

Gender, Sex, Love, Death, and Insanity in Postcolonial Drama

Course Description and Objectives

In Samuel Beckett's novel *Murphy*, the title character is revolted by the notion that (as a nurse in a psychiatric hospital) his job is to help his patients once again "wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner, and comfort [themselves] with the society of others in the same predicament." Murphy believes that it is far kinder to leave these patients in a state where they can feel these emotions in entirely unreasonable and unbalanced ways; or in other words, to let them remain insane.

This course examines drama from England, Ireland, Nigeria, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Australia, and New Zealand, and it explores how people affected by the project of British Imperialism "wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl" in both reasonable and unreasonable, balanced and unbalanced manners. By tracing the similarities and dissimilarities between depictions of gender, sex, love, death, and insanity in post-1950s drama we will, as a class, ask what these tropes might tell us about the possibility of finding comfort with gendered, racial, and sexual others who share one's own postcolonial predicament, either within one's own country or around the globe.

Our discussions and assignments will apply the techniques of literary and dramatic analysis to help us understand these texts in light of their historical contexts, intellectual ideas, literary and dramatic forms, and aesthetics. The overarching goals of this course are to help us all, as a class:

1. learn how to read and engage with unfamiliar literary works; think critically about formal and aesthetic elements of texts in both their written and staged forms
2. gain an understanding of non-Western literary works and their historical contexts and cultural environments
3. think, discuss, and write critically and creatively about both our own ideas and the thoughts of others.

Course Texts:

Caryl Churchill - *Cloud 9* (1979)

Brian Friel – *Translations* (1980)

Jez Butterworth – *The Ferryman* (2017)

Wole Soyinka – *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975)

Dennis Scott – *An Echo in the Bone* (1974)

Derek Walcott – *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954)

Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman - *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (1995)

John Romeril – *Miss Tanaka* (2005)

Albert Belz - *Awhi Tapu* (2003)

Toa Fraser - *No. 2* (play and film; 1999/2006)

Indian Ink – *The Pickle King* (2002)

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

Participation: 10%

Response papers: 15%

Mid-Term Exam: 25% (Close reading; 4-6 pages)

Creative Project Presentation: 20%

Final Paper: 30% (8-10 pages)

1. Response Papers

For this assignment, you will write three 3-4 page responses to a question which I will provide based on that particular week's primary and secondary reading. The questions/responses will be on the following texts.

2. Mid-Term Exam

The mid-term exam will take place during our last class before the break. I will provide you with one scene from each play we have discussed thus far (*Cloud 9*, *Translations*, *Death and the King's Horseman*) and you will carry out a written close analysis of ONE of these scenes, paying attention to formal, aesthetic, and thematic elements. In addition to answering the question, "What does this scene mean", you should also be answering the question, "How does this scene mean?" To do this, you will need to pay close attention to formal elements of the dramatic text (ie. setting, character, plot, action, lighting, sound, language, etc.) and draw meaning from these in order to make an argument about the scene itself and its purpose within the play as a whole.

3. Creative Project Presentation

The class will be divided into groups and each group will be expected to give a 20-30 minute presentation on their assigned text (either *No. 2*, or *Awhi Tapu*, or *The Pickle King*). The form that this presentation takes is entirely up to your group to decide, however you MUST, as a group, develop an informal proposal and have it approved by me by the end of week 10 before you go forward with your project. You must also ensure that your project involves a creative and an analytic aspect. Potential projects may include (but are not limited to) a staging of a scene and discussion of dramatic/directorial choices made; a 2D or 3D stage design and discussion of design choices; a rewriting of a scene in a new context (ie. what would a native American version of *Awhi Tapu* look like?) and a discussion about social/cultural/political links, etc.

4. Final Paper

In lieu of an exam, you will write an 8-10 page comparative essay that draws together TWO OR MORE texts from this course. For this assignment, I will provide you with 3-4 topic questions based on the semester's readings and class discussions and you will pick ONE question to answer. The final paper will be handed in on the day in which your exam is scheduled.

Participation and Attendance

Respect for Diversity: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

The topics that we're covering in this class are often difficult, not just intellectually but emotionally. While I expect there to be rigorous discussion and even disagreement in the course of our class discussions, I ask that you engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Aim to disagree without becoming disagreeable. In this class we will not shy away from the uncomfortable. In exchange, I will work to ensure a classroom environment that supports you taking these intellectual and emotional risks.

While in this classroom, you are expected to treat your fellow students with respect at all times. Failure to do so will significantly lower your in-class work grade.

Your **participation grade** includes attendance, class preparation, completion of all exercises, active participation in class and in small group and peer review discussions.

Note that this is not a lecture course and your participation will be evaluated based on your degree of engagement with the class. By "engagement" I mean your desire and ability to listen, process, and respond to others in a conscientious and constructive way. To be clear, "engagement with others" does not mean simply directing your thoughts and opinions at the instructor while ignoring your classmates, nor does it mean merely vocalizing your ideas without considering the arguments of others or attempting to engage in a conversation with others.

Each student is allotted **two free absences** for sickness, emergencies, etc. More than two missed classes will result in your final grade being lowered by a third (e.g., from a B- to a C+) for each absence beyond those two. **Five unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.** If extenuating circumstances require you to miss more than two class periods, come speak with me.

Students will not be penalised for University-approved excused absences (see <http://studenthandbook.nd.edu/academic/absence/> for a detailed description of approved absences).

Late Work Penalties and Exam Makeups

Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for each day that it is late.

