

JMU THEATRE READING LIST

The Theatre and Musical Theatre faculty invite you to enrich your knowledge of a primary element of our art, the plays upon which most productions are built. The following list offers many of the works that working professionals are often expected to know. The works, periods, and styles they represent are frequently referenced, directly and indirectly, by professionals in their process discussions and work. We challenge you to make them part of your professional arsenal, a step toward becoming a stronger collaborator with a solid stylistic, historical, and dramatic foundation.

One-third to half of the plays below are included in the curriculum, and instructors make an effort to incorporate them. They may also be referenced in production work.

We recommend you know these plays by the time you graduate. To achieve that, we advise making a plan and pacing yourself. Summer and winter breaks can be key times for play reading. Faculty will attempt to offer occasional online summer play reading groups, about which we will alert you.

Although many of the plays prior to the 20th century are in the public domain and may be available on the Internet, bear in mind that the introductory and footnoted information in a book may provide invaluable insight into the play and its significance.

Ancient to Renaissance

Greek:

Aeschylus THE ORESTEIA

The Oresteia is the only extant trilogy of ancient Greek drama and a foundational text not only of Western theatre but Western culture, as it traces the shift from a system of blood lust and revenge to the rule of law.

Sophocles OEDIPUS THE KING

Oedipus the King is the most noted of ancient Greek tragedies, the one used by Aristotle in *The Poetics* as the model of the perfect tragedy from which he deduces the nature and form of tragedy. It epitomizes Sophocles elegant, economical style and insight into human nature.

ANTIGONE

Although not a formal trilogy, *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* form a triad of related plays referred to as the Theban Plays. *Antigone* tells the story of Oedipus's daughter and her fight with her uncle Creon, ruler of Thebes, to determine which is more important, the law of the gods or the law of man. It has been used as a play of civic protest to unjust rule in the 20th century.

Euripides THE BACCHAE

The Bacchae is significant for showing the god Dionysus (god of wine, fertility, and theatre) as a character and for revealing some of the beliefs and practices centered on his worship.

MEDEA

Euripides' best known and most performed tragedy, *Medea* reveals Euripides' fascination with atypical personalities, realistic strokes in characterization, and movement toward melodrama and away from the strict tragedy of Sophocles and Aeschylus. *Medea* is thought of as one of the best and most challenging roles for women.

Aristophanes LYSISTRATA

Aristophanes' most popular, though not most representative, play, *Lysistrata* reveals the bawdiness that the writer of the only extant ancient Greek comedies was capable of. Its comedy has made it a favorite of 20th-century audiences as has its critique of war (many of Aristophanes' plays critiqued Athens' involvement in the Peloponnesian War with Sparta) and images of empowered women.

Roman:

Plautus THE MENAECHMI

Plautus is most responsible for introducing and popularizing many of the elements of dramatic comedy that would be used in Commedia dell'Arte, by Shakespeare, and up to the present day. This tale of confusion when twins are separated at birth but end up by coincidence in the same city as adults was Shakespeare's basis for *The Comedy of Errors*.

Medieval:

Wakefield Master THE SECOND SHEPHERD'S PLAY

Although the French and Germans wrote a number of medieval farces, *The Second Shepherd's Play* is one of the few surviving from England. This short play is still often performed at Christmastime, but was originally part of the Corpus Christi cycle plays dramatizing existence from creation to doomsday and is one of the finest examples of vernacular religious drama.

Anonymous EVERYMAN

Everyman is the most performed of Medieval morality plays, and embodies that form's portrayal of human characters and the use of allegory to show the consequences of moral choices that individuals make. This form is utilized in many modern plays, such as David Mamet's *Edmond*.

English:

Jonson VOLPONE

This dark comedy from 1605 shows Jonson's cynical view of human beings who bring on their own bad ends through their lust, greed, and deceit.

Marlowe DR FAUSTUS

The tragedy displays a fascinating combination of medieval dramatic elements with emerging Renaissance humanistic concerns, all underscored with some of Marlowe's most beautiful and powerful poetic verse.

Shakespeare HAMLET

Everything about the play is “classic,” from its memorable poetic lines (“To be or not to be. . .”) to its basic “revenge tragedy” action of Hamlet attempting to gain revenge on his father’s murderer. The revenge tragedy, inspired by Elizabethans' study of Seneca's works and having common characteristics like multiple deaths, supernatural elements, and soul-searching soliloquies, became a popular sub-genre of the time, the most famous example of which is Shakespeare's work.

