

ENG 484: MODERN DRAMA
Prof. Josh Epstein, Portland State Univ.

FROM STAGE TO RADIO: BRECHT, BECKETT, STOPPARD

This course will examine three playwrights of the 20th-21st centuries who experimented with both stage plays and radio plays: Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard. Among these figures, we will find both continuities and discontinuities. Each is concerned with both abstract philosophical problems and deeply material ones; with both the rarefied air of the intellect and the experiences of the body; with the absurd and the real; with emotional absorption and bracing alienation. These playwrights find the radio an intriguing complement to the stage, a space where disembodied voices and invisible noises can create uncanny effects; where pedagogical or propagandistic messages can be dictated to a mass; and where the immersive, intimate interiorities of sound can be explored. To support our reading/hearing of these playwrights, we will look at criticism and theory on the historical, conceptual, aesthetic, and ideological possibilities of stage and radio, as well as other media, such as TV plays and performance art, to which these artists contributed directly and indirectly.



Required Texts: Order these editions, in hard copy.

Bertolt Brecht, ed. Willett, *Collected Plays Two* and *Collected Plays Three* (Bloomsbury Methuen; ISBN 9780413685605 and ISBN 9780413704603).

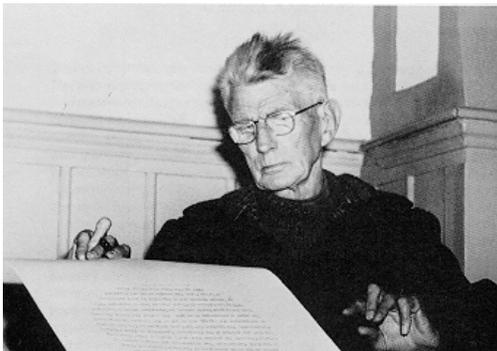
Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Grove; ISBN 9780802144423)

Beckett, *The Collected Shorter Plays* (Grove; ISBN 9780802144386)

Tom Stoppard, *Professional Foul* (Grove; ISBN 9780802150455)

Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms, 3rd ed. (Bedford; ISBN 9780312461881)

Readings posted to D2L (must be printed and brought to class).



Prerequisite: Successful completion of ENG 300. *ENG 484 presumes advanced critical writing, interpretation, and research skills.* Familiarity with literary theory is helpful, but not required.

Grad students (R&C): see addendum at the back of this syllabus.

Technology Policy: Our class will have many chances to work through the effects of technology on art, culture, perception, and pedagogy. With that said, technology distracts students from the work of the classroom. In a University of Michigan study (2011), 75% of students reported that “using a laptop during class increased the amount of time they spent on non-course work”; 35% of students reported having spent “more than ten minutes per class using social media sites and email. **Laptops, tablets, and cell phones must be stowed away in bags during class.** Readings on D2L must be printed out; bring them with you—with voluminous marginal notes—to class.

REQUIRED COURSEWORK

Participation + Quizzes (20% of course grade): Do the reading and come to class on time, *prepared* with questions, arguments, and passages to discuss. In addition to our plays, you

will be assigned theoretical and critical readings, entries from the *Bedford Glossary*, handouts, etc. All such readings are required. In class: stay off your phone, have your books out and open, and get involved. I know that not everyone is a "talker"—I'm not much of one myself, as it happens, but I make myself do it. Since this is your degree, I expect you to do the same. If you have trouble participating, my advice is to *do some writing before class* so that you come in with something to say.

As incentive to read for detail, I will sometimes give quizzes on the plays and other assigned readings (e.g. from the *Bedford Glossary*). One or two bad days will not hurt you; I will look for *general trends* as evidence of your preparation for class. Consistently good/poor performance on these quizzes may raise/lower your participation grade by up to a full mark.

Attendance: if you miss 3-4 classes (excused or unexcused), you will earn *at best* a C for participation and may well earn a lower grade. Missing five or more classes will result in a final participation grade of zero—no exceptions. Good quiz performance will not bail out your participation grade if you miss class frequently. Please note: **I do not distinguish between excused/unexcused absences.** As in the workforce, you're here or you're not. Likewise, you don't need to email me explaining why you missed class, nor will doing so erase the absence. Contact a classmate for notes, assignments, etc.

Theory Workshop (20%). Must be completed to pass the course.

