Instructor: Nick Fesette

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Office hours: Schwartz Center rm. 420 (4th floor), Tuesdays 3:00 – 5:00 PM and by appointment



**Course Description and Rationale**

Right now the United States incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in history, and is culturally saturated with narratives of penality, from *Prison Break* to *Orange is the New Black*. Yet even a cursory look at theatre history reveals that crime and punishment are nearly ubiquitous preoccupations in Euro-American cultures. In this time-traveling course, students will examine the history of prison drama to try and understand why we remain so fixated on the “criminal element” today. At the same time, students will develop their critical, creative, and persuasive writing skills through peer and instructor review and a multi-draft essay process. Dramatists covered include: Aeschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare, Fitzball, Galsworthy, Brecht, Blank & Jensen, Wallace, Puig, and Parks.

The focus of this class is first and foremost on helping students develop their writing. But in addition to this we will engage critically with a range of plays and the questions they raise about punishment, violence, power, redemption, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other topics. We will consider how dramatic representations affect social attitudes, and consider how these social attitudes in turn shape individuals and communities. Students will produce writing that creatively and compellingly engages with these topics and others, and by the end of the class will be well on the way to developing a working writing process and to possessing their own distinctive voice and style.

**Learning Outcomes**

This First-Year Writing Seminar will help you to produce writing that develops and demonstrates your competency in the following areas:

*-Theses, arguments, organization, evidence, and language appropriate to the fields of performance and media.  
-The use and analysis of texts, live performances, and films.  
-Citing sources appropriately and responsibly.  
-Active classroom participation in discussion and public presentations.  
-Thinking critically about the sociopolitical dimensions of art and culture.  
-Substantively engaging with prison drama and its history.*

**Texts and Screenings**

These following texts should be available through the Campus Store to order online or purchase in person. If you can’t find it, ask a staff member in the textbook area for assistance.

-Richard Bullock, Michal Brody, and Francine Weinberg, *Little Seagull Handbook*-Aeschylus (trans. Joel Agee), *Prometheus Bound* -Euripides (trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien), *Medea* -William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*-Bertolt Brecht (trans. Ralph Manheim and John Willett), *The Threepenny Opera* -Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, *The Exonerated*  
-Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman and Two Other Plays*-Suzan-Lori Parks, *The Red Letter Plays*  
-Naomi Wallace, *One Flea Spare*

All other required readings and viewings for this class will either be available through the course Blackboard site (under “Content”) or handed out in class.

**Guidelines for Submission of Essay Assignments**

No handwritten work will be accepted; all essay assignments should be typed and emailed to me on or before the due date. This is because I do all of my grading electronically. I prefer Microsoft Word .doc files, but please speak with me if this is not possible for you. All essays should be formatted as follows:

*-Your name, net id, assignment title, and date displayed at the beginning of paper*

*-The title of your paper centered below this information*

*-Double-space your writing*

*-Use one-inch margins; left justify only*

*-Use a standard font (such as Times New Roman or Calibri) and 12-point size*

-*Please hit the spacebar only once after colons and periods*

*-Number each page*

**Grading Policy**

Your final grade for this class will be determined by the instructor based on the following three components:

*Attendance, Class Participation and In-Class Presentation* (15%) – Students are required to attend all classes. If, for whatever reason, you cannot make a class, please email me in advance to explain the reason for your absence. If you miss more than two classes or fail to explain an absence, your grade could be affected. You are responsible for completing all assignments/readings and meeting all deadlines even if you have to be absent.

All students must participate actively in our class discussions and activities. I am not interested in lecturing at you, and I want to hear your thoughts and analysis. Even if you are not used to speaking up in class, you need to try to make comments that will add to our understanding of the material and/or that build significantly on others’ contributions in discussion. You will also need to engage actively in peer review activities and other class activities related to writing and analytic tasks.

In addition to your required attendance and in-class participation, on one of the class days you will each act as discussion leader. These “presentations” should be around 20-30 minutes long and can incorporate visual aids, in-class exercises, or a pre-circulated list of discussion questions. Be creative! You don’t have to put together a lecture, but you should approach this as if you were instructor-for-the-day. Feel free to consult with me if you have questions. What is important is that you thoroughly engage with the material and kickoff class discussion. We will sign up for these presentations on the second day of class.

*Blackboard Posts* (10%) – You are required to write a *very short* Blackboard post (NO MORE THAN 100 WORDS) in response to each class reading/viewing. You must post these in the appropriate forum in the “Discussion” section of Blackboard by 12:00 PM the Tuesday or Thursday that we are scheduled to discuss the reading/viewing.

You should use the posts to begin articulating for class discussion and for writing assignments your impressions, questions, arguments, and any other thoughts on the course material. Though we will not always discuss them in class, I will sometimes ask you to expand upon or elaborate your Blackboard post for the benefit of your peers. You should also use the forums as an opportunity to read what your peers think of a particular reading/viewing! This may help you generate and/or complicate your ideas. There are no “wrong” responses, but I expect your *very short* posts to be well written and thoughtful.

If you are a social media user, then this component should not present any problems for you!

