

PLAYWRITING WORKSHOP

Texts: Eric Lane, ed., *Telling Tales: New One-Act Plays* (Penguin) [TT below]
Harold Pinter, *Other Places* (Grove)
Yasmina Reza, 'Art' (Dramatists Play Service)
Kenneth Lonergan, *Lobby Hero* (Dramatists Play Service)

This course is intended to introduce you to some of the central challenges and skills inherent to the art of playwriting. It doesn't pretend to be able to turn you into a successful playwright in 13 weeks, but it should give you some tools and ideas that will be useful to you if you pursue playwriting in the future, and in any case should provide you heightened understanding of how plays are made and how they work.

To get credit for the course, you'll need to complete all assignments (on time except in case of emergency); participate regularly and conscientiously in class discussions; and generally demonstrate commitment to the goals of the class. I put a good deal of emphasis on the mutual effort it takes to achieve a harmonious group dynamic; that means, among other things, learning to listen well to each other. My office hours are MF 2:30-4:00, Th 1:30-3:00, and at other times by appointment. I'll be scheduling conferences with you at midterm and at the end of the semester, but please see me whenever you have questions or problems you'd like to talk about. You can also email me with quick questions or comments at david.walker@oberlin.edu.

This semester I have rethought the course in some central respects from the way in which I've taught it in the past (I'll explain in more detail in class). I will be making adjustments as we go, trying to respond to the group's needs and interests, so the syllabus is subject to revision. But here are some general guidelines:

1. In the first eight weeks of the course you'll write two short plays, while simultaneously the class will be analyzing a number of published plays; the goal is to introduce you systematically to particular aspects of the playwriting process. Then in the last five weeks you'll work more independently on a longer project. You should get to work right away on writing a ten-minute play, which will be due Monday, 17 February.
2. To write effectively for the stage, I believe you need to train your imagination to think in specifically theatrical terms (different in kind from those of film or television). Some of you have theater training, but many of you don't, so I'm asking you to take advantage of every opportunity to immerse yourselves in thinking theatrically this spring. See the plays that are available to you; think about taking a drama class concurrently; watch videotapes of theater productions; read theater articles and reviews in the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*.... You're also required to read at least four full-length contemporary (i.e., written since c. 1960) plays, in addition to those we're discussing in class—more if possible—and turn in notes on what you learn from them about playwriting. The more knowledgeable you become about what contemporary playwrights are doing, the more options will become available to you in your own writing.
3. Each of you should try to recruit a group of three actors who will be available to help try out work in progress. If they're used extensively enough, they can earn an hour of credit. We'll talk more about this in class.

Here's a schedule for the first two-thirds of the semester:

- T 2/4 Introduction
Th 2/6 Discuss the following 10-minute plays: Romulus Linney, *Stars*; Sybil Rosen, *Duet for Bear and Dog*; David Ives, *The Philadelphia* (download and print them out from Blackboard)
- T 2/11 Discuss the one-acts by Percy Granger and Richard Greenberg in *TT*, focusing on how they structure and develop dramatic action
Th 2/13 Discuss Pinter's *Other Places* (read them in this order: *Family Voices*, *Victoria Station*, *A Kind of Alaska*; no need to read *One for the Road*)
- M 2/17 Send your 10-minute play to DW as email attachment by noon; I'll post them on the Blackboard site so you can download and prepare to discuss the first group of them in class on Tuesday.
- T 2/18 Discuss Group A
Th 9/20 Discuss Group B
- T 2/25 Discuss Group C
Th 2/27 Discuss the one-acts by Maria Irene Fornes, David Henry Hwang, and David Ives in *TT*
- T 3/4 Discuss 'Art'
Th 3/6 Continue discussion of 'Art' (and in-class writing exercise)
- M 3/10 Send your second play as email attachment to DW by noon; I'll post them on the Blackboard site for you to download and print out in preparation for class.
- T 3/11 Discuss Group A
Th 3/13 Discuss Group B
- T 3/18 Discuss Group C
Th 3/20 TBA

SPRING BREAK 3/22-30

- T 4/1 Discuss *Lobby Hero*
Th 4/3 Continue discussion of *Lobby Hero* (and in-class writing exercise)
- M 4/7 Draft of your one-act due to DW by noon. (I'll distribute schedule for discussing them, and for the rest of the semester, later.)