

“Anti-Theater; or, Theater for Those who Hate Theater”

LIT 5934, Fall 2015, Department of English, University of North Florida

Tuesday and Thursdays 12:15 – 1:30 PM; Location: Bldg. 2-Founders Hall 2002

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Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 9:30-11:30 AM; 3:00-3:30 PM (and by appointment)

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Course Description

There is, in the theater, a long, glorious (and deserved) tradition of self-loathing, of disgust at the duplicities of dramatic performance. After all, if thought about, there is something rather stupid in an actor on a stage pretending to be someone other than him or herself, something infantile in the illusion of it all (“Let’s put on a play!” ... Nah, let’s not). One might, faced with such silly deceptions, be inclined to say: isn’t it time that we grow up, that we leave the childish make-believe behind, exposing—Oz-like—the “smoke and mirrors” as “smoke and mirrors”? And, besides, if it’s bedtime stories that we want, television and movies long ago proved that they were much better at entertaining us, deceiving us, telling us tall tales by which we can sleep our lives away (rather than live them).

In this class, we will therefore approach the theater from this point of view of suspicion, loathing and disgust, examining any number of modern and contemporary plays in which theater itself is caught in the cross-hairs of its own desired destruction. From the “characters in search of an author” in the plays of Luigi Pirandello, the ferocious desire for theater’s obliteration in Antonin Artaud’s essays, the theater-as-brothel in Jean Genet’s *The Balcony*, Eugene Ionesco’s *Bald Soprano* “anti-play,” Samuel Beckett’s bored (and boring) bums, Peter Handke’s “Offending the Audience” (and, as a counterpoint-in-film, Charlie Kaufman’s 2008 *Synecdoche, New York*), we will see in all of our material what remains of a form of literature so self-aware that it can barely stand to look itself in the mirror.

Required Texts (Available at the UNF bookstore): In order for us to all be “on the same page” in our discussions, please buy the exact editions of the books listed below, with the same ISBN listed below.

1. *The Seagull*, by Anton Chekhov, Publisher: Faber & Faber; ISBN-10: 057119270X
2. *The Life of Galileo*, by Bertolt Brecht. Publisher: Penguin Classics; ISBN-10: 0143105388
3. *Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays*, by Luigi Pirandello. Publisher: Penguin Classics; ISBN-10: 014018922X
4. *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 080214442X
5. *Bald Soprano and Other Plays*, by Eugene Ionesco. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802130798
6. *The Theater and its Double*, by Antonin Artaud. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN: 0802150306
7. *The Balcony*, by Jean Genet. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 0802150349
8. *The Flu Season and Other Plays* (2006), by Will Eno. Publisher: Theatre Communications Group; ISBN-10: 155936291X
9. *Middletown* (2010), by Will Eno. Publisher: Theatre Communications Group; ISBN-10: 1559363800
10. *Kaspar and Other Plays* (2012), by Peter Handke. Publisher: Hill and Wang; ISBN-10: 0809015463
11. *Passion Play* (2010), by Sarah Ruhl. Publisher: Samuel French, Inc.; ISBN-10: 0573699089

Selected Handouts (a variety of others will be given throughout the semester):

1. From Bertolt Brecht’s essay on “the Epic Theater” (1930)
2. From *Synecdoche, New York: The Shooting Script*, by Charlie Kaufman
3. “Seventy-five essays I don’t have time to write,” by Sarah Ruhl
4. “Surreal Life: The plays of Sarah Ruhl,” by John Lahr
5. Interview with Will Eno, from *BOMB Magazine*