“Literature has always more resembled a torch race than a furious dispute among heirs.” – Thornton Wilder

WHAT’S THIS CLASS?

Playwriting is playfully writing for the stage. If you lose your impishness, your inner devil, your love of words and actions on stage - you’re probably not going to have a great time with the writing part. So give yourself permission to play, and play boldly.

In this class, I will encourage you to write rugged, beautiful, imperfect plays. I hope you will write honestly, bravrly, and with willful stupidity, as necessary. I want you to learn to wring as much pleasure as you can out of your process, swat away the fruit flies of insecurity, develop patience and persistence, and come to a greater understanding of your own voice.

This class is part reading plays (which we then discuss), and part writing plays (which we then discuss). There are different rules for how we will talk about plays that exist out in the world (which have been written, rewritten, polished, produced, reviewed, and published) vs. new pages of early drafts, which the playwright is still discovering.

We will be reading existing plays to inquire: How does this play work? What inventive or well-worn strategies does this writer employ? What structure propels it forward and keeps us engaged? How does content relate to form? What are the micro forces at work on the level of the scene? How about on the level of the sentence? Plus, of course: How do you relate to this play as a writer, and what does that teach you about your tastes, and consequently, your voice? We will pick these plays apart to learn from them, riff on them, talk back to them. There will be weekly writing prompts so that we may engage actively, as writers, with these plays.

As for our colleagues’ plays: We will be reading new pages so that the writer may hear his or her words out loud, and ask us questions and solicit feedback. In this context, we are a community of peers, carefully ushering new pages into the world. Here it is our primary objective to be supportive, generous, and on point. We will talk more about this in the first week of class.
EXPECTATIONS
-Mandatory attendance. More than two absences will result in a 50% grade drop. A 4th absence will result in failing the course. In the case of illness or emergency please contact me privately via email, preferably by 9 am on the day of class.
-Complete all the readings. Bring in a print copy for discussion. Have 2-3 written observations at the ready.
-Complete all the writing prompts and short assignments. Bring in enough print copies to cast it and have a stage directions reader. *Please note: There will be weeks when we will not read everyone’s short pages. But everyone will have multiple opportunities to hear their work aloud over the course of the semester.
-Turn in assignments on time. I will not accept late assignments.
-Participate in a generous, supportive critique of the work of your peers.
-Playwriting is a low tech art form. This classroom will be, too. No cellphones, laptops, or iPads.

ASSIGNMENTS
-Write a one page analytical response to either Eurydice or Funnyhouse of a Negro, due November 5.
-Complete an assortment of short writing prompts, which you will turn in as a portfolio on November 14.
-Complete a one act (30 – 50 pages), due with the portfolio on November 14. In addition to workshopping your one act, we will read an excerpt from this play in a final presentation.
-Sign up for two 15 minute individual meetings with me, during my office hours. There will be a sign up sheet for this.
-Write a one page personal statement, due November 21.
-Keep an idea book: A sketchbook or journal to help you gather ideas and images for plays, due November 14. (This will be returned to you on November 21.)

Not required, but worth doing:
-Go see plays!

GRADING POLICY
30 % = Participation
30 % = Portfolio
30 % = One Act
5 % = Final Presentation
5 % = Idea Book

100-95 A 94-90 A-
89-87 B+ 86-83 B 82-80 B-
79-77 C+ 76-73 C 72-70 C-
69-67 D+ 66-63 D 62-60 D-

I will evaluate your work based on your growth as a writer, commitment to your craft, and commitment to our writers group.
DISABILITY RESOURCES
Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

REQUIRED THEORY

The Poetics by Aristotle
Against Interpretation by Susan Sontag
Visit to a Small Planet by Elinor Fuchs
Critical Response Process by Liz Lerman
Resistance from A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art in Theatre by Anne Bogart
Lightness & Quickness, from Six Memos For The Next Millennium by Italo Calvino
Language, Visualization, and the Inner Library by Sam Shepard
Play and Theory of the Duende by Garcia Lorca
Seventy-Five Essays I Don’t Have Time To Write by Sarah Ruhl

*With the exception of The Poetics, I will provide handouts for all the theory.

