

THR 351 Dramatic Theory and Criticism
Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:30 am -11:45 am
Art and Design Building 1007
Kristin Johnsen-Neshati
703.993.1122; kneshati@gmu.edu (preferred)
Office: PAB A407F

CATALOG DESCRIPTION & ADDITIONAL COURSE INFO.

A chronological study of development of dramatic theory and criticism from Plato and Aristotle through modern movements. Students read plays, theoretical works, and critical responses, and write original criticism of performances or texts.

Credits: 3

Hours of Lecture or Seminar per week: 3

Hours of Lab or Studio per week: 0

Content Delivery: Lecture & discussion, combined with a weekly writing workshop

- Satisfies the Upper-Level Literature requirement for the Theater major
- Satisfies 3 of 18 credits required for a minor in Theater
- Satisfies 3 of 9 Theater Studies Concentration electives
- Required for a Concentration in Playwriting and Dramaturgy
- Highly recommended for students considering graduate work in Theater Studies

(See “Requirements for the B.A. in Theater,” “Theater Minor Description,” and “University Catalog” at <http://www.gmu.edu/depts/theater/academics.html>.)

Departmental Website: www.gmu.edu/depts/theater. A copy of this syllabus may be found online: theater.gmu.edu/academics.

WRITING-INTENSIVE REQUIREMENT

This course fulfills the Writing-Intensive requirement in the Theater major. It does so through the 1000-word essay on “Why Theater Matters” due 3/20, and the 1,500-word theater review due 4/3. Students will choose one of these assignments to complete through a draft/feedback/revision process. The first draft will be due as listed above; I will provide commentary on the draft, and the revised draft will be due on 5/10. Additionally, students have the option of revising up to two other assignments by the same date for my feedback. Grades for first and final drafts will be averaged for each assignment.

GOALS

The first goal for this course is to introduce students to the twin purposes of theory and criticism, and to a variety of dramatic theorists and critics who have shaped and

responded to the continually evolving theatrical event. Throughout the semester we'll investigate more recent trends of artistic thought by comparing them with earlier examples of dramatic theory. The course's second goal is to help students develop a critical writing style that can be applied within and outside the theater; one that is clear, precise and true to each author's developing aesthetic. Students will take turns having their writing critiqued in a constructive manner by the entire class. Class sessions will alternate between this criticism workshop format and open discussions on the assigned texts. Regular attendance is crucial. Students are responsible to their peers, in particular, for attending all sessions. The workshop experience is essential to writers and respondents in the development of their critical writing skills.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this course, students should expect to learn to:

- (1) Identify and analyze several types of dramatic structure, using vocabulary appropriate to each aesthetic, historical, and theoretical context;
- (2) Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between artistic technique and a work's underlying concept by sharpening their skills in dramatic analysis to support their own artistic interpretations of texts on the page and in production;
- (3) Analyze and interpret classical plays and theater in their social, historical, and personal contexts through an understanding of how trends in dramatic content, dramaturgy, technology, and style reflect the artist's changing role in society;
- (4) Improve their communication skills, both orally and in writing, through the course's criticism workshop format;
- (5) Engage in the artistic and critical processes, by striving to capture performance as fully as possible in original criticism that synthesizes the viewer's experience of a full production with his or her own critical sensibilities.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Daniel Charles Gerould. *THEATRE/THEORY/THEATRE*. ISBN: 1557833095.

Michael Huxley & Noel Witts (ed.). *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*. ISBN: 9780415252874.

RECOMMENDED TEXT

Strunk/White. *The Elements of Style*.

OFFICE HOURS

MTW 1:30-3:00 pm, or by appointment.

Please schedule an appointment with me after class or by email in advance.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is your responsibility. No unexcused absence will be permitted without a penalty to your grade. Arrival later than 10:40 will not count toward class attendance. NB: Chronic lateness and/or absences will substantially lower your grade. If an emergency arises and you must miss class, please email me before class time. Please check with a classmate for material you may have missed.

