Weber State University

THEA 2330: Dramaturgy and Criticism

Fall 2012

Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:20 PM, VBC 317

**Instructor:**

Dr. Jenny Kokai **Office: V**BC 305

**Office hours:** Tuesday/Thursday 2-3 and by appointment

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**Course Overview:** This course is a practical examination of dramaturgy and theatrical criticism as it is practiced in the U.S. Dramaturgs are a vital, if often overlooked or misunderstood, part of a production team. Theatres in the United States are increasingly employing dramaturgs to help develop new plays, to help develop outreach programs with audiences, and to help cast and crew build a richer, more nuanced performance. This class will work to develop the skills students need to succeed as a dramaturg: critical thinking, research skills, communication skills, analytic and creative approaches to text and apply them specifically to the process of dramaturgy. At the end of the class students will have constructed a full dramaturgy protocol for a play of their choice. In addition, we will practice the necessary skills and approaches to writing solid theatrical criticism. How can you fairly critique a performance you see before you in a productive and helpful way?

**Required Texts:**

To purchase: Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy by Michael Mark Chemers

**Theatre Program Outcomes:**

*These will be demonstrated by the practical exercises students do throughout the class. The students will build a portfolio through the class that serves as the proof of learning.*

1. Have writing skills and ability to use research tools (library, internet, etc.).

5. Be able to present critical thinking through verbal and written presentations regarding the musical theatre. Specific areas of expertise will include major works, major figures (librettists, composers, lyricists, performers, directors, choreographers), theory, and history.

6. Have a practical, working knowledge of how to produce a play on stage, including all related performance, script, design, and technical considerations.

7. Have the ability to critically evaluate what they and others have created.

8. Develop necessary skills to be proficient in at least 1 area of theatre (performance, teaching, technical/design-costume, technical/design-scenery, technical/design-lighting, technical/design-sound, directing, theatre management, or playwriting), with the ability to identify, analyze and resolve specific problems pertaining to that area.

9. Understand the historical context of theatre, drama, and performance including plays, major figures, costumes, scenic innovations, and theoretical approaches, and how these relate to contemporary society and culture.

10. Have experience with individual and collaborative processes needed to produce and understand theatre.

**Attendance Policy:**

The Theatre area recognizes the importance of class participation and performance. To this end we enforce the following attendance policy: Tuesday/Thursday classes are allowed 2 absences, Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes are allowed 3 absences, however these absences may not be on a scheduled test day. Once the allowed absence limit has been reached the student's grade will drop incrementally for each additional absence.

Example: Mitzi, an “A” student, has missed 3 classes in a MWF theatre class. Today she is missing class and her grade will drop to an A-. If she misses the next class, her grade will drop to a B+. One more absence and she will have dropped a full letter grade to a B.

Tardies are as important an issue as absences. Therefore, 2 tardies equal 1 absence. Students should plan ahead and use absences and tardies wisely.

**Reading Assignments:**

Reading assignments should be completed regularly, and **prior to attending the class for which they are assigned**. This is a small, discussion based seminar and if you haven’t done the reading it will be impossible for you to contribute to the discussion. Students who have not done the reading will be counted as absent for the class period, whether they are physically there or not.

**Major Projects:**

The major project for this class will be a completed dramaturgy protocol for a play of your choosing. The protocol will consist of the following items:

* **An articulation of “why this play now.”**
* **A script analysis of the play.**
* **A production history of the play.**
* **Historical research on the play.**
* **A glossary of terms.**
* **An educational outreach packet for your play.**
* **A description of a lobby display you would construct for your play.**

As the semester goes on, what exactly these are and models for these will be discussed in class. The dates below are due dates for drafts of these things. You will be given a grade for every assignment. However, you will submit the finished protocol at the end of the semester. This will allow you time to revise sections if they need them. In turn, your grades can be raised to reflect the revisions.

**New Play Dramaturgy Reflection Paper:**

This should be a 3-4 page paper reflecting upon your experience working with a playwright on a new play. This paper should be typed, double spaced, with a standard font and font size. As yourself questions such as: What were my strengths working with a new playwright and what were my weaknesses? What problems did the playwright and I encounter and how did I try to overcome them? What was the audience response? Was it what I expected or different? What potential areas of conflict could arise and how would I handle them? Was the play better at the end as a result of my collaboration with the playwright?

**Lucky Stiff Review:** For this review you should identify the source you are writing for (is this a New York Times style review, a review for an academic journal, a review for a local audience) and tailor your response accordingly. You should carefully follow the ideas in Ghost Light pages 114-120. Be aware that critics need to consider word count. It is harder to edit a review down to a few thousand words and remain comprehensive. How concise, but clear, can you make your review?

**In addition:** There will be some minor assignments based upon the reading, points for these will be given in the general homework section.

