

# Fall 2010 Dynamics of Play Reading: Elements, Structure, Paradigms

## Basic info

Amherst College THDA 29

Course in the History, Literature and Theory  
of Theater and Dance

Keywords: artistic practice, writing attentive,  
speaking attentive

Course web page: <http://alturl.com/4dfyn>

Course meets TTHs from 10 to 11:20 a.m.  
in Chapin Hall 110

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## Course description

This course explores various elements of dramatic literature and their implications for audience experiences in performance. Character, language, spectacle, plotting and theme are studied in the light of dynamic play structures. In addition to analytical writing, students undertake experiential projects in realizing the underlying theatrical and narrative paradigms of the plays studied. Exemplary plays are chosen for their contrasting qualities, from antiquity to the present, and are read alongside related theoretical and critical texts. Particular emphasis is placed on exploring the legacy of classical form and later evolutionary and innovative responses to it.

## Focus

We will read a wide variety of plays in this course and try to get to the heart of how each play “works”. Our primary goal will be to develop facility in the reading of plays as meaningful theatrical experiences. You will gain insight into the dynamics of audience perceptions as they unfold in time and space, and the formal means by which playwrights influence those perceptions in order to translate literary themes into theatrical reality. In terms of dramatic form, our process together will include experiences in integrating parsed elements into a deeper understanding of the whole. If you enroll in this course, you should be prepared to read all of the required plays and to participate in short-form collaborative projects that will deepen your apprehension of the experiential qualities of plays in performance.

## Materials

Required reading is listed below, consisting of plays and Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In addition, I will require several shorter critical reading selections that I will either hand to you or for which I will direct you to the library.

Sources for additional reading are also listed below. I will give you a list of recommended videos separately.

### Required Reading

(available locally at Amherst Books; many also available at Frost library)

*Poetics*, by Aristotle, translated by Kenneth McLeish

*Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles, translation by Fitts & Fitzgerald

*Uncle Vanya*, by Chekhov, translation by Brian Friel

*You Can’t Take It With You*, by Kaufman & Hart

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, by Shakespeare

*A Flea In Her Ear*, by Georges Feydeau

*What The Butler Saw*, by Joe Orton

*Major Barbara*, by G.B. Shaw

*The Threepenny Opera*, by Bertolt Brecht, translation by Mannheim & Willet

*Marat/Sade*, by Peter Weiss

*Exit The King*, by Eugene Ionesco, translation by Watson & Marowitz

*Six Characters In Search of An Author*, by Luigi Pirandello, translation by Eric Bentley

*A Number*, by Caryl Churchill

*Not I* (from *Collected Shorter Plays*), by Samuel Beckett

*4.48 Psychosis*, by Sarah Kane

### Additional Resources

(from Frost Library or from me)

*Theatre/Theory/Theatre*, edited by Daniel Gerould (selections) - also available at Amherst Books

*An Anatomy of Drama*, by Martin Eslin (entire)

*Backwards & Forwards: a technical manual for reading plays*, by David Ball (entire)

*Evoking (and forgetting) Shakespeare*, by Peter Brook (entire)

### Films/video

I will hand to you separately a list of related video available in Frost library and/or by live streaming.

### **Assignments overview**

- Reading, as listed on the course schedule below, and additional hand-outs & reserve reading as assigned
- Three essays, **due on Oct. 5, Nov. 4, and Dec. 2**, respectively
- Five experiential projects, to be presented in class during Weeks 3, 5, 9, 12 & 14 (see below)

### **Experiential projects**

The experiential projects should be prepared outside of class. In some cases, we will also work on projects in class. I will ask you to do most of these projects in pairs or in groups. It is essential that you communicate with one another effectively to set aside time to meet and work together outside of class.

### **Writing process and extensions policy**

I am happy to read rough drafts and to meet with you individually as you work through the writing process. In addition, you may revise and re-submit any papers after the due date within one week of receiving my comments, and I will give you a higher grade if your revision warrants one.

If you need an extension on written work, please ask in advance. I never grant extensions that are requested on or after a due date.

### **Grading**

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Class participation & preparedness - 15%

Essays (3) - 45%

Experiential Projects (5) - 40%

### **Course Schedule (subject to change)**

#### Week 1

Tue. Sep. 7 Introduction  
Thu. Sep. 9 Aristotle's *Poetics* (Aristotle)

#### Week 2

Tue. Sep. 14 *Oedipus Rex* (Sophocles)  
Thu. Sep. 16 *Uncle Vanya* (Chekhov)

#### Week 3

Tue. Sep. 21 Project #1 Presentations  
Thu. Sep. 23 *You Can't Take It With You* (Kaufman & Hart)

#### Week 4

Tue. Sep. 28 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare)  
Thu. Sep. 30 Discussion / Work on Project #2

#### Week 5

Tue. Oct. 5 Work on Project #2 First paper due

Thu. Oct. 7 Project #2 Presentations

MID-SEMESTER BREAK

Week 6

Thu. Oct. 14 *A Flea In Her Ear* (Feydeau) & *What The Butler Saw* (Orton)

Week 7

Tue. Oct. 19 *Major Barbara* (Shaw)

Thu. Oct. 21 *The Threepenny Opera* (Brecht/Weil)

Week 8

Tue. Oct. 26 *Marat/Sade* (Weiss)

Thu. Oct. 28 Work on Project #3

Week 9

Tue. Nov. 2 Work on Project #3

Thu. Nov. 4 Project #3 Presentations / Second paper due

Week 10

Tue. Nov. 9 *Exit The King* (Ionesco)

Thu. Nov. 11 (discussion) Attend *Exit The King* this weekend

Week 11

Tue. Nov. 16 *Six Characters In Search of An Author* (Pirandello)

Thu. Nov. 18 *A Number* (Churchill)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 12

Tue. Nov. 29 Work on Project #4

Thu. Dec. 2 Project #4 Presentations / Third paper due

Week 13

Tue. Dec. 7 *Not I* (Beckett) & *4.48 Psychosis* (Kane)

Thu. Dec. 9 Work on Project #5

Week 14

Tue. Dec. 14 Project #5 presentations

**There is no examination during the Examination Period.**

**The absolute deadline for any outstanding writing is 5 p.m. on December 20.**

**Statement of Intellectual Responsibility and Implications**

*Every person's education is the product of his or her own intellectual effort and participation in a process of critical exchange. Amherst cannot educate those who are unwilling to submit their own work and ideas to critical assessment. Nor can it tolerate those who interfere with the participation of others in the critical process. Therefore, the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.*

Some implications of the Statement of Intellectual Responsibility for THDA 29 are listed below.

- Assigned group work outside of class is cooperative by design: it is your intellectual responsibility to yourself and to your peers to schedule and attend all meetings outside of class necessary to complete group work in

good faith, and to communicate conflicts openly and promptly. In addition, since learning in this course takes place cooperatively and experientially, it is your responsibility to attend all class meetings.

- Writing that you submit to me must be your own.