KING LEAR

One of the most monumental tragedies in the English language, it weaves together two terrible stories of fathers who fail to see the truth in their children until it's too late. Blindness and madness are recurring themes.

HENRY IV, pt. 1

As with the Biblical story of the prodigal son, Prince Hal leads a dissolute life and seems unfit to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious father until the King dies and Hal must prove his worth through courageous action and by dismissing his profligate friends, who include the memorable John Falstaff.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Shakespeare creates four separate worlds (fairies, the court, a band of common laborers, and two pairs of lovers in the woods) and then manages to bring them all into comic collision and achieve a climax that mocks the very theatre he practices.

MACBETH

A tale of passionate love and overreaching ambition with a backdrop of eerie witches. Some critics consider it Shakespeare's darkest play. It is certainly one of his shortest. Opinion divides over whether Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, who eggs him on, is most evil. Or are they evil. Are they victims of predestination?

TEMPEST

In the last play he wrote alone, Shakespeare uses magical powers and mystical creatures who can fly or live underground to explore the love, beauty, and forgiveness of human beings. Written while exploration of the Americas was at a fever pitch, the play reflects the mysteries of the new world and has often been considered a reflection on/of colonialism.

OTHELLO

A dastardly character brings about the fall of a great black hero by fueling his jealousy and suspicions regarding his beautiful white wife. It constitutes the last of what are commonly thought of as Shakespeare's four major tragedies, which also include HAMLET, KING LEAR, and MACBETH.

Webster THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

In one of his two tragedies with a powerful female protagonist (THE WHITE DEVIL is the other), Webster elevates a story of bloodthirsty family revenge into something almost lyrical and compassionate (c. 1613). Webster is now commonly considered second only to Shakespeare as a renaissance writer of tragedies.

Indian:

Kalidasa SAKUNTALA & THE RING OF RECOLLECTION

The prime example of ancient Indian Sanskrit drama, *Sakuntala* tells a fascinating story of a king who falls in love with a celestial nymph but suffers a curse that erases her from his memory. The play exhibits all the qualities of this most flexible of dramatic forms.

Japanese:

Kan'ami MATSUKAZE

Reflective of the Noh theatre form of which it is a part, this short play features spirits who cannot leave the world because they have become too attached to some part of it. Part ghost story, part Buddhist philosophy, and part dance this play reveals the sparseness of the Noh form.

Chikamatsu THE LOVE SUICIDES AT SONEZAKI

Originally written as Bunraku (puppet) play, *Love Suicides* was soon adapted to the Kabuki form. Like a feudal Japanese *Romeo and Juliet*, it tells a story of love and honor that ends tragically. It and similar plays became so popular that a rash of copycat double suicides forced the Japanese authorities to ban such works.

Spanish:

Calderon LIFE IS A DREAM

A prediction that his son will rule violently and tyrannically leads a king to lock his young son in a wilderness fortress. When his has grown, the king decides he should be drugged and brought to court to see how he behaves. If poorly, then he will be drugged again, returned to the wilderness and told it as all a dream. Such is the premise of one of the most profound dramas on identity and free will.

Lope de Vega THE SHEEPWELL (FUENTE OVEJUNA)

When Commander of the town of Fuente Ovejuna terrorizes its women, the women take matters into their own hands by shaming the village's men to mete out the justice that they know the higher authorities would avoid. One of the first plays with a group protagonist, this play has similarities to *Lysistrata*.

French:

Molière TARTUFFE

Written by the playwright whom many revere as the greatest dramatic comedy writer of all time, this play explores what happens when the head of a house believes in the lies of a charlatan religious man and how his family fights for control over their lives, property, and future. It was banned for years due to the power of outraged religious authorities before King Louis XIV was able to (somewhat) safely allow its production.

THE MISANTHROPE

The absolutist Alceste learns what social havoc he may cause and how his own life may be ruined when he holds to his philosophy that people should be absolutely honest with each other, no matter the consequences, forgoing the "hypocritical" social lubricant of good manners, gossip, and a bit of flattery.

Racine PHEGRE

With a position in the French canon like that of *Hamlet* in the English, this primary example of neoclassical tragedy explores the consequences of illicit love (of Phedre's stepson) and jealousy. Although based on Euripides' *Hippolytus*, it differs from the original. Phedre is thought of as one of the most prized and challenging roles for an actress by the French.

