Dr. Pettit  
ENGL 3913.001: Modern & Contemporary Political Drama  
Tuesdays, 6:30–9:20, LB 218  
Office: Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 5:25–6:25


**CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION.** Consideration of genres, themes, movements, authors and their relationship to the cultural contexts of the age.

**WHAT TO EXPECT.** As the course-title indicates, the plays that we will read concern “political” issues, broadly construed. Topics range from regional politics to international politics to cultural politics to the politics of race, class, and gender. My own political inclinations, which I will make no attempt to hide, are generally left-leaning. This is also true of most of the playwrights under discussion—not because I have selected the readings for ideological homogeneity but because creative writers and “theater-people” are on the whole on a liberal stripe, for whatever reason. I do not mistake my beliefs or opinions for the “truth,” and, as an American wholly enthusiastic about our Constitutional freedoms, will never use them to belittle or suppress the expression of beliefs or opinions different from or contrary to my own. Indeed I welcome the expression of such beliefs and opinions. But let’s ALL remember that we’re talking about the literary works primarily and the political issues that they introduce only by way of enriching those discussions or illuminating those works. Further caveat: there’s an abundance of profanity in many of these plays.

**POLICIES.** Students who miss two classes will be disallowed the grade “A”; students who miss three classes will be assigned the grade “F.” Two “lates” count as one absence; early departures, perhaps paradoxically, count as “lates.” No make-up quizzes or tests; no late final papers; enda story.

**A JOYFUL DISRUPTION.** Sometime toward the end of January or the beginning of February, my wife will give birth to a daughter. This felicitous eventuality has prompted me to purchase a cellular telephone, which I will commit the unpardonable offense of leaving on during class until the baby is safe at home. My apologies for this rudeness! If my wife goes into labor during class, I’ll pack up and scoot promptly. If she gives birth shortly before a scheduled class meeting, I may have to take an absence. Please check the website (see below) for updates. In any case, you will be responsible for the full slate of readings; that is, the class after the one that I may have to shorten or miss will cover both the shortened or missed reading and the reading regularly scheduled for that date. Thanks for bearing with me; this is unfamiliar territory for me, and I’m not quite sure how it will all “work”!

**E-MAIL vs. THE REAL THING.** E-mail is a lousy medium for intellectual discussion. We’ll talk about your ideas in my office, face to face, during my regularly scheduled hours. Please do not e-mail me with inanities like “I won’t be in class tonight”—a statement the veracity of which will be clear in due course, right?!

**WEBSITE.** Basic course information (e.g., updates, syllabus, mid-term and final grades, and, later, topics for the take-home final paper) will be posted at http://www.engl.unt.edu/~apettit.

**TESTS AND ASSIGNMENTS.** Often, I’ll give short objective quizzes at the start of class (no make-ups). If you’ve read the material, they will be extraordinarily easy; if you haven’t, they will be the sources of humiliation and embarrassment. The open-book midterm (no make-ups) will comprise one essay question, which you will answer in a blue-book. The final paper, details about which will follow, will be due on 4 May at 6:30. I will distribute topics several weeks in advance of that date. Submit
**your final paper electronically**, as an attachment in Word or WordPerfect: alexp@unt.edu.

**PLAGIARISM.** Plagiarism is the representation of another person’s words or ideas as one’s own. Papers transcribed from files in fraternities or sororities, from Internet sources, and from published sources all qualify. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense in the academic community. If I suspect you of plagiarism, I will question you closely. If, in my determination, you have committed an act of plagiarism, or if the suspected act of plagiarism takes place after the last class-meeting of the semester, I will file a Faculty Disposition of a Scholastic Dishonesty Case (see attachment) with the departmental chair, outlining the case and recording my decision to assign a failing grade for the course. More positively: most plagiarism is due to a student’s lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic writing. I will gladly discuss these with you during my office-hours.

**GRADING.** The quizzes, collectively, will be worth 1/3 of your final grade; the midterm and the final exam will be worth 1/3 each. See my comments on attendance, above.

**EXTRA CREDIT.** Attend one or more of the professional productions listed below. Write a short, highly informal paper commenting on some aspect of the production (as distinct from the play). For each paper, I will replace your lowest quiz grade with a B, B+, A-, A, or A+. Some theaters have discounted preview shows and student discounts.

* Dario Fo, Accidental Death of an Anarchist; Dallas Theater Center, 14 Jan. - 8 Feb.; [www.dallastheatercenter.org](http://www.dallastheatercenter.org)
* Mac Wellman, Two September, 24 Jan. - 14 Feb., Undermain Theatre (Dallas); [www.undermain.com](http://www.undermain.com)
* Suzan-Lori Parks, Topdog/Underdog; Dallas Theater Center, 25 Feb. - 21 March; [www.dallastheatercenter.org](http://www.dallastheatercenter.org)
* J. B. Priestley, An Inspector Calls; Water Tower Theatre (Addison), 1 - 25 April; [www.watertowertheater.org](http://www.watertowertheater.org)

**AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT.** Essential competencies for this course include the abilities to read and interpret literature; to participate in discussions about the literature; to answer, in writing, objective questions about the literature; and to write coherent essays about the literature, in class and outside of class. If you have a disability for which you will require accommodation under the terms of the Americans with Disabilities Act, register with the Office of Disability Accommodation and submit your request for accommodation by 20 January.

**SCHEDULE.** Read introductory material when it is present.

1/13. Introductory piffle
1/20. Brecht, Mother Courage and Her Children
1/27. Brecht, The Resistible Rise of Artureo Ui
2/3. Baraka, Dutchman; Wilson, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom
2/10. Wilson, Two Trains Running
2/17. Valdez, Actos, i.e., in the confusing table of contents for Early Works, all material through Soldado Razo (including “Notes on Chicano Theatre” and “The Actos”)
2/24. Valdez, Zoot Suit and I Don’t Have to Show You No Stinking Badges!
3/2. Churchill, Light Shining in Buckinghamshire; Churchill, Far Away
3/16. Spring break; classes do not meet.
3/23. Al-‘Ani, Where the Power Lies; Azzam, et al., Ansar; al-Hakim, War and Peace; Ismat, Was Dinner Good, Dear Sister? (all from Short Arabic Plays)
3/30. Wallace, In the Heart of America (from American Political Drama)
4/6. Moises Kaufman, et al., The Laramie Project
4/13. Parks, The American Play (from American Political Drama)
4/20. Parks, Topdog/Underdog
4/27. Pre-finals week. Class will not meet, but I will be in my office from 6:30-9:20 to discuss your final papers.
5/4. Final papers due at 6:30 via e-mail, as an attached file in Word or WordPerfect: alexp@unt.edu.