SYLLABUS

As the semester progresses, course assignments and materials that are distributed in class will be available at https://renatamiller.org/2019/01/30/english-49013-melodrama-spring-2019-2/.

OFFICE HOURS:

Monday and Wednesday, 9:00-9:45 AM, NAC 5/225. Also by appointment. Please meet with me during my office hours or make an appointment to discuss your work or any aspect of the course.

TEXTS:

Please have copies of assigned readings in class with you. As noted in the reading schedule below, some readings are included in a packet of materials provided to you in class at no cost.

You are required to purchase The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama, ed. Carolyn Williams, and I have ordered it through the online bookstore.

You are also required to have a copy of Mrs. Henry Wood’s novel East Lynne. You need not purchase the particular edition that I ordered, as long as you read an edition that is complete and unabridged. You may read it electronically, as long as you have a manageable copy with you in class.

COURSE AIMS AND STRUCTURE:

Melodrama has not always been celebrated or appreciated. When Allardyce Nicoll wrote in 1930, “Melodrama, like the poor, will always be with us,” he expressed distaste for melodrama as a popular art form. He also, however, highlighted melodrama’s enduring power as a mode of expression, understanding, and pleasure across time periods. Melodrama is associated with excess, emotion, recognizable conventions, and clearly defined virtue and villainy. It began as a particular theatrical form in 18th century France, flourished in the 19th century, and became an array of conventions and modes of expression employed in film, politics, and literature. Precisely because of its prevalence, it is no longer viewed with contempt but has come to occupy an important place in cultural history. This course will examine theatrical melodramas, the melodramatic mode in fiction, and the use of melodrama as a scholarly critical lens. The course will invite you to consider melodrama in film and culture, as well. In addition to class discussions of assigned readings, the course will function as a research workshop, providing support for your primary research and writing, conducted in carefully staged and supervised steps.

Expect to do large quantities of reading in the first half of the semester. In the second half of the semester you will build on this foundation as you engage in your own in-depth research and analysis.
COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:
By the end of this course you should be able to
--articulate and apply an array of definitions and theories of melodrama and the melodramatic mode;
--understand the emergence of melodrama in particular cultural and historical contexts;
--identity elements of melodrama in culture, and understand how and why they function; and
--conduct an in-depth analysis of a cultural text, informed by both primary and secondary research.

ASSIGNMENTS:
I will distribute specific directions for each assignment and we will discuss each assignment in class.

GRADING:
Blog entries (5 at 6% each) 30%
Presentation/workshop on your melodramatic text + annotated bibliography 20%
Critical Framework essay 10%
Final essay 30%
Participation (class participation, quizzes, peer review, attendance, punctuality, courteousness toward classmates) 10%

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:
I expect you to come to every class prepared to participate in discussion. Please inform me at the beginning of the semester of any religious observances that will require you to miss class. You are allowed two absences during the semester for illnesses and emergencies that prevent you from attending class. Each absence beyond two will reduce your participation grade by a full letter grade. If absences reduce your participation grade to an F, each additional absence will reduce your course grade by 1/3 grade. Two latenesses count as one absence. You are responsible for class activities that you miss when you are absent.

BLOG ENTRIES:
Blog entries must be posted to the class website 24 hours prior to class (by 10 am on Tuesday of the week in which a blog entry is due). Blog entries that are posted late will lose 1/3 of a grade for each week that they are late.

Blog entries are not formal essays, but rather informal notes to share with the class. Each blog entry should be between 200 and 400 words long. Focus on one of the critical works assigned for the week and explain some of the most important or interesting ideas or concepts presented by the critical work. The most successful blog entry will conclude by applying one of more of those ideas to the literary text assigned for the week. You should indicate quotations from the course texts with quotation marks and parenthetical page citations, but do not provide full bibliographic information.

LATE PAPERS:
Late submissions will lose 1/3 of a grade for each class meeting that they are late. The first grade reduction will be made at the end of the class during which the paper is due.
PLAGIARISM:
Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of anybody else's material (words or ideas). Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and the ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by quotation marks and citations. In academic environments, where thinking is of primary importance, stealing the thoughts of others and passing them off as your own is not tolerated and is subject to the highest penalties. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, a report filed with the college, and disciplinary action.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS
Assignments must be completed before the class for which they are listed.

**Melodrama**

**Week 1**
January 30
Introducing the course, ourselves, the nineteenth century, and melodrama

**Week 2**
February 6
Carolyn Williams, Introduction (in Williams)
Matthew Buckley, “Early English Melodrama” (in Williams)
Guilbert de Pixérécourt, *The Forest of Bondy; or The Dog of Montargis* (packet)

**Blog entry on Buckley or Brooks due on February 5**

**Week 3**
February 13
Katherine Newey, “Melodrama and Gender” (in Williams)
Rohan McWilliams, “Melodrama and Class” (in Williams)
William Jerrold, *The Rent Day* (packet)

**Blog entry on Newey or McWilliams due on February 12**

**Week 4**
February 20
Hayley Jayne Bradley, “Stagecraft, Spectacle, and Sensation” (in Williams)
Sarah Meer, “Melodrama and Race” (in Williams)
Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon* (packet)

**Blog entry on Bradley or Meer due on February 19**

**Week 5**
February 27
Michael V. Pisani, “Melodramatic Music” (in Williams)
George Taylor, “Melodramatic Acting” (in Williams)
Leopold Lewis, *The Bells*

