

THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT  
Revised Course Proposal for General Education Courses

1. Catalog Description

- a. Course Level: THA 3751-G
- b. Title: Theatre and Civilization I
- c. Meeting times and credit: 3-0-3
- d. Term to be offered: F
- e. Short title: Theatre & Civ I
- f. Course description: Effects of social, political, religious and aesthetic forces upon the development of the theatre during pivotal moments in civilization, from the prehistoric era to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Attention will be given to the development of theatre as an art form.
- g. Prerequisites: ENG 1001G and 1002G
- h. Writing Intensive

2. Student Learning Objectives

- Students will read and discuss in depth several masterpieces of world drama in relation to the period that produced them. Since the plays furnish the basis for discussion, quizzes, and exams, students must read for comprehension and write or speak cogently about what they have read. In all cases, students will be expected to observe the conventions of Standard American English in speech and writing. (Write and speak effectively)
- Part of the aim of the course is to encourage students to think about what they have read. The course is not a teacher-dominated lecture course (except for introductions to each historical period). To be successful, students must read, think, and analyze – always asking what each play can tell them about a given era. (Think critically)
- Masterpieces of drama are called “masterpieces” because they (in part) present universal problems and situations that have plagued humans from the beginning of civilization. Love was no less profound or complicated in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE than in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Conceptions of good and evil, moral and immoral, human and inhuman have not changed greatly over the centuries. Only the externals change (clothing, dwellings, language, customs, etc.). In studying the dilemmas of the past and in seeing how people have dealt with those dilemmas, students are studying all of humanity – and thus, themselves. (Responsible citizens)
- Because the course employs theatre and drama as a focal point, each contributes to students’ awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the contributions of (one of the) arts to past and present cultures. (Responsible citizens)
- The course seeks to arouse discussion, questions, debate, and controversy; hoping to spark curiosity either about each period or the theatre and drama of the time. Students choose a topic (an era, dramatist, performer, group of plays, etc.) and explore it in depth. Ideally this, too, opens doors for further inquiry and, perhaps, a lifelong interest! (Write effectively, responsible citizens)

3. Course Outline

The following topics will be covered in 15 weeks of 45 fifty-minute class periods.

- a. Week 1:

Theories of the origin of the theatre: storytelling, rites for the dead, prehistoric myths, rituals, tribal ceremonies, etc. surrounding seasonal cycles, fertility rites, chants, song and dance, and Aristotle's theory of mimesis.

Possible discussion topics:

Why theatre? Why did something like theatre develop? Why the need for theatre? Why masks, costumes, impersonation?

b. Weeks 2 and 3

The theatre and drama of the Greek Golden Age

Theories on the origin of the Greek theatre building and on the origin of tragedy (Aristotle, Else, and others). Read and discuss Oedipus Rex as reflection of Greek political and religious thought, as model of tragedy.

Theories on the origin of Greek comedy (Aristotle, Else, Olson, and others). Read and discuss Lysistrata as reflection of Greek daily life, Greek attitudes, political, military, and religious thought; as model of satire: as reflection of Greek democracy in the Age of Pericles.

Possible discussion topics:

The intellectual and political climate of the Golden Age, centrality of the theatre in Greek cultural and social life Greek ideals emerging from the two plays (e.g. personal freedom, communal spirit, courage, relationship between human and deity, etc.)

c. Weeks 3 and 4: The theatre and drama of Classical Rome

Overview of the development of Rome as a civilization: Etruscan and Greek roots.

Differences between the Republic and the Empire.

Achievements of Roman civilization: Roman civilization in today's world (language, law, building methods and styles, military strategy, world view, etc.)

Origins of the Roman theatre, drama, theatre building: debt to Greek Golden Age.

Roman comedy: read and discuss Plautus' The Menaechmi. Attention given to stock characters, and stock plot devices that were borrowed wholesale by Renaissance writers.

Possible discussion topics:

Compare the freely satiric Lysistrata with the highly politically "safe" The Menaechmi.