Restoration and 18th Century:

Behn THE ROVER

This Restoration comedy by Aphra Behn, England's first known professional female playwright, follows the exploits of a group of "Banish'd Cavaliers" who, ousted from their home in Cromwell-controlled England, seek romance and intrigue in Naples. The play's Carnival setting enables sisters Florinda and Hellena to don disguises and pursue the Englishmen—love interests of their own choosing—rebellious against patriarchal norms of the time and the will of their controlling brother, Pedro. Though the play ends happily with Florinda married to Belville and Hellena engaged to Willmore (the titular "rover"), this bawdy comedy offers a serious critique of socio-economic relationships between men and women during England's Restoration period.

Gay THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

Gay created a new form, ballad-opera, by using contemporary ballads as the basis for the music of the play and by setting his love story in a criminal world through which he could satirize contemporary politics and overly sentimental drama. Bertolt Brecht later adapted this play as THE THREEPENNY OPERA.

Lillo THE LONDON MERCHANT

The play is subtitled THE HISTORY OF GEORGE BARNWELL, and that title signifies the huge step that Lillo's play represents in 1731 because the tragic hero is a common man, an apprentice who steals from his employer. This domestic tragedy proved extremely influential, especially to European writers of 'bourgeois' drama—plays about the common man. As a warning and lesson, it was performed annually at holiday time for all of London's apprentices until the 19th century.

Sheridan THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL

Sheridan attacks scandal-mongers through a tightly constructed comic plot in which Lady Teazle almost commits adultery before reconciling with her husband. With distinctive characters and clever scenes (such as the "screen scene" where hidden characters overhear a torrid affair), the 1777 play became a model for comic drama, including early American plays such as FASHION and THE CONTRAST.

Goldoni THE SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS

Servant was Goldoni's most noted attempt to transfer the spirit and form of Commedia dell'Arte into a fully written script. Often performed today, this comedy of love and mistaken identity has at its heart a servant who outwits his masters.

Beaumarchais THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Beaumarchais's second play featuring the clever barber/servant character of Figaro, who manages to keep his beautiful young lover safe from the clutches of two wealthy, conniving, and lecherous old men. At its time (1784), the play was censored because it seemed too critical of aristocratic indulgence. Its ultimate production seemed a warning shot of the 1789 revolution.

Wycherley THE COUNTRY WIFE

In a Restoration world that seemed only interested in sex and other pleasures, Horner, the hero of this 1675 comedy, pretends impotence as a cover for his affairs and his courtship of Margery Pinchwife, the beautiful, naïve, and eager wife of the jealous Mr. Pinchwife. In this world, it is not libertine behavior that is wrong, but only hypocrisy and rural naiveté.

19th Century

Stowe/Aiken UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, this is the most widely produced drama in American theatre history. It influenced American culture for 100 years (e.g., "Uncle Tom," "grow like Topsy," and the Uncle Tom sequence in *The King and I*) and is still intriguing for its melodrama, its rich variety of characters, and the ways in which it confronts racial issues. George Aiken's dramatization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel was the most widely produced and was thought most effective.

Büchner WOYZECK

Revolutionary in his short life (he died at only 23) and in his three plays, Buchner expressed sympathy for the socially downtrodden but also disillusionment with all segments of humanity. Woyzeck is a soldier, but also the subject of a doctor's crude experiments. Although written in 1837, the play was not produced until 1913 because of its incomplete, disjointed construction.

Hauptmann THE WEAVERS

Although he wrote in some other styles, Nobel-prize-winner Gerhart Hauptmann is best known for his naturalism, which was influenced by the theories of Emile Zola and the drama of Henrik Ibsen. Hauptmann tends to emphasize characters over plot, as in this 1892 play, which features a rare group protagonist and examines the plight of common workers.

Ibsen A DOLL'S HOUSE

This play, in which a young wife comes to realize the constrictions put on her social and personal awareness and possibilities by society's and her husband's narrow conception of marriage and the roles of women not only demonstrated for the world how a detailed psychological conception of character could be incorporated in a realistic environment (the final step in creating realism), but became an icon and weapon in the women's rights movement.

