



## ASSIGNMENTS: TH 2140 THEATRE IN WESTERN CULTURE

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**Classroom** 222 Andrews Hall  
**Meeting Time** online and TR 12:30-1:50 p.m.

### WEEK 1

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Read **Introduction: Thinking about Drama** (1-22), **Writing About Drama** (1073-83), **Glossary of Dramatic Terms** (1085-92). This is the longest and most important reading assignment of the semester. It will provide you with a backstory and ground you in the principles needed to read, view, think about and discuss theatre.

There is no written assignment this week.

As you read the textbook, be sure to take notes on key concepts, figures and time periods. For some assignments, you will need to be familiar with the information provided in these sections.

### WEEK 2

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Read **Greek Drama** (30-40), **Roman Drama** (104-110) and **Medieval Drama** (122-32).

Summarize each section, highlighting the main characteristics and plays. The first sentence of each summary should be a thesis statement in which you explain the distinguishing feature or features of the dramatic form. 250-500 words apiece. Compose the summaries on the same document and upload them as one file.

NOTE: Do not cite verbatim passages from the texts in summaries. Paraphrase the texts and put them in your own words.

**DUE DATE & TIME:** Friday, Sep. 8, 9 a.m.

### WEEK 3

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Read **Sophocles, Oedipus Rex** (41-66) and **Sigmund Freud, "The Oedipus Complex"** (73-76).

Based on your reading of Freud's essay, define the Oedipus complex, then explain how it works in Sophocles' play, citing specific characters and passages from the play in defense of your claim. 250-500 words.

NOTE: When you quote texts, be sure to use **MLA style** and include page numbers.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Sep. 15, 9 a.m.**

#### **WEEK 4**

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Read **Drama in the Early- and Mid-Twentieth Century** (494-510) and **Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*** (666-706).

Your assignment this week is in two parts. The first part is a summary; the second is a creative response.

[1] Summarize **Drama in the Early- and Mid-Twentieth Century**, highlighting the main characteristics and plays. The first sentence of the summary should be a thesis statement in which you explain the distinguishing feature or features of the period. 250-500 words.

[2] Write a eulogy for Willy Loman from the perspective of Biff. Keep in mind that eulogies mention important moments in the deceased's life and the ways in which that person impacted the lives of others. Whatever information you choose to include in the eulogy, it should demonstrate that you read and reflected on the play. 250-500 words.

Please compose the summary and the creative response on the same document and upload them as one file.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Sep. 22, 9 a.m.**

#### **WEEK 5**

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View the 1985 film adaptation of ***Death of a Salesman*** on Tuesday and Thursday in 222 Andrews Hall from 12:30-1:50 p.m.

Write a critical response to the film that focuses on the actors' performances. Do Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich adequately portray, respectively, Willy Loman and Biff? Were their performances what you expected from reading the play? Or were their portrayals strange or (literally) uncharacteristic in your view? Be sure to include specific details in your response. 500-750 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Monday, Oct. 2, 9 a.m.**

#### **WEEK 6**

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Read **Martin Esslin, "Theatre of the Absurd"** (768-70) and **D. Harlan Wilson, *Primacy***. The play is not in the textbook. It appears in issue #58 of the online magazine *The Café Irreal* and can be accessed on Pilot via **CONTENT > Plays**.

In what ways does *Primacy* meet the conventions for the theatre of the absurd according to Esslin's article? In your response, be sure to cite specific examples from the play. 250-500 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Oct. 6, 9 a.m.**

## **WEEK 7**

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Read **Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*** (739-68).

Like D. Harlan Wilson's *Primacy*, Beckett's *Endgame* is also an example of theatre of the absurd. At this point, you should have a good idea of what constitutes the form.

For this creative exercise, your task is to write a very short play that in some way exhibits the principles of absurdism. 500-1000 words.

Some of you may want to write more than others, which is why I've expanded the parameters of the word count. Try not to go over 1000. You may format your play in any way you like, but don't try to do too much. I suggest beginning with a description of the setting and characters, then focusing on dialogue and character movement. There are many ways to format plays, but every play needs certain core elements, above all dialogue. Pattern the format of your play after examples in the textbook. Don't worry about writing a masterpiece! I don't care if you're a "talented" creative writer or if you don't have a lot of experience with creative writing. I want you to have fun, and my only concern is that you write clearly and demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of the theatre of the absurd.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Oct. 13, 9 a.m.**

## **WEEK 8**

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Read **Renaissance Drama** (146-58) and **Late-Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Drama** (300-12).

Summarize each section, highlighting the main characteristics and plays. The first sentence of each summary should be a thesis statement in which you explain the distinguishing feature or features of the form of drama. 250-500 words apiece. Compose the summaries on the same document and upload them as one file.

REMEMBER: Do not cite verbatim passages from the texts in summaries. Paraphrase the texts and put them in your own words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Oct. 20, 9 a.m.**

## **WEEK 9**

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Read "A Quick Guide to Reading Shakespeare" and this synopsis of *Hamlet* online via **Pilot > CONTENT > Tutorials**. These resources are part of **BardWeb.net**, an excellent website for Shakespearean studies. I encourage you to explore and read more of it.

