

THE 371: Play Analysis
Fall 2020
Tuesday/Thursday 8:00am-9:15am PST
Renfrew Hall 127; Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Sarah Alice Campbell (you can call me Sarah, please!) (pronouns: she/her/hers)

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Office: 228 Shoup Hall

Office Hours: T/Th 10:30AM – 12:00PM via Zoom: <https://uidaho.zoom.us/j/96303260178>

Phone: _____ (feel free to text/call if you are running late for class, need some help urgently, etc.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course in play analysis is open to any student, regardless of major, and focuses on the analysis of play texts predominantly for practice and criticism. Students in the course will develop skills the necessary skills in practice and criticism in order to refine their work as theatre artists. Students will also be exposed to literary theory (more specifically, theory for theatre) to enhance their understanding of the scholarship within theatre and performance studies. Students will have the opportunity to apply their skills in practice, criticism, and theory through class discussions, assignments, and projects. The course texts will focus on plays written/produced within the American theatre in last twenty years.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Describe why script analysis is a necessary part of the work we do as theatre artists
- Evaluate the tools of script analysis and apply the relevant tools to a specific play
- Understand how play texts differ from productions of play texts
- Isolate specific pieces of evidence from script and use them to support interpretations about the play, which in turn affect choices in production
- Create their own approach to script analysis, combining their pre-existing tools with those learned in class.

COURSE TEXTS

The majority of scripts used for the course have been selected from [American Theatre magazine](#), which is available to you for FREE! through the university library. Wherever possible, I have provided links rather than PDFs so that the library has a record of the texts being used by students. The **following plays will not be available** through the library website and **should be purchased by the student**:

Carmen Rivera, *La Gringa*, <https://bookshop.org/books/la-gringa-9780573663352/9780573663352> (estimated cost \$14).

Concepción León Mora (translated by Virginia Grise), *Mestiza Power!*, <https://bookshop.org/books/mestiza-power-9781387710515/9781387710515> (estimated cost \$6).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A general note on feedback for assignments: I am more than happy to provide feedback in advance of any assignment as long as you send it to me via email (sarahcampbell@uidaho.edu) – please do not upload the assignment to Blackboard or Weebly until you are ready for it to be graded.

For this class, you have three types of assignments: (1) special assignments, which are 100 points each and are focused on a specific practice related to script analysis; (2) your play reflection blog, which is made up of 15 separate blog posts; and (3) your final paper or project. Descriptions are found below and more details are available on our Weebly site.

Special Assignments (SA):

SA 1: Character Analysis in Action. For this assignment, you will practice the art of performance analysis. While performance analysis is not the same as script analysis, you will use the same tools (observations/evidence and interpretation/analysis) in the practice. We will watch a segment from Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles* and focus on the acting choices that Deavere Smith made in the portrayal of the character. See assignment description on Weebly. Due: October 8th. 100 points.

SA 2: Play Annotations and Dramaturgical First Steps. For this assignment, you will annotate ten pages of the play *Mestiza Power!* by Concepción León Mora (translated by Virginia Grise). Annotations will be followed up by creating a glossary (in the style of a dramaturgical packet) of the terms found in the script. See assignment description on Weebly. Due: Tuesday, October 20th. 100 points.

SA 3: Style Analysis. This informal writing assignment asks that you analyze the style in the play *Straight White Men* by Young Jean Lee. Details can be found in the assignment description on Weebly. Due: November 12th. 100 points.

Play Reflection Blog. For this assignment, you will respond to a brief prompt for each of the plays that we read in class. These responses can be a mix of video, audio, and text. I encourage you to experiment with responding in all the modalities offered, but if you prefer one modality that is ok too! The play reflection prompts are available on the Weebly page and have been preloaded into your individual Weebly site for the course. The blog is set up to be private but if you prefer/want to, you can make it public – this public option is NOT required. Due: before the respective reading is due, but you can go back and make changes as desired after the class discussion! There will be a total of 15 of these responses. 500 points total.

Final Paper or Project. Choose your favorite below! 300 points.

