

Wesleyan University Graduate Liberal Studies Program

ARTS 630 - Provocative Plays and the Theatrical Imagination

Wednesdays 6:00 – 8:30pm, Downey 100

Professor David B. Jaffe

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Overview

Provocative Plays and the Theatrical Imagination is a course designed to introduce students to a spectrum of contemporary plays that have challenged the social norms of their time. The selected playwrights have taken on deeply personal or political issues, and have often used heightened language, form, or setting to provoke strong response from the audience. Rather than examining these texts as literature - an important task to be sure - we will be looking at these plays primarily as scripts for performance and complementing that approach with examination of the artistic and social contexts in which they were written.

In addition to thinking critically and contextually about these plays, we will engage our imaginations as theatrical “approachers” to the texts. How do directors, designers, and actors unpack these plays as they look toward rehearsal and performance? What physical and atmospheric world does the playwright create, to be envisioned and executed by the creative team? We will explore answers to these questions, and beyond that, participants will also be developing their ability to engage others in the exploration of theatrical texts.

Format

The course is structured as a series of discussions, analyses, and presentations, accompanied by play readings or film viewings. In addition to the foundation texts related to the work and process of the creative team seeking to bring the plays to life, our goal is to cover ten plays (see reading list below) over the course of the term. Scenes from the selected texts will be presented as active readings and scenes from filmed versions of some of the plays will be shown.

Course Blog/Discussion Board

This course will have a Moodle on the Wesleyan ePortfolio system. Information such as the course syllabus, office hours, special articles, and internet links will be posted on our Course Moodle. In addition, you will be responsible for posting responses to the assigned readings and any special events that we may attend. The issues or questions to be addressed will accompany the specific reading assignment. Each assignment will have a deadline, and all postings must be up by that day and time.

Final Paper

In addition to the blogging, a final paper of more depth and formality (7 – 10 pages) will be due one week after the last day of classes. A choice of topics will be offered, all of which will require familiarity with the course reading list and plays from beyond the list.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

- @ 40% Final paper
- @ 30% Blog and Discussion Board Comments
- @ 30% Class participation

REQUIRED READING LIST

Foundation Texts

TRUE AND FALSE, David Mamet

LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT: STAGE LIGHTING FOR DIRECTORS AND ACTORS - AND THE REST OF US, David Hays

A SENSE OF DIRECTION: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ART OF DIRECTING, William Ball

THE DRAMATIC IMAGINATION: REFLECTIONS AND SPECULATIONS ON THE ART OF THE THEATRE, Robert Edmund Jones

Plays

BLASTED from *SARAH KANE: COMPLETE PLAYS*, Sarah Kane

TRUE LOVE, Charles Mee, *available online for free at charlesmee.org*

HOT N' THROBBING from *THE BALTIMORE WALTZ AND OTHER PLAYS*, Paula Vogel

DUTCHMAN, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka)

THE BLACKS: A CLOWN SHOW, Jean Genet

OLEANNA, David Mamet

KEELY AND DU, Jane Martin

MASTER HAROLD AND THE BOYS, Athol Fugard

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?, Edward Albee

THE LARAMIE PROJECT, Moises Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project