**Blog entry on Pisani or Taylor due on February 26**

**The Melodramatic Mode**

**Week 6**
March 6
Mrs. Henry Wood, *East Lynne*, chapters 1-16
In class: introduction to “Exploring the Uses of Melodrama”
Week 7
March 13
Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics*, Introduction and Chapter 4 (packet)
Carolyn Williams, “Melodrama and the Realist Novel” (in Williams)
Wood, *East Lynne*, chapters 17-32
**Blog entry on Hadley or Williams due on March 12**

Week 8
March 20
Wood, *East Lynne*, chapters 33-47
T.A. Palmer, *East Lynne* [stage adaptation] (packet)

**Exploring the Uses of Melodrama**

Week 9
March 27
In class: presentations and workshops on your melodramatic texts
**Annotated bibliographies due in class**

Week 10
April 3
In class: presentations and workshops on your melodramatic texts
**Annotated bibliographies due in class**

Week 11
April 10
1-2 page critical framework due in class

Week 12
April 17
In class: structures and strategies for the final essay

**SPRING RECESS APRIL 19-APRIL 28**

Week 13
May 1
**First draft of final essay due**
In class: peer review activities

Week 14
May 8
**Final essay due**
In class: drawing conclusions
Exploring the Uses of Melodrama: Sequence of Assignments

Presentation on your melodramatic text due in class, March 27 or April 3 (as assigned)
Annotated bibliography due, in class, March 27 or April 3 (as assigned)
Critical framework due, in class, April 10
First draft of final essay due, in class, May 1
Final draft of final essay due, in class, May 8 (also submit your partner’s peer review)

In this sequence of assignments for the second half of the class, you will analyze how melodrama functions in a work of your choice. In order to do this, you will place it in the context of other primary and critical materials that we have studied, and you will conduct research regarding the work and its reception. The steps listed above will help you to do this.

You will need to choose a melodramatic text, broadly defined. It should not be a text that appears on our syllabus. Some suggestions/leads for you to consider:

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, An Octoroon
William Wells Brown, The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom
Plays based on Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko
A nineteenth-century play (to find little-studied plays, consider consulting the Victorian Plays Project http://victorian.nuigalway.ie/modx/)
A novel
A film
A television series
Media or journalistic coverage of a particular event

Whatever you choose, you will need to make sure that you can identify and access the primary material(s) that form your object: a recording of the film, a copy of a play’s text, or specific magazine and newspaper articles.

Presentation on your melodramatic text
Your presentation to the class will serve the purpose of providing feedback on your topic. Your presentation should be less than 5 minutes long (that’s approximately 2.5 pages if you write it out, although you do not need to do so and can speak informally from notes or an outline). You should name the cultural object that you will be studying. Using 2-3 specific examples from the work, you should explain why you believe it is melodramatic. Finally, you should venture a tentative thesis about how the cultural text uses melodrama—what purpose does melodrama serve or what cultural work is melodrama doing in this example?

Annotated Bibliography
On the same day that you give your presentation, you will submit an annotated bibliography. This is a bibliography of sources that you will use in your final essay. These sources should serve the purpose of providing materials—concepts and contexts—that help you to analyze your melodramatic object. Each entry in your bibliography should include a brief (one paragraph or a few sentences) note about the key ideas in that source and the important points that you will be using. To that end, your annotated bibliography should include the following:
1. An entry (or entries) on your object(s) of analysis.
2. Entries on at least 2 of the critical sources that we have read in class.
3. Entries on at least 2 additional scholarly works beyond what we have read in class.
4. If you are doing a cultural object that lends itself to this: one or more reviews of that cultural object.

I recommend using the MLA database, available on the City College Library website, to find additional scholarly sources. To find reviews, consider using Lexis/Nexis or another database on the City College Library website.

**Critical Framework (approximately 2 double-spaced pages)**

In your critical framework essay, you will draw on the critical sources that we read in class and that you used in your annotated bibliography. In approximately 2 pages, use these sources to craft the underlying definition of melodrama that, in your final essay, you will apply to your melodramatic object. This is the foundation that you will use in your final essay to demonstrate that your object is melodramatic.

**Final essay (approximately 10 double-spaced pages)**

The thesis of your final essay should make a claim about the cultural work that melodrama performs in the object you are discussing. To what end does the object use melodrama?

Begin with an introductory paragraph that introduces the cultural object that you are analyzing and introduces your thesis.

Then use the material from your critical framework in order to establish how your object meets criteria to be considered melodramatic.

The remainder of your essay should demonstrate your thesis about how melodrama functions in the object. You should explore ways in which the object diverges from or alters the definitions of melodrama that you began with in your critical framework.

Your analysis should also include consideration of the reception of the work, evidenced by the reviews that you included in your annotated bibliography. (Note that this may not apply to objects such as media or journalistic coverage of an event.)

Throughout the essay, use the melodramatic works that we have read for class as points of comparison and contrast with your object.

Throughout the essay, also use the additional scholarly works from your annotated bibliography, introducing and engaging with their ideas in order to advance your own argument.

In assessing your success on this assignment, I will be looking for your ability to support your analysis with concrete and specific evidence while demonstrating a comprehensive grasp of the cultural field we’ve been exploring.