THEA 234: Scripts in Performance—A Peer Review of Teaching Project Benchmark Portfolio

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Peer Review
Portfolio
THEA 234 – Scripts in Performance
Dr. Ian M. Borden
Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
# Peer Review Portfolio

THEA 234 – Scripts in Performance

Dr. Ian M. Borden

Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Overview and Summary

Photos by Doug Smith
I. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

This portfolio is for THEA 234 – Scripts in Performance. This had traditionally been a theatre based course for the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film when I took over teaching it in the Fall semester of 2008. At that time, the course (a requirement for Theatre majors, Film and New Media majors, as well as Theatre and Musical Theatre minors) was populated almost entirely by upper level Theatre majors, particularly those in the performance stream. Over the next few years as the Film and new Media program grew, the needs of those students increased in relative importance as they comprised a larger and larger percentage of the class. Additionally, an increase in Theatre and Musical Theatre minors, and students from disciplines outside the Carson School changed the demographic of the class so distinctly that I felt a need to investigate the effectiveness of my teaching.

In addition, there was very little examination of material outside of European-based Western culture, both within the class and the theatre program as a whole. To address this deficiency, I started a new assignment as part of the class, the “Translation Project.” This project was a conscious attempt to engage students in examining other cultures, to question assumptions about their own, and to look at language more consciously as a tool for filmic and theatrical scripts.

Thus, I began the Peer Review Project to address three basic needs. First, examination and documentation of my teaching methods grew in importance as the demographic for the class had changed significantly over the six years that I had been teaching it. Second, I wanted to document the implementation of the Translation Project to determine its effectiveness as a teaching tool. Third, I wanted to ensure that I was effectively covering material in both theatre and film, as well as opening up new cultural explorations.

The new focus of the class should ensure that students are able to intellectually support the practical projects demanded by the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film. In addition, the changes mean the class applies to more than upper level theatre students. While I miss the ease of teaching a class where the enthusiasm of the students meant that I served as referee as much as instructor, I believe the class is now also addressing the needs of Film and New Media students, as well as providing new insight into theatrical and filmic scripts for non-majors and students from outside the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film.
Concerns and Course Objectives
II. CONCERNS AND COURSE OBJECTIVES

As I prepared for the Peer Review project, I listed the concerns I had about both my effectiveness and the perception of my teaching methods.

CONCERNS

Personal

- A need to document my teaching process for Tenure Review in 2014.
- Peer evaluation for my courses has been extremely limited (I had no peer review in 2012/2013).
- My official review letter was concerned that I did not have enough evaluation of my teaching (particularly the percentage of students responding to evaluations).
- Even though scores were generally high (always over 4), a small percentage of students have complained that my teaching methods are aggressive and intimidating, and some faculty have not recognized how I have rectified that.
- I believe my demeanor has changed greatly yet this has not been recognized by other faculty.

Course

- How do I balance what has changed in the course with the catalog description?
- How do I balance a student constituency that includes Theatre and Film and New Media Majors, as well as Musical Theatre Majors, Theatre Minors, students from other artistic disciplines in the Hixson-Lied College, and students from other disciplines that have ranged from nursing to business?
- This is a class required for all Theatre and Film and New Media majors – how do I keep it rigorous enough to serve their needs and make sure they possess the knowledge to proceed to higher level classes AND still be able to reach out to and make the course useful and interesting for the other students in the class?
- The course is the only survey of dramatic literature for the Theatre Program, and must include a broad spectrum of plays, ideally from a variety of time periods and cultures.
- If both Theatre and Film and New Media Students need the class, how do I include exposure/discussion/analysis of film scripts?
- For some students, this will be the only class that provides dramatic literature outside of a prescriptive and outdated canon that deals almost exclusively with white male writers; it is possible that this course will provide the only guided study and opportunity for students to encounter scripts focusing on divergent cultures, races, ethnicities and identities.
- This is the only exposure most students will have to dramaturgical analysis and research. How do I include this aspect of script analysis and keep it relevant, useful and interesting?
- To truly understand the work, students must be able to discuss the material orally and back up their arguments.
I also listed the objectives I felt I must meet in order for the course to be fully successful.

**OBJECTIVES**

**Course**

- Students must learn to recognize conflict as a storytelling element and how it functions.
- Students must learn to think of the *HOW* of a script, rather than the *WHAT*.
- Students must be able to understand dramatic genres and styles.
- Students must be able to articulate in WRITTEN and PICTORIAL form the basic structures of a script and use them practically.
- Students must be able to ORALLY discuss structures, issues and themes of scripts.
- Students must understand the differences between one-act, three-act, episodic, and circular plot structures.
- This includes understanding the concept of SETUP and PAYOFF, especially in film.
- Be able to distinguish the different needs of a film script from a theatre script.
- Students must be able to understand scripts in their historical, artistic and cultural context, and determine how they combine to influence the script and production.
- Students must be able to distinguish and examine the themes and issues within a script and understand how they apply to production.
- Students must be able to understand the idea of a directorial/ design/ acting concept and how that relates to the storytelling aspects, as well as the themes and issues within a script.
- Students must be able to understand broad artistic concepts and movements and how they relate to the script and performance.
- Students must come in contact and explore issues with GENDER, RACE and ETHNICITY and how that functions in terms of a theatre or film script.
- Students must encounter stories and scripts from cultures foreign to their own and be able to recognize intrinsic story elements as well as differences in culture.
- Students must finish the course ready for more advanced work either in class or production.
Course Design

Photos by Doug Smith
III. COURSE DESIGN

A. Description of THEA 234 – Scripts in Performance
The course covers a broad variety of theatrical and filmic Scripts. Students read 14-16 scripts and view 3-5 films. The focus is less on history or dramatic literature, except where those serve to provide context, and more on how text feeds design and performance on stage. Plays are examined in the context of their original historical and cultural milieu, as well as how they would effectively be staged. Films are viewed and deconstructed, examining script structure, production design, cinematography and editing as storytelling factors. One of the unifying elements is the idea of story structure, especially the three act structure common to most Western theatre and film.

B. Students
When I started teaching the class, students were almost entirely upper level Theatre majors, largely from the performance emphasis. Now the students are mainly lower level Theatre majors in the performance, directing and stage management, and design emphases, or lower level Film and New Media students. A significant number of Musical Theatre minors take the class, as well as students from English, Film studies and other disciplines from outside the Carson School. These changes have necessitated a change from an almost singly discussion based focus to adding the viewing of films and reading film scripts. As the class has progressed further, it now has the Translation Project as a means of examining culture and script structure.

C. Course Goals
The course must satisfy two major goals –
1. It must expose students to as wide an array of theatre and film scripts as possible. In addition, through their examination, students must be exposed to various world cultures.
2. It must prepare students for upper level course work as well as productions in theatre or film as mandated by the Carson School.
These goals will be further elaborated in the syllabus.

The course must also fall under the umbrella provided by the description of the course provided in the undergraduate bulletin:

Survey of dramatic literature and texts in performance designed to provide a broad understanding of the forms and functions of drama, historically, across diverse cultural traditions. Methods for analyzing thematic issues, as those related to gender, race, and ethnicity, as they appear in 12-15 plays.

In large part, these goals had not been met when I inherited the class, particularly as outlined in syllabi from previous instructors.

I believe the changes I have made to the class not only better satisfy these goals, but also the needs of the changing class demographic.
D. Syllabus

| Class Location: Temple 104 | Class Meeting Time: TR 9:30-10:45 |
| Instructor: Ian Borden | E-mail: iborden2@unl.edu |
| Office: Temple 209 | Office Hours: M 1:00-2:00, TR 11:00-12:00, and by Appointment |

Please be aware that the syllabus is subject to change.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
The course is designed to introduce students to a broad variety of plays and films in order to develop analytical ability, focusing on how the plays and films function in production. It is a crash course in script structure, formation, construction and transformation to stage and screen. The workload is large and students must work constantly not to fall behind in the class.

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING PROJECT:
This semester, I have elected to take part in the Peer Review Project, a University-wide, on-going attempt to develop new and better methods for promoting student learning. This is a year-long process in which participants in the project (professors) put a great deal of thought into the design of a single course (in this case THEA 234) including syllabus, exams, class activities and written assignments. One of the project's ultimate goals is to improve student learning, and we cannot accomplish this goal without student input.