•As part of your attendance grade, you will be required to attend all Mason Players mainstage productions, and you should be prepared to discuss them in class. You are also encouraged to take advantage of the many arts events—including Studio productions, play readings, dance and music concerts, as well as gallery exhibits and artist lectures—available on campus and in the Washington area. For more information on the free student ticket policy for George Mason events, please see the Center for the Arts brochure, or call the CFA box office at 993-8888.

PARTICIPATION

Students can participate in a variety of meaningful ways, such as:

- 1) making original, well-informed and relevant comments on the material under discussion; quality of comments is more important than quantity.
- 2) raising focused questions in class and/or directly to me over email
- 3) volunteering in class, as appropriate
- 4) offering constructive, thoughtful comments on fellow students' work

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

As a courtesy to others in the class, and in accordance with George Mason University policy, please turn off all beepers, cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class. Also, please refrain from using Instant Messenger, surfing the Web, or checking email during class.

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Faculty, staff, and students have the right to be treated with respect and professionalism by students and peers in all classes and activities sponsored by the Theater department. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. If, in the opinion of the responsible faculty member, a student becomes disruptive in class or rehearsal, faculty may exercise their judgment on how best to address the situation, be it by requiring the student to leave, calling Campus Police, or taking other steps deemed necessary for the safety and wellbeing of the class, rehearsal or group. Such action may affect the student's final grade and standing in the University.

MISSING CLASS FOR PRODUCTIONS

Under what circumstances is involvement with a Mason Players production justification for missing a class? Here are the general ground rules that we work with:

- 1) Students are never required to miss a class to participate in a Mason Players production. This includes rehearsals, load-ins, performances, etc.
- 2) Students are asked to provide their class schedule when auditioning or requesting an assignment as a designer, etc. When directors cast a show and assign production duties, they accept these conflicts.
- 3) Subject to the attendance policies of a given class, students may request permission of their instructors to miss a class or portion thereof to participate in critical activities. Such a request should be made rarely and is subject to the approval of each individual instructor. The syllabus policy on absences applies. Student academic success is our priority.
- 4) In the case of our Mainstage productions, including weekday matinees on Friday, because of the unique nature of the situation, the director of the production will provide an email confirming a student's participation in the performance (on stage, back stage, etc.). Excusing these absences remains at the discretion of each instructor. With at least 6 weeks' advance notice about production assignments, each student is responsible for confirming his or her availability to participate so that alternative arrangements can be made, if necessary.

Given the dual nature of our learning experience - in the classroom and in production - it is not surprising that schedules sometimes conflict. In the end, we are an academic institution, and our first priority is students' academic success.

GRADING

Letter grades will be assigned based on the George Mason University undergraduate grading system in which a letter grade of "A" is equal to 4.00 grade points, "A-" equals 3.67 grade points, etc. See the Academic Policies section of the *University Catalog* (available online at www.gmu.edu) for more information.

GRADING STANDARDS

What makes a project or other assignment an "A"? (B, C, D, F)

- A grade of "A" is given for superlative work that demonstrates a profound commitment to the course material, and further, employs this material as a springboard for independent thought and work.

- A grade of “B” is given for very good work that completely fulfills all the requirements of the course in a conscientious and dedicated manner, and that demonstrates mastery of the course content.
- A grade of “C” is given for work that fulfills all the requirements of the course in a satisfactory manner, but that falls short of demonstrating rigor and mastery.
- A grade of “D” is given for work that is unsatisfactory in content, but meets the standards of submission.
- A grade of “F” is given for work that fails to fulfill the requirements of the course.

MASON’S ADD/DROP POLICY

The last day to drop this class with no tuition liability is **1/31/2012**. The last day to drop this class without Dean’s permission is **2/24/2012, by 5 pm**. The selective withdrawal period is 2/27/2012 – 3/30/2012. It is the student’s responsibility to check to verify that they are properly enrolled, as no credit will be awarded to students who are not.

