

Theatre and Politics in Modern Europe
ENG 429 SLC 429/598

Dr. Orlich (965-4658; orlich@asu.edu)

Office: LL 402 A

Office hours: LL 402 A. M, W 2:00-3:00; T,Th 3:00-4:00

Class time: T, Th 12:00-1:15

"Try to be original in your play and as clever as possible; but don't be afraid to show yourself foolish; we must have freedom of thinking, and only he is an emancipated thinker who is not afraid to write foolish things. Don't round things out, don't polish – but be awkward and impudent."

Anton Chekhov, *Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and Other Literary Topics*

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Description:

This course offers a comparative cultural perspective on the political, social, ethical and aesthetic problems tackled in contemporary West- and East-European drama. By exploring the collective biography of modern Europe – a multicultural, ethnically and nationally diverse space by definition – and on the developing nations of Central and Eastern Europe before and after the 1989 fall of the Berlin wall, this course examines the conflicting global issues that have changed the face of Europe over the past century to the present, providing them with key strategies of survival and personal/national/transnational identity configuration that are relevant for understanding today's dialogical interplay between national goals and global concerns. In particular, this course explores the intertextual web of references that connects plays produced by authors of diverse cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds, lodging the cultural decipherment and interpretative approaches to the dramatic corpus under analysis in a trans-disciplinary, global perspective on antagonistic concepts such as conflict/harmony, nationalism/universalism, materialism/humanism.

The politically-inflected plays included in the syllabus for this course are the works of prominent playwrights of modern and contemporary Western and Central/Eastern Europe: Tom Stoppard, Max Frisch, Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, Eugene Ionesco, Nedyalko Iordanov, Vlad Zografi, Vaclav Havel, Nic Ularu and Matei Visniec. Their plays examine the importance of establishing a dialogue between selfhood and otherness through inter-cultural communication and through developing cultural interrelationships on a global scale, in order to foster cultural learning among varied societies/cultures and to address and resolve conflictual situations generated by political phenomena like dictatorship, totalitarianism, mass migrations, and the threat of global wars.

Consistent with the overall heterological perspective (developing an awareness of and respect for otherness) espoused in the literary/theatrical/filmic works analyzed here, the course also addresses issues such as women's rights under totalitarian regimes, overpopulation, natality and state-sanctioned demographic policies within the context of contemporary films and cinematic adaptations of these plays. This survey of dramatic renditions of twentieth-century European societal systems and relationships – supplemented by further readings of relevant fiction or literary/political manifestos – provides the students with a synoptic model of global

conflict and resolution patterns, enabling them to develop and maintain a global perspective that stresses international cooperation and inter-cultural understanding.

Objectives:

1. To examine, from an inter- and trans-disciplinary perspective the politics and ideology that led to the formation of the "Other Europe" in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
2. To develop a critical understanding of the philosophical-moral attitude of respect for otherness and cultural diversity that underlies the aesthetic – literary, theatrical and filmic – works subjected to analysis and decipherment.
3. To enhance analytical and critical skills that explore "the detritus that constitutes modern consciousness," with a view to developing a global awareness of key cultural, political, social, aesthetic and ethical issues that are highly relevant in today's trans-national and trans-cultural society.

READINGS:

Materials are available from two sources: bookstore or course manual from THE ALTERNATIVE PRINT AND COPY located at 1004 South Mill Ave., Tempe, AZ 85281; phone: 480-829-7992; email: alttempe@alternativecopy.com

READINGS:

Weeks one, two:

Tom Stoppard: **Rozencrantz and Gilderstern are Dead** (film shown in class)

Nedyalko Iordanov: **The Murder of Gonzago** (manual)

Weeks three and four:

Oscar Wilde: **The Importance of Being Earnest** (Bookstore and movie shown in class)

Tom Stoppard; **Travesties** (Leninist ideology; Joycean aesthetics; Romanian Dadaism) (Bookstore)

Vlad Zografi: **Peter** (Stalinism; autocracy, cultural values in France and Russia) (Bookstore)

Weeks five:

Anton Chekhov: **The Cherry Orchard** (twilight of tsarist Russia) (Bookstore)

Nic Ularu: **The Cherry Orchard, A Sequel** (aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution) (manual)

Weeks six, seven and eight:

Max Frisch: **The Firebugs** (the political play; rise of Communism) (manual)

Eugene Ionesco: **The Rhinoceros** (aberrant politics of pre and post-WWII Europe) (Bookstore and movie shown in class)

Eugene Ionesco: **The Lesson** (language as political weapon) (Bookstore)

Tristan, Tzara: **The Dadaist Manifesto** (manual)

MIDTERM EXAM in-class examination; bring blue books; no open books or notes.

Week nine, ten, eleven and twelve:

Nikolai Gogol: **The Government Inspector** (the bureaucracy of empires; the personage K) (Bookstore)

Kafla: **The Castle**; (not a play, but an essential novel for explaining the origin of K. and the concept of empire, be it tsarist or Austro-Hungarian) (Bookstore)

Samuel Beckett: **Waiting for Godot** (the absurd; the stage as wasteland) (Bookstore)

The Trial (not a play, but an essential novel for this course explaining Beckett's clowns and the mysterious K.) (Bookstore)

Matei Visniec: **Old Clown for Hire** (the absurd continued) (manual)

Pockets Full of Bread (more of the absurd) (Blackboard)

Week thirteen and fourteen:

Churchill: **The Mad Forest** (women in totalitarian regimes) (manual)

Matei Visniec: **Body of Woman as Battlefield in the Bosnian War** (ethnic wars and the victimization of women) (Bookstore in the volume Balkan Plots)

Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days (movie shown in class)

TERM PAPER

FINAL EXAM in-class examination; bring blue books; no open books or notes.

Secondary Readings:

Ruby Cohn, Ed. *The Impact of Beckett's Modern Classic: Reviews, Reflections and Interpretations*

Toby Cole, Ed. *Playwrights on Playwriting*

Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*

Frederick Hoffmann, *Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self*

Bonnie Marranca, *Plays for the End of the Century*

Paul Ricoeur, *The Self as Another*

Lawrence Venutti, *Our Halcyon Days*

Grading: Your grade in this class will be based on the following:

1. **midterm exam** (short essay answers) 30%
2. **final exam** (short essay answers) 30%
3. **term paper** (six to eight pages for undergraduates; ten to twelve pages for graduate students; use 12 point font and 1.5 spacing- see MLA or Chicago Manual for style) 30% . Your paper will focus on a work by any Central Eastern European playwright whose work appeared during the 1918-present period. Works discussed in class cannot be used for the paper, but you may choose to write on works other than those discussed in this class by the authors included on the syllabus. Early papers are welcome. Late papers will not be accepted. You need to discuss with me your selected topic, so make sure you let me know your selection before you begin writing.
4. Your class participation will account for 10% of your grade.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, including plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration or cheating, is not tolerated!

In the Student Academic Integrity Policy manual, ASU defines Plagiarism [as] using another's words, ideas, materials or work without properly acknowledging and documenting the source. Students are responsible for knowing the rules governing the use of another's work or materials and for acknowledging and documenting the source appropriately. You can find this definition at:

http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/judicial/academic_integrity.htm#definitions

There are severe sanctions for cheating, plagiarizing and any other form of dishonesty. Please see the Student Code of Conduct and Student Disciplinary Procedures. All work must be yours and it must be original to this class. If you have questions about this, please ask me.