For the project, I will need to select several students whose work would be copied and included in my course portfolio as an archive of student performance for the course. These examples are a very important piece of the project for professors to show how much and how deeply students are learning. Once the course portfolio is completed, it will be put on a project website (www.courseportfolio.org) so that it can be shared, used, and reviewed by other faculty.

REQUIRED and REFERENCE TEXTS:
Students are required to purchase several volumes from the bookstore, including an assembled anthology. Other reading and research material will be made available to students through the Blackboard course website and/or electronic library reserves. Students will need to find reference material from other sources.

The plays for this class are:

- Hamlet
- Cyrano de Bergerac
- Zastrozzi
- Beating Heart Cadaver
- Abundance
- The Road to Mecca
- The Threepenny Opera
- The Rocky Horror Show
- The Rover
- Zoot Suit
- Breath. Boom.
- Polygraph
- Blasted

The textbook, Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays by David Ball and Michael Langham is highly recommended but is not required.

REQUIRED VIEWING:
Students are required to see all JCSTF and Theatrix shows during the semester.

OBJECTIVES:
Generally, the class is designed to give students a broader exposure to theatrical and film literature, to deepen play and film analysis skills, and to understand how plays and film function with an audience.

More specifically, students will be able to:
- Analyze a script, allowing them to
  - understand its structure, perceive how it functions as a piece of theatre or film, and discover conflicts
  - understand the role of the dramaturg, and thoroughly research a script in its historical and artistic context
  - produce design, directorial and acting concepts appropriate to the material
STUDENT OBJECTIVES (What you should want):
- Exposure to as many scripts as possible
- To learn how to conceptualize about scripts for production on stage or for film
- To understand the basics of dramaturgy, research and writing about theatre
- To challenge yourselves in ways you didn’t think you could
- To challenge your ideas and others through class discussion
- To be willing to get things horribly wrong and learn from it

EVALUATION:

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<th>Grade Scale by Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and Discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play Responses:</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Responses:</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Depth Script Response Papers:</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation Project:</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project:</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please note that poor attendance can have a severe negative effect on your overall grade!

POLICIES:
Students must have access to the Blackboard system.

You may email yes/no questions about the course only. If you have a more complex issue, please speak to me in person, either before/after class or during office hours. If there is a conflict with office hours, I will be happy to make an appointment.

Late papers and presentations will not be accepted, and will receive a grade of zero. Late responses will not be accepted under any circumstances, including those turned in only a short time after class. In addition, work will not be accepted in disc format, or by e-mail. If you are having some form of emergency and are not able to submit the assignment due to a printer problem, digestion of homework by a pet, or even a glitch in the matrix, email a copy of the assignment to the professor via email. This creates a time stamp confirming that you have completed the assignment by the appropriate day or time. Students are then responsible for ensuring the professor receives the assignment in the appropriate manner.

All work must be typed and follow Chicago Style format guidelines. Use Times New Roman Font, size 12. For more information, see writing guidelines posted on the course Blackboard site. Place name block information in top left corner.

Academic Fraud, plagiarism and other breaches of the Student Code of Conduct will not be tolerated. Students who are found to be in violation of the Student Code of Conduct will receive a minimum penalty of an "F" for the course. The incident will also be reported to the Dean of Students. For further information consult section 4.2 of the Student Code on Academic Dishonesty.

While not mandatory, students with learning or physical disabilities are encouraged to contact Professor Borden within the first two weeks of the semester for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the director for SSD for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodations. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Likewise, any students requesting accommodations for this course due to a religious observance should do so within the first two weeks of class. Late requests cannot be assured an accommodation. Generally, students missing class for religious observance will be expected to complete assignments early.

Students must keep copies of all work done in this course until grades are posted. It is also recommended that all returned work be kept until final grades have been received.

Lobby furniture is not to be used by students for classroom or recreational activities.

Do not hesitate to see Professor Borden in office hours, by appointment or contact him via e-mail. Feel free to drop in any time I am in my office and available. Students are encouraged to speak to Professor Borden before problems develop.
ATTENDANCE:
Theatre and Film are demanding businesses that require prompt arrival and attendance at all events. In recognition of this, the JCSTF policy is that you are allowed ONE WEEK’S WORTH OF UNEXCUSED ABSENCES. Any additional unexcused absences will result in the LOSS OF A FULL LETTER GRADE. This means that if you earn a B+, your final grade will be reduced to a C+. Additional absences will continue to result in the loss of a letter grade.

In addition, you must be on time. That means be in class and ready to begin precisely at 12:30. Every three times you are late it equals one absence.

ACTF WEEK:
In lieu of classes, all majors are required to volunteer for a minimum of 3 hours at the KC/ACTF Festival. A Mandatory meeting will be held in Howell Theatre on Sunday, January 19, at 1:00 pm. For volunteering, each student will receive an ACTF badge allowing them access to all ACTF events. Non-majors will be welcome as volunteers and will also be granted access to ACTF events.

ASSIGNMENTS:

PARTICIPATION and DISCUSSION: 5%
Students are responsible for being prepared to discuss the material in class. Everyone is expected to have an opinion and talk about it. A student cannot gain full points for this portion of the overall grade without being active during class discussions.

PLAY RESPONSES: 28% (4% Each)
For each of the scripts read for class, students will be assigned a short assignment that will be due at the beginning of the week that play is assigned to be read. Each response will be graded out of 100 and is potentially worth 4% of the overall grade. Please do not dismiss these small assignments – failing to turn in one or more, or doing a poor job, could significantly affect the overall grade.

Students may be asked to present their response as a basis for class discussion.

All Responses are due the first class of every week for all scripts read during that week.

FILM RESPONSES: 20% (4% each)
Students will write, draw or graph short responses to the films viewed in class. The focus of each response will be assigned in class.

IN-DEPTH SCRIPT RESPONSE PAPERS: 20% (10% each)
Students are responsible for writing a review of 2 of the assigned plays or films for the class. Students may choose which plays they choose to write on, and may write on staged reading scripts, as well. The critiques should focus on how the plays would work in production. The reviews must include examples from the play script. They may include examples of actual productions of the play. The reviews may also reflect back on previous plays read during the semester, or the other play(s) read that week. Each review should be 3 pages double spaced. Examples may be found on BlackBoard.

The due dates for the papers are listed as follows:


Paper 2: Due April 29, 2014 – Choose one play from: Abundance, The Road to Mecca, The Threepenny Opera, Zastrozzi, Polygraph, Blasted
TRANSLATION PROJECT: 12%

Students will be assigned groups and a short play, scene, film or a piece of literature from a non-English source. The group will be responsible for approaching a translation/adaptation of the script in such a fashion that it will work for present-day audiences. Each group will present their ideas and a short scene will be read/acted aloud at the completion of the project. In addition, each group will submit a digital copy of their PowerPoint or other digital form of presentation materials.

The presentations will take place during class March 20, 2014. Presentations will be limited to 12 minutes and timed. Each group will be expected to have rehearsed the presentation. Groups will be stopped sharply at 12 minutes. All groups should have their material loaded into the class computer before the start of class to ensure speedy transitions between groups.

FINAL PROJECT – YOU ARE THE DRAMATURG: 15%

Each student will be responsible for making a dramaturgical project on one of the plays listed for the project.

1: The project must include visual and written elements. These include research on the play’s author, the theatrical period of the play and the play itself. If appropriate, the project should include information on the historical period and/or geographical region in which the play is written and/or set. Production reviews, academic discussion of the play and production images of the original production as well as other productions are all expected to be part of the project.

As an example, a project on Cymbeline would start with information on Shakespeare and theatre in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It would also need to include the Elizabethan/Jacobean understanding of Roman era Britain as well as their understanding of ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy. Also important would be an examination of the myths of the Roman origins of British Kings and why that matters in the play. There should be an examination of the play itself: how it was first received, how it was presented over the centuries and why it was not presented for a period of time. In addition, investigate what people have written about the play and how it functions on stage and how various productions have solved various problems with the play or highlighted certain aspects of the play. The play also has been rewritten a number of times – these rewrites should be part of the discussion.

2: A second aspect of the project is to put the play in context as you would as the dramaturg for a production of the play. This should include:

A series of images that would help the actors, designers and directors understand the physicality, dress, living styles (furniture, rooms, architecture, etc.) and ways of moving appropriate to the era of the play.

