

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY
Madrid Campus
Department of English
M.A. Program in English

ENGL 4070 M01 Advanced Creative Writing: Drama
(cross-listed with)
ENGL 6150 M01 Playwriting: Theory and Practice

Spring Semester, 2015
3 Credit Hours Tuesdays 2:30-5:15 pm PRH 14
Prof. Cary Barney, MFA (cbarney1@slu.edu)
Office Hours MW 3:00-5:00 pm & TTh 5:30-7:00 pm, or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES: As a creative writing course, ENGL 4070 has as its purpose the teaching of the nuts and bolts of playwriting, starting with a fundamental recognition of the language of theater and progressing through varying strategies of harnessing it. To bolster this overview of dramatic technique, students will read a selection of modern plays (from Ibsen to the present) and discuss them in class. Each student will present two drafts of a complete play (extended one-act or full length). These plays will be read and critiqued in class.

ENGL 6150 shares this purpose and has the additional objective of instilling in students a theatrical perspective for the reading and critiquing of theatrical works. Here the emphasis will be on the “dramatic” half of “dramatic literature” and developing the critical apparatus necessary for reading plays as performance texts in addition to evaluating them as works of literature. To this end, students will excerpts from key works of modern dramatic theory, including manifestos of Artaud and Brecht, demonstrate their understanding of modern dramatic theory in class presentations, and produce a critical paper examining a twentieth- or twenty-first century play from its perspective.

In the first half of the course, students write the first draft of a play, and part of each class will be dedicated to lessons and exercises on playwriting. We’ll also read a few plays (see below) and discuss them in class, perhaps as literature but primarily as theatrical texts. After the midterm, readings and lessons will be largely determined by the needs of student playwrights.

OUTCOMES: Students enrolled in these two courses will:

- increase their understanding of theatre and the playwright’s place within it
- learn how actors, directors and designers approach scripts
- increase their awareness of the role of the audience in the theatrical experience
- learn basic principles of dramatic action
- learn to establish character through motivation and action
- learn the differences between conversation, debate, and dialogue
- identify and harness various types and levels of dialogue
- learn to identify and use different types of dramatic structure
- learn to establish the parameters of a dramatic work
- gain an instinct for beats and scenes
- learn how to structure scenes
- learn to establish the “thrust” of a scene
- demonstrate the ability to write a complete, viable play

In addition, students enrolled in ENGL 6150 will:

- gain an overview of modern dramatic theory
- gain a full understanding of the craft of playwriting
- learn to examine works of dramatic literature through a theatrical lens

TEXTS: Here are some of the plays that may be read:

Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*
Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*
Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*
Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*
Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine*
Timberlake Wertenbaker: *Our Country's Good*

Theoretical works for ENGL 6150 only (others may be added):

Aristotle, *Poetics*
Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*
Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (in *Brecht on Theatre*, tr. John Willett)
Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (Both courses):

Full play (30 pages minimum), first ten pages due Tuesday, February 3, first finished draft due Tuesday, February 24, second draft due Tuesday, May 5. Students are responsible for distributing as many copies as there are students in the class. Before you panic about writing 30+ pages of playscript, have a look at the required format (attached).

(ENGL 6150 only): Critical paper, on a 20th or 21st century play (not from the common reading list) selected by the student, 10 page minimum (MLA format) due Tuesday, April 27.

IN-CLASS PRESENTATION (ENGL 6150 only): Each student in ENGL 6150 will give, in class, a presentation on a key 20th or 21st century dramatic theorist, emphasizing the implications of his or her theories for playwrights.

EXAMS AND QUIZZES: There are no exams planned for this class. However, pop quizzes may be given if I get the impression that not everyone is doing the reading. Grades on these will be reflected in the preparation/participation portion of your grade.

HOMEWORK, PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION: Homework assignments for this class are fun! Do them, or the following class will be very dull. The same goes for assigned readings. You are expected to speak up in critiques and classroom discussions. The teacher will only talk if you do!

GRADING:

ENGL 4070		ENGL 6150	
Homework	15%	Homework	5%
First ten pages of play	10%	First ten pages of play	5%
First draft of play	20%	First draft of play	10%
Second draft of play	30%	Second draft of play	20%
Participation	25%	Individual presentation	20%
		Critical paper	20%
		Participation	20%

BEING HERE: Two unexcused absences are permitted (but by no means encouraged). Any unexcused absences in excess of two will result in a lowered grade. Six or more absences, excused OR unexcused, will result in automatic failure. Please don't come and go; it's impolite.

MOBILE PHONES and MP3 DEVICES must be turned off before you enter the classroom.

FOOD and DRINK, other than water, are not permitted in the classroom.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT: Please familiarize yourself with the Academic Honesty Policy in effect here at SLU, Madrid. The policy is online at:

http://spain.slu.edu/academics/policies_&_procedures/docs/Academic_integrity.pdf

These guidelines will be followed in case of any breach of academic honesty committed or suspected in this course

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Saint Louis University - Madrid Campus is committed to excellent and innovative educational practices. In order to maintain quality academic offerings and to conform to relevant accreditation requirements, we regularly assess our teaching, services, and programs for evidence of student learning outcomes achievement. For this purpose we keep on file anonymous representative examples of student work from all courses and programs such as: assignments, papers, exams, portfolios, and results from student surveys, focus groups, and reflective exercises. *Thus, copies of your work for this course, including exams, assignments, or recorded scene work may be kept on file for institutional research, assessment and accreditation purposes.* If you prefer that Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus does not keep your work on file, you will need to communicate your decision in writing to your professor.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS: In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.