REQUIRED PLAYS

Microdramas by Wolfgang Bauer
Zoo Story by Edward Albee
Cloud 9 by Caryl Churchill
Punkplay by Greg Moss
(*anthologized in Play: A Journal of Plays vol. 4 available from papertheatre.org)
Buried Child by Sam Shepard
The Bacchae by Euripides
Blood Wedding by Garcia Lorca
God’s Ear by Jenny Schwartz
Eurvydice by Sarah Ruhl
Funnyhouse of a Negro by Adrienne Kennedy
WEEKLY AGENDA
(subject to change)

After fall break, you will be bringing in pages from your one acts. There will be a sign up sheet for time slots. Plan ahead!

WEEK 1 : INTRO WEEK : STRUCTURE AND LIMITS
Tuesday, September 3
Course & Syllabus overview
In class, we will read: Microdramas & 36 Assumptions
Write & Share in class: Short impossible plays

HW:
Read:
Visit to a Small Planet
Critical Response Process
Zoo Story

Thursday, September 5
Discuss the ground rules of workshop feedback
Discuss Zoo Story, Visit to a Small Planet, Critical Response Process
What is traditional playwriting structure? What are Aristotle’s elements of drama?

HW:
Read: Cloud 9
Writing prompt: Write a naturalistic 2 character scene that takes place in outer space. 3-5 printed pages.

WEEK 2 : SYNTHETIC FRAGMENT
Tuesday, September 10
Share some of the 2 character scenes
Introduce Paula Vogel’s Plot Forms
Discuss Cloud 9

HW:
Writing prompt based on history remixed

Thursday, September 12
Read & Discuss your work.
Or: Possible fieldtrip to Yale to attend Stephen Adly Guirgis masterclass.

HW:
Read: *Punkplay*
Read: *Against Interpretation*

**WEEK 3: LINEAR / ASSOCIATIVE**
Tuesday, September 17
Discuss *Punkplay*
Discuss *Against Interpretation*

HW:
Writing prompt based on the logic of memory

Thursday, September 19
Read & Discuss your work.

HW: Read *Buried Child*
Read *Language, Visualization, and the Inner Library*

**WEEK 4: GREAT RECKONINGS IN LITTLE ROOMS**
Tuesday, September 24
Discuss *Buried Child."

HW:
Read: *Resistance*
Writing prompt based on “family secret” and family photo

Thursday, September 26
Read & Discuss your work.

HW: Read *The Bacchae*

**WEEK 5: ORDER VS. CHAOS (APOLLO & DIONYSUS)**
Tuesday, October 1
Discuss *The Bacchae*

HW: Writing prompt based on Greek Tragedy

Thursday, October 3
Read & Discuss your work.

HW: Read *Blood Wedding*
Read *Play and Theory of the Duende*

**WEEK 6: MYTH & SYMBOL**
Tuesday, October 8
Discuss *Blood Wedding*
HW: Writing prompt based on mythologizing a story from the news

Thursday, October 10
Read & Discuss your work

HW: Read *God’s Ear*

**WEEK 7: LANGUAGE**
Tuesday, October 15
Discuss *God’s Ear*
HW: Writing prompt based on language as an engine

Thursday, October 17
Read & Discuss your work
Talk about the one act on the horizon
HW: Marsha Norman 5 Sentence Play Exercise.

**WEEK 8**
Tuesday, October 22
*NO CLASS – FALL BREAK*

Thursday, October 24
Workshop longer pieces.

HW: Read *Eurydice*

**WEEK 9**
Tuesday, October 29
Workshop longer pieces.

Thursday, October 31
Workshop longer pieces.

HW: Read *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

**WEEK 10**
Tuesday, November 5
**DUE: One page analytical response**
Workshop longer pieces.

HW: Read *Lightness & Quickness*

Thursday, November 7
Workshop longer pieces.
We will also discuss Calvino in light of rewriting.
WEEK 11
Tuesday, November 12
Workshop rewrites.
HW: Read Seventy Five Essays I Don’t Have Time to Write

Thursday, November 14
DUE: One Act, Portfolio, and Idea Book.
Workshop rewrites. Reflect on how this class went.

WEEK 12
Tuesday, November 19
FINAL PRESENTATIONS.

Thursday, November 21
DUE: One page personal statement.
FINAL PRESENTATIONS.

*Please note class may run longer this week, due to the festival presentation format.