Samples of music from the era that will help the actors, designers and directors have a sense for the rhythm and feeling of the era AND/OR that will help explain what is occurring in the play. For example, the music of the 1960s changes drastically through the decade and exemplifies many of the social and political changes that were happening during the period. In addition, a play like August Wilson’s Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom has a very specific style of music that is intrinsic to the language and rhythm of the play.

In short, you are expected to thoroughly research the play and present a cogent, professional and comprehensive project. The project should be visually interesting, well organized and professionally presented.

3: Students will include a list of ten discussion questions on the play.

4: Students should justify their selection as if it would be included in the JCSTF Mainstage season. Include appropriate marketing and outreach materials – these might include items such as a poster, program notes, or an educational packet, or even the creation of a potential lobby display.

5: Students will turn in a packet of the project materials as either a PowerPoint with music examples embedded, or a PDF File with music files submitted separately. Music files MUST BE INCLUDED AS MP3 OR MP4 FILES OR OTHER FORM OF DIGITAL FILE THAT THE PROFESSOR’S COMPUTER CAN OPEN AND PLAY. A URL for a YouTube video or the equivalent is not acceptable. The projects should include a works cited page and a bibliography of source material. It is recommended that students find sources other than Wikipedia – maybe even some that have pages.

NOTE: Before the project is due, students are HIGHLY ENCOURAGED to speak with the professor on an individual basis.
Plays for Dramaturgy Project:

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<th>Aeschylus –</th>
<th>Wycherly –</th>
<th>Hammerstein and Kern –</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Oresteia</td>
<td>The Country Wife</td>
<td>Show Boat!</td>
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<tr>
<th>Aristophanes –</th>
<th>Ford –</th>
<th>Gray –</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lysistrata</td>
<td>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</td>
<td>Billy Bishop Goes to War</td>
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<tr>
<th>Plautus –</th>
<th>Webster –</th>
<th>Kushner –</th>
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<tr>
<td>Truculentus</td>
<td>The Duchess of Malfi</td>
<td>Angels in America 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<th>Anonymous –</th>
<th>Goldsmith –</th>
<th>Soyinka –</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Second Shepherds Play</td>
<td>She Stoops to Conquer</td>
<td>Death and the King's Horseman</td>
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<th>de Vega –</th>
<th>Muset –</th>
<th>Churchill –</th>
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<tr>
<td>Castilvenes y Monteses</td>
<td>Fantasio</td>
<td>Mad Forest</td>
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<th>Torahiko –</th>
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<th>Wilson –</th>
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<td>Raizan</td>
<td>Uncle Tom's Cabin</td>
<td>The Piano Lesson</td>
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<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Our Country's Good</td>
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<th>Augustin Daly –</th>
<th>Vaya Inclan –</th>
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<td>Under the Gaslight</td>
<td>Divine Words</td>
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<th>Shaw –</th>
<th>O’Neill –</th>
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<td>Le Cid</td>
<td>Mrs. Warren’s Profession</td>
<td>Desire Under the Elms</td>
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<th>de Zayas –</th>
<th>Buchner –</th>
<th>Weiss –</th>
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<td>Friendship Betrayed</td>
<td>Woyceck</td>
<td>Marat/Sade</td>
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**EXTRA CREDIT:** up to 10%
For each of the plays presented for the Mainstage and Theatrix seasons, students may write a 2-3 page paper comparing the original script to what was presented on stage. The paper should investigate design, acting and directorial choices that affect how the script changes through performance.

Each review is worth up to 2.5% added to the overall grade at the end of the semester. An “A” paper = 2.5 percentage points, a “B” paper 2.0 points, and a “C” paper will add 1.5 points.

These must be submitted by the Wednesday after the final performance of each production.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 14</td>
<td>Introductions: Dramaturgy, Theatre History Round-up, Structure and</td>
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<td>Jan 16</td>
<td>basics of Analysis, Library Research Tools, Dramaturgy Assignment,</td>
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<td>Translation/Adaptation Project</td>
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<td><em>Hamlet Response due Jan 28</em></td>
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<td>Script Development – <strong>Digs</strong></td>
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<td><em>Digs Response due Feb 4</em></td>
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<td>Feb 6</td>
<td>Watch and discuss <em>Strictly Ballroom</em></td>
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<td><em>Breath. Boom.</em></td>
<td><em>Strictly Ballroom Response due Feb 11</em></td>
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<td><em>Beating Heart Cadaver</em></td>
<td>*Responses due Feb 11 for <em>Breath. Boom.</em> and</td>
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<td><em>Beating Heart</em></td>
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<td><em>The Rover</em></td>
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<td><em>Cyrano de Bergerac</em></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Feb 25</td>
<td>Watch and discuss <em>The Secret of Kells</em></td>
<td><em>Kells Response due Feb 27</em></td>
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<td><em>Ian Travels to AHCT – No Class</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mar 4</td>
<td><em>Zoot Suit</em></td>
<td>*Responses due Mar 4 for <em>Zoot Suit</em> and <em>Rocky</em></td>
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<td><em>The Rocky Horror Show</em></td>
<td><em>Translation/Adaptation Groups Chosen</em></td>
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<td><em>Final Project Play Chosen by April 1</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>Watch and discuss <em>Dirty Pretty Things</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>April 8</td>
<td><em>Abundance</em></td>
<td>*Responses due April 8 for <em>Abundance</em> and *The</td>
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<td></td>
<td>April 10</td>
<td><em>The Road to Mecca</em></td>
<td>Road to Mecca*</td>
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<td><em>Dirty Pretty Things Response due April 8</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td><em>The Threepenny Opera</em></td>
<td>*Responses due April 15 for <em>Threepenny Opera</em></td>
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<td>April 17</td>
<td><em>Zastrozzi</em></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>April 22</td>
<td><em>Polygraph</em></td>
<td>*Responses due April 22 for <em>Polygraph</em> and</td>
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<tr>
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<td>April 24</td>
<td><em>Blasted</em></td>
<td><em>Blasted</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>April 29</td>
<td>Watch and discuss <em>The Guard</em></td>
<td><em>Paper 2 Due April 29</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
<td><em>Guard Response in class May 1</em></td>
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**Final Project due by noon, Thursday, May 8**
Teaching and Evaluation Methods
IV. TEACHING AND EVALUATION METHODS

A. Discussion

Much of the class remains discussion oriented, as that is the most effective means of illuminating the production needs, themes within scripts, and problems and issues raised by scripts. I also firmly believe that students who are able to discuss material have learned it more deeply, and are more receptive to and able to defend critiques of their ideas.

When I first took over the course, the high percentage of upper level Theatre students, particularly those with a performance emphasis, made this very easy. There were, in fact, class periods where I needed to serve as a referee as much as an instructor. Students readily challenged each other’s statements, and were extremely willing to express their opinions.

As the class demographic has shifted to include a higher percentage of Film and New Media students, as well as more minors and students from outside the Carson School, this willingness to express opinions has greatly diminished. The effect has been exacerbated by teaching in a space that forces students to face towards the instructor at the front of the room, rather than facing each other. In addition, class sizes have risen approximately 30 percent, again diminishing the atmosphere conducive to discussion.

This has necessitated breaking the class into smaller sections, providing focused discussion questions, and then returning to entire class discussions. This has generally been very successful in facilitating class discussion, even with a large percentage of more reticent students.

B. Play Responses

When I inherited the class, the previous instructor had students make Top Ten lists for each play, highlighting what they felt was the most important aspect of the play. While some students were very successful at this type of work, others did the bare minimum to receive the points given for each list. While this was effective at ensuring students would read the plays in time for class (or provide evidence of those who were failing to read the assigned material), it was not particularly effective at assisting with discussion.

I have now shifted to providing a focused question for each play that forces students to examine plays more deeply. Questions may focus on plot structures, themes and how they relate to production, staging requirements, audience reception, and problems with the text itself.

While each response is only a small portion of the overall grade (4 percent), in total these comprise 28 percent of the overall grade.
C. Film Responses

The Film Responses were added to the class as a means of addressing the needs of Film and New Media students. A benefit is that many of the Theatre students have become more equipped to work on film productions as designers, performers and technicians. Not only is there much greater integration of the two sections of the Carson School, some Theatre students have effectively switched their focus to actively include study and practice in film, including several who have written scripts for film.