What does this say about the theatre in the two cultures? The political and intellectual climate? Freedom? Values? What does close reading of The Menaechmi tell the 20<sup>th</sup> Century about Roman daily life?

Other popular quasi-theatrical Roman entertainments: races, arms contests, beastbaiting, etc.

The amphitheatres and the events therein: races, gladiatorial combat, slaughter of political prisoners and religious dissidents, man vs. beast combats, etc.

Possible discussion topics:

What does this form of entertainment say about the Roman Empire as a civilization? Values? Ideals? Compare to Greek theatrical fare. Compare the two civilizations, based upon the plays.

d. Weeks 5, 6, and 7: The theatre and the Church: obliteration of the theatre and its rebirth from the Mass

Rise of Christianity in late Empire period. Church proclamations against all theatrical fare; decline of the Empire and subsequent decline in professional theatrical activity in the West; Church ban against theatricals and theatrical activity. The "fall of Rome" and subsequent so-called "Dark Ages" or Middle Ages /Medieval period in the West.

Survival of performance during this period: town fairs, local and travelling bards, jongleurs, storytellers, travelling troupes of singers and dancers, other entertainments (trained animals, jugglers, poets, clowns); survival of non-Christian rites and rituals, etc.

“Rebirth” of the theatre from the Mass: tropes, liturgical drama, full-blown religious drama in the Middle Ages in Europe, leading to Corpus Christi drama and cycle or pageant plays.

Spectacle in religious drama both inside and outside of the church building: organization and management of religious plays. Morality Plays. Allegory.

Read The Second Shepherd’s Play and Everyman.

Possible discussion topics:

What insights into medieval domestic life, religion, and politics are gained from the first play?

Insights into religious life from Everyman? Values and beliefs inherent in both plays?

Evidence of 20<sup>th</sup> Century values in either or both of the plays? Evidence of earlier practices in Medieval theatre and drama? Contributions of the Medieval theatre and drama to later developments.

e. Weeks 8, 9, 10, and 11: The Renaissance

Discussion of developments leading to the Renaissance; decline of feudalism and the rise of mercantilism, great city states, political and financial centers, “merchant Princes”, and the “new Romans”. The Italian Renaissance in art and learning.

Discoveries and developments that affected the theatre. Italian scenic practices: perspective scenery; dramatic criticism; the purpose of the theatre in the new city state. Neoclassicism.

Read Racine’s Phaedre as an example of neoclassical tragedy. Discussion of tragic and neoclassical qualities of the play. Discussion of “hidden” social and political values and assumptions in the play.

Read Moliere’s The Misanthrope as an example of neoclassical French comedy. Discussion of how Moliere’s 17<sup>th</sup> Century satire parallels Greek satire. Discussion of social, political, and religious elements Moliere seems to be satirizing. Discussion of court life as evidenced by the play. Values and assumptions inherent in the play.

The comedy of the people: the Italian Commedia delle ‘arte. How it differed from “educated” neoclassical comedy. Theories of origin of the commedia. Survival of ancient Greek or Roman types? Character types, costumes, and masks. Performances. Influence on contemporaries and survival into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

f. Weeks 12, 13, 14, and 15: The Renaissance in England.

Discussion of why Renaissance developed differently in England. Why English theatre and drama developed differently than on the Continent. Why neoclassicism did not take hold immediately. English dramatic and theatrical traditions as a continuation of medieval practices and beliefs,

Read Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus as an example of the “bridge” between medieval and Renaissance theatre and drama in England.

Possible discussion topics:

Compare Dr. Faustus to Everyman. Differences and similarities. Changes from the medieval “pawn hero” to the “Renaissance Man”. Faustus as evidence of English domestic life, values and beliefs?

The English Renaissance as seen in two plays by Shakespeare. Shakespearean tragedy.

Development of the English theatre building(s). Read and discuss either Hamlet or Othello.

The play as Renaissance tragedy. Differences between French neoclassical tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy. The play as evidence of Renaissance English beliefs and values: social, political, and religious.

