

Dr. A. Pettit  
University Distinguished Teaching Professor  
ENGL 3912: American Drama, 1845–1916  
Spring 2018 | Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:00–3:20

*Quick* Name one important, interesting, or even good American playwright before Eugene O'Neill. Can't do it? Join the club! Better, *quit the club*, because ignorance is never good, and ignorance of a sturdy tradition of extremely cool and often wacky drama is flat-out silly. The period starts before the Civil War, runs through it, and leaves us smack-dab in the middle of first-wave US feminism—kind of an overdue return to the fabulous play that initiated the period: Anna Cora Mowatt's proto-feminist comedy *Fashion*. That's a fascinating span with lots of fascinating drama, much of it quite popular in its own day.

Comedy? Check. Melodrama? Yup (ditch the bias—you'll thank me!). Tragedy? Well, kinda-sorta, but we'll read plenty of odd plays that tilt in that direction. Realism before you thought it existed? Yup. Gay and straight and male and female playwrights? Of course. Teaser: the rules were way different then. That's a big part of the fun.

This is a literature class, not a performance class. But I'll pitch it equally to the needs and interests of ENGL and THEA students. It's a good fit for Integrative Studies students as well.

The probable line-up: Zoe Akin, George Aiken, Dion Boucicault, Rachel Crothers, Clyde Fitch, Susan Glaspell, James A. Hearne, Branson Howard, William Dean Howells, Percy MacKaye, Steele MacKaye, William Vaughn Moody, Anna Cora Mowatt, and Edward Sheldon.

Text: Gassner, ed., *Best Plays of the Early American Theatre, 1787–1911* (~\$25), plus plays that I'll distribute in PDF. Assignments: two short papers, weekly quizzes, some online postings, extra-credit if you want it. Vibe: deep digging, ample jollity. George Clinton: "Think! It ain't illegal yet!"



Questions or comments? Drop me a line at [alex.pettit@unt.edu](mailto:alex.pettit@unt.edu). See you soon?