

English 437A: Modern Drama to WW2

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Course description:

Explore the motivation of a notorious murderer; witness the results of falling class and gender barriers; speculate about the power of education to transform a life, or a society; diagnose the lies on which happy families are built. These are some of the roles offered to audiences by the playwrights studied in this course. From the end of the Victorian era to the brink of the Second World War, theatre was a place to

experiment with art and ideas. Emerging media like photography and cinema inspired a new approach to realism. The rising authority of science encouraged playwrights to investigate psychology, sexuality, and the basis of social structures. This period of revolution and war spurred one dramatist to critique nationalism (even as he opposed colonization of his nation) and another to praise Mussolini yet advocate socialism. Together we will explore theatre's initial response to our modern world.



(Fiona Shaw in *Machinal* - Photo: Tristram Kenton, *The Guardian*)

Proposed assignments:

Scene analysis (20%); essay (30%); performance review (20%); exam (30%)

Proposed readings:

Playwrights studied will include Henrik Ibsen, Sophie Treadwell, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, Tennessee Williams.