1. Paper Option: Write a 5-8-page paper (due by the end of the semester). The topic is completely up to you (within the scope of the class) but could focus on a play, a series of play texts, a playwright, or a theatrical event.
2. Project Option: Let your imagination run wild! Have you always wanted to design the set for Taylor Mac's *Hir*? Perhaps you are really into the work of Adrienne Kennedy and you want to create a dramaturgy packet on one of her plays. Project should be approved by me by midterm. We will work together to design a rubric for your specific project.

Scaffolding for this final paper/project assignment is as follows:

Due: Topic proposal (4-5 sentence description of your project) – October 1. 50 points.

Draft of Grading Rubric for your Final Paper/Project – October 29. 100 points.

Paper/Project due – December 15. 150 points.

COURSE CALENDAR:

The following is a basic breakdown of the calendar for our course. Links to items will be to an external website, directly to the item via the library website, or to a OneDrive folder with a PDF. The latter two options require that you sign in with you U of Idaho credentials.

Introduction: What is a Play? What is Play Analysis?

Guiding Questions: Why do we study plays? What is a play? What is analysis?

Tuesday, August 25 - Review of Syllabus, Class Structure, Expectations, Outcomes

Due: Nothing!

Thursday, August 27 - Ways of Looking at Plays, Observations, Interpretations, Theory, and Criticism

Due: Elinor Fuchs, "EF's Visit to a Small Planet"

Herman Rappaport, "Comprehension versus Interpretation," *Literary Theory Toolkit*.

Celena E. Kusch, "A Basic Guide to Literary Theory," (read pg. 1-2, you can skim the other pages).

Part One: Structure

Guiding Questions: What is plot? What is story? How do we talk about structure?

Tuesday, September 1 – Distinguishing plot from story (defining terms: plot, story, event, causal, linear, circular, etc.)

Due: Selections from Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Herman Rappaport, "Form and Aristotle," *Literary Theory Toolkit*.

Thursday, September 3 – Understanding the Basic Classifications of Structure through Causality and Time pt. 1

Due: Idris Goodwin, *This is Modern Art*.

Tuesday, September 8 – Understanding the Basic Classifications of Structure through Causality and Time pt. 2

Due: Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Thursday, September 10 – Understanding the Basic Classifications of Structure through Causality and Time pt. 3

Due: Nothing (continue conversation about Brecht and Goodwin).

Part Two: Genre

Guiding Questions: How and why do we categorize plays according to "genre"? What is genre?

Tuesday, September 15 – Theories of Genre: Genre as affect? Genre as form? Four genres. Why is genre important for the theatre artist? Where did tragedy go?

Due: John Gassner, "The Possibilities and Perils of Modern Tragedy," p. 3-14.

Thursday, September 17 – Comedy – its Characteristics and Types

Due: Yussef El Guindi, *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World, American Theatre*.

Tuesday, September 22 – Tragicomedy – the Genre of the Modern World

Due: Taylor Mac, *Hir, American Theatre*.

Thursday, September 24 – Troubling Genre: Impositions of Western Literary Criticism & Genre Theory

Due: Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters*.

Rubelise da Cunha, "'The Unending Appetite for Stories': Genre Theory, Indigenous Theater, and Tomson Highway's 'RezCycle.'"

Part Three: Character

Guiding Questions: What is character? Why are we so fascinated with the study of characters today? Can a play exist without characters? Can props, scenic elements, or costumes become a character?

Tuesday, September 29 – What is Character? Why Does it Matter?

Due: Terry Eagleton, "Character," from *How to Read Literature*. p. 45-79.

Anthony Aguilar, *El Verde: Career Day*, YouTube. (Rosenthal Theatre @ Inner City Arts LA).

Thursday, October 1 – Examining Character as an Actor

Due: Thomas, “Character,” from *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*. p. 168-199.
Final Paper/Project Topic Proposal due.

Tuesday, October 6 – Character Analysis in Action

Due: Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles*, PBS. Watch first 20 minutes of the filmed version.
We will work on an in-class activity based on the video.

Thursday, October 8 - Character Analysis in Action

Due: Special Assignment 1 - Character Analysis in Action.

Part Four: Theme

Guiding Questions: What do plays mean? How do playwrights communicate meaning in their works? Can a production change the meaning of a play?