University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Academic Dean's Office (San Ignacio Hall) or by going to http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning_resources.html.

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at +34 915 54 58 58, ext. 204, send an e-mail to counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu, or to visit the Counseling Office (Padre Rubio Hall). Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter.

SYLLABUS (very likely to change)

January 20 Introduction. Are plays literature? Theatre and the playwright's place in it. Audience and the act of theatre. Setting parameters of time and space.

January 27 Actors and actions. Beats.

February 3 **First ten pages of play due for in-class reading and critique.** Character, conflict, and plot.

February 10 Scenes: form, content, purpose.

February 17 Dialogue: functions and levels. Subtext.

February 24 **First draft of play due for in-class reading and critique.** Dialogue: music and rhythm.

March 3 Pauses, silences, and what fills them.

March 10 Soliloquies and asides. Breaking the fourth wall.

March 15 Monologues.

March 22 Individual ENGL 6150 presentations and discussion.

March 29 Counterpoint and distancing.

April 7 **Critical paper due (ENGL 6150 only).** Ghosts and other impossibilities.

April 14 *Show week; no class.* ATTENDANCE AT PLAY MANDATORY

April 21 Discuss previous week's production.

April 28 Adaption and documentary.

May 5 **Second draft of play due.** One-, five-, and ten-minute plays.

Wednesday, May 13 12:00-15:00 Designated Final Exam time. Final in-class reading of plays.

Playscript Format

Scripts in book form generally use a space-saving format, such as this:

BOB (*angrily*): Why didn't anybody tell me about Dad's operation?

SUE: We didn't know how you'd take it. You were always so close. (*She strokes his hair.*) We just wanted to make it easy for you. (*Pause.*)

BOB: This beer is warm.

However, most theatre companies, contests, and publishers consider this format unacceptable for script submissions. Here's the same scene in standard playscript format:

BOB (*angrily*)

Why didn't anybody tell me about Dad's operation?

SUE

We didn't know how you'd take it. You were always so close. (*She strokes his hair.*) We just wanted to make it easy for you.

(*Pause.*)

BOB

This beer is warm.

Character names are in caps and centered over the line of dialogue. Speeches are followed by a blank line before the name of the next speaker. Stage directions are italics and indented, unless they occur within speeches and are brief, as when Sue strokes Bob's hair. Within speeches, use single spacing. The exception is double spacing for single-character plays (monologues):

URSULA

Fufi? Fufi? Now where has that dog got to? Have any of you seen a small poodle, hair dyed light purple, diamond collar, rheumy eyes, hostile disposition? He's actually quite sweet once he gets his teeth out of your leg. I know he's around here somewhere. They don't allow dogs in this theater but for my little Fufi they make an exception. Let me tell you why.

(*She opens her handbag and takes out a small gun.*)

The general rule of thumb for dialogue pages is one minute per page, though this obviously can vary depending on the length of the speeches and stage directions, and the amount and length of pauses, which are usually not under the playwright's control. Pauses and silences can be effective, but prescribe them sparingly.

The healthy trend nowadays is away from elaborate scene and character descriptions and overly detailed stage directions, both meant primarily for readers and relics of a time when production was secondary to publication. Parenthetical comments on line delivery (as in Bob's "*angrily*" above) are often a sign of mistrust toward actors and directors, and are also thankfully falling out of use.

More Plays

The following is a suggestive list of late 20th and early 21st century plays which may be used for the critical paper; some may also be used for class discussion. I have all of them. This is by no means a definitive list, and if you'd like to write on another play, feel free to suggest it.

Fernando Arrabal: *Fando and Lis, The Automobile Cemetery, ...and they put handcuffs on the flowers*
Samuel Beckett: *Happy Days, Krapp's Last Tape*, selected short plays
Edward Bond: *Saved, Lear*
Bertolt Brecht: *The Measures Taken, The Good Person of Szechuan*
Howard Brenton: *The Romans in Britain, Bloody Poetry*
Caryl Churchill: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire, Cloud Nine, Top Girls*
Don DeLillo: *The Day Room, Valparaiso, Love-Lies-Bleeding*
Dario Fo: *Accidental Death of an Anarchist, Misterio Buffo, Low Pay? Don't Pay!*
Michael Frayn: *Copenhagen*
Jean Genet: *The Maids, The Balcony*
Eugene Ionesco: *Rhinoceros*
Sarah Kane: *Blasted, Cleansed, 4:48 Psychosis*
Neil LaBute: *The Shape of Things*
Tracy Letts: *August, Osage County*
David Mamet: *Edmond, Oleanna, The Cryptogram*
Charles Mee: *Big Love* (available online)
Suzan Lori Parks: *Venus*
Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming, Old Times, One for the Road*
Sarah Ruhl: *The Clean House, Euridice, Dead Man's Cell Phone, In the Next Room*
Sam Shepard: *The Tooth of Crime, Buried Child, True West*
Tom Stoppard: *Jumpers, Arcadia*
Naomi Wallace: *One Flea Spare, In the Heart of America*
Timberlake Wertenbaker: *Our Country's Good, After Darwin*

Playgoing

We should see as much live theatre as we can. Madrid has a lively and varied offering. Most of it is in Spanish, of course, so a good grasp of the language or prior familiarity with the play helps. I'll suggest shows I think it would be interesting to see and we'll make arrangements for all who are interested in attending. Our undergraduate production (probably Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone*), directed by me, goes up April 16 and 17; be there!