Strindberg MISS JULIE

Strindberg claimed to be following the naturalism of Emile Zola, but his emphasis on the psychology of his characters and on their heredity and environment—very apparent in this short 1888 drama--achieved a symbolic

level. The "Preface" to the play is also worth reading and is considered a blueprint for creating a naturalist production.

Wilde THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Wilde and his brilliantly drawn upper class characters turn normal values upside down in this comic masterpiece from 1895. The dialogue is so clever it may have you laughing out loud as you read it.

1900-1950

Feydeau A FLEA IN HER EAR

This play epitomizes "French farce." A variety of characters, most of whom possess some identifying idiosyncratic feature, seek sexual couplings for a variety of reasons, and they all come together in a disreputable hotel with surprises behind all the numerous doors on the set. In addition to tight construction, the 1907 play features a revolving bed and one actor playing two lead roles.

Artaud SPURT OF BLOOD

This play of a few pages by the theorizer of Theatre of Cruelty, whose ideas influenced post-WWII theatre deeply, reveals its surrealistic roots in a nightmarish vision of little dialogue and rich images that includes, among others, a spurt of God's blood.

Beckett WAITING FOR GODOT

The masterpiece by the most influential of "absurdist" playwrights, *Waiting for Godot* has been called the most important play of the twentieth century. Its dramatic form and action, in which "nothing" happens, involving two tramps waiting for someone who may never arrive, challenged and revolutionized the way plays were written.

ENDGAME

In a single, seemingly inescapable environment, a blind character who cannot walk gives orders to a seeing man who moves with difficulty as they seek to understand their environment and situation, often by insulting the blind man's elderly parents, who each live in a trash can.

Brecht MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

This now classic piece of epic theatre by the major playwright and theorist of the form traces the actions of a woman and the cart from which she sells her wares to soldiers during the Thirty-Years War (1618-1648). The loss of each of her three children to the war raises questions of her responsibility for their deaths, the humanity of capitalistic systems, the value of family, and the justice of war.

Chekhov THE CHERRY ORCHARD

One of the four full-length plays by the playwright whose works in part inspired Stanislavsky's theories to address their character complexities, *The Cherry Orchard* reveals the resistance of Russia's landed gentry to adapt to the social and economic changes that threaten to claim their beloved orchard and home. In the meantime, it raises questions about how alone we are in the universe, what the past means to the present, and what is possible in relationships.

Genet THE MAIDS

Based in a true story, Genet's play portrays the ritualistic act of two maids who take turns acting as "Madame," abusing each other as either servant or employer. The ceremony reveals not only the maids' hatred of the Madame's authority, but also their hatred of themselves for participating in the hierarchy that oppresses them.

Ionesco THE BALD SOPRANO

Fascinated with the banalities in a text Ionesco was using to learn English, he transcribed their superficialities and odd truths into this classic absurdist play, which rejects traditional forms of narrative, plot, and structure and explores the modern human experience through the fragmentation of language.

Kaiser FROM MORN TO MIDNIGHT

This play, which some call the greatest of expressionistic dramas, follows the experiences of a bank clerk who embezzles money from his bank, rejects his family, and attempts to find true experience, unalloyed by social norms, as well as a kind of salvation in a series of experiences that reveal and portray the distortion of human nature and perception that modern civilization has caused.

Lorca BLOOD WEDDING

When a new bride runs away with another man after her wedding, her husband finds the couple, the two men kill each other, and all are left to mourn. Through song, chant, poetry, music, rhythm and nonrealistic techniques, Lorca creates a highly symbolic and stylized action that at once critiques parts of Spanish society and also reveals the conflict between individual wishes and societal decrees.

Miller DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Perhaps the best-known American play of the twentieth century, by the playwright often referred to as America's social conscience, *Death of a Salesman* portrays the illusions and memories of a salesman one evening when he returns from a failed sales trip. Showing the influence of expressionism and using a flashback technique, the play reveals how Willie Loman's wholesale acceptance of ideals related to the American Dream lead to his interpersonal, social, and economic failure.

O'Neill A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Written in about 1940 but not staged until 1956, the play displays the typical emotional power of O'Neill's characters within a realistic world. Since it is highly autobiographical, the play is also significant as a look into O'Neill's troubled personal life, and a wonderful portrait of his father, a famous star of the nineteenth-century stage.

