

Melodrama to Minstrelsy

The Popular Stage in 19th Century America

FSEM 1111-17

T/R 10:00 – 11:50 / JMAC 107

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Office hours: T/R; noon to 2:00 pm; by appt.



Seminar Description:

Americans love the "big show" – a phenomenon as true in the nineteenth century as it is today. Thus, this seminar explores the "blockbuster" of yesteryear, that is, the 1800's most popular stage entertainments (e.g., melodrama, extravaganza/burlesque, minstrelsy, operetta, circus, vaudeville, revue, and early musical theatre). In this survey of theatre forms (many of which are not rooted in the written word), as well as their surrounding racial, ethnic, social, cultural, and political milieus, you will be supplied with history, context, and theatre theory/criticism, while you are also encouraged to find contemporary relevance in such "pop culture" artifacts. Viewing videos of illustrative works, along with required readings, in-class presentations, a live performance attendance, and creative/performance projects, will provide a platform for studying the history, development, import, and contemporary manifestations of these historical forms of entertainment.

Through this seminar, you should learn to:

- *Critically identify, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate the dominant theatre forms of the popular stage in 19th century America, as well as their development, signature artifacts, and racial, ethnic, social, cultural, and political contexts*
- *Discover what it means to be an active member of an intellectual community by meeting rigorous academic expectations through critical reading, viewing, discussion, research, and writing*
- *Practice newly acquired skills and knowledge in an active learning environment where writing, performing, critical analyses, and other forms of experiential/creative activities will shape academic goals and experience*

Required Purchases, Theatre Attendance, and Resources:

Textbook Purchase: *American Melodrama*, ed. Daniel C. Gerould

Theatre Attendance: *The Three Musketeers* by the Denver Center Theatre Company at The Stage Theatre, running 9/21-10/21 (Tues-Sun, check show times) -- 303-893-4100 or 800-641-1222 or online (www.denvercenter.org) -- *there is a link on Blackboard*. Group attendance is scheduled and reserved for **Sunday matinee, 1:30 pm, October 14th**. If you cannot attend under the group reservation, you will need to arrange for your own ticket/attendance.

Video Resources: Core video viewings streamed through CourseMedia

Text Resources: E-reserves and Blackboard postings (Stiehl manuscript of *Backstage Pass* and *Course Reserves* links)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION / CITIZENRY

Attendance: Attendance will be taken every day and is 10% of your grade. An absence is an absence, whether excused or not, and no point will be given for a day that you are not in attendance. In addition, if a pattern of tardiness becomes apparent, I may dock your attendance grade accordingly, with one warning.

Participation / Citizenry: Participation in this seminar is crucial. Responsible participation and good citizenry includes attentive viewing of video/media material and active listening to the lecture and your classmates; while timeliness is a sign of respect and courtesy to the entire class. **Further, if you are asked questions about assigned readings and viewings and cannot respond, it will affect your participation grade.** Following is the 10-point grading rubric for participation/citizenry:

9-10	Actively participated, often contributed to discussions, on time, and courteous/attentive of others
8-9	Dutifully participated, semi-regularly contributed to discussions, on time, and courteous/attentive
7-8	Seldom participated, occasionally contributed to discussions, on time, and courteous/attentive
6-7	Participated and contributed only when absolutely required, on time, and courteous/attentive
0-6	Failed in regards to participation, contribution, promptness, and/or courtesy/attention

2. CREATE A MODERN MELODRAMA: This creative assignment will provide the opportunity for you to envision/create your own melodrama for a contemporary audience. The project will comprise three inventive stages:

- 1) You will invent a storyline for a modern-day melodrama and write a descriptive **plot synopsis (at least 3 pgs)**
 - 2) You will write a **2-page (minimum) climactic scene with dialogue** for your invented plot that can be performed
 - 3) You will participate in a fully staged **group performance of the climactic scene** (either yours or that of a classmate, depending on the scene chosen by the group). The group performance will be with costumes, props, blocking, and memorized.
- Each stage is worth 10 points / 30 points total. Grade is based on effort, original thought, and application of concepts.**

"Melodrama" Synopsis, Scene, and Performance Deadlines = 9/25, 9/27 and 10/4 respectively

3. MINSTRELSY REFLECTION: You are required to write a reflection essay on the phenomenon of minstrelsy and its significance in regards to contemporary popular culture. This is a "**personal voice**" observation (e.g., "I think," "I feel" and/or "I've observed"), looking for the impact of minstrelsy on today's entertainment and/or pop culture, citing examples, in your opinion, of current repercussions, vestiges and/or manifestations (concealed or overt) of the genre. The paper should be in formal essay form and **2-3 pages in length. (10-point grade scale)**

Reflection Deadline = 10/16

➡ See [General Writing Tips](#) on Blackboard for some general guidelines for writing formal essays in this class.

