ThSt S392/Engl S361: Modern American Drama
Prof. Marc Robinson
Summer 2020, Mon/Wed: 7:00-8:30 PM
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This seminar surveys American theater between World War I and 2000. We’ll begin with the pre-history to this century’s theater—its melodramas, temperance plays, panoramas, and other popular forms. This work laid the foundation for the startling innovations of the early twentieth century. Eugene O’Neill and Gertrude Stein both began writing plays in 1913—O’Neill consciously allying himself with European innovation, Stein working in a theatrical vacuum, inaugurating a tradition of her own. We read both writers before moving on to the third pillar of American theatrical modernism, Thornton Wilder—someone wrongly assumed to be an unthreatening, homely figure in our culture.

We then re-read canonical works by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller in the context of the less familiar experiments of previous decades. What, beyond narrative and character, contributes to these plays’ enduring value? We’ll also look at an idiosyncratic writer—Jane Bowles—who addresses shifting ideas of marginality and sociability in her theater.

The boldness of all these mid-century playwrights sets the stage for the explosion of theatrical experiment in the 1960s. After a consideration of Edward Albee’s theatrical vitriol and menace, we’ll move briskly through selected playwrights from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s—some of whom are mainstays of our theater (Sam Shepard, David Mamet), while others are deserving of more attention (Maria Irene Fornes, Adrienne Kennedy). Finally, we’ll consider three writers who are also radical performers—Spalding Gray, Anna Deavere Smith, and Wallace Shawn. Throughout the course, in fact, we’ll acknowledge the pressure of theatrical production on often resistant texts, drawing on videos to aid our analysis.

May 25: George Aiken: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) (server)
Elinor Fuchs: “EF’s Visit to a Small Planet” (server)

May 27: Eugene O’Neill: *The Emperor Jones* (1920) (server)
*Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1941)

June 1: Zora Neale Hurston: *Color Struck* (1925) (server)
Gertrude Stein: *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1927, 1934) (server)
Gertrude Stein: “Plays” (1935) (server)
Thornton Wilder: *Our Town* (1938)

June 3: Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie* (1945)
*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)
*Suddenly Last Summer* (1958) (server)
June 8: Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman* (1949)
    Jane Bowles: *In the Summer House* (1953) (server)

    *A Delicate Balance* (1966)

**June 12: First paper due at 11:59 PM (6 pages)**

June 15: Adrienne Kennedy: *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) 
    *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976)
    Maria Irene Fornes: *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977)

    *Buried Child* (1978)

    View DVD of *Fires in the Mirror* by Anna Deavere Smith (server)

    *The Designated Mourner* (1996)
    View DVD of *Swimming to Cambodia* by Spalding Gray (server)

**June 26: Final paper due at 11:59 PM (10-12 pages)**

**Requirements and Grading Breakdown:**

Engaged participation in class discussion (20%)
Eight blog posts on Canvas (20%)
One 6-page essay (topic approved by me in advance) (25%)
One 10-12-page essay (topic approved by me in advance) (35%)

**Recommended editions:**

(Many electronic editions are available through the Yale Library; you may also use other publishers’ editions.)

Eugene O'Neill: *Long Day's Journey into Night* (Yale UP)
Thornton Wilder: *Our Town* (HarperCollins)
Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie* (New Directions)
Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (New Directions)
Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin)
Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Penguin)
Edward Albee: *A Delicate Balance* (Penguin)
Adrienne Kennedy: *Adrienne Kennedy Reader* (Univ. of Minnesota Press)
Maria Irene Fornes: *Fefu and Her Friends* (PAJ Publications)
Sam Shepard: *Buried Child* (Knopf/Doubleday)
David Mamet: *The Cryptogram* (Knopf/Doubleday)
Wallace Shawn: *The Designated Mourners* (Farrar Straus)
Wallace Shawn: *The Fever* (Farrar Straus)
Tony Kushner: *Homebody/Kabul* (revised version) (TCG)
August Wilson: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Penguin)
Suzan-Lori Parks: *The America Play and Other Works* (TCG)

**Photocopies on server:**

Elinor Fuchs: “EF’s Visit to a Small Planet”
George Aiken: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
Eugene O’Neill: *The Emperor Jones*
Zora Neale Hurston: *Color Struck*
Gertrude Stein: *Four Saints in Three Acts*
Gertrude Stein “Plays”
Tennessee Williams: *Suddenly Last Summer*
Jane Bowles: *In the Summer House*
Sam Shepard: *Action*

**Videos on server:**

Anna Deavere Smith: *Fires in the Mirror*
Spalding Gray: *Swimming to Cambodia*

**Academic integrity:**

Academic integrity is a core institutional value at Yale. It means, among other things, truth in presentation, diligence and precision in citing works and ideas we have used, and acknowledging our collaborations with others. In view of our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity, the following forms of behavior are prohibited: cheating on examinations, problem sets, and all other forms of assessment; falsification and/or fabrication of data; plagiarism, that is, the failure in an essay or other written exercise to acknowledge ideas, research, or language taken from others; and multiple submission of the same work without obtaining explicit written permission from both instructors before the material is submitted. Students found guilty of violations of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary action.