In groups of two or three, students will lead class discussions on an assigned theoretical, historical, or contextual reading. **Lead at least 20-25 minutes of discussion, and distribute a handout** (format up to you: passages, questions, background context, etc.). The workshop should be discussion-oriented; your job is not to lecture the class, but to promote collaborative engagement with the reading by framing its major terms, concepts, and problems; *asking good questions*; focusing in on specific passages; and using a handout to organize our thinking. **At least 24 hours in advance of the workshop**, the presenters should email the class with 2-3 focused discussion questions that will direct our reading: What should we focus on? What concepts should we look out for? Etc. (This means that you may have to read ahead a bit—it will be worth the trouble. Crafting good discussion questions is the single most important thing you can do to ensure good participation.) Additionally, on Monday, May 2, all students will post to a D2L forum on a shared theory reading. Details TBA.



Midterm Paper (25%). Must be submitted to pass the course.

An argumentative essay (1500+ words, MLA FORMAT) that develops a complex, focused interpretation of a radio play by Brecht or Beckett, either on its own or in comparison to a stage play. Your paper should develop your argument through in-depth and insightful close readings of literary language. If you wish, you may apply theoretical or critical perspectives on the play (e.g. from your Theory Presentation), but this is not required.

Final Project, Critical or Creative (35%). Must be submitted to pass the course.

You may pursue a critical or a creative project. Creative projects need to serve rigorous intellectual purposes in keeping with our course aims. Such projects will involve extensive work—including written explanations of what you've done, grounded in critical analysis—so do not view it as "the easy option." The opposite may well be true. Here are your options:

- (1) A critical essay of 2700-3000 words (plus MLA Works Cited) in which you develop an interpretive argument in relation to one of our course texts, using secondary research (at least 4-5 scholarly sources) to provide critical framing for your thesis;
- (2) An audio/"radio" adaptation of one of the stage plays we study in this course. How will you convert the play's "staginess" into something radiophonic? How will you emphasize, distort, exaggerate, or reframe its content? Will you modernize its themes? Use audio magic to reverse how we think about background and foreground? Etc. I will ask you to write a short analysis of the original play and a short preface of your radio adaptation, explaining what you've done and engaging with theory readings from our course. You could also provide some textual apparatus—audience guides, questionnaires, etc.—to direct our listening.
- (3) A developed critical argument in a different format (e.g. construct a web site). You will need to clear your project with me in advance, and I will expect roughly the same amount (and quality) of writing/research as for the critical essay.

Further details will be provided. **If you plan to choose the creative option, you must send me a proposal, by May 20,** of the play and the approach you plan to take.

POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Email/Office Hours:

- (1) You are welcome to email me with questions or concerns. I do ask that you check the syllabus (or assignment sheet, etc.) before emailing with policy questions, and that you treat emails as professional communications (www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor). I do not review drafts or discuss grades over email, but I'm happy to do so during . . .
- (2) **Office hours:** held by appointment. Send me an email with 2-3 times that work and we'll find a time. You are cordially invited to speak with me about any aspect of the class—the more notice you give me, the better, but I will always do my best to make time to meet.

Late Work will be penalized a full letter grade per day late, including weekends. Missed busses, work schedules, computer crashes, etc. are not excuses for late work.

Writing Center: Cramer Hall 188; www.writingcenter.pdx.edu; 503.725.3570.

Academic Misconduct: I am doggedly serious about academic misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, and multiple submission. *Any incident of academic misconduct, no matter how "accidental" or "minor," will result in a grade of zero and a report to the Dean of Students.* Review the Student Code of Conduct (bit.ly/PSUcode), which applies to all work for ENG 484, and contact me *before submitting the assignment* if you're unsure about what you're doing. *Uncertainty about the rules is not an excuse for violating them.*

Anti-Discrimination/Accessibility: I do not permit personal attacks or hate speech on any basis, including race or ethnicity, sex or gender, sexual/affectional orientation, disability, age, or religion. If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact the Disability Resource Center (www.drc.pdx.edu) *in advance of when the accommodation is needed.*

ASSESSMENT

Your grade is based on the *quality of coursework submitted*. I do not grade on effort or extracurricular matters; I do not negotiate individual grades; I do not give extra credit (with the exception of one assignment, distributed separately). Do your best work and the grades will take care of themselves.

Again, you must submit all of the major course assignments to pass ENG 484. Failure to do so will result in an F for the course, regardless of your performance on other assignments.