4. VAUDEVILLE EXERCISE: In groups, you will design and produce pseudo-vaudeville programs with your own creative attempts at a roster of idiosyncratic acts or "turns" (no act is too silly for vaudeville). The programs will be performed in class.

Vaudeville Performance = 10/23

5. LIVE PRODUCTION CRITIQUE / ESSAY: You are required to write one critical essay (**3-4 pages**) -- an analysis of the live performance of *The Three Musketeers* at the Denver Center that we will attend as a class on 10/14. Attendance at the group outing is mandatory; however, you are welcome to see an additional production, and you may write about it in place of the *Musketeers* if you prefer. **(10-point grade scale)**

Live Production Critique / Essay Deadline = 11/1

➡ See [Live Production Critique Prompt](#) and [General Writing Tips](#) on Blackboard for details regarding essay format/content.

6. ACTOR / PERFORMER PRESENTATIONS: You will be required, **with a teammate**, to present a profile of an assigned actor/performer who was a "star" of the nineteenth-century stage. The combined presentation should be **approximately 20 minutes in length**. It should include a visual and/or take-away component; and its purpose is to incite and foster a lively group discussion. Each presenter must prepare and turn in a **1-page typed "outline" which includes discussion questions (that is, you must each supply independent outline/questions for your contribution to the presentation)**. The presentation AND the written materials will be graded for overall comprehensiveness and effectiveness at bringing the star to life for the class. The purpose of the presentation is to introduce the class to the iconic actors/performers of the 1800s, chronicle their careers, define their particular talents, pinpoint their historical significance, and raise interest and/or question as to their places in the popular theatre of their time. **In short, why did these artists matter? (10-point grade scale)**

Actor/Performer Presentations Due = 11/6

7. INVENTED DIALOGUE: You must write an illustrative **2-page** conversation and/or argument between two of the real-life artists or fictional characters addressed in this seminar. Do not limit your imagination. Characters do not need to be contemporaries (more fun if they are not). You may use either or both of these levels of invention: 1) select and weave quotes from primary sources and/or 2) invent reasonable quotes that fit characters and context. If using primary-source quotes, you do not need to formally cite the sources. Grade is based on effort and attempt at creativity and dramatic effectiveness (i.e., the dialogue makes a point and reads as a "scene"). Please bring **two copies** to class; we will be sharing, critiquing, and performing them in our final exam period. **(10-point grade scale)**

Invented Dialogue Deadline = 11/5

Seminar Grading Breakdown:

<i>Attendance</i>	10%
<i>Participation (10-pt. grade scale)</i>	10%
<i>Create a Modern Melodrama (30 pts total / three parts)</i>	30%
<i>Minstrelsy Reflection (10-pt. grade scale)</i>	10%
<i>Actor/Performer Presentation (10-pt. grade scale)</i>	10%
<i>Vaudeville Exercise</i>	5%
<i>Live Production Critique / Essay (10-pt. grade scale)</i>	15%
<i>Invented Dialogue (10-pt. grade scale)</i>	10%

DU's WRITING AND RESEARCH CENTERS

I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing and Research Center's services, benefiting writers at all skill levels. Here, you can ask about everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. The Penrose Library Research Center answers research questions seven days a week by phone, email, in-person, and chat. One-on-one research consultations are also available on a drop-in basis or by appointment. Consultations can help you at any stage of the research process, from refining your topic, to finding books and articles, to creating a bibliography with RefWorks. To ask a question or make an appointment at the **Research Center**, call 303-871-2905 or go to research-help@du.edu. For information on the **Writing Program** or to make an appointment, call them at 303-871-7431 or visit www.du.edu/writing/wrc.htm.

ACCESSING "E-RESERVE" REQUIRED READINGS

You can access the Penrose e-reserve copies of excerpts, articles, and plays assigned for this course that are not in your textbook through Blackboard as follows:

- Go to <http://blackboard.du.edu/> (and bookmark it!)
- Log on using your DU ID# (username) and Password
- Click on this class under "My Courses" on the right
- Click on the "Course Reserves" link in the box on the upper left
- You may be asked to agree to a © agreement the first time you sign on
- Scroll down to the title of the material you want to view or print as a PDF.
- Click on it to open the file (the first page might be blank, continue to scroll down until you reach the text)

* Please note that some of your online required readings are not under "Course Reserves" but are under the Blackboard link "Backstage Pass" – these are specified on your class assignments/schedule.

