

Governors State University  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Division of Humanities and Social Sciences  
English Programs

**English 8570**  
**Seminar in World Literature:**  
**Ibsen and Shaw**  
3 credit hours  
Professor Rosemary Johnsen  
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**Catalog Description**

Explores selected works of world literature. Focuses on works available in English, including translations from other languages and works written in English. Focuses on period, theme, or genre, with the literature placed in context. Course may be repeated once for credit under a different topic.

**Prerequisites**

Graduate student status; literature survey courses, or equivalent

**Course Description**

Following the example of the Program in Comparative and World Literature at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, we define World Literature as a subject of study that places literature and culture in a comparative context, with texts written in English and translations into English of texts written in other languages. Course offerings can draw on a wide range of time periods and of national literatures, including those in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

This semester, we will study the drama of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906, Norwegian) and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950, Anglo-Irish), playwrights of international significance. Reading their work offers immense potential for us to study issues of their day, consider the role of drama in reflecting and shaping culture, and make connections among the playwrights' societies and our own time. It is a commonplace that Ibsen and Shaw challenged orthodoxy and scandalized theatre-goers by linking polite society with unpleasant topics such as armaments manufacturing, venereal disease, and slumlords, and indeed our reading will give us insight into some of those social realities, providing opportunities for discussions of economic inequality, women's rights, and the role of religion in society, among other topics. However, the works and lives of these playwrights also provide opportunities to learn about such topics as theatre history, the functioning of censorship, translation, and print publication of play scripts, and the interaction between theatre and national self-identification. The plays provide the foundation, and our goal is to build variously upon them, as our interests and research take us. We will read chronologically, picking up on aspects of interest as we go, until the annotated bibliographies are due. After that, the course ends with a 2-week consideration of Shaw's stage play *Pygmalion* (1913), the 1938 film version to which Shaw contributed, the Lerner & Loewe stage musical, *My*

*Fair Lady* (1956), and the 1964 film starring Audrey Hepburn. This quartet helps us think about popularity and adaptability as Shaw's play about language and social mobility provides the basis for a musical confection that, it is important to note, poured huge sums of money into the Shaw estate.

Our work this semester is based on the play texts, media clips from various film and theatrical adaptations, and independent research. Everything we do in this class—including reading, discussion, presentation, viewing, and all forms of writing—works together toward not only a greater understanding of these specific texts and their contexts, but also a richer engagement with the fundamental rewards of literary study. The course is designed so that each individual piece contributes to a gradually developing “big picture,” and the reading is foundational, valuable regardless of how we engage it during class.

### **Expected Student Outcomes**

Students completing this course are expected to demonstrate

- familiarity with the chronological development of the œuvres and careers of Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw
- ability to summarize, analyze, and synthesize ideas and tendencies within a single work and across course readings
- understanding of relevant historical and literary contexts developed through course readings, lectures and discussions, and outside research
- knowledge of relevant scholarship, including theoretical concepts
- ability to use the practices and methodologies specific to the academic study of literature
- advancement of ideas about world literature through research, presentation, and critical writing

### **Required Texts**

Ibsen:

*Four Major Plays, Volume I* (Signet Classics)

*Four Major Plays, Volume II* (Signet Classics)

Shaw:

*Heartbreak House*

*John Bull's Other Island* (published in *Modern Irish Drama*, ed. Harrington, Norton)

*Major Barbara*

*Mrs Warren's Profession* (published in *Plays Unpleasant*, Penguin)

*Pygmalion* (published with *My Fair Lady*, Penguin)

*Saint Joan*

note on texts: Please get the Norton text containing *John Bull's Other Island*, as it contains supplemental material that we will draw on in class, and the Signet combined *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady*. For the other titles, while I have ordered reasonably-priced quality editions of all texts through the campus bookstore, any edition is fine. Most of these plays are out of copyright and can be found online; be sure you can access the text during class if you decide to use online versions of course readings.

## **Activities and Assignments**

### *Responses*

For each play, you will bring to class a focused analysis of approximately 300 words. Your response should be based in specifics from the reading, and you may focus it in any of several ways: you might address an important thematic issue, discuss a key scene in the play, or consider performance implications. After your response, include 2-3 open-ended discussion questions that direct our attention to interesting aspects of the play. Be prepared to share your response with the class, and to offer your questions as a contribution to our work with the text. These assignments can only be submitted in person at class as hardcopy; I will not take them late or accept them by email. Responses will be returned to you with comments; these comments are conversational in nature, not grading comments. Responses will be evaluated as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory (including late or missing ones), and the pattern of on-time satisfactory submission of them will be converted into a grade at the end of the course.

### *Annotated bibliography with presentation*

You will research, write, and compile an annotated bibliography of secondary material and present it to the class week 12. Your bibliography should include 8-10 items with one-paragraph annotations of each source. Sources may be theoretically oriented, literary-critical, and/or historical. Your bibliography will include an introduction of 1-2 pages, in which you draw together themes that emerged from your research and highlight significant findings. In advance of the presentation, you will send me a pdf of your bibliography to be shared via Blackboard. Plan on presenting for approximately 10 minutes. Your presentation should not review each item, but provide an overview of your research results and highlight 1 or 2 individual sources.

These shared bibliographies are designed to introduce the entire class to work in Ibsen and Shaw studies. This assignment gives you experience with relevant research tools, and it exposes you to the evolving critical conversations in which your seminar papers will be participating. By sharing bibliographies through pdfs and presentations, we can leverage individual research into broader class contributions.

### *Seminar paper with presentation*

Your seminar paper is due at the end of the semester. You should develop a topic based on this semester's readings and our course objectives. There are many possibilities for defining your topic, and I am happy to discuss ideas for the essay with you at any time during the semester. Your essay should be in MLA format, approximately 12-15 pages long (standard double-spaced format) and incorporate at least 6 critical and/or historical sources. At the end of the semester, each of you will make an informal oral presentation to the rest of the seminar participants based on your essay.

## **Evaluation**

Responses	20%
Annotated bibliography	20%
Seminar paper	60%

## **Content Outline**

You should complete readings by the date listed on this schedule. The schedule is subject to change; any changes will be announced in advance.

Week 1	Introduction to course, syllabus, introductions
Week 2	<i>A Doll House</i>
Week 3	<i>Ghosts</i>
Week 4	<i>An Enemy of the People</i>
Week 5	<i>Hedda Gabler</i>
Week 6	<i>The Master Builder</i>
Week 7	<i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i>
Week 8	<i>John Bull's Other Island</i> and related material in <i>Modern Irish Drama</i>
Week 9	<i>Major Barbara</i>
Week 10	<i>Heartbreak House</i>
Week 11	<i>Saint Joan</i>
Week 12	Annotated bibliographies due; presentations
Weeks 13/14	<i>Pygmalion</i> and <i>My Fair Lady</i>
Week 15	Seminar papers due; presentations