

DRA 402: Modern Drama

Emine Fişek
Office: TB 475

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emine.fisek@boun.edu.tr
Office Hours: XXX

Course Description

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the parameters of “modern drama”, a term that refers to a broad chronology and geography, even as it designates a certain canon in Euro-American dramatic literature. Our survey will span the naturalist and realist stage traditions of the second half the nineteenth century, the varied experiments of the modernist avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century, the post-war fascination with the absurd as well as twentieth century experiments with verisimilitude and documentary forms. Throughout, will pay close attention to what is “modern” about these plays, and think about how changing theatrical forms seek to respond to, and in turn shape, changing socio-historical circumstances. Additionally, we will trace modern drama’s changing relationship to ideas of the human body, of spectatorship, and of collective ritual and performance traditions.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation*	15 points
Connection Quizzes**	15 points
Four Response Papers***	40 points
Final Paper/Exam (TBA)	30 points

* Our work in this course will be developed through classroom exercises, discussions and lectures, so your presence and active participation is crucial. Active participation means that you have completed and reflected on the assigned reading for the day, that you have the day’s texts, your notebook and other materials with you and that you are an active listener to your classmates and share your own ideas with the group. Attendance is mandatory: if you attend less than %75 of the total class hours, you will automatically fail the course.

** These are approximately five unannounced quizzes that will be scattered throughout the semester, and will ask students to make connections between prior course concepts and topics and the readings that are scheduled for any given day. In other words, “connection quizzes” are not “reading quizzes” that evaluate whether or not you have read a particular text, but rather, they ask you to think about them in relation to the framework of the course.

*** The scheduled Response Papers will take the place of a traditional midterm and provide opportunities for close reading. They will consist of one single-spaced page (or approximately 750 words) and be devoted to an idea, theme or image that interests you. I will be providing a detailed prompt for these papers during the first week. The due dates are marked below with (*).

Course Schedule

Week 1

19th Century Legacies: Naturalism & Realism

Wed, Feb. 8

Introduction: What’s “modern” about “modern drama”?

Fri, Feb. 10

August Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (Author’s Preface-pg. 121)

Week 2

Wed, Feb. 15 Strindberg, cont. (pg. 121-161)
Fri, Feb. 17 Una Chaudhuri, "Private Parts"

Week 3

Wed, Feb. 22 Henrik Ibsen, *The Wild Duck* (Acts 1-3)
Fri, Feb. 24 Ibsen, cont. (Acts 4-5)

Week 4

Wed, Mar. 1 W.B. Worthen, "Chekhov's Camera"
***Response Paper #1 due**

The Age of "isms": Manifesto Fever and Primitivism

Fri, Mar. 3 Filippo Marinetti, "The Variety Theatre" + "Disconcerted States of Mind", "To Understand Weeping", "Bachelor Apartment", "The Body that Ascends"

Week 5

Wed, Mar. 8 Antonin Artaud, "The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto", "On the Balinese Theatre", "Oriental Theater and Western Theater"
Fri, Mar. 10 Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (Episodes 1-9)

Week 6

Wed, Mar. 15 Treadwell cont.
Rebecca Schneider, "After Us the Savage Goddess" (TBA)

Epic Theatre and the "Gest"

Fri, Mar. 17 Berthold Brecht, *Life of Galileo* (Scenes 1-3)

Week 7

Wed, Mar. 22 Brecht cont. (Scenes 4-15)
Fri, Mar. 24 Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?"
***Response Paper #2 due**

Week 8

Winking at Post-Modernism: The Absurd

Wed, Mar. 29 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Act 1)
Fri, Mar. 31 Beckett, cont. (Act 2)

Week 9

Wed, Apr. 5 Martin Esslin, "The Significance of the Absurd"

Fri, Apr. 7 Jean Genet, *The Balcony* (Scenes 1-4)

Week 10

Wed, Apr. 12 Genet, cont. (Scenes 5-9)
Fri, Apr. 14 Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra"
***Response Paper #3 due**

Week 11

--- Spring Break ---

Week 12 20th Century American Experiments

Wed, Apr. 26 David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*
Fri, Apr. 28 Hwang cont.

Week 13

Wed, May 3 Karen Shimakawa, "Mimetic Abjection/Object Mimicry"
Fri, May 5 Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*

Week 14

Wed, May 10 Kaufman cont.
Fri, May 12 Jill Dolan, "Rehearsing for the Example"
***Response Paper #4 due**