In designing this aspect of the class, finding film scripts as they appear for production was very difficult. Instead of reading film scripts, film viewing became a part of the class. For the responses, students have to “reverse engineer” an aspect of the production. This is done by providing focused questions for the students to investigate. These can include a variety of filmic elements. Examples include discussions of animation style, script structure, and production design.

The film responses each comprise 4 percent of the overall grade, with the five response accounting for a total of 20 percent.

D. In-Depth Script Response Papers

The In-Depth Script Response is a more academically rigorous assignment than the short response. Students investigate a theatrical script in detail, focusing on how the play works in production rather than on the script as dramatic literature. These responses are presented in essay form. If students have been diligent about the short play and film responses, they will be better prepared for this assignment.

E. Translation Project

The Translation Project, the reasoning behind the project and its development, will be discussed in the next section of the portfolio.

F. Final Dramaturgy Project

The Final Dramaturgy Project demands that students pursue historical and theatrical research, consider marketing and educational outreach possibilities, and how the play might work in production.

Students are required to submit a PowerPoint or PDF of their work that includes appropriate music samples, discussion questions and preparatory material as if the play was to go into production.

For this project students choose a play that they alone will read.
Developing the Translation Project

Photos by Doug Smith
A. Reasoning for the Translation Project

I started the translation project in response to three main factors. First, the class demographic change made me want to add to the approaches we were taking towards scripts. I wanted to move beyond looking only at film and theatrical scripts and more at the core of storytelling. Second, within the Theatre and Film and New Media curricula there is very little conscious exposure to culture – stories, ideas, plays or films – that does not come from Europe or North America. Finally, my own work in the translation of scripts had made me more aware of how valuable this work is. It opens up new ideas for the stage and screen, as well as demands immersion in the original culture in order to make a product for a new target culture.

The first attempt at the Translation Project came during the Fall semester of 2013. For this project I included a variety of source material that included plays in translation as well as folk stories from Japan and Ireland. My original idea was to have students translate from another language, but the range of language skills within the class varied so widely that I knew that I needed to provide already translated material.

For the play scripts that were provided, I was hoping that they would find a more effective translation. This proved problematic. Groups bogged down in the minutiae of the project, barely shifting at all from the already translated material, and not considering textual choices. Instead, they moved towards ideas about staging or filming. This in itself was successful, but made it less of a departure from the work already being carried out in the class.

In contrast, groups that worked with folk or fairy tales were more successful. Having to move the story from literature (although the original stories may have come from an oral storytelling tradition) to script demanded immersion in the source culture and examination of story structure.

B. First Survey

At the end of the project, I gave out a survey looking at whether the project was effective in demanding cross-cultural and cross-media investigation, and also to discover whether the amounts of work and time allotted were appropriate. The results confirmed that students felt much as I had after watching them in the classroom over two weeks. While formal responses were limited, they confirmed what I had already been able to ascertain from oral interaction in the class and seeing the final project presentations.

I have provided all answers to each of the questions posed in the survey. These surveys were anonymous and voluntary.
1. Did the project make you think about culture and cross-cultural communication in new ways?
   - It made me think about the time period the play was written during and how that affected the meaning behind the characters and story line.
   - Yes, we focused on the Japanese fairytales, and doing the project well meant really thinking about the differences between Western and Eastern culture. I do feel that some of the texts may not have provided as much contrast because not all were in foreign languages, but the overall effect is, I imagine, generally the same.
   - Yes. I was interested in the differences we found between the cultures and how we were able to mold them.

2. Do you feel the project had value for you as a student? Please explain.
   - This project helped me to analyze underlying meanings within plays.
   - I do. Even though there was no exact translation going on (not that I could really do that), it was fun and new to think about how to adapt this collection of fairytales for American audiences.
   - Yes. I felt like this group project was a useful one when some are not.

3. Was the amount of work required to complete the assignment feasible within the allotted amount of time?
   - Yes, the time in class dedicated to this project was more than enough for it to be completed.
   - Very much so. We were given just the right amount of time to do it all in class (with some out-of-the-classroom thinking as well, of course).
   - Yes. The time was enough for our group to finish the assignment. Enough but not too much.

4. Do you feel there was enough guidance from the instructor during the course of the project? If not, what could he have done that would have helped you more?
   - Yes, whenever the group was close to understanding certain points within the play Ian would give us more information to add and work with.
   - Yep! It was nice that we were pretty much on our own most of the time and then you checked in periodically to help us shape our ideas and answer our questions.
   - Maybe more detail in specifics needed from the students.

5. Did the project help you better understand the script creation process or understand it in new ways?
   - Yes and no. It helped me really understand the process of adapting a story/script within another language, but not so much the process of translating. So maybe label the project as a foreign language adaptation project instead?

6. What would have helped you to be more successful with this project?
   - I wanted a little bit more instruction at the start on where to go with this project. That being said, I still feel my group was very successful and I have a feeling the open-endedness of the project is what allowed us to be creative.

7. Please feel free to make other comments about the project.
   - It’s difficult to write a script with four people! Interesting lesson in collaboration in writing, conceptualization, and design. In that way, that may have been one of the biggest lessons. I learned how to sacrifice some of my ideas to incorporate the ideas of others.
C. Developing the Translation Project for the Spring 2014 Semester

The folk tales proved to be the most effective in confronting issues of culture, story structure, and differences between European/Western and non-European/non-Western storytelling. Students were forced to investigate the original culture much more deeply, to examine what was valued in the original and target cultures, and to be more inventive in their script outlines.

For these reasons, as I prepared the Translation Project for the Spring semester, I moved entirely to folk tales from various cultures – Japanese, Irish, Coast Salish, African, Haitian and Incan – as the source material for the project. Generally, as the survey results below will show, the project was extremely successful in examining storytelling ideology and structure, as well as the source cultures.

D. Second Survey

The second survey focused less on instructional issues (such as amount of time needed) and instead asked questions about cultural investigation and the understanding of structure and storytelling.

Once again, responses were anonymous and voluntary.

| Peer Review of Teaching Project |
| Assignment Feedback |

Translation Project – Spring 2014

1. How did this assignment help you engage with a culture foreign to your own?
   - I researched Haiti’s music, culture and stories, but I still didn’t feel as connected and knowledgeable about the country as I could have been. I think if we would have actually translated text AND themes, I would have become more engaged, solely because foreign language resonates with me more.
   - It was interesting because the stories we read were foreign, but they all had at least one element that we could relate to or recognize from one of our stories.
   - It helped me understand the different way they tell their stories. It was interesting to see how they portray different characters and how they interact with other characters in the story.
   - In order to do well on the assignment I had to do a lot of work on the Salish Native Tribe, and I learned a lot about their culture.
   - It gave me a chance to see what stories other cultures would call normal and how different (or not) their stories were to my culture.
   - It forced me to actually pay attention to the differences between the foreign culture and what is familiar to us.
   - It forced me to learn more – I needed to have an adequate understanding of the culture set in order to do the stories justice.
2. How did this assignment help you understand story structure, especially in terms of Western/Non-Western story-telling.
   - Our stories all had extremely abrupt endings and themes uncommon to the U.S. It certainly opened my eyes to what we call “traditional storytelling” versus what that phrase means for other countries.
   - For the stories that had multiple stories within them, it was difficult to follow or try to connect the stories when maybe they don’t need to be.
   - It is a lot different compared to what I am used to. They use a lot of Earth elements like wind and fire. We don’t really do that here in the U.S.
   - I was able to see how different it is in non-western stories. The stories seemed random, ended at no particular place, and didn’t really teach any moral lessons.
   - Story structure was relatively easy to see, Western or non-Western storytelling.
   - It helped me recognize the typical patterns that shape a lot of Western storytelling and realizing much of non-Western storytelling doesn’t follow them at all.
   - The juxtaposition between the stories I’m intimately familiar with and the foreign ones I’m being forced to analyze serves to highlight the inherent differences.