ACCESSING "STREAMING VIDEOS"

You can access the video material assigned for and viewed in class through the following:

- You can either go to our Blackboard site and use its CourseMedia link or go directly to <https://coursemedia.du.edu/>
- Once at CourseMedia, log in using your DU ID# and passcode
- You may be asked to agree to a © agreement the first time you sign on
- Find the "First Year Seminar 1111 Autumn Quarter 2012" heading and click on gallery "FSEM Required Course Video"
- Click on the thumbnail of the image or video you wish to see (e.g. *Pirates of Penzance*)
- Note: To watch streaming videos, you will need an Ethernet or broadband connection.

ASSIGNMENTS / CLASS SCHEDULE

Remember to **check Blackboard** throughout the week for new and/or updated announcements and information. I will also be emailing you regularly with updates, reminders, and general information. Feel free to email me regularly as well with questions, concerns, or to simply touch base and/or further discuss a topic (or other first-year issues). I will always answer you within 24 hours.

Reading assignments are due by the start of class on the date by which they are listed.

I have a "NO LATE ASSIGNMENT" policy – no exceptions, do not ask . . . I also have a "NO MAKE UP" and "NO ADDITIONAL / EXCEPTIONAL ASSIGNMENTS" policy. The syllabus, required assignments, and grading scale/s are set in stone. The grade you earned is the grade you will receive. After-the-fact requests for extra credit, alternate/additional assignments or grading reconsiderations will not receive a response from me, as you have been duly forewarned that your grade is solely determined by the assignments and criteria set forth in this syllabus.

Discoveries Week: Sept 4 – Sept 6

- Complete email assignment (last page of this syllabus)

Tues 9/11	Course Orientation / Review Background: American Theatre Beginnings and Early Conventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read "Theatres in America and the Hallam Family" (Course Reserves / <i>Living Theatre</i> pp 296-297)
Thurs 9/13	Intro to Melodrama, Boucicault <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read "Melodrama" (Blackboard <i>Backstage Pass</i> / Antecedents pp 6-7) ▪ Have read <i>The Poor of New York</i> with intro (<i>American Melodrama</i> pp 10-14, 31-74)
Tues 9/18	Melodrama cont., Daly, Performance and Acting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read: <i>Under the Gaslight</i> with intro (<i>American Melodrama</i> pp 18-22, 135-181) ▪ In-class work on modern synopsis
Thurs 9/20	Melodrama cont., the "Tom Shows" Research Center session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read: <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> with intro (<i>American Melodrama</i> pp 14-18, 75-133)
Tues 9/25	DUE – "Create a Modern Melodrama" Plot Synopsis Melodrama / <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> cont. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Roundtable sharing of plot synopses
Thurs 9/27	DUE – "Modern Melodrama" Climactic Scene Script <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-class workshop/rehearsal of scenes
Tues 10/2	*** NO CLASS due to Presidential Debates (use this time to meet and polish scenes) ***
Thurs 10/4	DUE -- "Modern Melodrama" Performances and Feedback The Minstrel Show <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read "Minstrelsy" ((Blackboard <i>Backstage Pass</i> / Antecedents, pp 7-9) ▪ Have read <i>Oh, Hush! or, The Virginny Cupids</i> and <i>Othello</i> (Course Reserves / <i>Grotesque Essence</i>, pp 1-12, 68-77)
Tues 10/9	<i>Bamboozled</i> video (in-class viewing to be finished independently through CourseMedia)
Thurs 10/11	Extravaganza, Burlesque, and the Leg Show <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read "The Black Crook" (Course Reserves / <i>Showtime</i>, Stempel pp 42-51) Vaudeville <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have read "Vaudeville" (Blackboard <i>Backstage Pass</i> / Antecedents, pp 10-12)
Sun 10/14	*** The Three Musketeers group attendance (The Stage Theatre); curtain at 1:30 ***

- Tues 10/16 **DUE – Minstrelsy Reflection Essay**
Circus, other variety entertainments, and the Revue
- Have read "Florenz Ziegfeld" (Blackboard *Backstage Pass* / Cohan-Ziegfeld-Williams, pp 13-17)
 - Have viewed *P. T. Barnum* (A&E biography on CourseMedia)
 - In-class work on vaudeville exercise
- Thurs 10/18 *Showboat* video (in-class viewing to be finished independently through CourseMedia)
- Tues 10/23 **DUE – Vaudeville Exercise Performances**
Harrigan and Hart; Williams and Walker
- Have read "Harrigan & Hart" (Blackboard *Backstage Pass* / Antecedents, pp 12-14)
 - Have read "Bert Williams" (Blackboard *Backstage Pass* / Cohan-Ziegfeld-Williams, pp 21-23)
- Thurs 10/25 Operetta; Gilbert and Sullivan
- Have read: "Gilbert and Sullivan" (*Backstage* / Antecedents, p 5)
 - In-class workshop/peer review for "Live Production Critique" essay
- Tues 10/30 *Pirates of Penzance* video (in-class viewing to be finished independently through CourseMedia)
- Thurs 11/1 **DUE – Live Production Critique / Essay**
- Roundtable discussion of *Three Musketeers* and essays
 - Career Center presentation
- Tues 11/6 **DUE – Actor/Performer Presentations**
- Thurs 11/8 **DUE – Actor/Performer Presentations (cont.)**
American Operetta – Victor Herbert
- Have read "American Operetta and Victor Herbert" (*Backstage* / Antecedents, pp 14-17)
- Tues 11/13 George M. Cohan and the American Musical Comedy
- Have read: "George M. Cohan" (*Backstage* / Cohan-Ziegfeld-Williams, pp 5-9)
- Thurs 11/15 **DUE -- "Invented Dialogue"**
- Seminar review and summary
 - In-class work and rehearsal of "Dialogue" scenes

