The Family Drama: Dysfunctional Families and First-Year Seminar: One Credit

ARTSCI 1138.xx

Day TBA

Time and Place TBA

Professor Hannibal Hamlin

Department of English

Office Hours tba

501 Denney Hall

**Course Description**: It is no accident that Freud drew his theories of the Oedipus and Electra

complexes from his reading of tragic drama. He also has interesting comments to make about

some of Shakespeare’s plays (*Hamlet* especially). In fact, the title of this course, though it seems straightforward enough, is actually the name Freud gave to the complex psychological interrelationships among the members of a family: fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters (you can work out the rest). We will read a representative sampling of the history of drama focusing on the dysfunctional family as a dramatic subject. Many of the great plays in Western literature center on family crises, and one of the questions we will ask ourselves over the next weeks is why this should be so. What is it about the family that provides so much material for the playwright? Is the family inherently dramatic? Are family relations inherently tragic? Why are so many great plays about family breakdowns? Leo Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* opens with one famous explanation: “All happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.” Is Tolstoy right that unhappiness is simply more diverse and interesting as a literary subject? Why do we enjoy watching other people’s families implode? Is this part of what tragedy is all about? We will attempt to answer these and other questions over the next fifteen weeks as we read about, discuss, and write about many of these unhappy families. In so doing we will learn about the history of drama, the nature of tragedy, and many other important aspects of literature, as well as perhaps something about families. Above all, we will read some great plays.

**Course requirements**:

Class Participation: Full attendance is required, but you must also keep up with assigned readings and participate in class discussions. Not everyone is an extrovert, but be bold and pitch in. Don’t be afraid to ask questions or even disagree with something.

Weekly Journals: each week you will write a critical and thoughtful response (approx. 250 words) to the play you have read. The topic is up to you, though it should vary over the course, including detailed close readings, reflections on plot and character, and broader reflections on themes and ideas.

Oral Presentation: After the first few sessions, for each class, one student will be responsible for a brief presentation (10 minutes) introducing the play and proposing some initial questions for discussion. A second student will be responsible for being the chief respondent, reading the play especially carefully, and taking a lead role in discussion. (The grade for being respondent will be included in the participation grade.)

**Grading**: Satisfactory/ Unsatisfactory

Class participation: 30%

Oral presentation: 20%

Critical Journals: 50%

**Course Objectives**:

• To get a better understanding of the history of drama and of the tragic genre more specifically, as well as of the history of representation of family dysfunction.

• To develop techniques of literary analysis and interpretation.

• To enhance critical skills in discussion, oral presentation, and writing.

**Academic Misconduct** It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

**Students with Disabilities** Students with disabilities (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions) that have been certified by the Office of Student Life Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue; telephone 614- 292- 3307, [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); [slds.osu.edu](file:///C:\Users\hanlin.3\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\9SG2R9C9\slds.osu.edu).

**Biographical Statement** I have been a professor in the Department of English at Ohio State for about 20 years. I teach Shakespeare’s plays, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and other English Renaissance literature as well as courses on the Bible as literature and the Bible’s literary influence. I have also taught film and literature, love in the Renaissance, meals in ancient and Renaissance literature, and several study abroad courses in London. I have published books on the Psalms and English Renaissance Literature, Shakespeare’s allusions to the Bible, and the history and influence of the King James Bible in the U.K., the United States, and around the world.

Weekly Readings:

1. Introduction

2. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* (5th c. BCE)

3. Aeschylus, *Oresteia: Agamemnon* (5th c. BCE)

4. Aeschylus, *Oresteia: Libation Bearers, Eumenides*

5. William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (1605)

6. Shakespeare, *King Lear* (cont.)

7. Jean Racine, *Phèdre* (1667)

8. Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts* (1881)

9. Clifford Odets, *Awake and Sing!* (1935)

10. Arthur Miller, *All My Sons* (1947)

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

12. August Wilson, *Fences* (1985)

13. Tracey Letts, *August Osage County* (2007)

14. Conclusions and Further Questions