3. How did this assignment help you understand the construction of a theatrical or filmic script?
   - Technically, our piece was filmic, though I wrote my sample script closer to theatre script style. It made me think about stage directions more – how to give the actors/directors enough help without making choices for them.
   - Even though we discussed if our stories would be a stage production or film, it didn’t help me understand the actual construction of a theatrical or filmic script.
   - There is a lot more graphic structure to the theatrical script in the lines to give you the chance to use your imagination.
   - It helped me get a lot deeper into the Western 3-Act structure by forcing me to pull elements from a basically structure-less story and add the climaxes necessary.
   - Having a story from a different culture that’s not actually a script (so to speak) and having to adapt it to stage or screen.
   - Exposition-ish dialogue is an art form? IDK. I’m honestly stumped on how to answer these next two.

4. What would you want to have added to this assignment to improve the experience and why?
   - I would have loved an option to translate text and themes. I understand it wouldn’t be realistic for the whole class, seeing as everyone is at different places in terms of foreign language, but I know translating Spanish or French texts and themes would have engaged me more.
   - Letting us pic our groups mostly because I can find a way to work with people I know or I know how they work, but some people in my group were not moving on things they thought.
   - I would have liked to maybe done like a drawing sketch of the play or maybe do the makeup of a character that would be in the story.
   - I thought the project was good. The point of the project was pretty much met in all the requirements.
   - I would have had the groups smaller so members could have the chance to look at things more in depth. Also maybe cutting down what we had to cover because there was a lot and in the amount of time we had, we couldn’t really focus too much and that left out a lot of detail.

5. What other commentary would you like to add?
   - I think it was a great project to work on, overall. Translating themes is an important skill to have in order to appeal to different audiences. Also, the more knowledge we have to of different cultures, in my mind, the better.
   - Throughout the process I never really understood what the end objective was. I also didn’t understand why we were changing the story.
   - It was just cool to see the difference and learn how other cultures tell their stories.
   - Personally, I wasn’t a fan of this project but I understood the purpose behind it.
E. Translation Project Summary

The Translation Project proved a success in the main objectives of the assignment. Most students were able to benefit from investigation into another culture, from examining Western and Non-Western story structure and themes, and the formational differences between narrative story and theatrical and filmic scripts.

Where there was some difficulty was in the students’ base knowledge regarding scripts and structure, and in the contextual understanding of the story and the translation/adaptation of it. Comparing the Spring semester project to that of the Fall, I was able to make an assessment of the reasons why.

In the Fall semester I was forced (because of conference travel) to move the project to later in the semester when students had read more plays, seen more films and generally had a better understanding of structure and other storytelling elements. In the Spring, I moved the project to where I had originally envisioned it, the middle of the semester. Students did not yet have enough contextual understanding to be universally successful with the project.

In short, the project was successful in accomplishing its main goals of cultural interaction and investigation as well as creating a deeper understanding of storytelling forms and scripts. However, students who were already relatively accomplished in theatre or film were able to get more out of the project than those who were less experienced. By moving the project to later in the semester, future Translation projects will be more successful.
Analysis of Student Learning

Photos by Tracy Holliday
VI. ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING

A. Discussion

I firmly believe that if students are able to articulate ideas orally, it shows a greater understanding of the material than only responding in written form. This is the key to the continued class discussion element for the course.

As I articulated earlier, the class demographic had changed, leading to an overall drop in willing and animated class discussion. I began to break the class into smaller discussion groups working on focused questions. This was very successful in improving oral articulation of the issues inherent in the play scripts being discussed.

However, I also wanted to ensure that participation in class discussion correlated with higher scores on other assignments. To that purpose, I had students fill out the questionnaire on the right. The survey questions were based on questionnaires developed by the National Survey of Student Engagement.

I received 23 total responses. Every response indicated that discussion helped develop their understanding of course material at least sometimes, and 87% stated Always or Very Often. The response to the smaller group discussions seemed less immediately productive. However, my understanding through class interaction suggests that smaller group discussions led to more fruitful full class discussions. All responses indicated that Often, Very Often or Always, class discussion changed a student’s view of an issue or concept. I would have to say that these responses, although from a relatively small sample group, indicate that class discussion of material is extremely effective as a teaching tool for this course.

The first two questions from the survey were in part to satisfy my curiosity about whether students who kept up with the material also performed better at written assignments. The three students who stated that they Rarely or Never participated actively in class discussions were also three of the lowest scoring students on the In-Depth Script Responses. Again, the sample size is small, but does appear to confirm my contention that the processing of class material in such a way that it can be articulated orally leads to greater overall understanding of the material.
B. Play Responses

For each play read in class, students were asked to answer short paragraph questions. There was a dual purpose to these assignments. First, they were to ensure that students read the required plays in a timely manner. Second, they helped build students’ ability to analyze a script by focusing on only one or two issues with a play. The questions covered a wide variety of topics, including plot structure graphs, thematic elements, theatre history, staging requirements and audience reception.

There was a correlation between success in completing these short assignments and the In-Depth Script Responses that were to follow.

The table below shows the scores of three students on the Play Responses and the corresponding grade on the In-Depth response which followed:

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<th>Play Response 1</th>
<th>Play Response 2</th>
<th>Play Response 3</th>
<th>First In-Depth Response</th>
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However, not all students maintained a corresponding score on the In-Depth Script Response as they had on the shorter, more focused Play Responses, as shown by the table below, showing the corresponding scores of three different students:

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<th>Play Response 1</th>
<th>Play Response 2</th>
<th>Play Response 3</th>
<th>First In-Depth Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>85</td>
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The reason for this drop is clarified by the comments I gave to the students. It was not they failed to cogently discuss ideas pertinent to the plays, but rather a failure to strongly connect the ideas being discussed to the text from the plays. The need to do so is explicitly stated in the assignment description. My grading comments focus on this point, telling students that they “need to tie the work more strongly to themes from the text,” or that there was “Not enough connection to and elaboration of the themes within the text – mainly this was a discussion of the play’s production history without enough solid reasoning for production ideas.”

Students who did very poorly on this assignment or even received a zero (because they did not submit an In-Depth Script Response) also missed one or more Play Responses. This suggests that when there is an extreme lack of correlation between short and in-depth responses it is more about general student skills and attitude rather than a failure of the Play Responses to prepare students for more in-depth work.
C. Film Responses

The Film Responses were necessitated by the large increase of Film and New Media students in the class demographic. I also recognized that it is vital that both Film and New Media students, as well as Theatre students, be able to examine and analyze scripts designed for film.

As film scripts are much more difficult to acquire than play scripts (particularly scripts as used for production), I first started looking at film through viewing films in class. This provided the benefit of allowing students to engage with the idea of a script and storytelling from a very different perspective. Viewing a film and then examining what made it successful requires students to “reverse engineer” a movie in order to understand the production process. It also provides the opportunity to see a completed production, and examine the steps necessary to bring it to that stage of development.

This has been aided by the development of the Carson Film series, a high level production produced by the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film every three years. This allows in-depth examination of the script at two stages as it is developed for production. This is followed by an examination of the film itself. The access to scripts and insight into the production process, combined with a viewing and “talk-through” of the film engages and prepares for later assignments students much more successfully than previous versions of the class.

Examples of the Film Response questions are below. The first is for the animated film, The Secret of Kells. The second is for the French film, Amélie.

- If we consider Disney/Pixar to be the "norm" for animation in the last 2 decades, then The Secret of Kells stands out as being different. Note 5 ways that The Secret of Kells differs in animation/storytelling from the Hollywood "norm."

- Choose 1 sequence from the movie as an example and describe how editing helps tell the story. Choose 1 sequence from the story and describe how design elements help tell the story.

These types of questions force students to examine movies as an active spectator, and investigate what transforms a script into film.

D. In-Depth Script Response Papers

The In-Depth Responses require each student to thoroughly investigate one of the play scripts read up to that point in the class. They are required to examine a script, not as literature, but rather as a blueprint for performance, marking the challenges and requirements to successfully bring a script to the stage. Students may discuss anything that impacts a production: the language of the text, music, stage configuration, special effects, and especially historical and theatrical context. The short responses written earlier in the semester help prepare students for these more thorough examinations. Unlike the informal short responses, the In-Depth Responses are in formal essay style and graded with all expectations of academic rigor. To assist with this aspect of grading, examples are provided and students have the opportunity for one on one writing instruction.
E. Translation Project

The translation project requires students to work as a group in transforming a non-Western folktale into a theatrical or filmic script. Students must investigate elements of culture, story structure, dialogue and imagery in order to be successful.

