



DR 315 THEATER IN LONDON: AN INTRODUCTION

IES Abroad London

DESCRIPTION: This theatre course uses the city of London to provide a unique opportunity for students to develop their existing knowledge of the theatre, in the context of nine theatre productions. The focus is as much on smaller fringe venues and theatre companies, as on the National Theatre and the West End. Students will read new and innovative plays as well as the classics. They will then assess the way those plays are interpreted for the stage, taking into account direction, design and acting, as well as other staging elements. The course lectures will closely relate to the productions seen. Those subjects include theatre history, individual playwrights, as well as current political, social and economic issues that significantly shape the theory and practice of contemporary British theatre.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None. The course is designed for students who are not Theatre or English majors and/or who have not previously taken a course in Theatre.

ADDITIONAL COST: Students in any class that requires attendance at theater performances are charged a fee to help cover the cost of these performances. Classes subject to this fee are DR315 and TH390. If students are in two or more of these classes in the same term, they are charged only once. For more information on the fee, please see the program fee sheet. This additional fee is not charged to students in the Theatre Studies Program, as performances are included in their program fee.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

- Lectures
- Seminar discussions
- Student presentations

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- **Participation** – 10 % - Students will attend a production of their own choice during the term, and will write a review of this production, to be presented in class and handed in the following week. Discussion is one of the best ways of learning but only if all students prepare and participate. In order to participate fully, students must make sure they have read and brought to the seminar: the text of the play, the programme for the production, the reviews of that production (if available) and any relevant article. Copies of reviews and relevant articles will be handed out whenever possible.
- **Oral Presentation** – 20% - students choose a play that is seen in production and talk about both the text and the performance
- **Follow-up Paper** – 30% - Students will write a follow-up paper to the oral presentation approximately 1,300 words in length, based upon a particular aspect of the play and its production, drawing upon the student's presentation and the general seminar discussion. The instructor will discuss the choice of topic with the student. The paper is handed in a week following the presentation.
- **Final Exam** – 40% - A final unseen two-hour examination consisting of questions referring specifically to plays read and seen in productions. Two questions must be attempted. Play texts can be taken into the examination.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Understand the significance of some historical periods in the development of theatre
- Understand the work of some individual playwrights
- Understand the structures that shape British theatre
- Analyse the text of a play and the theatre production of that play
- Analyse the process whereby a text is transformed into a theatre production
- Give a seminar presentation, test out ideas in debate and have respect for the ideas of others

CONTENT:

Session	Content
Session 1	There are a number of key elements that define theatre: the style of acting, the fact that it is live, the relationship between actor and audience, the characteristics of the stage and the theatre venue, and the role of those who interpret the play for the stage. Along with an identification of the fundamental ingredients of drama, these elements will be considered in the context of students' previous experience of theater, and/or their assumptions and expectations of the plays to be read and productions to be seen. We will also briefly survey the rich landscape and structure of theater provision in London and the various ways in which it is funded. Students will attend a theatre production.
Session 2	Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Realism, Naturalism, Acting and Directing</u> : We will further examine the creative and social context, conventions and expressive possibilities of theater in relation to the so-called Realist and Naturalistic movements from the mid 19 th Century that – arguably - established the template for modern approaches to acting, directing and playwriting. Students will attend a theatre production.
Session 3	Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Musical Theater, Musicality, and the Origins of Theater</u> . We will explore the musical origins of theatre in ancient Greece, examining how this has influenced music and musicality coming to play a major part in contemporary theater - in musical theater itself but also in other genres and types. Students will attend a theatre production.
Session 4	Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Performing Englishness</u> . Through the late 19th Century and most of the 20th Century the English theater made use of a particular model of supposedly 'English' behavior, especially in relation to language and text use. It could be argued that this was in a sense the 'obverse' of the US 'method' approach to acting: the former operating in the main through the visible <i>suppression</i> of emotion by means of the spoken text, the latter through making the text fully part of the <i>expression</i> of emotion. We will here examine ideas of national identity underlying this 'English' mode, trace their evolution and effectiveness in UK theater, and examine the moment that - arguably – everything changed, in 1956. Students will attend a theatre production.
Session 5	Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Beyond Realism</u> . Having established a 'realist' model of theater, we will now look at some of the further developments that took place at the end of the 19 th Century and into the early 20 th Century in the so-called 'Modernist' revolution, such as Expressionism, Symbolism and Constructivism. These greatly re-extended theater's expressive and communicative possibilities beyond Realism. As well as heralding the future, each also had much in common with much earlier phases and periods of theater history. Taken together, they provide a very useful extended 'map' within which to locate performances in today's rich tapestry of theater in London and elsewhere. Students will attend a theatre production.