Read **William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*** (159-217) and **T.S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems”** (227-30).

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud argued that *Hamlet* is “founded on the same basis as *Oedipus Rex*. Specifically, in *Oedipus Rex*, the basic wish-phantasy of the child is brought to light and realized as it is in the dream; in *Hamlet*, it remains repressed, and we learn of its existence—somewhat as in the case of a neurosis—only by the inhibition which results from it.”

Conduct online research and find two professional articles about the role of the Oedipus complex in *Hamlet*, then write a short annotation of each article in which you identify the author’s thesis and briefly explain what they say in the article. 250-500 words apiece.

For this assignment, you must use the **Academic Search Complete** or **MLA International Bibliography**. You can find them by going to [libraries.wright.edu](http://libraries.wright.edu), clicking **RESEARCH**, and clicking **Databases**. Be sure to adequately document the articles you select using MLA style, including a bibliographic entry above each annotation.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Oct. 27, 9 a.m.**

#### **WEEK 10**

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View the 2000 film adaptation of *Hamlet* on Tuesday and Thursday in 222 Andrews Hall from 12:30-1:50 p.m.

Unlike the 4-hour 1996 adaptation of *Hamlet* (starring Kenneth Branagh), which enacts the entirety of Shakespeare’s play, the 2000 adaptation (starring Ethan Hawke) is considerably abridged as well as updated from a setting in the late middle ages to the twenty-first century. What is your general reaction to this version? What are some of the ways in which it is modernized? Does the actor who plays Hamlet effectively represent the character based upon your reading of the play? Why or why not? Be sure to cite specific examples from the text in defense of the claims you make. 500-750 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Monday, Nov. 6, 9 a.m.**

#### **WEEK 11**

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View *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet* via Pilot.

As the title suggests, this adaptation is a very short version of *Hamlet* that combines elements of the theatre of the absurd with Shakespeare’s classic play. Your task is to identify the ways in which the adaptation manifests the absurd. *Hamlet* is a serious drama, but *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet* is funny. Why? 250-500 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Monday, Nov. 10, 9 a.m.**

#### **WEEK 12**

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Read **Nineteenth-Century Drama through the Turn of the Twentieth Century** (361-74) and **Contemporary Drama** (812-833).

Summarize each section, highlighting the main characteristics and plays. The first sentence of each summary should be a thesis statement in which you explain the distinguishing feature or features of the form of drama. 250-500 words apiece. Compose the summaries on the same document and upload them as one file.

REMEMBER: Do not cite verbatim passages from the texts in summaries. Paraphrase the texts and put them in your own words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Nov. 17, 9 a.m.**

### WEEK 13

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Read **Sarah Ruhl, *Eurydice*** (996-1016).

For this creative exercise, your task is to compose a diary entry hypothetically written by the titular character. The entry should express the central conflict in the play and her role in it. Be sure to reference other characters, commenting on her relationship with them, and remember to write from Eurydice's perspective and in her voice, as you understand it, based upon your reading of the play. 500-1000 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Nov. 24, 9 a.m.**

### WEEK 14

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Read **David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross***. The play is not in the textbook. It can be accessed as a .pdf file on Pilot via **CONTENT > Plays**.

Review **Glossary of Dramatic Terms** (1085-92) at the back of the textbook and answer the following questions:

- [1] What character(s) use **bombast**?
- [2] What is the central **crisis** in the play?
- [3] Do any characters exhibit **hubris**? If so, who? And how?
- [4] Is the play grounded in **realism** or **surrealism**?

Be sure to sufficiently explain your answers and use specific examples from the text in defense of your claims. 500-750 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Friday, Dec. 1, 9 a.m.**

### WEEK 15

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View the 1992 film adaptation of ***Glengarry Glen Ross*** on Tuesday and Thursday in 222 Andrews Hall from 12:30-1:50 p.m.

In "Masculinity and Money: Glengarry Glen Ross," Helen Johnson writes: "*Always be closing*. This is the basic building block for a definition of masculinity in David Mamet's play. According to the characters' dialogue, masculinity stands as the most important characteristic for any salesman and is only achievable by proficient ones. In both the play and the film, the audience hears that a salesman's masculinity is based, almost exclusively, on his ability to sell products to his customers. However, the characters compromise their masculinity many times over in their quest to 'be a man.' Every character, from the down-on-his-luck Shelly Levene to the top seller Ricky Roma, is involved in an emasculating occurrence. Even Barker, the added film character played by Alec Baldwin, alludes to effeminate actions. The audience draws several conclusions about Mamet's concept of masculinity, all stemming from the realization that the writer does not agree with his characters' beliefs on the matter. The added and altered scenes in the movie reinforce the notion that masculinity is not and cannot be achieved through the methods and theories of the characters."

Write a critical, interpretive response to the film that addresses the theme of masculinity. Potential questions you may field include the following: What features in the character's dialogue indicate a quest for masculinity? How do they go about emasculating one another? Do you agree with Johnson that Mamet's play is a critique of masculinity, or does it reaffirm masculinity? 500-750 words.

**DUE DATE & TIME: Monday, Dec. 11, 9 a.m.**