The group is then tasked with transforming the results of their project into a visual presentation, requiring PowerPoint or other digital visual aid. Each group must also provide at least two pages of realized script (students may opt to perform the script, as well). Students are given four class periods to work on the material. This provides enough time for the group members to work in concert, to receive assistance from me as their instructor, and to generate the required presentation materials.

A sample PowerPoint and Script Pages follow:

![Sample PowerPoint](image1.png)

![Sample Script Pages](image2.png)
Jackal’s Favorite Game – Script Example

Hare closes his eyes and chants:

Hare
Cabbages, peppers, carrots and peas
Count them by ones, by twos, by threes
I’ll find you first, then I’ll plant these,
Cabbages, peppers, carrots and peas.

Jackal skips off and hides in a clump of bushes.

Jackal
I cover myself with leaves.
I close my eyes.
You’ll never, ever find me
Till I yell, ‘Surprise!’

Narrator
Hare looked here. Hare looked there. So far, no Jackal anywhere. Hare put his hands on his hips and hopped to the bushes. He was about to hop on when he saw a tail switch.

Hare
Uh-huh! I never saw a tail-wagging bush before. Come out! Come out, wherever you are. A telltale tail’s told me you’re in there.

Jackal doesn’t budge

Hare (continued)
Come out come out wherever you are. I spy Jackal!

Hare stamps on Jackal’s tail

Jackal
Yow! Surprise! You thought I was a bush, eh! You didn’t see me. I go again.

Hare
Uh-uh! I go now. I knew you were there. Your tail may be bushy, but bushes don’t wag tails.

Jackal ignores this.

Jackal
I go again! I am bigger than you! I am faster too! I’m tough as can be! So don’t you, I go me!

Narrator
Jackal reached out, snatched Hare and spun him three times.

Hare
Not fair!

Cabbages, peppers, carrots and peas
Count them by ones, by twos, by threes
I’ll find you first, then I’ll plant these,
Cabbages, peppers, carrots and peas.

As the PowerPoint and Script reveal, the group was forced to confront cultural issues, story structuring problems, and production concerns, as well as transform the original story into at least two pages of realized script. The script above is for a children’s play which is appropriate for the original story. However, a variety of source material provided a variety of results from each of the groups. All the groups were successful to some degree. As stated previously, placing the project later in the semester would have helped overcome the relatively small problems each group encountered. Overall, the project was successful, enjoyable and effective.
F. Final Dramaturgy Project

The Dramaturgy Project is designed to get students to investigate the historical, social and theatrical context for a script. They must perform a wide variety of tasks that may be ascribed to a dramaturg. These include staging concepts, production history, marketing ideas, education and outreach, and the tiny historical details that can assist actors, designers and the director.

For this assignment, they were instructed to create a packet that would include the necessary information for actors, designers and directors, as well as possible marketing strategies, music appropriate for the production, and a production history.

The packet that begins on the next page was designed for of Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes by Tony Kushner, and includes preparatory work for both Angels in America: Millennium Approaches and Angels in America: Perestroika. It is very successful in addressing a variety of dramaturgical challenges, and was given a very high grade. Not included here are the MP3 Music samples each student was asked to supply as part of the project.
THEA 234 FINAL PROJECT
A Dramaturgical Analysis on Tony Kushner’s Angels in America

The Playwright

Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes is Tony Kushner’s Pulitzer Prize and Tony-winning drama (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). Tony Kushner is an American playwright born in Manhattan on July sixteen, 1956 (Sparknotes.com, 2014). His parents are both classical musicians. Kushner grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana. “Growing up as a gay Jew in the Deep South, he has later said, made him more conscious of his distinctive identity as he might not have in heavily Jewish New York City (Sparknotes.com, 2014).” Kushner moved back to New York City for college. He received a degree in medieval literature from Columbia University (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013), and later earned an M.F.A. at New York University (Sparknotes.com, 2014).

Before his Angels in America (1991-1992) bust on the theatrical scene, he was a little-known off-Broadway playwright (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). His early work include Yes, Yes, No. No in 1985 (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013), an adaptation of Pierre Corneille’s The Illusion in 1988, and A Bright Room called Day in 1990 (Sparknotes.com, 2014). Angels in America was an overnight success for Kushner. It won him numerous awards and nominations (see Table 1 for the list of awards and nominations). This play was later adapted into an Emmy-winning television drama in 2002, directed by Mike Nichols (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). It was also adapted into an opera by Peter Eötvos in 2004 (Gradsaver.com, 2014).


The Play

Settings and history

Angels in America is a seven-hour play in two parts. The two parts are separately presentable and entitled Millennium Approaches and Perestroika (Gradsaver.com, 2014). Angels in America is an explicit brief for the multi-cultural movement that surged in the late 80s and 90s (Siegel, 2003). One major theme of the movement addresses the broader story of gays and lesbians in America. In the United States, the modern gay rights movement began after World War Two (Sparknotes.com, 2014). In the 1950s and 60s, Gay bars and political organizations mostly existed in secret. In 1969, the Stonewall riot in New York City led to a period of growing openness among gay people and greater public acceptance of gay culture (Sparknotes.com, 2014). In spite of the flourishing gay culture in the 70s, the 80s was a period of tragedy. In 1981, the first cases of AIDS were diagnosed among gay men (Sparknotes.com, 2014). More than 100,000 people in America died of AIDS in the following 10 years. The mainstream reactions to AIDS were filled with ignorance and fear, thus it resulted in a widespread discrimination against AIDS patients, especially gay patients. Furthermore, the political backlash against gay rights hindered the social acceptance of the homosexuality in the American society. Presidents Reagan and Bush represented the opposition (Sparknotes.com, 2014). “Regan remained silent on the subject of AIDS until 1987, when more than 20,000 people had died (Sparknotes.com, 2014).” Bill Clinton was the first presidential candidate who openly reached out to homosexual voters after President George Bush (Sparknotes.com, 2014). There is no doubt that Kushner’s Angels strongly reflects his opposition and question on the Republican’s conservative attitude towards the homosexual population.

Themes and academic discussion of the play

Angels in America has two parts: Part I: Millennium Approaches and Part II” Perestroika. According to Luers (2006:63), the focus of Part I is “the ‘revelation’ of opinions and questions regarding society, politics, religion, and love in the face of homosexuality and the burgeoning AIDS crisis.” Part II further discusses the questions and the merits of the options. Luers believes that Kushner well weaves the allusions of the decay of the ozone layer, Dr. Ruth, Ronald Reagan, and recognizable references to Shakespearian, Miltonian, and Dickensian literary conceits into historical context of the play. Many scholars agree that the themes of the play are “far grander than simply exploring American culture’s ambivalence and hypocrisies about homosexuality and disease (Bronski, 2004).” To support this point, I include a few constructive quotes that address the complexity of the themes of the play.

- “Kushner deliberately recycles traditional American myths and elements of American culture and pins them all on the reconstruction of identity- whether gender, racial, or political- as the real axes of his play (Muñoz, 2006).”
- “It mingles the political, personal, and universal themes such as gay and straight relationships, the Mormon faith, Roy Cohn, Ethel Rosenberg, disease, love, and death (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013).”
- “(It is) a serious play about politics, history, spirituality, and death (Bronski, 2004).”
“He creates a theater of theurgy where the nature of God, humanity, and the cosmos is transfigured for characters and audience alike (Lioi, 2004).”

“Angels... is much more than a tale about AIDS. Interweaving the stories of a diverse group of characters, from real-life power attorney Roy Cohn to a Mormon mother from Salt Lake City, it addresses the potential for diversity and freedom in the USA and how that potential can be thwarted (Elysa on USA Today, 2003).”

“Kushner’s vision in Angels is a majestic, cunning, and above all utopian statement about the feasibility and inevitability of political and social progress. While he details, with a sharp, often mean wit, the evils of Reaganism and the ravages of the past half century of American conservatism, Kushner’s main goal here is to show that—even if God has left heaven—a useful and beneficial evolution of goodness is still possible on earth (Bronski, 2004).”

“Angels, not just the most ambitious effort by a gay playwright but a major vision of American complexities, gives Broadway one more chance to embrace the most challenging American theater. (Kroll, 1993)”

The major themes of the play are community, identity, stasis versus change, politics, and religions. The most obvious symbols of the play are angels and San Francisco. In the following paragraphs, I will analyze the themes of community, identity, and stasis versus change.

