

America Drama and Working Men
Instructor: Derek McGrath

Course description

With the end of the Civil War and a resulting demand for labor in rebuilding the South, settling the West, and furthering a nationwide Industrial Revolution, early twentieth-century conceptions of American masculinity focused on the physical and even mental labor that men pursued. Men came to define these successes through tangible or monetary achievements. But after two World Wars and additional military battles around the world, this older model of masculinity was thought to be compromised by the increased presence of women in the work force, increased ethnic and racial diversity in numerous professions, and a supposedly resulting emasculation, even feminization of many men who failed to succeed professionally and financially. Yet as these “womanly men” appeared more frequently in popular representations of American life, masculinity benefits through increased diversity in defining gender beyond limitations that categorized ideas or behaviors as belong to only one gender.

This class will use the idea of men’s labor in the American drama to explore issues regarding gender and the art forms of theater and film, as developing in the late twentieth century into the twenty-first century, and even originating far earlier with the founding of the American republic. This class will focus on how dramatic portrayals of masculinity have come to take on qualities traditionally—and oftentimes wrongly—associated with femininity: powerlessness, sensitivity, and a rocking set of musical performances. By looking at those qualities of human life traditionally associated with men, including labor, family, parents, and even superheroes, masculinity will appear in numerous forms in American theatrical works. While definitions of masculinity is one key focus, this class also considers how drama has adapted to new forms and technology, moving from large theaters to small rooms, from the stage to the film screen, the television screen, and even the laptop screen. Authors will include early and nineteenth-century American playwrights like Royall Tyler and William H. Smith, a large number of twentieth-century authors including Lorraine Hansberry, Frank Chin, and David Mamet, and even online content courtesy of Joss Whedon. This course will include film adaptations to be screened in class.

Required texts:

Early American Drama. Penguin Classics, 1997 (ISBN: 0140435883).

Frank Chin. *Chicken Coop Chinaman* and *The Year of the Dragon*. University of Washington, 2004 (ISBN: 0295958332).

Lorraine Hansberry. *A Raisin in the Sun*. Vintage, 2004.
ISBN-10: 0679755330.

Arthur Miller. *Death of a Salesman*. Penguin-Viking, 1996 (ISBN: 0140247734).

David Mamet. *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Grove Press, 1994 (ISBN: 0802130917).

Sam Shepard. *Fool for Love and Other Plays*. Dial, 1984 (ISBN: 0553345907).

Sam Shepard. *A Lie of the Mind*. Dramatist's Play Service, 1998 (ISBN: 0822206560).

August Wilson. *Fences*. Samuel French, 2010 (ISBN: 0573619050).

Film adaptations and dramatic movies (to be screened in class):

Dr. Horrible's Sing Along Blog (2008), directed by Joss Whedon, starring Neil Patrick Harris and Felicia Day.

A Raisin in the Sun (1961), directed by Daniel Petrie, starring Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee.

Other films (excerpts to be screened in class):

Death of a Salesman (1985), directed by Volker Schlöndorff, starring Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich.

Glengarry Glen Ross (1992), directed by James Foley, starring Al Pacino and Jack Lemmon.

Fool for Love (1985), directed by Robert Altman, starring Sam Shepard and Kim Basinger.

A Raisin in the Sun (2008), directed by Kenny Leon, starring Sean Combs and Phylicia Rashad.

The Year of the Dragon (1975), directed by Portman Paget, starring George Takei and Pat Suzuki.

Course requirements and grading policies:

The course, divided into two classes per week, will rely heavily class discussion. Learning occurs in the presence of others, especially with literature; any one interpretation of a text is insufficient unless you can explain your ideas to someone else and, upon encountering a different interpretation, debate the evidence you bring into this discussion. We will trace similarities and differences amongst our interpretations of the texts in order to strengthen and clarify claims that we will bring to our written work.

The two assigned essays will develop your critical voice for future writing and literature classes, as well as for preparation for the final. In each essay, your goal is to respond to the assigned prompt and to consider how to connect our texts within and across the themed sections. In addition, the essay will include one peer review session held in class; just as learning occurs in a community, so does improving your writing. You are encouraged to continue the peer review work outside of the classroom—meet with each other, email each other, fill out the peer review form, and write notes on each other's papers in order to build upon each other's skills at writing.

If I think students are not reading assigned texts (e.g. little class discussion from most students), I will assign quizzes, weekly response papers, and even a midterm and a final exam as necessary. Therefore, it is in your best interest to encourage your classmates to speak up in class—whether your comments are content-based remarks, questions about the texts or authors, or observations you have in how the readings relate to each other.

