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The Craft of Drama
ENGL 6946-601

Fall 2015

“I shall be an obstinate colorist.”
Vincent van Gogh,
letter to his brother, 11 August 1888

Prof.: Justin Maxwell
Time: T/Th 3:30-4:45
Place: LA 396
Office: LA 287
Office hours: T/Th 1:45-3:30; W 3:30-6:00
Email: jmaxwell@uno.edu

Official Course Description
This course provides aspiring writers with a unique opportunity to delve into the craft of drama. Like a conventional literature class, this course uses close readings of texts and discussion of theoretical paradigms for insight into the material; however, this class looks fundamentally at the actual construction of dramatic text. The class shows students how diverse dramas employ various structural methodologies to produce their tonal and thematic results. From this exploration, students will explore the hands-on experience of crafting very short works to manifest the effects of specific craft elements. Regular writing assignments, both creative and critical, will be used to further explore course material and assess student learning.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the semester, student will learn different ways major dramatic texts operate structurally. Students will have a much stronger understanding of:

• how masters of the craft have assembled major works by comparing aesthetically diverse primary texts
• how different theoretical and cultural paradigms shape our understanding of “text”
• how different dramatic structures produce different results, including the use of open and closed denouement, non-representational work and psychological realism, and “scriptless” texts derived from (instead of for) performance
• how students can better use basic craft elements to shape their own art

Required Texts and Handouts
Required handouts will be distributed through Moodle. When an acting edition is available, feel free to use it instead
Archer, pilot episode, “Mole Hunt” (Hulu/Netflix)
Fences by August Wilson
“Gruesome Playground Injuries” by Rajif Joseph
Topdog/Underdog by Suzan Lori-Parks
Balm in Gilead by Lanford Wilson
Turds in Hell by Ludlam (from handout).
Mother Courage and Her Children by Brecht—preferably Kushner’s translation
Dutchman by Amiri Baraka
Cellophane, the anthology, by Mac Wellman
Unbalancing Acts by Foreman, and the video of Lava on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFrwqIA9dgE
New Downtown Now, the anthology, specifically Ajax (por nobody) by Alice Tuan

Class Policies
Let me start by saying that these policies are not written in stone. They are subject to change, revision, and exception as circumstances warrant. I know that life isn’t always easy or fair; if there is a problem, please come and talk with me. We will try and work something out. Furthermore, any student struggling with a learning disability or other hurdle should reach out to me right away; I am always willing to help however I can and make the classroom a place where all students have the opportunity to thrive. UNO’s official policy on accommodating students with disabilities is:

- It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to http://www.ods.uno.edu.

Late work
Because I have a lot of students doing a lot of writing this semester, the time set aside to read your work is very specific and intensely limited. Consequently, late work will be taken at the loss of one full letter grade per business day. Work turned in late will not be returned in a timely manner, as it will be read when I have an opening from someone else not turning in work.

If you cannot make class, you should feel free to email me assignments. Work in my inbox before the start of class on the day the assignment is due will be considered on time; however, it will still take me extra time to read, process, grade, and return it.

Cheating and other misbehavior
This is the single worst thing that you can do for yourself academically. Plagiarism is theft. It is fundamentally immoral in our late-stage capitalism. Cheating includes plagiarism, copying from someone else, turning in another student’s work as your own, etc. Cheating is bad for you even if you’re not caught. You’ve spent a lot of money and energy on this class and cheating is throwing away the opportunity that you’ve paid for. Cheating is really bad for you if you’re caught. If I find out you’ve cheated, I will fail you for the entire course.

UNO’s official policy about academic dishonesty states that:

- Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic
records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at [http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu](http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu).

We are here to learn from each other and to benefit from each other’s experiences and differences. This classroom will be a place where we will listen to each other. Differences of opinion are welcome as long as they are expressed with respect. When you are in class I expect cell phones and other such devices to be off and for you to be focused on the class.

UNO policies on scholastic dishonesty and sexual harassment apply. Basically we have neither the room nor the time for it here and UNO Administration will be notified if either arises and they will deal with the issue.

**Attendance**
Attendance is mandatory. I will be taking attendance every time. To keep this issue very simple, UNO allows our graduate students to miss four classes. If you miss more than four classes, you will fail the course. If you come in late (after attendance) or leave early, it will be counted as a half absence. Being mentally absent, i.e. checking Facebook, texting, sleeping, etc, also constitute an absence. If there is an emergency that requires you to miss class more than four, come talk to me when you’re crisis is resolved, and we will see if a return to the class is possible.

**Grading and Assignments**
Students will collectively make the course assignments on the first day of class. However, presentations and a final exam are inalterable components.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No class</td>
<td>August 20, introductions, syllabus discussion, assignments, Aristotle and Archer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25 Discuss Archer, s1.ep1</td>
<td>27 Psychological realism and kitchen sink realism Fences</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Sept 1 Discuss Fences and the dramatic arc</td>
<td>3 Close reading of Fences</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>8 Discuss the non-linear narrative and “Gruesome Playground Injuries”</td>
<td>10 Graph out the plot and look at the rising stakes. How does Joseph build the dramatic arc?</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>15 Discuss Topdog/Underdog Trends toward smaller casts—the two hander</td>
<td>17 How does Lori-Parks sustain dramatic tension with so few characters? Close reading for language. Student presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>22 Discuss Balm in Gilead Trends towards larger casts—the ensemble</td>
<td>24 Close reading for structure. How does such a seemingly chaotic work hold together? How does confusion and disorientation work in the text? Student presentation.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>29 Discuss “Turds in Hell” Camp, it’s politics, and structure</td>
<td>Oct 1 Close reading. How is camp a different take on narrative? Why is it necessary? Student presentation.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6 Discuss Mother Courage and Her Children. Political theatre (Epic)</td>
<td>8 How does the play work to manifest Brecht’s ideas of alienation? Student presentation.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>13 Comparison of structural methods</td>
<td>No class (read ahead)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>20 Discuss Dutchman Political theatre</td>
<td>22 Close reading, characters as archetypes/stereotypes. How does Baraka use the zeitgeist for (or against) his audience? Student presentation.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>27 Discuss “Cleveland” Political theatre (satire) Wellman’s essay,</td>
<td>29 Close reading of what is being satirized and how? How does Wellman sustain layers of satire? Student presentation.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Nov 3 Comparison of political methodologies and dramatic structure</td>
<td>5 Non-narrative. Discuss Jones’ essay and Foreman’s essay. Student presentation.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>10 Discuss Lava Poetic theatre</td>
<td>12 Close reading of video. Student presentation.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>17 Discuss Ajax (por nobody) Curious theatre</td>
<td>19 Close reading. What is this? How does it work? Student presentation.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>24 Exam prep. What is the value of shock?</td>
<td>No class</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dec 1 Comparison of structural methods and the obdurate colorist.</td>
<td>3 Final exam</td>
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