Grades will be determined by the assignment weights indicated above. If you end up on the cusp between two grades, I will consider, as a tiebreaker, the quality and consistency of your class participation *throughout the term*.

Grading Standards (<https://www.pdx.edu/registration/grading-system#/?section=grades>):

A = Excellent B = Good C = Satisfactory D = Inferior F = Failing

Grades of A are reserved for genuinely outstanding, sophisticated, engaging work. A grade of C is not a "bad grade"—it reflects competent, satisfactory college-level work.

"Covering My Behind" notes:

- (1) As indicated above, failure to complete all major assignments (presentation, midterm, final project) will result in an F for the course, regardless of your other grades.
- (2) If you are taking the course P/NP, you must earn at least a C- for a passing mark (PSU policy). I will not fudge your grade to make this work out for you.
- (3) *I do not give Incompletes, except in the case of extreme medical emergencies, and even in those rare cases, only for students who have completed a majority of the coursework.*

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Readings/assignments are due to be completed *before class* on the days indicated.

Readings marked (x) are uploaded to D2L. *Print them out and bring them to class.*

CP2 and CP3 = Brecht, *Collected Plays Two* and *Collected Plays Three*

CSP = Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*

Unit One: Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)

M., Mar. 28 Introductions.

W., Mar. 30 *Man Equals Man*, through Interlude (CP2 p.38); Bentley, entry on Brecht (x). *Bedford Glossary* entries: **modern period, modernism, drama, play, representation.**

M., Apr. 4 Finish *Man Equals Man*. Brecht, "A Radio Speech" (x); "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (x); and "Theater for Pleasure/Instruction" (x). *Bedford Glossary* entries: **aesthetic distance, allegory, melodrama, epic.**

- W., Apr. 6 Brecht, *Rise and Fall/Mahagonny* through scene 18 (CP2 p.227). *Bedford Glossary*: **utopian literature, Marxist criticism** (read all, focus esp. on pp.284-5).
- M., Apr. 11 Finish *Mahagonny*; read Brecht, "Short Organum for the Theatre" (x). **Theory workshop**: Michel Chion, from *Audio/Vision* (x).
- W., Apr. 13 *Lindbergh's Flight* and variants (CP3 1-19, 315-324); Brecht, "An Example of Paedagogics" (x); "Radio as an Apparatus of Communication" (x). *Bedford* entry on **performative**. Listen to *Lindbergh* recording on D2L.
- M., Apr. 18 *Lindbergh*, cont. *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent* (CP3 21-44) and variants (325-332). **Theory workshop**: Dan Gilfillan, from *Pieces of Sound* (x).
- W., Apr. 20 *The Exception and the Rule* (CP3 153-76; variants 395-400); recording on D2L.

Unit Two: Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

- M., Apr. 25 *Waiting for Godot*. *Bedford* entries: **absurd, tragicomedy, farce, slapstick**.
- W., Apr. 27 *Godot*, cont.; *Not I* (CSP 213-24; watch on D2L). *Bedford* entries: **signifier, feminist criticism** (read all but focus esp. on pp.172-173). **Theory workshop**: Ben-Zvi, "Beckett and Disgust" (x).
- M., May 2 **No class (professor out of the country)**. On your own: Read *Krapp's Last Tape* (CSP 47-58) and *All that Fall* (1-34); Ulrika Maude, "Hearing Beckett" (x); listen to *All that Fall* recording on D2L. (You can also find *Krapp* on YouTube; I suggest Patrick Magee's performance.) **By the end of class time (3:50 p.m.)**, post a 600-800-word response to D2L, citing examples from either Beckett play and from the Maude essay. This is part of your theory workshop grade.
- W., May 4 Peer-review on paper 1. **Details TBA.**
- Fri., May 6 Paper 1 due by 11:59 p.m., submitted to D2L Dropbox.**
- M., May 9 *All that Fall*, cont.; *Embers* (CSP 85-102). *Bedford* entry: **avant-garde**. **Theory Workshop**: Perloff, "The Silence that is not Silence" (x)
- W., May 11 *Cascando* (CSP 135-146); *Quad* (287-92). **Theory workshop**: Tubridy, "Beckett and Performance Art" (x). Watch/listen on D2L: *Cascando*; *Quad*; MacLennan, *Aught Naught*; Nauman, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner*; *Stamping in the Studio*.

