

Legacy of 20th Century American Drama

UHON 122-001 | T R | 9:30-10:45 | SHC 12 | 27335

Fulfills UNM Core Group V: Humanities

Dr. Maria Szasz

How have American dramatists responded to, questioned and attempted to make sense of the American experience? This Legacy will explore and celebrate how many of the greatest American playwrights from the 1940s to the early twenty-first century have used the stage, or what scholar Christopher W. Bigsby has called "the most public of the arts," to express their differing viewpoints on the tensions and concerns within American society. We will read, discuss and watch excerpts of plays by well known, Pulitzer-prize winning playwrights, including Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Lorraine Hansberry, Sam Shepard, Beth Henley, Wendy Wasserstein, August Wilson, David Henry Hwang, and John Patrick Shanley, as well as some lesser known, but still important dramatists such as Luis Valdez, Cherríe Moraga, Shirley Lauro, Diane Glancy and Gloria Calderon Kellett. We will ponder the traditional concept of an American dramatic "canon," and determine why certain playwrights remain either inside or outside this canon. Our discussions will include the captivating history of professional theatre in America: the development of Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off Broadway, and the rise of regional theatres across the country. We will decide why our playwrights either failed or succeeded (or both) in these professional theatrical venues. By reflecting upon such gifted dramatists and their work, we will probe into the deep recesses of our country's social conscience, defining crucial issues at the core of American history, including: immigration, and what it means to be "an American"; the American Dream; the impact of technology on American life; slavery; the evolving position of women, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics; the American family; sexuality; the 1960s and the Vietnam War; and the myths vs. the reality of the modern American West. Finally, the class will evaluate the state of American theatre today, and explore why it continues to thrive.

Readings

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Luis Valdez, *Actos* (1971)

Beth Henley, *Crimes of the Heart* (1979)

Sam Shepard, *True West* (1980)

David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (1987)

August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988)

Wendy Wasserstein, *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988)

Shirley Lauro, *A Piece of My Heart* (1992)

Cherríe Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* (1994)

Diane Glancy, *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance* (1995)

Gloria Calderon Kellett, *Accessories* (2005)

John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt* (2005)

Requirements

Consistent attendance and preparation for each class; three two to three (2-3) page response papers about certain plays; a one page proposal for a research paper; a ten minute conference with the instructor about the research paper proposal; one four to six (4-6) page research paper; attendance at a local production of an American play (the play will be determined based on local theatres' schedules); attendance at three Legacy Lectures, and a one page review of each lecture; a group project: a short performance of a few scenes from one of the plays we have studied this term.

About the Instructor

Maria Szasz holds a Masters Degree in Theatre Education from Emerson College, and a PhD in English from the University of New Mexico, where she focused on Drama and Irish Literature. She is currently revising her dissertation on Irish playwright Brian Friel.