THE EMPEROR JONES

In addition to realism, O'Neill experimented with a variety of other styles. In this 1920 one-act tragedy he dramatizes the "expressionistic" decline of a mercenary West Indies dictator. Besides the unique style, the play is significant for focusing on an African-American as protagonist (an effort that has seen wide swings in critical response), for the actors who first played that lead role, Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson, and for the startling designs of Cleon Throckmorton.

Pirandello SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

Pirandello challenged traditional theatrical, social, and cultural values and forms. In this 1921 play he uses a play-within-a-play format to explore relationships between appearance and reality, life and the theatre, and private identity and social role-playing.

Rodgers/Hammerstein II OKLAHOMA!

Set in the early twentieth century when Oklahoma was Indian Territory, the musical *Oklahoma!* centers around a love story between a farm girl, Laurey, and a handsome cowboy, Curly. The dramatic conflict arises when Laurey has to choose between taking Curly, a man she secretly loves, or Jud, the fearsome farmhand, to the local farm dance. The musical includes a subsidiary plot between Ado Annie, Will Parker, and Ali Hakim and highlights the ensemble in the dream ballet and multiple numbers in the score. The game changing musical *Oklahoma!* was Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II first collaboration. *Oklahoma!* examines the themes of racial and cultural prejudice and promoting tolerance and acceptance, both themes which appear in nearly every subsequent musical Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote. In addition, *Oklahoma!* shaped artistic norms of the art form still adhered to in the twenty-first century. The understanding of a musical as dramatic form, with equal parts given to the story as told through scenes, song, and dance, laid the template for other shows' creation and critique. *Oklahoma!* was also the first musical to have an original cast recording produced in its entirety with the original Broadway performers and orchestra.

Sartre NO EXIT

A French philosopher, novelist, and playwright, Sartre espoused his "existentialism" through his plays, in which characters are defined not by their psychological states, but by their choices and their actions. Like many European works written just after World War II, *No Exit* (1944) implicitly explores what individuals did or didn't do during the war years.

Shaw MAJOR BARBARA

Shaw's ability to dramatize debate on social and political issues is illustrated in this 1905 play in which an arms dealer takes on a social reformer. Shaw's irreverent and incisive humor allowed him to take generally accepted ideas and turn them on their head.

Treadwell MACHINAL

Loosely based on an actual murder case, Sophie Treadwell's 1927 expressionist drama traces the life of a "Young Woman" through a series of "episodes" that depict her as an unwilling participant in the rote routines of a woman's daily life. The Young Woman eventually breaks out of the confines of her prescribed roles as wife and mother, only to face another "machine": the legal system that finds her guilty of murder and sentences her to death. Treadwell employs many expressionist techniques in her play: telegraphic speech, episodic structure, unnamed typical characters, distorted sounds, and harsh lighting effects. Like other expressionist plays of the period, *Machinal* critiques the rigidity of a mechanized society that oppresses the human spirit, but by replacing the "everyman" that is most often the subject of these plays with an "every woman" character, Treadwell exposes the specifically gendered nature of many of these oppressions.

Wilder OUR TOWN

This 1938 classic celebrates the joys of everyday life in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, on a day in 1901. In it, as in all his plays, Wilder deviates remarkably from the realistic stage conventions of his day by using minimal scenery, direct address to the audience, and other non-realistic devices.

Williams A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

The battle between Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois in this 1947 play set in New Orleans is one that resonates through most of Williams's work: the lady of illusion and refinement versus the man of strength and candor. Or, repression versus release, the puritan versus the sensualist.

Post-1950

Akhtar DISGRACED:

The Pulitzer Prize-winner for Drama in 2013, *Disgraced* questions whether we can ever truly escape our upbringing and heritage. Born in Pakistan and raised Muslim, lawyer Amir Kapoor has left his upbringing behind and is successfully climbing the corporate ladder. When he decides to help his nephew with a case defending a man of Muslim faith, everything he thought he knew and believed comes into question. An intimate dinner party with two colleagues and friends starts out friendly and soon escalates into an intense conversation involving religion, race and violence. Accusations are spoken, truths are revealed, and Amir's life will never be the same again.

Albee WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

Albee takes on the theme of illusion and reality in this 1962 drama. The dialogue is especially vivid and fierce as the play explores the love-hate relationship between George and Martha. The Mike Nichols-directed black and white movie (with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor) is also excellent.

