

## DRAM 205: Theatre in the Age of Film and TV

### Essay 1: Drama into Film

Length: 4-5 pages (1250-1500 words)

Due: Wednesday February 4, 2009 at beginning of class

Weight: 25%

#### Topic

Compare Samuel Beckett's stage play "Catastrophe" (1982) to the 2000 film version directed by David Mamet.

#### Details

This assignment requires you to write a 4-5 page essay that compares the play as written for the stage with the film version of the play. In particular, the essay should focus on the way that the adaptation employs film style (mise-en-scène, cinematographic properties, editing, sound) in order to deliver its narrative. How is style employed to address the film spectator, and how does this differ from the way(s) the play addresses the theatre spectator? This essay is an exercise in comparative close analysis, and therefore draws on close-reading skills developed in other humanities courses (or in high-school English class). The difference is that you will compare a close-reading of the play-text with a close-reading of the visual and aural style of the film. Your essay must develop an argument about how the film treats Beckett's play; this argument must be supported by specific comparisons between at least two closely analyzed sequences in the play/film.

#### Suggested Approach

1. Read the play. Note the way text is delivered, and how stage directions shape the play's staging.
2. Watch the film multiple times, pausing to compare how the film treats specific passages. Keep the play text close at hand.
3. Carefully scrutinize the way film style is employed at different moments in the film. Consider the following questions to get started: How is the mise-en-scène put together for the audience? What does the film show us/not show us? How does the camera frame the image? Does the camera move? How are shots edited together, and what effect does this create? How and when is sound used? And of course, how does all of this compare to the stage version of the play?

#### TIPS

- The main purpose of the essay is to consider how the film treats themes and issues in the play; once you have achieved this, you may consider literary and/or philosophical approaches to analysis (just ensure that the latter are not your *focus*).
- Instead, you should question what film style brings to an already existing dramatic text. Your task is to articulate how the unique medium of film contributes to the spectator's understanding of the play.
- As a starting point, look for moments where the film version seemingly diverges from the play, or where the film breaks its own patterns.

#### Resources

Copies of the film are available to borrow from the Drama department. The film and the play text are both available online (see website for links), but I caution you that the size and quality of the image on YouTube are inferior to the DVD copies, so it is advisable to see it through on DVD at least a couple of times.