

Course description

Descriptif du cours

Department : Department of English

Instructor (s): Dorra Touzri / Ines Gharbi

Academic year: 2020-21

Level: 3rd Year

Course title: Post-World War II American Drama: Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (Semester 1)

Course outline: This course aims at initiating 3rd year students to Post-World War II American drama through the study of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, an autobiographical play described by Williams himself as a "memory" play. A clear account of the historical, philosophical, and cultural context in which the drama thrived will guide students to a richer understanding and appreciation of the text. First performed in 1944, the play is deeply anchored in the harsh reality of the Great Depression which shaped Williams' dramatic vision of failure, entrapment and disillusionment affecting all the characters of his play, himself included. It's the blindness of the American middle classes who "were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy" that is the main cause of the breakdown of the individual under social and psychological stress.

Extracts are chosen on the basis of their dramatic importance and relevance to the spirit of the period. The close reading of the selected passages should help students assimilate the dramatic genre and its purposes, and especially feel the passion and sensitivity of a playwright who, together with Arthur Miller dominated the Post-World War II American theatre until the 1960s.

Course Outline

Weeks 1&2

Introduction : Biographical, historical and literary contexts

Weeks 3&4

Extract one : Opening scene, pp.233-5.

Experimental techniques/ « emotional truth vs. « Realistic rendering »

Week 5

Extract Two : Scene Three, pp.249-252

Alienation/ estrangement and failure of communication

Week 6

Extract Three, Scene Three, pp.252-253.

Laura's glass menagerie and the significance of Tom's smashing some of the transparent glass collection.

Week 7 :

Extract Four, Scene four,pp.258-260.

Memory and the past

Week 8 :

Extract five : Scene Four, pp.254-255.

Dream/ reality/ Escapism

Failure / Loss of the self/ fragmentation

Weeks 9&10

Extract six : Scene Seven, pp.306-310.

Abandonment and the shattering of dreams

Week 11

Extract seven : Scene seven, pp.312-3

Modern tragic temperament : the Theater of despair

Week 12

Evaluation

Weeks 13&14

Correction and round up session

Course objectives: The course's main objective is to familiarize students the expressionistic techniques that Williams used in the Glass Menagerie and his experimental use of a symbolic setting, of music, lighting, and a screen device. Students should be able to demonstrate how Williams' exploration of time and non-linear structure marked a revolutionary turning point in American drama which up until then had been very naturalistic in its presentation. Through his sculptural drama and his "stage poetry", his play became one of the seminal works of American literature in the twentieth century.

Method of evaluation: Presentations / Term papers / Final exams

References:

King, Thomas. L. « Irony and Distance in *The Glass Menagerie*. » *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol.25, No.2 (May, 1973), pp.207-215.

Man, Glen. « Memory as Technique and Theme in *The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman*. » *Notre Dame English Journal*, Vol.5, No.2 (Spring, 1970), pp.23-30.

Vowels, Richard B. « Tennessee Williams : A World of his Imagery. » *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol.3, No.2 (1958), pp.51-56.

Durham, Frank. « Tennessee Williams : Theater Poet in Prose. » *South Atlantic Bulletin*, Vol.36, No.2 (1971), pp.3-16.

Gassner, John. « Tennessee Williams : Dramatist of Frustration. » *College English*, Vol.10. No.1 (1948), pp.1-7.

Cluck, Anne Nancy. « Showing or Telling : Narrators in the Drama of Tennessee Williams. » *American Literature*, Vol.51, No.1 (1979), pp.84-93.

Simon, John. « O'Neill and Williams : Brothers under the Skin. » *The Hudson Review*, Vol.39, No.4 (1987), pp.553-565.

Ganzr, Arthur. « The Desperate Morality of the Plays of Tennessee Williams. » *The American Scholar*, Vol.31, No.2 (1962), pp.278-94.