Baraka/Jones DUTCHMAN

A leader in the black arts revolutionary movement that viewed theatre as a weapon in the struggle for black liberation, Baraka dramatizes social and racial issues from unusual perspectives and with arresting candor, as in this powerful 1964 one-act play. The play reflects Baraka's suspicions if black involvement in white or dominant culture is healthy for blacks, which is in turn reflected in his name change from Leroi Jones to Amiri Baraka when he accepted Islam.

Churchill CLOUD NINE

Social injustice and feminism are two themes that run through many of Churchill's plays, and none more so than this 1979 play, which was developed through a series of improvisational sessions. Churchill is also fascinated by the historical background of current social and political issues, and in this play British imperialism leads to sexual and racial problems. The play also shows the author's characteristic switching of genders and time frames to create unnerving effects.

Fo THE ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

Noble Prize winner Dario Fo began as a comic writer, and his work became more and more political and satiric. This 1970 comedy combines his political sensibilities with his comic skills to expose corruption and incompetence in government bureaucracy.

Fornes FEFU AND HER FRIENDS

Fornes is known for whimsical humor and innovative, cinematic dramatic techniques. In this 1977 piece, her most well-known work, she delivers a feminist perspective on female friendship and women's roles in a patriarchal society.

Friel TRANSLATIONS

Irish playwright Brian Friel often uses clever theatrical devices such as narrators in his plays. This 1980 drama deals inherently with colonialism and loss of native culture as the English rename Irish locations in 1833. It also features a touching love story and the problems of cross-cultural communication.

Fugard SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD

Fugard's work comes out of the South African political oppression known as "apartheid," which tried to keep races legally separated. But his plays reach beyond political polemic and expose individual pain and loneliness through difficult choices, as in this 1972 drama, in which a man must decide whether to give up his identity and assume that of another person in order to get a job.

Hamlisch, Kleban, Kirkwood Jr., and Dante A CHORUS LINE

The quintessential musical-about-musicals, *A Chorus Line* centers on seventeen dancers auditioning for the chorus of an unnamed Broadway show. Between learning and performing combinations, each of the characters are tasked to share stories that offer a window into their personalities, hopes, and dreams. Often categorized as a "concept musical," the show's slim plot exists primarily as a vehicle to tell the stories of each character as they explore "What I Did for Love" - the reasons why they work and sacrifice for the theatre. The musical was created in part through interviews with Broadway "gypsies," many of who were cast in the original production in 1975. *A Chorus Line* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and remains one of Broadway's longest running musicals of all time.

Hansberry A RAISIN IN THE SUN

This 1959 drama is a classic portrait of black family life, black cultural movements, and the situation of blacks within American society prior to the civil rights upheavals of the 1960s. The play, the first by an African-American woman on Broadway, introduced the themes that black drama would deal with for the following decades: tension between white and black society, division over ways for blacks to react to white oppression, assimilation, the locus of black identity, African heritage, the relationship between black men and women, dreams and the impediments to their realization, stereotypes, etc. Moreover, the play was prescient in its feminist perspectives that marriage is not necessary and that career ambition is acceptable if not laudatory for a woman.

Hwang M. BUTTERFLY

Hwang typically mixes history, fantasy, and realism to explore the "fluidity of identity" common to the multicultural modern world. This 1988 play about a French diplomat who falls in love with a Chinese Opera star, has been called "a dazzling deconstruction of cross-cultural and sexual delusions."

Kushner ANGELS IN AMERICA : THE MILLENNIUM APPROACHES and PERESTROIKA

Kushner's monumental 1993 set of two plays addresses issues of family, love, death, acceptance, the AIDS epidemic, and the political world of the 1980s in a style that veers from realism to fantasy, utilizing miraculous appearances and overlapped scenes.

Mamet GLENGARY GLEN ROSS

This 1983 Pulitzer Prize-winning play shows off Mamet's distinctive, truncated language style, his lively, outspoken characters, and his recurring interest in the way America does business.

Miranda HAMILTON

Winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and other awards, this sung-through musical tells the tale of founding father Alexander Hamilton. Primarily using hip hop musical forms, the play's lyrics relate immigrant Hamilton's eventful life, verbal dexterity, and impact on the new republic. The called-for casting of the principal roles with actors of color has been interpreted as not only a way to make the story match how America looks today, but a claim of that story by Americans of every race and ethnicity.