Read Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors. Compare to neoclassical French satire. Survival of Roman comedy in Shakespeare's play. (Compare The Menaechmi with Comedy of Errors). Shakespeare's embellishments and why he made them.

Religious objections to the theatre; counter-objections. The English Civil War and closing of the theatres. Contributions and achievements of the Renaissance English Theatre and drama to society.

4. Evaluation of student learning

- a. Students will be evaluated primarily upon writing assignments done in conjunction with text and/or play readings:

Essay examinations (approx. 50%)

Two essay examinations, a Midterm and a Final. Before each examination, students will be given a study guide with a selection of possible questions, from which they will write three essays.

(E.g., Describe a performance of a play, including details of the theatre, the audience, the scenery, etc. Why did people come to the theatre during that time? Or, for example, Everyman and The Second Shepherd's Play are both medieval dramas. Using both plays as "archaeological evidence", construct a "world view" for the middle ages: religious, social, political, and philosophical. What was most important to them and to their lives? Or, for example, Phaedra and The Misanthrope are both neoclassical French plays written for particular kinds of spectators. Construct an essay in which you describe the values and assumptions of a spectator attending a neoclassical play.

A semester project (approx. 25%)

A 10-15 page paper covering some topic germane to the course: a research paper, a critical/analytical paper, a biography of some "great person", or any other topic the student and instructor agree would be beneficial and worthwhile.

Quizzes or short "reaction papers" (approx. 15%)

Each time students read a new play, they will have been given a study guide on the day the play is due, they will be given a selection of questions to respond to and write their answers in class. Questions may range from brief answers to questions on plot or character to more analytical questions specific to the era in which the play was written.

Analysis papers (approx. 10%)

Two analysis papers will be written in response to supplied "focus" questions on plays viewed either in class (or outside of class if the Theatre Arts Department's offerings fit the course's scope).

- b. Criteria for Writing-intensive Designation

Between the “Semester Project” and the “Analysis Papers”, more than 35% of the final grade is based on the writing component. Additionally, any one of these papers may be resubmitted after revision for a grade reconsideration. This is consistent with the criteria for a writing-intensive course.

## 5. Rationale

- a. This course meets the requirements of the Humanities and Fine Arts segment in that it explores why and how societies developed theatre as a medium of expression. Each unit focuses on how the primary texts (plays) reflect their respective cultures (politically, socially, and philosophically); after reading the plays, students are asked what the theatre and drama of a given period can tell the 20<sup>th</sup> Century about the society that produced those plays. In formulating possible responses, students gain insights not only into masterpieces of drama but also into crucial moments in Western Civilization. Moreover, in each unit, connections are drawn between seemingly diverse periods and cultures so that students can see how these societies evolved, how the ancient and modern worlds are related, and ways theatre and drama have affected – or have been affected by – social and historical pressures.
- b. This course requires an advanced level of critical analysis, in both writing and speaking effectively. The 3000 level plus the prerequisites of ENG 1001G and 1002G will help ensure that students are prepared for this course.
- c. There is no similarity to any existing course.
- d. This course is a requirement of all Theatre Arts majors. This course is a General Education elective open to all majors with no exclusions.

## 6. Implementation

- a. Faculty members to whom the course may be assigned:  
C.P. Blanchette, J. Eisenhour, J. Wolski, D. Wolski
- b. Texts:  
Wilson & Goldfarb, Living Theater: A History, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (history text)  
Jacobus, The Bedford Introduction to Drama, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (anthology)  
Klaus, Gilbert and Field, Stages of Drama, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (anthology)
- c. Additional costs:  
When available, students will be required to see Theatre Arts Department productions that are consistent with the scope of the course.
- d. Term first offered:  
Fall 2000

## 7. Community College Transfer

A community college course will not be judged as equivalent to this course.

8. Date approved by the Department: 4/03/00

9. Date approved by the College Curriculum Committee: 4/12/00

10. Date approved by Council on Academic Affairs: \_\_\_\_\_

Department contact person: David Wolski

Campus phone: 581-3417