<p>Session 6</p>	<p>Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Political Theater and the Politics of Theater</u>. We will explore the operations of power in theater and the development of 'political theatre', asking, for example 'who controls the performance, how, and on whose behalf does it speak and work?' 'can theater be both a radical and a conservative force? As an exemplar, we will look at the work of arguably the most influential 'political' theatre practitioner of the 20th Century, Bertold Brecht. Students will attend a theatre production.</p>
<p>Session 7</p>	<p>Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Contemporary Focus: Beyond the 'Dramatic'</u>. In the 21st Century there has been an explosion of new performance forms in UK theater such as so-called Immersive and Verbatim theater, and work drawing on the field of performance art. Each of these is searching to develop new strategies of so-called 'authenticity'. We will survey the field and analyse particular examples of texts and associated video material, looking to understand and evaluate the theories and practices behind each form and their influence on the performances attended over the semester</p>
<p>Session 8</p>	<p>Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Reimagining Shakespeare in Performance</u>. Just what are the contemporary possibilities for realizing a Shakespeare play on the London stage? And what exactly is the aim here? Using the Shakespeare production attended during the semester as a case study we will investigate some of the production approaches currently fashionable and look at how they have evolved, and also at the original Elizabethan and Jacobean context in which the plays were first performed, asking: how can a play so far from its original context find resonance and accessibility in the contemporary world? Students will attend a theatre production.</p>
<p>Session 9</p>	<p>Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Secondary Text</u>. In preparation for students' forthcoming theater review assignment, we will look at the evolution, practice and impact of what might be termed 'secondary texts', such as marketing material, reviews and 'programs', as well as touching on the impact of theater censorship - formal and informal - into the 20th Century and beyond. Students will attend a theatre production.</p>
<p>Session 10</p>	<p>Seminar discussion of the play read and seen in production the previous week. Followed by: <u>Contemporary Play Text - From Page to Performance</u>. We will engage with an unpublished short performance text by a leading contemporary UK playwright, focusing in particular on its potential interrogation and 'staging' of Englishness, and in doing so examine different choices in realising and interpreting dramatic text into actual theatre production, and the implications of this for director, performer and creative team practice. Students choose their own production to attend and review.</p>
<p>Session 11</p>	<p>Seminar discussion of the performances students attended of their own choice in the previous week. Followed by: <u>A London Theater Season: Overview and Review</u>. We will reflect on all the productions and classes of the semester, we will attempt to characterize key aspects and trends that have emerged over the semester as well as identifying exceptional work experienced in production and performance</p>

**COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:**

There is a guided front and backstage tour of the National Theatre, as well as a weekly theatre production.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Theatre programme for each of the productions seen. Some programmes simply contain information about the actors, director, designer etc., some also include articles about the playwright, the period during which the play was written, while others combine production details with the text of the play.
- Play text of each of the nine productions seen.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

The following are all available in the IES library:

- Bentley, Eric. *The Life of the Drama*. London: Methuen, 1965
- Bentley, Eric. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. London: Penguin, 1992
- Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990
- Brook, Peter. *The Shifting Point*. London: Methuen, 1987
- Carlson, Marvin. *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993
- Cook, Philip. *How to Enjoy the Theatre*. London: Piatkus, 1983
- Gilman, Richard. *The Making of Modern Drama*. New York: Da Capo, 1987
- Hall, Peter. *The Necessary Theatre*. London: Nick Hern Books, 1999
- Pickering, Kenneth. *Key concepts in Drama and Performance*. London: Macmillan, 2005
- Roose-Evans, James. *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*. London: Routledge, 1991
- Russell Brown, John ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995
- Wickham, Glynne. *A History of the Theatre*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1985