Müller HAMLETMACHINE

The poster-child of postmodern theatre texts, *Hamletmachine's* few-page length belies its often multiple-hour playing time. Themes, events, characters, and actors from *Hamlet* overlap with historical, cultural, ideological, and metatheatrical connotations, references, double and triple entendres. Its pastiche, "quotes," layering, and reflexivity make it densely postmodern.

Norman 'NIGHT MOTHER

When a thirty-something woman announces to the mother with whom she lives and cares that she plans to commit suicide before the night is over, it sets up a struggle between the mother's attempt to save her life and the daughter's justification for her death. The truth-telling that results, as well as the quality of dialogue, pacing, character construction and insight reveal Norman's strengths.

Nottage RUINED:

Playwright Lynn Nottage traveled to Uganda to interview women in preparation for writing *Ruined*. Inspired by Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* follows Mama Nadi who takes "damaged" girls into her brother/bar and, though she profits from them she also protects them. Set in a small mining town in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, *Ruined* confronts the war that has ravaged the country, especially young girls who have literally been torn to pieces by soldiers on both sides of the conflict. *Ruined* premiered at the Goodman Theatre before opening at the Manhattan Theatre Club and received the 2009 Pulitzer Prize Winner.

Osborne LOOK BACK IN ANGER

This 1956 play, by criticizing British society and even the Queen herself, signaled the emergence of a post-World War II group of British dramatists who came to be known as "the angry young men." The phrase derives from the protagonist of this play, Porter, who, although university educated, comes from a working-class background. He refuses to hold a job while he allows himself to be catered to by two women.

Parks THE AMERICA PLAY

Less than 40 years old, Suzan-Lori Parks was the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama, for *Topdog/Underdog* (2001), but it was *The America Play* that largely created her reputation as a

playwright who experiments outside conventional form and is willing to raise difficult questions of racism and African-American legacies. The play's (black) protagonist, The Foundling Father, in a twist on blackface, works in a carnival in whiteface dressed as Abraham Lincoln while patrons take on the role of Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, and reenact the killing. Other characters dig for the evidence of the Foundling Father and other remains in the Great Whole of History. Parks' idiomatic use of language marks her as one of the US's most distinctive playwrights.

Pinter THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Pinter's plays were criticized for the lack of a traditional plot. In this 1958 play, Goldberg and McCann bully Stanley, although we aren't quite sure why. The term "Pinteresque" was coined to describe such menacing and enigmatic situations. Pinter was also known for the pauses and silences that punctuate his work (a "Pinter pause"), and claimed that the important actions take place in the pauses.

Shaffer EQUUS

When a psychologist decides to take on the case of an adolescent boy who has blinded a number of horses with a spike he finds a boy who has found a god through the horses, on which he goes on sensual night rides naked. The play reveals the often conflicting impulses in people between rationality and irrationality, and the need for both. Although the doctor realizes he can make the boy socially acceptable, the cost will be the boy's creativity and sense of spirituality. Dramaturgically the play is interesting in that it uses psychological realism as well as a sense of expressionism, employing such devices as masks, mime, and dance.

Shange FOR COLORED GIRLS . . .

Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enough* is actually a "choreopoem," a series of 20 poems choreographed to music. Through seven performers, the work searches for and expresses a black female identity, marking out and clarifying a unique black female body, language, and movement. Movement is, in fact a central theme of the piece, and its attempt to combat stasis is expressed in the improvisational foundation of the piece, and the improvisational, ensemble nature of its performance.

Shepard BURIED CHILD

Winner of the first Pulitzer Prize ever awarded to a play premiering off-Broadway, this work has undergone numerous revivals and an extensive revision by Shepard. As one of his three "family" dramas that brought Shepard international recognition (including *The Curse of the Starving Class* and *True West*), *Buried Child* is already, according to Ben Brantley of the *NY Times* "a bona fide classic: a work that conveys the mystical, cannibalistic pull of family ties even as they unravel." When Vince arrives at his grandparents' farmhouse and they don't remember him, the strange events begin as a fallow field yields armloads of carrots and corn and the secrets and forgotten past of the family begin to surface as well.

Simon THE ODD COUPLE

One of the most popular plays by America's most successful playwright, *The Odd Couple* traces the comedy that arises when two friends, diametrically opposed in temperament, find themselves as roommates after their marriages fall apart. Often reprised, inspiration for a long-running television series, and existing in a more recent female version by Simon, this play reveals the playwright's gift for comedy, character behavior, and his insight into the foibles and complexities of human relationships.