Unit Three: Tom Stoppard (b.1937)

- M., May 16 Intro to Stoppard (x); Stoppard, *Professional Foul*. *Bedford* entries TBA.
- W., May 18 *Professional Foul*; *Albert's Bridge* (x); listen to recording of *Albert's Bridge* on D2L. **Theory Workshop**: Cobby, "Catastrophe Theory in *Professional Foul*" (x)
- Fri., May 20 If you plan to pursue the creative option for your project, you must email me by 11:59 p.m. with a specific, detailed topic proposal.
- M., May 23 *Albert's Bridge*, cont. *Artist Descending a Staircase* (x); recording of *Artist* on D2L. *Bedford* entries: **Dadaism**, possibly others TBA.
- W., May 25 *Artist Descending*, cont.
- M., May 30 **NO CLASS (MEMORIAL DAY)**
- W., June 1 Meet in computer lab (TBA). Work on final projects in class.

FINAL PROJECT, DUE BY FRI., JUNE 10, 11:59 P.M. No extensions/late work permitted.

ENG 505 R&C – Addendum For Grad Students

Grad students taking Modern Drama on an R&C/by-arrangement basis will be expected to do the following. **You are encouraged to treat these assignments as interconnected—to work on the same (or similar) topics for each assignment** (e.g. to use materials from your lesson plan for your teaching presentation).

Please contact me by Week Two (April 6) to propose topics/deadlines for these assignments.

- (1) Your midterm essay should be at least 2000 words, and should cite at least two scholarly critical sources from beyond the syllabus. This assignment will be due as indicated on the syllabus.
- (2) Complete the final project, as detailed on pp.2-3. Expectations for quality and critical sophistication are higher for you than for undergrads, but in logistical terms, the requirements are the same.
- (3) Take part in the theory presentation (you will likely be in a group with undergrads; you should expect to take a leadership role in this task, and in any other collaborative activities).
- (4) **Two pedagogy assignments.** Even if teaching modernism isn't your life goal (poor sap!), teaching a text adds vitally to one's understanding of it. Thus, I will ask you to do the following two assignments—which, again, I encourage you to think of as interconnected:
 - a. Give a **"teaching presentation"**: lead the class through an interpretation of the day's text (questioning your students, leading them through passages, providing background context, etc.). Aim to lead at least 30-35 minutes of discussion (longer is OK).
 - b. Produce a **lesson plan for one primary text from our syllabus**. How would you teach this text to an undergrad or high school class (you decide)? What would be your guiding concepts, themes, or questions; how would you convey them? Each lesson plan should run 1000-1200 words (in outline form or in prose) and should include:
 - i. Defined audience and logistics, e.g. "a college class on modern drama; we'd spend four hour-long class sessions on *Not I*." Or whatever. You don't have to teach the class I'm teaching!
 - ii. An explanation of objectives. Define what you want them to take away from the unit: better understanding of the text at hand (be specific—"better understanding" how?); broader historical/theoretical/conceptual topics (e.g. "What is minimalist theatre," "how did British and Irish media change post-WWII," etc.), and/or more "skills-based" components (e.g. a skill of close reading). Mold your objectives to whatever context you've defined in (a).
 - iii. A broad outline of the unit. For example, if you're spending three sessions on *Not I*, explain what you'd do in each of those sessions: "On Day 1, we'd work through the play's narrative by [XYZ]. On Day 2, which I elaborate below, we'd close-read the following passages..., to accomplish [yada-yada]. On Day 3 we'd act out the following passages, to think about staging [or whatever]." Think about how the sessions would build on each other cumulatively.
 - iv. An elaboration of one specific class session (in the above example, the Day 2 session). This will be the bulk of the assignment. Break down how you'd use the time in that session, and what background info, discussion questions, in-class exercises, etc. you'd use to guide the class.
 - v. A bibliography of sources consulted.
- (5) Produce an **annotated bibliography with headnote** on one of our course texts. I would expect this to be due near the end of the quarter (last day of class?), but again, you should make me an offer as to deadlines. The task: Identify a specific, narrowly focused topic and locate 6-7 scholarly journal and/or book sources, which you then organize into a bibliography (formatted in MLA). Annotate each source briefly (50-100 words each), explaining its argument and approach, and what light it sheds on the topic. Write a short (500-600-word) headnote explaining the topic you've chosen to investigate and briefly summarizing the "state of the field" on that topic: what trends do you observe in how scholars have approached this text?

For grad students, a grade of B indicates *satisfactory* work. A grade of C is considered below standard.