## **Course Grade:**

**Dramaturgy Protocol: Due Date: Worth:**

An articulation of “why this play now.” Sept. 25 5%

A script analysis of the play. Oct. 4 5%

A production history of the play. Oct. 11 10%

A glossary of terms. Oct. 18 10%

Historical research on the play. Oct. 25 15%

An educational outreach packet for your play. Nov. 6 15%

A description of a lobby display you would

create for your play. Nov. 6 5%

Total: 65%

**Participation:** 10%

**New Play Dramaturgy Reflection Paper:** Nov. 27 10%

**Review of “Lucky Stiff”:** Dec. 6 10%

**General Homework:** 5%

**TOTAL: 100%**

Grades within one half of a percentage point (i.e. an 89.5%, or a 79.5%, etc) will automatically be rounded up to the next highest point or letter value. Out of fairness to all of the students in the class, no other grades will be raised, and extra credit will not be offered.

**Class Schedule:**

Unit One: Dramaturgy in Context

Week One:

**Aug 28:** Introductions, overview

**Aug 30:** What is a Dramaturg, what kind of Dramaturg do I want to be?

***Due: Chapter One in Ghost Light 3-11***

Week Two:

**Sept 4:** Dramaturgy through history

***Due: Chapter 2 in Ghost Light (each student will be given 1-2 theorists to concentrate on and present to the group)***

**Sept 6: Case Study: Brecht v. Brecht**

***Due: Read Mother Courage*** (if you don’t have a copy, I have several and you can borrow one from me, as far as I can tell it is NOT online)

Week Three: Theory

**Sept 11:** Theory I

***Due: Chapter 3, pgs. 39-47, this is dense and probably confusing reading. Allow time. Take notes. Come with questions.***

**Sept 13:** Theory II

***Due: Chapter 3, pgs. 47 (Marxism-65), this is also dense and also probably confusing. We’ll get through it together.***

Unit Two: Existing Play Dramaturgy

Week Four:

**Sept 18: Library Trip—Meet at the library, RM 138**

**Sept 20:** Why this play now?

***Due: choose the play you want to develop a dramaturgy protocol for. This should be a play you really love. Musical, straight play, kabuki, I don’t care. Just love it, because you’re marrying it for the semester. Bring the play to class.***

Week Five:

**Sept 25:** Script analysis

***Due: Chapter 4, pgs. 69-92, Draft of Why This Play Now***

**Sept 27:** Form and Function

***Due: Chapter 5 in Ghost Light***

Week Six:

**Oct 2:** Production Histories and Historical Research/Terms

***Due: Chapter 6, 108-113, meet in the DPA computer lab***

**Oct 4:** Independent research on your play **(NO CLASS MEETING)**

Week Seven:

**Oct 9:** Working with Directors

***Due: Ghost Light, pgs. 150-154***

***Due: Draft of Script analysis for your play***

**Oct 11:** Working with Actors

***Due: Ghost Light, pgs. 154-160***

***Due: Draft of Production History for your play***

Week Eight: Audience Development

**Oct 16:** Educational Packets

***Due: Chapter 9 Ghost Light***

**Oct 18:** Lobby displays

***Due: glossary of terms for your play***

Week Nine: Audience Development

**Oct 23:** Talkbacks

**Oct 25:** Program Notes, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook (social media outreach)

***Due: Draft of Historical Research***

Unit Three: New Play Dramaturgy

Week Ten:

**Oct 30:** Working with playwrights

***Due: Chapter 7, Ghost Light***

**Nov 1: NO CLASS**

Week Eleven:

**Nov 6:** Meet in teams

***Due: Turn your previous research into an Educational Packet aimed at a specific grade (k-5, 6-8, 9-12). Sketch out ideas for what kind of lobby display you would build for your play. Into your protocol they go.***

**Nov 8:** Meet in teams

Week Twelve:

**Nov 13:** Hosting a staged reading

***Due: Have a draft list of questions you and the playwright want to ask the audience about the piece***

**Nov 15:** Staged reading, day 2

Week Thirteen:

**Nov 20:** What to do after the staged reading

**Nov 22: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING**

Unit Four: Theatrical Criticism

Week Fourteen:

**Nov 27:** The basics of reviewing

***Due: Ghost Light 114-120, reflection paper on new play dramaturgy experience***

**Nov 29:** Good reviews/bad reviews

Week Fifteen:

**Dec 4:** Discussion of “Lucky Stiff”

**Dec 6:** Alternative forms of Dramaturgy

***Due: Your review of Lucky Stiff***

**FINAL: Your completed/revised dramaturgy protocol is due during our final time of Thursday, Dec 13** **by 2:30 PM**

**Academic Dishonesty**: As specified in PPM 6-22 IV D, cheating and plagiarism violate the Student Code. Plagiarism is “the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person’s or group’s ideas or work.” This means that “putting something into your own words” is plagiarism. Students found guilty of cheating or plagiarism are subject to failure of a specific assignment, or, in more serious cases, failure of the entire course. In this class collusion will also be considered plagiarism. Collusion is when you work with another student on homework, or exam preparation.

**Core Beliefs**: According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “[d]etermine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs.”

**DEPARTMENT COURSE CONTENT POLICY**: Some of the writings, lectures, discussions or presentations in this course may include material that some students may find offensive. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking. If you have a concern, please discuss it with me at your earliest convenience.

**Disability Accommodation**: PPM 3-34 notes: “When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the quarter [semester] in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.”

**Emergency Closure**: If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class through our Canvas page. Look for announcements on Weber email and our Canvas page.