*Writing Assignments* (75%) - There are six formal writing assignments for this class; two of these assignments will be revised in consultation with me. While the length and form of the assignments may vary, most of the essays will fall in the 1000-1250 word range. You will be graded on the overall quality of your paper in the context of the assignment, as well as on your careful attention to the mechanics of writing (spelling, punctuation, grammar, word usage, etc.). Additionally, revisions will be graded based on your thoroughgoing re-engagement with your work: You must pay careful attention to the instructor’s comments and references to writing issues in addition to developing your own individual revision process. Poorly revised essays will be graded accordingly. All assignments must be submitted by the deadline; there may be a grade penalty for late assignments.

BONUS: Writing is a process of revision, and developing good editing and rewriting practices is crucial to developing your voice as a writer. You may revise any graded essay at any point in the semester in order to improve that initial grade. If you have sufficiently revised the essay, I will replace the first grade with a better one. There is no penalty if you revise a graded essay poorly; the grade will simply stand as is.

**University Policies and Regulations**

*TURNITIN and Academic Integrity -* It is critical that you submit only your own, original work for this class, and that you follow scrupulously appropriate academic standards for acknowledging the work of others in your writing and research. Information on proper documentation can be found in *The Little Seagull Handbook*. Please use either MLA or *Chicago* style documentation for this class.

The Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others is found in the Policy Notebook for the Cornell Community and also on the web at <http://www.theuniversityfaculty.cornell.edu/AcadInteg/code.html>.

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Students are also encouraged to use Turnitin.com themselves to help ensure that their writing meets these standards for integrity and acknowledging the work of others. For more information on Turnitin, see <http://www.it.cornell.edu/services/turnitin>.

Students also understand that by taking this course they agree to share their writing with others in the class for purposes of peer review and related exercises.

Students are prohibited from buying or selling course materials connected with this class. All course materials, including all reading/viewing/listening materials as well as lectures, assignments, syllabi, and related instructional materials, are protected by copyright. Without the express, written permission of the instructors, any buying or selling of course materials is unauthorized and constitutes classroom dishonesty.

*Students with Disabilities -* If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, please provide the instructor with an accommodation notification letter from Student Disability Services. Students are expected to give notice of the need for accommodations within the first three days of instruction. If you need immediate accommodations or physical access, please arrange to meet with the instructors within the first two class meetings.

**Course Calendar** (subject to change)

Aug 25 – Introductions

Aug 27 – “They Say, I Say,” Graff and Birkenstein (Blackboard)

“The New Jim Crow,” Alexander(BB)

Sept 1 – *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus

Sept 3 – “Writing Politics,” Kramnick (BB)

**Sept 4 – DUE final draft of Paper #1 by 12PM in my email inbox (nf234)**

Sept 8 – *Medea*, Euripides

NO CLASS Sept 10

Sept 15 – “Male Medea,” Rabinowitz (BB)

Sept 17 – *Imagining Medea* introduction, Fraden (BB)

“Restorytive Justice,” Warner (BB)

**Sept 18 – DUE final draft of Paper #2**

Sept 22 – *The Tempest*, Shakespeare

Sept 24 – “Caliban: The Primitive Man’s Evolution” Sharp (BB)

“Teaching the Mind Good Habits,” Wineburg (BB)

**Sept 25 – DUE draft of Paper #3**

Sept 29 – *Shakespeare Behind Bars* film (film)

“Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,” Sommers (BB)

Oct 1 – Explore the Phoenix Players Theatre Group (PPTG) website (BB)

“Prison Theatre and the Promise of Reintegration,” Shailor (BB)

**Oct 2 – DUE final draft of Paper #3**

Oct 6 – *Jonathan Bradford; or, the Murder at the Roadside Inn* (BB)

“The Acting of Melodrama,” Booth (BB)

Oct 8 – “Mega-Melodrama!” Williams (BB)

FALL BREAK

Oct 15 – *Justice* (BB)

**Oct 16 – DUE draft of Paper #4**

Oct 20 – *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht

Oct 22 – “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” Brecht (BB)

**Oct 23 – DUE final draft of Paper #4**

Oct 27 – *The Exonerated*, Blank and Jensen

Oct 29 – “Emotional Contraband,” Lopez (BB)

Nov 3 – *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Puig

Nov 5 – *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (BB link to rent film online)

Nov 10 – *Discipline and Punish* pgs 3-16, 195-228, Foucault (BB)

“How to write a theatre review,” Gardner (BB)

“How to Write a Play Review,” Price (BB)

NO CLASS Nov 12

Nov 17 – *Fucking A*, Parks

Nov 19 – “Incarcerated Women: Motherhood on the Margins,” Bloom and Brown (BB)

**Nov 23 – DUE final draft of Paper #5**

Nov 24 – *Softcops,* Churchill (BB)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Dec 1 – *One Flea Spare,* Wallace

Dec 3 – “Physical Prisons: Naomi Wallace’s Drama of Captivity,” Barnett (BB)

**FINAL “EXAM” – DATE TBA DUE final draft of Paper #6**