Reading Responses **must** be handed in to the instructor in class on the day in which they are due. No late reading responses will be accepted.

If you are absent on the day of the midterm and have a legitimate reason (ie. illness or an emergency), you must contact me within 48 hours to schedule a day and time to make up the exam. **If you do not contact me within 48 hours, you will receive a score of 0.**

Assignment Grading Standards

A= 93-100	A- = 90-92.9	B+ = 87-89.9	B = 83-86.9	B- = 80-82.9
C+ = 77-79.9	C = 73-76.9	C- = 70-72.9	D = 60-69.9	F = below 60

The specific grading criteria for each major assignment will be provided with the assignment sheet. Generally speaking, however, the grading standards for this class follow the university-wide grading standards and are as follows:

“A-level” work: Clearly meets or exceeds all expectations for the assignment. Paper is outstanding in form and content, well organized, and easy to understand. The central thesis is cogent and insightful, and engages with course materials in complex and rigorous ways. The evidence chosen in support of the thesis is convincing, and the authorial voice is engaged and lively. There are no, or very few, errors of spelling, grammar, or typing.

“B-level” work: Clearly meets or exceeds nearly all expectations of the assignment. Thesis is strong and clear, and there is good evidence presented to support it. The argument exhibits thoughtful engagement with class material and demonstrates critical thinking about the course’s central questions. Polished, although may contain a few minor sentence-level errors.

“C-level” work: Clearly meets all basic expectations of the assignment. The paper contains a central thesis, and attempts to support that thesis with appropriate evidence. The central argument is maintained and attempts are made to engage with course materials, though at times the essay’s focus may drift. May contain a few patterns of sentence-level errors, but not severe enough to interfere with communication.

****Note:** many students are surprised to receive a “C--level” grade when they have “done everything listed on the assignment sheet.” Simply meeting the minimum requirements constitutes a basic “passing” grade; to get a “B” or an “A,” you must exceed those minimum requirements through more sophisticated execution.

“D-level” work: Work is below “average,” meaning it does not clearly meet basic expectations of the assignment. The central idea of the paper may not be clear, or the evidence may not be convincing or seem appropriate. The paper may fail to address the course’s core theme, or may suffer from serious disorganization. May contain patterns of sentence-level error that are severe enough to interfere with communication.

“F-level” work: Work does not meet minimum expectations for the assignment. Shows little to no central argument. May demonstrate inadequate command of the subject matter, and information may not be presented in a clear and appropriate way for readers. Perspective may be unoriginal, difficult to follow, or not truly argumentative. Connection between ideas may be very rough and difficult for readers to follow. May contain numerous patterns of sentence-level error that are severe enough to interfere with communication.

Policies and Resources

Academic Honesty: Upon entering Notre Dame, you were required to study the online edition of the *Academic Code of Honor*, to pass a quiz on it, and to sign a pledge to abide by it. The full code is available at: <http://honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/>. Please pay particular section IV-B, particularly the first sentence:

The pledge to uphold the *Academic Code of Honor* includes an understanding that a student’s submitted work, graded or ungraded –

examinations, draft copies, papers, homework assignments, extra credit work, etc. – must be his or her own.

Please review the University's Honor Code and talk to me about any questions you have throughout the semester. Most instances of plagiarism are not done from malice but from ignorance of the law. If you are *ever* uncertain throughout the semester about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, or if you think you may have inadvertently plagiarised, then *please talk to me ASAP!*

Disability Services: If you have a disability and will need accommodations for this course, please register with Disability Services (www.nd.edu/~osd/). After you have discussed your accommodation needs with the Coordinator of Disability Services, please speak with me to make whatever arrangements may be necessary.

The University Writing Center: The Writing Center is dedicated to helping students become better writers. **It is not mandatory for you to attend an appointment for this course, however it is strongly advised.** When you visit the Writing Center, the tutors working there will help you by listening to your questions attentively, reading your papers carefully, and talking with you intelligently about your ideas. Writing Center tutors work with writers during all stages of the writing process—from understanding an assignment, to developing a thesis, to organizing the paper, to revising the first draft, to editing the final product. The tutors do not write or edit your papers for you. Rather, they help you develop effective rhetorical strategies for your written work. To learn more about the Writing Center and make an appointment online, visit: <http://writingcenter.nd.edu>.

Schedule

Week 1

- Introduction: What is “Postcolonial Drama”
- What are we talking about when we talk about sex, love, death, and insanity?

Week 2: Churchill, *Cloud 9*

Week 3: Friel, *Translations*

Week 4: Butterworth, *The Ferryman*

Week 5: Soyinka, *Death and the King’s Horseman*

Week 6: Denis Scott – *An Echo in the Bone*

Week 7: Midterm Preparation

Week 8: MID-TERM IN CLASS; Creative Project Group Work

Week 9: Derek Walcott – *The Sea at Dauphin*

BREAK

Week 10: Enoch and Mailman, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*

*****MUST MEET WITH ME THIS WEEK TO DISCUSS GROUP PROJECT*****

Week 11: John Romeril – *Miss Tanaka*

Week 12: Belz, *Awhi Tapu*; **GROUP 3’S PRESENTATION**

Week 13: Fraser, *No. 2*; **GROUP 2’S PRESENTATION**

Week 14: Indian Ink – *The Pickle King* **GROUP 3’S PRESENTATION**

Week 15: Conclusion.

FINAL PAPER DUE ON EXAM DAY