

DRAMA 301: Theories of Theatre I
Fall 2008

Comparative Essay
(2000 words*)
Due: October 16, 2008
15% of final grade

Assignment: Choose one of the two topics below, and write a *focused* essay of approximately 2000 words that critically analyses and compares how this topic is addressed by **three** of the following theorists: Aristotle, Schiller, Zola, Plato, Tertullian, Rousseau. The topics are only a *beginning* point: you must choose a *specific angle* from which to approach the topic. Your essay must discuss the various approaches each theorist takes to your individually refined topic, draw explicit comparisons between their approaches, and draw conclusions about the impact of their ideas on our understanding of theatre as an art form, and theatre as a social experience. In the course of your essay, make sure to make direct reference to passages in the readings.

Topics:

1. (Audience) Whether or not a theorist directly discusses the audience, it is fair to say that all theories of theatre's value and role in society inevitably contain implicit assumptions about the audience's role in the theatrical experience. What assumptions do the theorists make about the character, function, and response of the audience? How does this shape our understanding of theatre as an art form, and theatre as a social experience?
2. (Morality) The theorists we have read to date all share the belief that theatre has a moral function in society, yet they certainly do not agree on what that moral function *is*, or what it *should* be. Carefully articulate what each theorist argues about the relationship between theatre and morality, being sure to define the moral codes or goals that shape each theorist's worldview. What assumptions about the theatrical experience are required in order for theatre to make a significant impact on moral viewpoints and practices?

Goals:

- To deepen your understanding of relevant ideas in ways that are not possible in 250-word statements, or in brief class discussions.
- To challenge you to choose a specific focus.
- To encourage you to maintain that focus in an extended analysis, thereby allowing you to go further in your dissection of the idea and its implications.

I am around to discuss how to refine your topic to something that is engaging and manageable in size...

*The standard format for a paper is double-spaced, 12-pt Times New Roman font, one-inch margins. Following this format, 2000 words works out to about 6 pages. So let's say 5-7 pages.