writing to the last minute, especially considering that technology issues arise frequently.

As a "respondent," your goal is not to produce expertly crafted individual treatises, but to develop the facility to think, respond, and communicate in writing. Your contributions can and should be informal, spontaneous, informed, and impassioned. Don't worry about typos. Do worry about supporting all your points with examples from the texts. Keep in mind though that we should be engaged in dialogue, not merely posting in isolation. Read your classmates' responses and endorse, contradict, or build upon them. Your responses are due by *10 a.m.* on the day when "Notes Conference/Response" appears on the syllabus.

### Conferences

I am regularly available to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or by appointment. To make an appointment, speak to me after class or contact me via email.

### Grading

Paper	20%	<u>Woyzeck</u> Project	10%
2 Seed Papers:	10%	Participation ("NC")	10%
Final Exam	20%	Participation (class/quizzes)	20%
Midterm	10%		

**\*\*You must complete all written assignments and exams to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.**

### Shorter Written Assignments

\*Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called "seed papers" in which you pose a productive question which relates to the inquiry issues of the course about the text and then attempt to answer it. You will be asked to present your questions in class. However, you will be required to write **two** seed essays total that may explore issues of character, style, language, symbolism in props or setting, and/or thematic point. *No* late seed papers will be accepted.

\*Reading Quizzes

\*A short paper on Woyzeck

### Other assignments:

\*One critical paper that focuses on a particular issue that has provoked, challenged, or disturbed your thinking during the first part of the course and can be generated from seed papers. Writing guidelines will be handed out in advance.

\*Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion --- defined as TALKING productively.

\*Group Project and Presentation

\*Midterm and Final Exams

**Performance Extra Credit:** This semester (October 25<sup>th</sup>-November 4<sup>th</sup>), the University of Illinois theater department is doing a production in Champaign of one of Tennessee Williams' early plays, *Fugitive Kind*. Attend this production and, in a 2-3 page paper, carefully analyze the play in terms of how it represents issues of gender, social class, family, desire, and even the act of representation itself, the same issues we have been discussing in class. How does it respond to Modernist issues and anxieties? Make sure to make connections to plays we have covered already in class and to argue with evidence for the playwright's thematic point on one of these issues. I will let you know if other productions nearby also could relate to the course.

### Schedule of Assignments

THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AT ANY TIME ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE CLASS. MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS BRING IT WITH YOU FOR MODIFICATION.

August	20	Introductory Comments
	24	Modernism(s) / "Feet" and "Detonation" (handouts) / Seed Paper Due (All)
	26	Ibsen's <u>A Doll's House</u>

#### Unit One: The Voyage Out

	27	<u>A Doll's House</u>
	29	Shaw's <u>Mrs. Warren's Profession</u> (Notes Conference / Response)
	31	Shaw's <u>Mrs. Warren's Profession</u>
September	3	NO CLASS – HAPPY LABOR DAY!
	5	Wilde's <u>A Woman of No Importance</u> Seed Paper E-J
	7	<u>Woman of No Importance</u>
	10	Ibsen's <u>Rosmersholm</u>
	12	<u>Rosmersholm</u>
	14	Wilde's <u>The Importance of Being Earnest</u> (film)
	17	<u>Importance of Being Earnest</u> (film)
	19	Chekhov's <u>The Seagull</u> (Notes Conference / Response)
	21	<u>The Seagull</u>
	24	Barrie's <u>Peter Pan</u>
	26	<u>Peter Pan</u>
	28	<b>Paper #1 Due</b> / <u>Peter Pan</u>
October	1	Coward's <u>Private Lives</u> (Notes Conference / Response)
	3	<u>Private Lives</u>
	5	Coward's <u>Blithe Spirit</u>

- 8 Midterm Exam Review
- 10 **Midterm Exam**
- 12 MIDTERM BREAK
  
- 15 Shaw's Heartbreak House (Notes Conference / Response)
- 17 Heartbreak House
- 19 Heartbreak House Seed Paper P-S
  
- 22 Hellman's The Little Foxes (Notes Conference / Response)
- 24 Foxes Seed paper A-D
- 26 Foxes (video)

**Unit Two: Things Fall Apart**

- 29 Buchner's Woyzeck
- 31 Woyzeck Group Meetings
- November 2 Woyzeck Group Meetings
  
- 5 Woyzeck project due / presentations
- 7 Woyzeck presentations
- 9 Woyzeck (video)
  
- 12 O'Neill's Emperor Jones
- 14 Emperor Jones (video)
- 16 **Woyzeck Paper Due**

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- 26 Ionesco's The Bald Soprano
- 28 The Bald Soprano Seed Paper K-O
- 30 Ionesco's The Lesson
  
- December 3 Beckett's "Breath", "Play", and "Come and Go" (video)
- 5 Final Exam Preparation and Review
- 7 Final Exam Preparation and Review

\*\*Final exam date:



## Modernism--A Working Definition

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Modernism is a cultural movement that rebelled against Victorian mores, a culture that emphasized nationalism and cultural absolutism. Victorians placed humans over and outside of nature. They believed in a single way of looking at the world, and in absolute and clear-cut dichotomies between right and wrong, good and bad, and hero and villain. Further, they saw the world as being governed by God's will, and that each person and thing in this world had a specific use. Finally, they saw the world as neatly divided between "civilized" and "savage" peoples. According to Victorians, the "civilized" were those from industrialized nations, cash-based economies, Protestant Christian traditions, and patriarchal societies; the "savage" were those from agrarian or hunter-gatherer tribes, barter-based economies, "pagan" or "totemistic" traditions, and matriarchal (or at least "unmanly" societies).

In contrast, Modernists rebelled against Victorian ideals. Blaming Victorianism for such evils as slavery, racism, and imperialism--and later for World War I--Modernists emphasized humanism over nationalism, and argued for cultural relativism. Modernists emphasized the ways in which humans were part of and responsible to nature. They argued for multiple ways of looking at the world, and blurred the Victorian dichotomies by presenting antiheroes, uncategorizable persons, and anti-art movements like Dada. Further, they challenged the idea that God played an active role in the world, which led them to challenge the Victorian assumption that there was meaning and purpose behind world events. Instead, Modernists argued that no thing or person was born for a specific use; instead, they found or made their own meaning in the world. Challenging the Victorian dichotomy between "civilized" and "savage," Modernists reversed the values associated with each kind of culture. Modernists presented the Victorian "civilized" as greedy and warmongering (instead of being industrialized nations and cash-based economies), as hypocrites (rather than Christians), and as enemies of freedom and self-realization (instead of good patriarchs). Those that the Victorians had dismissed (and subjugated) as "savages" the Modernists saw as being the truly civilized--responsible users of their environments, unselfish and family-oriented, generous, creative, mystical and full of wonder, and egalitarian. These "savages," post-WWI Modernists pointed out, did not kill millions with mustard gas, machine-guns, barbed wire, and genocidal starvation.

---Dr. *Catherine Lavender*, The City University of New York,

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