Sondheim and Lapine

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE

Sondheim and Lapine's musical account of the creation of a famous pointillist painting, *Sunday in the Park with George* examines the process of making art and the costs of artistic genius. In the show's first act, set in 1884, the painter George (based on Georges Seurat) works to finish his masterwork as his mistress and model Dot competes with the painting for his attention. The show's second act, set a century later, features George and Dot's great-grandson as he struggles to create his own art that will matter and endure. *Sunday* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Musical.

Soyinka

DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

Nigeria's best known playwright and Nobel Prize winner used his experiences in England as a university student and his knowledge of his native Yoruba culture to stage a divergence of cultural understandings, based in an actual incident, that illuminates the dynamics and blind spots in colonial and colonized societies. The King's Horseman, Elesin, celebrates his last day on earth prior to the ritual suicide that will enable his spirit to help the spirit of the recently deceased chief ascend to the afterlife rather than wander the earth and bring harm to his people. When the British colonial ruler learns of a practice he considers barbaric and halts it, chaos and tragedy on earthly and spiritual planes ensue.

Stoppard

ARCADIA

Arcadia opens in the early 19th century as the grounds of an estate are being transformed from rational, orderly arrangements of the Enlightenment to the radical Romantic look of wild nature that swept Europe. When the precocious fourteen year old Thomasina asks her handsome tutor what "carnal embrace" is and replies to hug a cow carcass, the comedy and themes of the work quickly take off, as the space between and intersections of rationality and emotion, science and art, time and space come into play. When the second scene opens in the same room but now in the present time, with characters investigating the estate's early 19th-century activities, the questions of how far history differs from the past and how time is not the obstacle we thought it was arise provocatively.

Valdez

LOS VENDIDOS

Written by founding artistic director of the influential Latino theatre collective El Teatro Campesino, this 1965 one-act play offers a biting satire in which Miss Jimenez, a secretary from California Governor Ronald Regan's office, visits a used Mexican lot to purchase a Mexican to add diversity to the state government and attract Latino votes. Emphasizing stereotypes of Mexicans from the period akin to different automobile models, the play uncovers the poorly founded assumptions upon which they are based.

Vogel

HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *How I Learned the Drive* accounts the story of Li'l Bit and her relationship with her uncle, who sexually molested her from the time she was eleven. Told from Li'l Bit's perspective as a full-grown woman after her Uncle Peck's death and within the context of Peck's lessons to her of how to drive, the play admits not easy condemnation of the man, for it was he who most cared for her in the world and who taught her, literally and figuratively, how to control her vehicle. The form of the play is interesting in moving forward and back in time simultaneously, utilizing the driving metaphor, and in calling for minimalist staging.

Wasserstein

THE HEIDI CHRONICLES

Although ostensibly about the title character, Wasserstein's play depicts the experience of women in the baby boom generation in their journey from adolescence to full womanhood. Set between 1965 and 1989, Heidi serves as the play's guide as we witness, often through comedy, key moments in her life, the obstacles she encounters, often in the form of males' narrow view of women, and choices she makes to create a life that she feels is self-defined. The play won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer and Tony.

Wilson FENCES

Fences was the second drama August Wilson wrote in his vast project of a series of plays, each of which would represent African-American experience during one decade of the twentieth century. With *Radio Golf* in 2005 he completed the project, which had begun with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in 1984. All the plays are set in Pittsburgh, the town of Wilson 's youth, and *Fences* concerns the decade after WWII and conditions and feeling on the eve of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. In the play, Wilson takes up many of the circumstances and themes with which Miller dealt in *Death of a Salesman*, but always with an important difference that illuminates the divergence between white and black experience. Troy Maxson, a once talented baseball player, found himself relegated to the Negro leagues, representative of the opportunities denied or lost to him in his life. His rebellion and frustration infect not only his dealings with society but with his family, particularly his sons, and lead to his personal failings. The play is a complex and compelling query into the roots and effects of social vs personal responsibility, legacies, and the importance of historical experience in shaping generational perspectives.

NON-DRAMATIC RECOMMENDED WORKS

Robert Edmond Jones THE DRAMATIC IMAGINATION