HU3541 Major American Authors  
(American Drama Since World War I)

Summer Session 2005  
Track B  
Office: Walker 327  
Office phone: 487-3246  
(with voice mail)  
Days: M, T, W, Th  
Time: 9:30 to 10:40 a.m.  
Place: Walker 108  
Office hours: 11-11:30 a.m.  
MTWTh  
Professor Gill, PhD  
gegill@mtu.edu  
(checked, usually, once a day)

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: Reading in-depth of one or more major American writers.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
To expose the students to classics in the American canon.  
To encourage critical thought.  
To inform the student about production history.  
To acquaint the students with the playwright's life.  
To foster improved skills in oral presentation.  
To enhance writing and editing skills.  
To offer creative options to the traditional critical paper.  
To develop an appreciation for the American theatre.  
To learn basic research skills in the use of the library.

TEXTS:  
The Odd Couple, Neil Simon  
A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry  
A Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams  
The Price, Arthur Miller  
Our Town, Thornton Wilder  
The Heiress, Ruth and Augustus Goetz

N.B. There will be four films of the six plays to be studied. i.e., only four films.

THEME: The American Dream

What is the American dream? Is it elusive? Does is mean, as it did to Mama Younger in Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, a new home with a picket fence and rooms for all her family members? Can it mean living in a fulfilling marriage with one partner for life as Oscar and Felix had hoped in Simon's The Odd Couple? Does it mean finding joy in little things, such as clocks ticking and warm baths as it does for Emily who discovers this only after death in Thornton Wilder's Our Town? Does it mean having character and shouldering responsibility as it did for one of the two brothers in Arthur Miller's The Price? Does it mean finding economic security, one of the many themes in Williams's Streetcar Named Desire? Does it mean, as it did for Catherine Sloper in The Heiress, finding a mate at any cost? What is your America dream?

N.B. This plan is flexible. With an interactive class, I cannot predict how long discussion will last, but this plan is a close estimate as to where we will be on a particular day.

(next page, please)
Mon. – June 27—Introductions of ourselves, course expectations, filling out of biographical information on index cards; begin Simon’s The Odd Couple.

Tu. – June 28—The Odd Couple

Wed. – June 29—If we complete The Odd Couple on Tuesday, we will meet at the beginning of the hour in the Library for a session arranged by Ms. Joan Goodbody. We may need a portion of this day to complete our discussion of the play, first. I will announce our final plans on Tuesday. Students who miss the library orientation (even if they have had a session before) find themselves, often, at a loss as the semester progresses. Please come if you can. This is important.

Th. – June 30—All students are asked to give a report (no grade) on The Odd Couple. This play opened on Broadway in 1965 and ran for 966 performances. The Walter Matthau/Jack Lemmon film version met with critical acclaim. There is far more on this play in data bases related to popular culture (Infotrac, LexisNexis) than in the MLA Bibliography or JSTOR. Matthau and Lemmon are in Current Biography, I am sure. Please look for reviews and or other forms of critical reception. Each student has five minutes to present his or her findings orally. Please research this on Wednesday in the library.

Mon. – July 4—Independence Day

Tu. – July 5- Th, July 7—Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams.

Mon. – July 11—Each student is asked to read an article of theory or criticism on Streetcar or a performance history/analysis and give a 3-5 minute report (No grade). One or two students may also tell us about the playwright. There is a lot in the MLA Bibliography on Streetcar.

Tu. – July 12—FIRST PAPERS/CREATIVE PROJECTS on The Odd Couple or Streetcar.

Wed. – July 13—Cushion for FIRST PAPERS/PROJECTS/ begin Our Town, Thornton Wilder.

Th. – July 14—Our Town (Bastille Day)

Mon. – July 18—conclude Our Town. Again, each student is asked to give a report on an article of theory/criticism and/or a performance analysis. One or two students may wish to tell us about Thornton Wilder.

Tu. – July 19—Cushion for reports. Begin A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry.

Wed. – July 20—Raisin

Th. – July 21—Raisin

Mon. – July 25—Conclude Raisin. Begin reports on an article of theory/criticism or a performance analysis of A Raisin in the Sun. One or two students may wish to tell us about Lorraine Hansberry. In 2004, Sean (P. Diddy) Combs played Walter Lee Younger on Broadway. Phylicia Rashad played Mama Younger. You may also want to look up performance history of the 1959 Broadway production where Sidney Poitier created the role of Walter Lee, with an all star cast.

