

Theatre Arts 274
DRAMATURGY
Professor Mazer
Spring 2018

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Office Hours: by appointment

THERE IS NO SYLLABUS, PER SE, FOR THIS COURSE; the course is not organized on a tight schedule of weekly readings and occasional writing assignments. Rather, there will be regular in-class discussions of ongoing topics through the semester, with some of them cued to specific readings; and there will be regular assignments of succinct *oral* presentations (since much of the dramaturg's work in the theatre involves making succinct and persuasive oral presentations). Some of the presentations will be individual; other assignments may be group presentations (since virtually all of the dramaturg's work in the theatre involves collaboration as a team member). At the end of the semester, there is a final project, which may be team or may be individual.

I. Discussion Topics and Readings.

Topics include: What is a dramaturg? What is the dramaturg's function? What is the dramaturg's function in relation to certain institutional structures, special tasks, ways of organizing rehearsals, etc.?

Readings will be drawn, for the most part, from *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*, ed. Susan Jonas, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu. Essays (downloadable for the Canvas site) to be read include:

Anne Cataneo, "Dramaturgy: An Overview."

Joel Schechter, "In the Beginning There Was Lessing ... Then Brecht, Müller and Other Dramaturgs."

Martin Esslin, "Towards an American Dramaturgy: Adapting the function of dramaturgy to U.S. conditions."

Geoffrey S. Proehl, "The Images Before Us: Metaphors for the Role of the Dramaturg in American Theater."

and possibly other essays to be announced. There may be additional readings, for other sources, depending on our other work during the semester.

II. Historical/Social/Contextual Research.

On several occasions, each person will be assigned to research a particular aspect of a particular period, country, social class and/or activity. BEFORE THE CLASS when the assignment is due, each person will post information, visual aids, etc. on the Canvas site, along with bibliographical references (reference book, web site, etc.) for the sources of the information; in class, each person will make a *brief* presentation.

One assignment might be aided by an in-class visit from research librarian Samantha Kirk.

III. Dramaturging the Season.

Over the course of the semester, we will both select a season of *five* plays and begin dramaturgical work on at least one of these plays. The theme for the season will be EITHER

- 1) The Great Divide (relating to the widening gap between the 1% and the 99%)
- 2) Dystopias, or
- 3) Resisting Totalitarianism.

The season's theme may be something we wish to advertise, or it might be something the season's plays reference indirectly, without the audience necessarily realizing it (e.g. *Wicked* being about the vilification of the Other, *Into the Woods* being about AIDS, etc.). Our collective task is to decide on the scale and mission of our hypothetical theatre company; to define what we mean by our season's theme; and to select a full season of plays, representing a balance of genre, tone, and company size, etc., appropriate to the theatre company's audience and community.

The company's Artistic Director has already decided that ONE OF THE PLAYS WILL BE BY SHAKESPEARE or one of his contemporaries. During the first part of the semester, we will devise a system for reading, discussing, and selecting the five plays of the season, to be drawn from a list of appropriate plays we collectively research and compile. It is likely that the process will initially involve individuals giving initial reports, with a recommendation about whether another individual, or the entire class, should read the play. (I only ask that, in the initial stages, individuals report on plays THAT THEY HAVE NOT READ BEFORE; if you know a script that you think the group and the class should consider, that play should initially be reported on by someone ELSE.)

As we select the plays, we will schedule individual and group dramaturgical projects for some or all of the plays in the season. These might include:

Researching period contexts, historical and political details, etc.

Preparing visual materials for the director, designers, and cast.

For the Shakespeare play: recommending period settings (historical, Elizabethan, contemporary, some other period, eclectic), preparing doubling schemes, cutting the text, etc. (We will be assisted by readings from Andrew James Hartley, *The Shakespearean Dramaturg*).

If we choose to cast the season from a resident company of actors, devising cross-casting between the five plays of the season.

IV. New Play Dramaturgy.

We will both study and practice "New Dramaturgy" in two ways:

1) A class session (date to be announced) with Edward Sobel, former Director of New Play Development at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, and dramaturg for Tracy Letts, including the original production of the Pulitzer-Prize-winning play, *August: Osage County*; currently Associate Professor of Theatre at Temple University and director of their graduate programs in dramaaturgy and in playwriting. He was for several years the Associate Artistic Director of the Arden Theatre, where he directed *Superior Donuts*, *Clybourne Park*, and *Endgame*, and created The Writers' Room. (Sobel is a Penn alumnus and Theatre Arts minor, class of 1987).

2) Periodic class visits by Danielle Bainbridge (Theatre Arts major, class of 2012), currently completing a doctorate in African American and American Studies at Yale, and host of the on-line PBS Digital Studios series, *The Origin of Everything*. The Theatre Arts Program will be developing and staging her new play (based on her dissertation research) on the McCoy sisters, conjoined twins born in slavery, as this year's Edinburgh Project, which will then tour to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe this August.

V. Required Theatregoing:

1984, adapted from the novel by George Orwell, directed by James Schlatter, Theatre Arts Program, Bruce Montgomery Theatre, March 21-24, 2018. Other required theatregoing to be determined.

VI. The final writing assignment.

At the end of the semester (at a date to be announced) we will, individually or collectively, prepare a set of written and visual materials for THE ENTIRE SEASON, including some or all of the following: a) a program note about the playwrights; b) a program note about the plays and the (hypothetical) productions; c) a packet of materials for a program insert or a subscriber bulletin; d) a packet of materials to be sent to the press; e) a packet of materials to be sent to school groups; f) visual displays for the theatre lobby; g) on-line blogs, articles, visual materials, etc. Our particular challenge will be to support the theme of the season, even if we don't necessarily want the audience to notice that the season has that particular theme.

Materials should be posted on the website for comment, and presented in the final class.

Attendance and participation are mandatory. Persistent unexcused absences, especially an absence on a day of an individual or team presentation, will be reflected in your semester grade. If your absences of unpreparedness jeopardize another student's work, you will be asked to drop the class.