Tuesday, October 13 - All the World's a Stage! Metatheatre!

Due: Christopher Chen, *Caught, American Theatre*.

Thursday, October 15 - Identity and Belonging in the Theatre

Due: Carmen Rivera, *La Gringa*.

Tuesday, October 20 - Play Analysis for Dramaturgs

Due: Concepción León Mora, *Mestiza Power!* (trans. Virginia Grise).
Special Assignment 2 - Play Annotation and Dramaturgical First Steps.

Thursday, October 22 - Play Analysis for Directors

Due: Larissa Fasthose, *The Thanksgiving Play, American Theatre*.

Part 5: Language

Guiding questions: What does language do in plays? What tools do we have for analyzing language? How can multilingual productions change our experiences of a play (especially if we don't know all of the languages)? Is there such a thing as a pure translation of a play?

Tuesday, October 27 - Playing with Language; Language at Play

Due: Marvin Carlson, "Introduction," from *Speaking in Tongues: Language Play in the Theatre*, p. 1-19.

Thursday, October 29 - Reported Speech and Evocative Language

Due: Adrienne Kennedy, *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box, American Theatre*.
Draft of rubric for your final paper/project due.

Part 6: Style

Guiding questions: What is style? Why is it important for theatre practitioners? How is style of a play different from style of a production? Can a play be "ruined" by producing it with a style that clashes with the play text?

Tuesday, November 3 – Basics of Style

Due: Francis Hodge, “The Director’s Analysis of Style in a Playscript,” *Play Directing*.

Thursday, November 5: Realism, Modified Realism, & Naturalism

Due: Young Jean Lee, *Straight White Men*, *American Theatre*.
Isaac Butler, "The Death and Life of the Living-Room Play," *American Theatre*.

Tuesday, November 10 - Presentational & Epic

Due: Antoinette Nwandu, *Pass Over*, *American Theatre*.

Thursday, November 12 - Play Analysis for Designers

Due: J. Michael Gillette, "Chapter 2: The Design Process," *Theatrical Design and Production*.
Special Assignment 3 - Analysis of Style due.

Part 7: Writing About Plays (Theory and Criticism)

Guiding questions: Why do people write about theatre? What is criticism? Why is it important? What is the difference between theory and criticism?

Tuesday, November 17 – Close Reading as a Strategy in Theatre Criticism

Due: Patricia Ybarra, "Young Jean Lee's Cruel Dramaturgy," *Modern Drama*.

Thursday, November 19 – Beyond Formalism: Diverse Approaches for Writing About Plays

Due: James Thomas, "Further Questions for Script Analysis," *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*.

NO CLASS – Fall Recess: November 23 - 27 *

***Classes after this date will be conducted online ONLY. More details to come. :)**

Part 8: Writing about Performance (Performance Analysis and Criticism)

Guiding questions: What is performance analysis and why does it matter? What aspects are important to include in a performance analysis? How do you decide what is appropriate to include in reviews/analyses based on your audience? What are the ethics of performance analysis? Is every critical voice valid?

Tuesday, December 1 – Best Practices for Writing About Plays

Due: Jan Cohen-Cruz, "Introduction" from *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*. (Read p. 1-8, rest is optional).

Diep Tran, "The Review That Shook Chicago," *American Theatre*.

Antoinette Nwandu, "When Critics Don't Like Their Reflection," *American Theatre*.

Antoinette Nwandu & Graham Schmidt, "Theatre in Black and White: Antoinette Nwandu and Graham Schmidt," *American Theatre*.

Thursday, December 3 – Writing about Design

Due: Sergio Costola, "Guide for Writing in Theatre."

Yolanda Bonnell, "Why I'm Asking White Critics Not to Review My Show."

Tuesday, December 7 – Writing about Acting

Due: Fisher, "Writing About Acting," *How to Write About the Theatre*.

Mary Kathryn Nagle, "Criticisms about a Cherokee Woman's Choices in the Play *Sovereignty* are problematic from a Native and Women's Rights Standpoint," *Indian Country Today*.

Thursday, December 10 – Writing about Directing

Due: Nothing!

There will be no final exam for the course!