

## PLAYWRITING & TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### SYLLABUS, WEBSITE VERSION

(subject to revision ea. semester)

**Beth Cleary, Professor**

During this course you will write one ten-minute play, and two short one-acts. We will also discuss staging terminology and geographies, read a variety of plays in the short and long form, meet several accomplished playwrights, read their work and learn from them in class, and see fully-staged productions of 2 plays we read. You'll be busy – and by the end, you'll produce a portfolio of three new works for the theatre!

The course is certainly an immersion – how can we understand this form if we don't read it, analyze it, write it ourselves, and hear it read in draft form? But the course also provides ample *pacing* for integration of concepts and techniques. Effort is all, and discipline is crucial; as you'll see on the attached Course Readings & Assignments Schedule, deadlines are hard and fast, and for most of you that will mean the continuous consultation of the syllabus, and new practices in how you use your time so you can meet these deadlines.

This course is very lucky to have Rob Gelberg '14 as the course preceptor. Rob is a deeply skilled theatre practitioner, and a particularly passionate and advanced playwright; he'll be going to graduate school in playwrighting next year, and you will benefit from Rob's already substantial “real world” experience as a playwright, director, and actor. He is inspiring!

Grading: you'll be graded on **participation** (60%, which includes meeting all deadlines, not being absent, staying on top of the various simultaneous activities and being a good sport!), and **improvement and quality of your writing** (40%). The three major writing assignments are graded as follows:

Ten-Minute Play 25% (A, A-, B+, etc., down to 'D' or *zero* if you don't turn one in)

First Short Play 35% (Same letter-grade scale)

Second One-Act 40% (Same letter-grade scale)

There are also “extra credit” assignments, which are optional but if you're juggling a lot this semester you might want to complete one or more of these simple analytical essay assignments as insurance. These assignments are outlined at the end of this syllabus.

There are several books required for the course, all play texts. Please see last page for the list.

On the first day of the course, we will figure out the laptop v. hard copy question for having materials available in class. No one should be disadvantaged by not having a laptop; however, we will all need to pay attention in order to make sure everyone can participate in every class, without any nuttiness or running to the printer and slowing class down, etc. *THINK AHEAD.*

**PLAYWRIGHTING & TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**  
**SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS**

**LARGE SERIOUS NOTE:** THE DEADLINES IN HERE ARE ABSOLUTE. THERE ARE **NO EXTENSIONS. NONE WHATSOEVER.** DO NOT ASK FOR AN EXTENSION. IF YOU MISS A POSTING, AT THE TIME IT'S DUE, THAT'S IT – YOUR WORK WILL NOT BE READ, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A “D” FOR THAT ASSIGNMENT. **DEADLINES ARE REAL FOR WRITERS** – contests, applications, editors -- AND CHOICES MUST BE MADE IN ORDER TO MEET DEADLINES. HEAR YE, HEAR YE!

**WEEK 1    Lining up Carts and Horses**

M    1/27    **Introductions** and Syllabus Review; Hand-Out for Wednesday, “Packet...”

**SIGN UP:** Rob’s Salons, and Reading Duos, Trios for semester

**READ** in class: Samuel Beckett, *Come and Go*

W    1/29    **READ:** “Packet of One-Act Openings,” prepared with observations/questions;

**ALSO IN CLASS:** coverage of stage geographies & terms, formatting software

F    1/31    **READ:** Terrence McNally’s *Prelude & Liebestod* (also, listen to the music that the play is based on)

**DUE:** “*An opening...*” – bring 3 hard copies (note; from now on, assignments are due as Google Docs postings...)

**WEEK 2    Reading Dialogue: Listening for Texture, Imagining Spatial Tone**

*(note: during this week, read 2 10-minute plays, see Sunday 2/9 “DUE”)*

M    2/3    **READ:** Sam Shepard, *The Short Life of Trouble*

**ROB’S SALON #1:** *Goddess of Mercy*, Jenny Connell Davis

W    2/5    **READ:** Naomi Wallace, *And I and Silence*

F    2/7    **DUE:** Transcript of Eavesdropped Dialogue, and 1-2 page scene based on it  
(GD Beth, Rob and duo-partner)

IN CLASS: Discuss 1-2 pp. scene w/duo partner; then, in-class exercises

### WEEK 3 The Clear and the Evanescent: Asking Audiences to Work

SUN 2/9 DUE by 9 P.M.: **10-minute play** (10 pages, GD Beth, Rob, duo-partner)

M 2/10 DISCUSS in CLASS: 10-minute plays, in duos (everyone, bring in hard copies, your own and your reading partner's – or bring your laptop)

W 2/12 READ: Christopher Shinn, *The Coming World*

F 2/14 READ: Christopher Shinn, *Teddy Ferrara*

DUE: same exercise as 2/7, **new** eavesdropped conversation, same instructions, 'though this time comments will be given by readers *after class*

### WEEK 4 All in Motion: Structure, Character, Conflict Building-Blocks

M 2/17 GET BACK: 10-minute plays from Beth and Rob, with comments

DUE by class (GD Beth, Rob and new trios): Beginnings of *YOUR* One-Act Play: Character Descriptions (3 chars. max); Setting and Opening Action; forecast re: plot/conflict, structure (continuous? Scenes?); any imagined offstage presences, music, etc.

IN CLASS: read your new One-Act Play beginnings in **new trios**, *discuss*

By midnight GET BACK: Comments from Beth or Rob on your One-Act Beginnings

W 2/19 DUE by class (GD Beth, Rob, trio): First dialogues, scenes – however your play is emerging

IN CLASS: discuss new dialogues in **trios**

F 2/21 IN CLASS: exercises to work on your emerging one-acts (bring laptops or notebooks, however you're working – but *be prepared*)

**WEEK 5 While You Work: Inspiration from Professional Playwright 1**

M 2/24 **READ:** Aditi Kapi, *Love Person*

W 2/26 **READ:** Aditi Kapil, *Agnes Under the Big Top* – DISCUSS w/Aditi in class!