HONOR CODE, COPYRIGHT & COMPUTER USE POLICIES

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

You are expected to adhere to all University policies and guidelines during your participation in this course. All work must be your own. Inappropriate use of the work of others is a George Mason University Honor Code violation. Please review the University’s website for information on the following: Honor Code and Judicial Procedures; Copyright/Fair Use; and Responsible Use of Computing.

DISABILITY RESOURCES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Students must inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester, and the specific accommodation will be arranged through the Disability Resource Center.

MASON EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. The Mason email accounts are the official accounts for this class. All communications regarding this course must occur via Mason email accounts.

WRITING CENTER

Students in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of the Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). These services are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

OTHER MASON RESOURCES

<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/freshman/resources.html>

University Policies: University Catalog can be accessed catalog.gmu.edu
University Libraries “ Ask a Librarian” <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) caps.gmu.edu or (703) 993-2380

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

MASON ALERT SYSTEM

You are encouraged to sign up for the Mason Alert System by visiting the website <https://alert.gmu.edu>. Emergency information is posted in each classroom explaining what to do in the event of crises. Further information about emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert>. **NOTE:** Cell phones, pagers and alarms must be turned off in class. Exceptions will only be made in advance or in case of emergency.

<i>January 1 Day of Week</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Martin Luther King Day (no classes)	Mon Jan 16
First day of classes ; last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date; full semester waitlists removed	Mon Jan 23
Summer 2012 Graduation Intent Available via Patriot Web	Mon Jan 30
Last day to drop with no tuition penalty	Tues Jan 31
Last day to add classes —all individualized section forms due	Tues Jan 31
Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty	Tues Feb 14
Last day to drop with a 67% tuition penalty	Fri Feb 24
Last day to drop	Fri Feb 24
Last day to file your Spring 2012 Graduation Intent	Fri Feb 24
Immunization Record Deadline	Tue Mar 1
Midterm progress reporting period (100-200 level classes)—grades available via Patriot Web	Mon Feb 20 - Fri Mar 23
Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only)	Mon Feb 27 - Fri Mar 30
Spring Break	Mon Mar 12 - Sun Mar 18
Incomplete work from Fall 2011 due to instructor**	Fri Mar 30
Incomplete grade changes from fall 2011 due to registrar**	Fri Apr 6
Dissertation/Thesis Deadline**	Fri May 4
Last day of classes	Sat May 5
Reading Days	Mon May 7 & Tue May 8
Exam Period (beginning at 7:30 a.m.)	Wed May 9 - Wed May 16
Commencement and Degree Conferral Date	May 19, 2012

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading assignments will be made each week. Additional readings will be made available to you through library reserve or class handouts on a week-by-week basis. Students will also be expected to follow current theater criticism (newspaper or online) on a weekly basis.

1. Attendance, thoughtful participation, class preparation & discussion; regular attendance at Theater at Mason performances; selection and reading of at least one piece of contemporary theater criticism each week chosen from a major national newspaper, book, periodical or website. 15%
2. Six-line bio. Due 1/26. 5%
3. Essay: The movie that changed my life. 750 words. Due 2/7. 10%
4. Professional theater review. 500 words. Due 2/21. 10%
5. Film review. 250 words. One-hour time limit. Due 3/6. 10%
6. Essay: Why theater matters. 1000 words. Due 3/20. 10%
7. Professional theater review. No adverbs. 1500 words. Due 4/3. 10%
8. Your choice: Professional theater or film review. 500 words. Due 4/17. 10%
9. Feature article or interview with theater professional. 1000 words. Due 5/1. 10%
10. One of your reviews must be revised and resubmitted by 5/10. Additionally, you have the option of revising up to two other assignments by the same date for your instructor's feedback. NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED. 10%

If you are absent, be sure to check with a classmate for updated assignments. Students are expected to adhere strictly to the University Honor Code. For descriptions of the Honor Code and plagiarism, please consult your University Catalog.

There will be no final exam.