(next page, please)
Tu. – July 26—Conclude reports. SECOND PAPERS/CREATIVE PROJECTS on A Raisin in the Sun.


Th. – July 28—The Price

Mon. – Aug. 1—The Price. If we finish, students should be prepared to give reports.

Tu. – Aug. 2—Conclude reports on The Price.

Wed. – Aug. 3—The Heiress, by Ruth and Augustus Goetz.

Th. – Aug. 4—The Heiress

Mon. – Aug. 8—The Heiress

Tu. – Aug. 9—Reports on The Heiress (theory, criticism or performance).

Wed., August 10 and Thursday, August 11 – FINAL PAPERS/CREATIVE PROJECTS (With current enrollment, six per day. This may change if the enrollment changes.)

N. B. A report is simply that. One summarizes facts and findings. The papers/creative projects require a great deal more—one needs to build an argument, to persuade or to analyze a dimension of one or more of these American dramas or a dynamic of one or more. For this reason, I will always have my pad, writing down what it is you plan for us.
PAPERS/PROJECTS:

You have choices of:

1. a critical paper (only if you know how to write one), supported by three articles found in refereed journals, generally indexed in the MLA Bibliography. Ms. Goodbody will demonstrate how to locate articles in MLA. Articles found in JSTOR will require my approval.

2. a performance analysis of an actor’s work we study in class. You will need three reviews from quality newspapers or magazines. One source you might use (for plays done in the last twenty years) is Lexis Nexis. Current Biography (where most entries are not in the computer) is an excellent place to begin. Infotrac in another good source.

3. a historical or social analysis of a play, undergirded by theory, history of statistical data from a reputable source.

4. a creative project, with a scholarly narrative, including, but not limited to music, puppetry, multi-media projects, a website, a drawing, a painting, or photography. A good poet may wish to write an original poem, based on the plays studied in this class. You should work with your strongest of your seven intelligences. All creative projects should show research in three scholarly articles. You may also do scene or costume design.

5. You may do one personal paper (out of three assignments), perhaps on Our Town. For example, you may write on your hometown. This is the only paper where second person is acceptable.

6. All papers should average 1,000 words. Please double-space and use a size 14 font.

I MUST APPROVE ALL TOPICS IN ADVANCE. If you wait until the day before the assignment is due, I will not have time to think. I will always be willing to consider topics any day, a few a day, hopefully. I can also take email and I can see people in my office. You need to come with an idea, however, and you should have looked to see what articles are available, for sure. Articles coming from INTERLIBRARY LOAN in summer are high risk.

You may seek help in The Writing Center. You may also seek help from a Reference Librarian.

N.B. The MLA Bibliography is only good for critical papers, not for either of the other categories/genres of writing suggested.

Thank you for taking my class!
No set of criteria can include all the characteristics of every forceful and convincing piece of writing or speaking. However, the purpose of this form is to help you learn to incorporate certain elements of effective communication in all your papers and speeches.

CONTENT

Central idea: clear; limited; implications of situation carefully considered? adapted to audience?
Support: sufficient, relevant? specific? sources attributed as needed?

ORGANIZATION

Beginning engages interest? indicates purpose? Development: thoughtful analysis apparent?
Purpose and relationship of sections clear? paragraphs coherently structured?
Ending: significance maintained? Is there a sense of closure?

EXPRESSION

Tone: indicates involvement with subject? (I hold that tone is the single most important element in writing.) Appropriate to purpose and audience? Appropriately maintained?
Sentences: clear? concise? varied? patterns suitable for reading and/or listening?
Word Choice: accurate? appropriate to audience?

DELIVERY

Conveys involvement with audience and subject: animation? (Is your delivery alive and enthusiastic?) Are gestures appropriate? Do you have too many gestures? Are they overdone? Eye contact? Too much reliance on notes? Are you familiar with the piece you are presenting?
Voice: articulation clear? appropriate projection? intensity? rate?

MECHANICS (Writing and speaking)

Usage: tense? subject-verb agreement? (This can be very serious.)
Do you write in fragments? (This is a serious problem.)
Documentations: form correct? We use the MLA Handbook as our guide. It can be purchased. I recommend the Fourth Edition. It is also available on the World Wide Web. It is in the library and in The Writing Center.