F 2/28 **IN CLASS:** In-class writings exercises, led by Aditi Kapil

**WEEK 6 HEARING AND COMMENTING ON DIALOGUE 1**

SUN 3/2 **DUE BY 9 P.M.: FIRST DRAFTS OF COMPLETED 20-MIN. ONE-ACTS**  
(GD share with Beth, Rob and new reading partner)

M 3/3 **IN CLASS:** comments in class with new reading partner

**ROB'S SALON #2:** *Terminus*, Gabriel Jason Dean

T 3/4 **DUE BY 9 P.M.:** any re-writes or re-submits, for readings 3/5-3/14 (GD Beth, Rob, and class-members whom you are “casting” in your plays)

W 3/5 **READ IN CLASS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**SPECIAL PERFORMANCE EVENT with ROB:** discuss Mark St. Germain's *Freud's Last Session*, over dinner, and attend Guthrie performance

F 3/7 **READ IN CLASS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK 7 HEARING AND COMMENTING ON DIALOGUE 2**

M 3/10 **READ IN CLASS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

W 3/12 **READ IN CLASS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

F 3/14 **READ IN CLASS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK 8: SPRING BREAK: KEEP WORKING!**

**WEEK 9 GERMINATING YOUR NEXT PLAY, and  
INSPIRATION FROM PROFESSIONAL PLAYWRIGHT 2**

SUN 3/23 **DUE by 9 p.m.:** Postings of One-Acts (**GD** Beth, Rob), with any re-writes from readings, *if you want to be considered by Directing class for production!*

M 3/24 **READ:** *Slither*, by Carson Kreitzer

**GET BACK:** Comments on your first One-Act, Beth and Rob

W 3/26 **READ:** *The Love Song of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, with Carson Kreitzer in class

F 3/28 **BRING:** new ideas for next one-acts requiring historical research – exercises with Carson Kreitzer

**WEEK 10 WRITING, PUSHING, WRITING, HATING IT, WRITING  
ANYWAY, NOT CENSORING, WRITING -- GETTING SOMEWHERE!**

M 3/31 **DUE BY CLASS:** **GD** Beth, Rob, and *first* duo-partner: Beginnings of new One-Act play, min. 30 minutes

W 4/2 **YOU KEEP WRITING**

**IN CLASS:** Bring your writing, in-class exercises

F 4/4 **YOU KEEP WRITING – YOUR PLAY WON'T WRITE ITSELF!**

**IN CLASS:** Bring your new work, for in-class exercises

**WEEK 11 WRITING, SHAPING, DISCARDING,  
with PAGE-TO-STAGE INSPIRATION**

M 4/7 **READ:** *Venus*, Suzan-Lori Parks

**ROB'S SALON #3:** *Seed*, by Winter Miller

W 4/9 **READ:** *In the Blood*, Suzan-Lori Parks

**OPENS TONIGHT:** Macalester Production of *In the Blood*

F 4/11 **DISCUSS:** *In the Blood*, production, page-to-stage

**IN CLASS WRITING, FINAL PUSH TO FINISH THIS NEW PLAY!**

## WEEK 12 WRITING, WRITING

- M    4/14    No Class Meeting; **DUE BY MIDNIGHT: Completed Draft of new One-Act**  
(GD Beth, Rob and first/again duo-partner)
- W    4/16    **IN CLASS:** Duo partners discuss drafts, which must be pre-read
- Th    4/17    **DUE BY 9 P.M.: GD** everyone in class: Your One-Act, with Any Re-writes  
based on W discussion
- F    4/18    **SIMULTANEOUS READINGS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

## WEEK 13 LISTENING, REVISING

- M    4/21    **SIMULTANEOUS READINGS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- W    4/23    **SIMULTANEOUS READINGS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- F    4/25    **SIMULTANEOUS READINGS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

## WEEK 14 LISTENING, REVISING

- M    4/28    **SIMULTANEOUS READINGS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- W    5/1    **SIMULTANEOUS READINGS:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- F    5/3    **RE-CAP:** Next Steps, Ten-Minute and One-Act Play Festivals, etc.

## WEEK 15 FORWARD, PLAYWRIGHTS!

- M    5/5    CLOSING

NOTE: Directing Projects will perform during the last 10 days of school, *may produce some plays from this class!*

F 5/9

**DUE: 3-PLAY PORTFOLIO:** (1) Ten-Minute Play; (1) 20-Minute Play; (1) 30+-Minute Play, with one-page essay about the arc of your writing development in this class

Submit **2 Hard Copies**, bound (large clip or 3-ring binder), to THDA Main Office

**Due: by 4 p.m., No Extensions**

(These will be available with notes by the middle of the following week; please leave mailing address if you are leaving campus.)

#### **EXTRA CREDIT POSSIBILITIES:**

- you are welcome to supplement your work/grade by turning in written work (3-page commentary on script and production choices) within 10 days of any of the following events:

Rob's Salon #1

Rob's Salon #2

Rob's Salon #3

*Freud's Last Session* (available in bookstore)

*In the Blood* (will be discussed in class, available in bookstore)

Your essay should identify the *genre* of the work (farce, problem comedy, etc.), engage the playwright's structuring of "story," his/her use of language to distinguish character, and any staging challenges that would be (in the case of readings) or were hard to render. If you saw a full production, how were the problems solved?

It's up to you to do or not do these papers. If you falter on any deadlines and get a 'zero,' you might like to have one or two of these in your pocket!