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Critical Reviews & The New York Times Assignment

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THA 50 – Introduction to Theatre Arts

PROF. THOMAS L. ROTHACKER

Critical Reviews & The New York Times

Once the role of the Playwright and the playwriting process have been explored, the role of the Critic and Theatre Criticism is discussed.

What is the role of criticism in any art form?

What is the purpose? Is it to enlighten the artists involved? The audience?

Using sample Plays and Playwrights from this term, students will go on a deep dive into the archives of the New York Times theatre reviews. Comparing reviews on the same play with different productions shows different points of view.

NOTE: The first class will be conducted in a computer lab. This will be an introduction into how to access and maneuver through The New York Times archives.

THE ASSIGNMENT, Part I:

1. Choose a play (from a provided list) based off of the few authors we have read / explored this current semester.
2. Search for reviews in the NYT archive of the same play from different productions / critics. Note the date of each production, director, theatre company (if given) and the authorship of the critique.
3. Print out each review and annotate. (You will need to turn both in as part of the assignment)
4. Create a list of items that each critic has commented on in a similar way and in a contrasting way.
5. Write freely about the “voice” of each writer. How do they each use words? Would you consider them “high-brow” or “down to earth” in their critiques? Who is more specific? Who do you think is a stronger writer and why?

THE ASSIGNMENT, Part II:

1. After compiling all of your notes based off of the annotations and lists, you will compose a short essay.
2. Essentially, the essay will consist of a brief summary of each critique (not a summary of the play itself). In addition, and it being the most important aspect of your writing, is the comparisons of each writer and their voices. Based on your notes (as stated in Part I), create a narrative about the critics.
3. Compose a 2 (full) – 4 page essay with your findings. An intro, body and conclusion are required as well as citations/quotes from each review.
4. Print out the essay and attach the 2 annotated reviews and bring to class on day that it is due.

THE ASSIGNMENT, Part III:

5. In class, you will be placed into groups of 3-4, based on what play you investigated.
6. You will spend at least 20-30 min discussing your findings. If different critics and reviews were studied, please share with the group. The key is to learn from as many critics as possible and how they approach the same work.
7. Create a bulleted list, as a group, of the similarities about all the reviews. Create another list with the differences. Finally, create a list with the 3-5 biggest takeaways you discovered while comparing and contrasting.
8. Each group will give a 5-10 presentation in class where they will share the play, different critics and critiques and lists.

Here is a rubric of how you will be evaluated and graded for this assignment:

	2 annotated REVIEWS from the NYT	Essay criteria met	Group discussion / formation of presentation	Group presentation
"A" range	Completed and very detailed annotations of 2 reviews	Essay meets the criteria in length and fulfillment of prompt questions.	Worked well and closely with group members to facilitate presentation.	Active in presenting work to the class and working alongside group members.
"B" range	Completed annotations of 2 reviews	Essay approaches the criteria in length and fulfillment of prompt questions.	Worked decently with group members to facilitate presentation.	Somewhat active in presenting work to the class and working alongside group members.
"C" range	Limited annotations of 2 reviews	Essay is limited in meeting the criteria in length and fulfillment of prompt questions.	Did not work well or very little to partake in facilitating of presentation.	Not active in presenting work to the class and working alongside group members.
"D" range	Limited to no annotations of 2 reviews	Essay does not meet the criteria.	Did not work well or at all to partake in facilitating of presentation.	Did not take part in group presentation or was present but not active/engaged.
F	Limited or no annotations for 1 or 2 reviews	No essay produced or criteria met.	Not present or did not work with group at all.	Not present or did not work with group at all.