The theme of community reveals the truth that no one in the society is isolated. People are connected in different ways: normal ways such as Joe and Louis in the workplace, Harper and Joe in the dream. Different groups in the society symbol functional organs of the society, thus the well being of one group will affect the well being of other groups. The play clearly demonstrates a praise of cooperation and communal existence. The idea of collectivism behind the play reveals a call for a more tolerant and inclusive society of groups that are different. I think this call for a cooperative, collective society explains why the second part of the play is named “Perestroika”, a Russian word for the revolution in the 1980s. According to Steyn (1995), in Russia, the “revolution” means involving the civilian bombardment of Chechen cities; in America, “revolution” would be "cultural", which means to accept the gay culture as a mainstream culture.

Identity is another major theme of the play. The most visible identities mentioned in the play are Jewish, Mormon, Black, heterosexual, homosexual, AIDS patients, Republican, and Democrat. Through recognition, acceptance, and denial of an identity, an individual continuously recognizes, forms, and reforms his identity. Identities are not only socially and culturally assigned, but also individually recognized. Roy Cohn is gay by the societal definition; however, he denies his gay identity and imposes an image of a straight man to the public. Cohn is not the only one in the play who furiously denies his gay identity. Joe also tries to closet his homosexual identity in the first place. In the play, Kushner presents a strong picture of gay men struggling with embracing their homosexual identity under the social pressure.

The theme of stasis versus change is best demonstrated by the Angel’s speech. The Angel tells Prior that the progress of human beings causes God to abandon Heaven and angels. To find God back, human beings have to stop moving forward. In a world filled with despair, the desire to halt change, to preserve the past, and to ignore or suppress the future is a natural reaction of the society (Sparknotes.com, 2014). In certain ways, AIDS symbolizes a negative consequence of human progress. Ironically, Kushner made Prior, an AIDS patient, the “chosen prophet” to cease the societal evolution. Prior rejects the mission from the angel, instead, he chooses to live, even though it means to suffer from AIDS, Prior chooses to advance his life. Through this treatment of text, we can see that Kushner advocates change. The society has to change the hostile attitude towards the gay community; the society has to change to accept gay culture and to embrace gay people.
The Major Characters of the Play

Angels in America: Millennium Approaches - Opening Night at Walter Kerr Theatre, the Broadway Premiere in 1994

According to Luers (2006), every character has his or her internal argument and struggle in the play. Louis is Prior’s partner Louis. He struggles with his Jewish identity and his gay man identity. He is an idealist who despises Roy Cohn’s immoral deeds and Regan’s policies.

Prior Walter, a main character in the play, struggles with accepting his fate. He is an AIDS patient. He feels dirty, as through his heart is “pumping polluted blood.” He feels his illness is an unfair judgment to his life, and could not accept his destiny as a prophet. Eventually, he chooses to live the life, even though it is a life of sickness and pain. In the end, he finds himself “drawn to cosmologies with ‘no judgment, no guilt, or responsibility’”. (Schindler, 1999).

Louis Ironson (Played by Ben Shenkman)
HBO 2003 TV mini series

Prior Walter (Played by Justin Kirk)
HBO 2003 TV mini series

Prior Walter, a main character in the play, struggles with accepting his fate. He is an AIDS patient. He feels dirty, as through his heart is “pumping polluted blood.” He feels his illness is an unfair judgment to his life, and could not accept his destiny as a prophet. Eventually, he chooses to live the life, even though it is a life of sickness and pain. In the end, he finds himself “drawn to cosmologies with ‘no judgment, no guilt, or responsibility’”. (Schindler, 1999).

Louis Ironson (Played by Ben Shenkman)
HBO 2003 TV mini series

Prior Walter (Played by Justin Kirk)
HBO 2003 TV mini series
Belize is an interesting character. He is a cool, wise, ironic, cynical, vitriolic, saintly former drag queen and now a male nurse who takes care of Roy in the hospital (Siegel, 2003). His identity is complicated. He is an African American gay man. In the American society, he belongs to one of the least privileged groups. But he never let people take away his dignity. He embraces his identity as a colored gay man.

Joe Pitt, a Mormon homosexual, lies about his homosexual identity and pursues “the same destructed right-wing politics as Cohn (Siegel, 2003: 28).” He struggles to embrace both his Mormon identity with his identity as a gay man.

Harper Pitt, Joe Pitt’s wife, lives a very unhappy life. She tries to escape the reality by taking drugs. She feels unloved and abandoned. But eventually she chooses to leave her husband and pursues a new life.

Hannah is Joe’s mother. She is a dedicated Mormon. She is upset when she discovers her son’s homosexuality. After she moves to NYC, she meets Prior and takes care of him in he hospital. In the end, she becomes friend with gay men.
Roy Cohn is such a complicated character in the play. It is impossible to fully analyze him in a short paragraph. He is a famous New York lawyer and powerbroker (Sparknotes.com, 2014). He is the most vicious and disturbing character in the play, “a closeted homosexual who disavows other gays and cares only about amassing clout (parknotes.com, 2014).” Kushner made a Biblical reference regarding the mark on Roy’s nose. She is a real-life Jewish woman who was executed for treason during the McCarthy era (Sparknotes.com, 2014). Roy Cohn played an important role in her persecution. Kushner made Ethel appear on stage as a ghost. He portrays her as a character with compassion. In the play, she is able to forgive Roy.

She is the “Bird of America”. She is the “Principality of the Continent”. She is a powerful angel who descends from heaven to fulfill the mission of stopping human progress. She believes the result of human progress is death. She asks Prior, the chosen prophet, to help her stop the progress.
Production History

The first part of the Play, *Millennium Approaches*, was first performed in Los Angeles as a workshop in May 1990 by the Center Theatre Group at the Mark Taper Forum (Gradsaver.com, 2014). It received a world premiere in May 1991 in a production performed by the Eureka Theater Company of San Francisco. The play was directed by Declan Donnellan (Programme to the RNT’s production of *Millennium Approaches*, 1992). Henry Goodman played Cohn; Nick Reding played Joe; Felicity Montagu played Harper; Marcus D’Amico played Louis, and Sean Chapman played Prior (Programme to the RNT’s production of *Millennium Approaches*, 1992). The London production opened on 23rd of January 1992, and ran for a year (Programme to the RNT’s production of *Millennium Approaches*, 1992). It visited Düsseldorf as part of the first Union des Théâtres de l’Europe festival in November 1992 (Programme to the RNT’s production of *Millennium Approaches*, 1992).

The second part of the Play, *Perestroika*, was still under development when *Millennium Approaches* was performed (Gradsaver.com, 2014). Both the Eureka Theatre and the Mark Taper Forum performed *Perestroika* as staged readings in 1991 and 1992 (Gradsaver.com, 2014). The debut of *Perestroika* was in a production by the Mark Taper Forum in November 1992 (Gradsaver.com, 2014). In November 1993, it received its London premiere at the National Theatre (Gradsaver.com, 2014).

The entire two-part play premiered on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre in 1993. *Millennium Approaches* was performed on May 4 and *Perestroika* joined it in repertory on November 23. The whole play closed on December 4, 1994. George C. Wolfe was the director (Gradsaver.com, 2014). “The original cast included Ron Leibman, Stephen Spinella, Kathleen Chalfant, Marcia Gay Harden, Jeffrey Wright, Ellen McLaughlin, David Marshall Grant and Joe Mantello. Among the replacements during the run were F. Murray Abraham (for Ron Leibman), Cherry Jones (for Ellen McLaughlin), Dan Futterman (for Joe Mantello), Cynthia Nixon (for Marcia Gay Harden) and Jay Goede (for David Marshall Grant) (Gradsaver.com, 2014).” Both the *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* were awarded Tony Awards for Best Play and Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Play in 1993 and 1994 respectively (Gradsaver.com, 2014). Kushner made a few revisions to *Perestroika* in the following year, and officially completed the work in 1995. He made additional revisions to *Perestroika* in 2010 (Gradsaver.com, 2014). The most recent production of *Millennium Approaches* was by St Andrews based on Mermaids Theatre in August 2013, during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Gradsaver.com, 2014).