11/20 FINAL 10:00-11:50 am: Perform "Invented Dialogues," Discuss, and Reflect

OTHER CRITICAL COURSE POLICIES

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Any student who feels (s)he may need an accommodation (e.g., a note-taker) based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the **Disability Services Program (DSP)** located on the 4th floor of Ruffatto Hall (1999 E. Evans Ave.) to coordinate reasonable accommodations for documented disabilities / medical issues. For more information, you can visit www.du.edu/disability/dsp or you can call the DSP at 303-871-2278 /2372 /7432.

LECTURE GADGET “BAN”: Thanks to some of the less well-behaved cohorts in other classes, I’m afraid I’ve instated a “ban” on laptop computer use during lectures (because checking Facebook, surfing gossip sites, etc., is NOT acceptable class behavior at any time). It is crucial to the success of the course that you stay engaged during class, not clicking on a keyboard or buried in a laptop. Please check with me if you feel you need an exception to this rule. Rest assured, **my PowerPoint slides are posted on Blackboard and can be used as study/reference guides**. Further, you may use your laptops for in-class assignments or project work. On a similar note, it goes without saying that cell-phone use, texting, etc., is also taboo, and that I reserve the right to confiscate your technology for the duration of class if you use it.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: As you know, plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses—and ones that I will prosecute pursuant to all University of Denver sanctions. ANY time you use another person’s *words or ideas*, you MUST give them full credit, citing them accordingly. I am also aware of the numerous websites offering downloadable papers or encyclopedic entries on theatrical styles/eras/artists, as well as all reviews written by local critics regarding professional Denver area productions. Save yourself the trouble: the written work in this course is tailored so that a general-purpose essay just won’t do, and I can spot a “fake” or cut-and-paste job all too well (and use Google to track it down). Using your classmates’ work (with or without their permission) is, of course, also taboo, as is asking for a former student’s work to copy *en toto* or borrow any part thereof. Do your own work, and I’ll be happy to help out in any way that I can. Please do NOT join the sadly growing ranks of students who have been suspended/expelled for plagiarism or trying to cheat. If you are unsure as to what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask me and I will get you up to speed.

CIVILITY AND TOLERANCE: If not already familiar with DU’s Code of Student Conduct, please review it at (<http://www.du.edu/ccs/code.html>). All codes of conduct are to be upheld in this class. **In addition, side-talking, sleeping, and other basic displays of rudeness in class will be noted in your “Participation” grade.**

Course Grade Scale :

A	94-100	superior/excellent	4.0
A-	90-93		3.7
B+	87-89		3.3
B	83-86	good/better than average	3.0
B-	80-82		2.7
C+	77-79		2.3
C	73-76	competent/average	2.0
C-	70-72		1.7
D+	67-69		1.3
D	63-66		1.0
D-	60-62	minimum passing	0.7
F	0-59	failing	0.0

A failing grade results

- when a student drops a course without permission and/or official notice
- when a student’s academic work is judged failing
- as a result of a finding of academic dishonesty
- when a student registers for but never attends a class

EMAIL ASSIGNMENT

YOUR REPLY IS EXPECTED BY FRIDAY 9/14, LATEST. FAILURE TO COMPLY WILL BE NOTED.

EMAIL QUESTIONS:

- 1) WHY ARE YOU TAKING THIS CLASS?
- 2) TELL ME OF A PAST THEATRE EXPERIENCE.
- 3) WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOU TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR DESIRED GOALS IN THIS CLASS?
- 4) HAVE YOU READ THE SYLLABUS AND REFERENCED MATERIALS ON BLACKBOARD ("Live Production Critique Prompt" and "General Writing Tips")? DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE CONTENTS, AND ACCEPT ALL AS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS DESCRIBING BOTH OF OUR OBLIGATIONS IN THIS COURSE (WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT I MAY MAKE ADJUSTMENTS/ ALTERATIONS IF NECESSARY)?