Attendance:

Absences can be excused on a case by case basis, either with prior notice or, retroactively, with sufficient evidence, such as a doctor's note. Students are considered late if they are not seated and ready for discussion at the minute class beings. Students with more than two unexcused absences will see their participation grade in the class lowered; two tardies count as one unexcused absence.

24-hour rule:

Extensions can be provided on a case by case basis, but I require 24-hour notice before all deadlines. I will push back the essay deadline three times for an additional 24 hours per request—in other words, at most three days—provided that you notify me 24 hours in advance of the most recent deadline. As well, I require 24-hour notice for any appointments you make outside of office hours.

Grade breakdown:

Diagnostic Essay:	1%
Essay #1 (5-page):	25%
Essay #2 (5-page):	25%
Short assignments, quizzes, peer editing:	14%
Participation:	20%
Attendance:	15%

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

If I suspect a student has represented the ideas of another person as his or her own (including but not limited to the absence of quotation marks with sentences or words not your own, inadequate paraphrasing, and the absence of citations), then that student will have his or her written work submitted to the Academic Judiciary, will receive an F for the assignment, and may receive an F for the course. Understand your rights as a student and visit the university's web site to understand the appeals process.

Disabilities Services

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the university's disability support services, where employees will determine with you what accommodations are appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. If you require assistance during emergency evacuation, please discuss your needs with me and visit the university's website.

Critical Incident Management

This university expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of University Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn.

Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

Counseling, Prevention, Outreach, and Safe Spaces

Getting through college is stressful, and sometimes it helps to talk with someone—a professor, a classmate, a relative, a friend, or a counselor. The university's psychological services center offers a variety of programs to help students cope with stress and address emergencies. Services include one-on-one sessions, group therapy, and meditation. You may contact the service or visit its office. Also, the prevention and outreach center provides a safe environment for students to

address concerns about drugs, alcohol, relationships, and gender.

More information of services is available at the psychological services center's web site. Appointments and walk-in visits are welcome. In an emergency during hours, call the counseling center and tell the receptionist that you are having an emergency, or come directly to the center. In an emergency after hours, call University Police or 911 from a campus phone. The on-campus emergency room is also available, as is Psychiatry ER.

Finally, university's instructors offer safe spaces to provide support and resources to GLBTQI persons. A list of on-campus safe spaces is available online.

Schedule

Online Man-Children and the Postmodern Supervillain

Day 1

Introductions.

Screened in class: Joss Whedon (1964-), *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008).

Day 2

Continued discussion on Whedon, *Dr. Horrible*.

Anouk Lang, "The Status Is Not Quo!': Pursuing Resolution in Web-Disseminated Serial," *Narrative* (2010) [Library database link in Blackboard].

Due via email Friday by 5 PM: Diagnostic

1980s masculinity: Cowboys and superheroes

Day 3

David Mamet (1947-), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984)

Day 4

David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*

Day 5

Sam Shepard (1943-), *Fool for Love* (1983).

Day 6

Sam Shepard, *Fool for Love*.

Day 7

Sam Shepard, *A Lie of the Mind* (1985).

Day 8

Sam Shepard, *A Lie of the Mind*.

Future generations, or parents just don't understand

Day 9

Essay #1 Peer Review

Day 10

August Wilson (1945-2005). *Fences* (1985).

Day 11

August Wilson. *Fences*.

Day 12

August Wilson. *Fences*.

Due via email Friday by 5 PM: Essay #1

Day 13

Frank Chin (1940-), *The Year of the Dragon* (1974).

Day 14

Frank Chin, *The Year of the Dragon*.

Day 15

Frank Chin, *The Year of the Dragon*.

Day 16

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965). *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959).

Day 17

Lorraine Hansberry. *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Day 18

Lorraine Hansberry. *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Day 19

Film screened in class: *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Day 20

Film screened in class: *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Work Sucks

Day 21

Arthur Miller (1915-2005), *Death of a Salesman* (1949).

Day 22

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*.

Day 23

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*.

Production of an early American identity

Day 24

William H. Smith and the anonymous “gentleman” [John Pierpont (1785-1866)], *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved* (1844).

Day 25

William H. Smith and [John Pierpont], *The Drunkard*.

Day 26

Royall Tyler (1757-1826), *The Contrast* (1787).

Day 27

Royall Tyler, *The Contrast*.

Excerpt: Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* [Blackboard reading].

Day 28

Essay #2 Peer Review

Due via email by Friday 5 PM: Essay #2