Critiques and Reviews Quotations

Many believe that Kushner’s *Angels* represents a real turning point in mainstream American drama (Muñoz, 2006). Kroll (1993) believes that this play moved “the theme of gay sensibility from the margin to the center of American culture.” Some scholars claim that *Angels in America* is “the most important theatrical event of the latter part of the century.” (Schindler, 1999). Even though most majority of the critiques are positive, there are a few that I found criticize the inadequacy of the play. For example, Siegel (2003: 28) thinks “Angels in America’s dramatic guts were as trite and tame as its theatricality was gratifyingly overblown.” The following quotations collected from both journal and scholarly articles will provide deeper and broader interpretations on Kushner’s *Angel in America*.

Positive critiques on the style/ general critiques

- Taut, serious, heart breaking drama about the AIDS epidemic and...a witty, sexy evocation of gay life in contemporary America (Blanchard, 1994).
- With Angels, we found in the theater a room where we could go to try make sense of things. And it became that room not only for our community but for America. Its scope, its beauty, its wisdom resonated with the nation. It was the most searching and epic American play of its time. (Kaufman, 2002).
- The breadth of the play’s thematic concerns, the originality of its construction and characterizations, and the multiple ambivalences of its message guarantee that it will provoke stimulating critical and scholarly discussion (Schindler, 1999).
- Seldom has a new work of dramatic literature been discussed by scholars as widely and quickly as Tony Kushner’s Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-winning Angels in America (Melton, 1998).
- A turning point in the history of gay drama, the history of American drama, and of American literary culture (Muñoz, 2006).

Positive critiques on the themes/ content

- *Angels in America* is the story of AIDS in America in its most devastating and devastated year: “for Kushner AIDS... is about the fate of the country (Pearl 2007: 761).
- Kushner’s themes and design were grand...It was not only an attack on 1980s Reaganism, but also on the conservative movement of U.S. politics and culture since the end of World War II. By centering the play in the middle of the AIDS epidemic, Kushner’s charting of the religious and political right’s attack on New Deal ideals becomes an important, and stinging, indictment of the antihumanism of
U.S. conservatism (Bronski, 2004).

- And in its grandeur it dealt with politics, morality, sex, religion, and above all, democracy. Angels in America spoke our words. To us. To the world. It told our story. Our story as gays and lesbians, our story as Americans, our story as citizens (Kaufman, 2002).
- It leaps from Washington to Moscow, from the south Bronx to the South Pole, from earth to heaven. And it intersects with reality: the pivotal character is Roy Cohn (Ron Leibman), the McCarthyite lawyer who denied his homosexuality right up to his death from AIDS in 1986. "Angels" goes far beyond the significant AIDS plays that have emerged recently: Larry Kramer’s "The Destiny of Me," Paul Rudnick’s "Jeffrey," William Finn’s "Falsettos." The gay theme has captured the stage, but that stage (except for the musical "Falsettos") is not on Broadway. "Angels," not just the most ambitious effort by a gay playwright but a major vision of American complexities, gives Broadway one more chance to embrace the most challenging American theater. (Kroll, 1993)

Mixed/Negative critiques

- Angels in America’s dramatic guts were as trite and tame as its theatricality was gratifyingly overblown.
- Cohn is the only character with a hint of complexity.
- The play ends less like a drama by Kushner’s hero Brecht than a musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, with everyone teamed up together in the end, in harmony and love. (Siegel 2003: 28)
- Like Millennium Approaches, Perestroika is alive with fierce intelligence and sharp scenes. It contains the same engrossing conflicts and engaging central characters. A kind of extraterrestrial soap opera (akin to "Twin Peaks"), it continues to mix reality, and dreams--personal relationships and supernatural shenanigans--in a dazzling display of style. It features the wittiest writing, and brightest sensibility, of any play in memory. But it not only has little in the way of structure, it also lacks the important dramatic component of a central action, or animating event, to push it forward. Most serious, it fails to prove its thematic premise, that an insistently homosexual perspective can be the basis for a universal worldview. Even more than Millennium Approaches, Perestroika looks at politics and metaphysics almost entirely through the prism of sex and interpersonal transactions (Brustein, 1993).

General Pictures and Production Pictures

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**Music**

When I read *Angels in America*, Thomas Newman’s music is the first that came to my mind. I like his minimalist style. His score is simple, but peaceful. It moves and touches people’s hearts. His music is a narrative by itself. It tells stories in a soft and calm way. It builds up in people. I want the music to strengthen the story, but not too much that it distracts audiences from the play and dialogues. I think Newman’s music achieves a good balance. I also want to include music that has Jewish elements and Christian elements in the play.

The list of selected music scores and songs is

1. Thomas Newman’s *Any Other Name*
2. Thomas Newman’s *Road to Perdition*
3. Hans Zimmer’s *the Burning Bush* from the *Prince of Egypt* (the theme for the Angel)
4. *20 Melody from a Burning Bush* (Hassidic Melody), before 2’45” (for Jewish funerals)
5. Thomas Newman’s *So Was Red* (the ending music of the play)

**Discussion questions**

1. Do you agree that *Angels in America* is a political play? Why or why not?
2. What do “Millennium Approaches” and “Perestroika” mean? How do the titles add to the meaning of the play?
3. Who is “the Angel of America”? What does she/he advocate?
4. Discuss the Biblical references in the play: the Mark of Cain, Jacob wrestling with an angel, and the Isaac and Jacob story.
5. Why do you think Kushner choose Jews and Mormons to represent his major characters?
6. What is identity? Is it important for an individual? Why do people choose to accept certain identity but reject another identity? Can people have multiple identities?
7. Do you agree that the social attitudes and acceptance of homosexuality in America has changed in the past decade? Why or why not?
8. What kind of image or ideology does Roy Cohn represents in the play?
9. Why do you think Kushner made this statement about the play, “The question I am trying to ask is how broad is a community’s embrace? How wide does it reach?”
10. How do you like the play? Do you disagree with Kushner on any of the ideas he expresses in the play?

**Awards and Nominations of Angels in America**

**Millennium Approaches**

- 1990 Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays (non-competitive grant)
- 1991 Bay Area Drama Critics Award for Best Play
- 1991 National Arts Club Joseph Kesselring Award
- 1992 Evening Standard Award for Best Play
- 1992 London Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New Play
- 1993 Drama Desk award for Best Play
- 1993 New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play
- 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- 1993 Tony Award for Best Play

**Perestroika**

- 1992 Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays (non-competitive grant)
- 1992 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New Play
- 1994 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play
- 1994 Tony Award for Best Play
Work Cited


Steyn M. Communism is dead; long live the king!. New Criterion. February 1995;13(6):49.


The Programme to the RNT’s production of Millennium Approaches in 1992.

42
Reflection and Assessment

Photos by Tracy Holliday
Reflection and Assessment

The Peer Review Project for THEA 234 Scripts in performance did not result in any major surprises. It did, however, support some of the theoretical approaches I had developed in teaching the class, and confirmed the effectiveness of the Translation Project. Most importantly, I was able to quantify that which had previously been unquantifiable.

As I stated at the beginning of this portfolio, this class has undergone a large number of changes since I started teaching it in the Fall 2008 semester. While several of these were necessitated by a change in class demographics and an increase in enrollment numbers, I also felt a need to address scripts of both a theatrical and filmic nature. In addition, I wanted to increase students’ exposure to story-telling from other cultures.

The development of the Translation Project, while time-consuming, has turned out to be successful in engaging students with other cultures and their story-telling practices. Moreover, it challenges students to examine and create a theatrical or filmic script, and understand structure and story arc in completely new ways.

The class discussion periods, while no longer requiring me as a simple referee, are still surprisingly productive. This is despite the handicap of teaching in a room that inhibits discussion, as students find it awkward to face each other. Yet the surveys clearly show that orally articulating the issues being discussed results in a greater and deeper understanding of the material.

I am satisfied with what the Peer Review of Teaching Project has revealed. The changes have resulted in the class being amenable to majors in both Film and New Media and Theatre, Minors in Theatre, and students from other disciplines. Small tweaks in scheduling, as well as reading and viewing selections, should be enough to keep the course strongly engaging and effective in the future. I am happy to say that the Peer Review of Teaching Project has confirmed that the class is a success.