

## Theatre in London: Classic to Contemporary

Fall 2010

Dr. Sheila Fox

The course examines the key elements in the development of British theatre through a study of dramatists whose work is currently being performed in London. While the precise shape of the course is dependent on the plays that are on stage at the time of your visit to Britain, we will cover a representative range of periods and styles, with particular emphasis on the very rich and important period between the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and the present.

Amongst other productions on our schedule, we will see two of Europe's best physical theatre companies - Complicite, with the incomparable **A Disappearing Number** and the brilliant Vesturport from Iceland with a version of Goethe's **Faust**; **Krapp's Last Tape** by the master of theatrical absurdism Samuel Beckett, starring the great classical actor Michael Gambon; the famous black musical **Five Guys Named Moe** at London's foremost black theatre; legendary theatre director Trevor Nunn's new production of Sebastian Faulks' powerful war epic **Birdsong**; and the smash hit National Theatre production of **War Horse**.

### Students will acquire:

- 1/ Knowledge of the development of British drama, in its infinite variety.
- 2/ Knowledge of European and Irish drama - and how these relate to the British tradition.
- 3/ An understanding of the social and historical contexts out of which the plays spring.
- 4/ The ability to relate text to production and in so doing to assess their relative value.
- 5/ Critical skills; the ability to assess individual plays effectively, to form your own opinions about what is being experienced and to base these on valid criteria.
- 6/ The skill of being able to take part in a discussion on a play through sharing your own perceptions and absorbing other views through listening and empathy.
- 7/ An appreciation of the many different types of London theatre, ranging from the major subsidised companies (the Royal National Theatre), through the commercial venues of the West End to the smaller alternative theatres on what used to be known as the Fringe.
- 8/ A genuine enthusiasm for theatre at its most thought-provoking.....something which will, it is hoped, become an enduring, lifelong passion.

The course consists of two classes and one theatre visit per week. We will aim to go to the theatre on Mondays, whenever possible, but some productions are on Tuesday, so check your schedule.

Class will involve a variety of teaching methods, with an emphasis on group discussion. We will also have some visiting speakers – actors, directors or writers to give you greater insight into the nature of the theatrical experience.

In addition, there will be a tour of the National Theatre.

## **Theatre Visits**

Theatre performances are an important part of the course and your attendance is obligatory: missing a performance affects your grade.

Tickets will normally be given out in class. All the necessary information on how to get to the theatre will be provided at the same time. You will be responsible for making your own way to the theatre. Always allow plenty of time to get there on time: most theatres do not allow latecomers in until the interval.

## **Course Requirements**

**1/ Seminar Presentation:** Critical Review (20-30 minutes) **15%**

**2/ Written Review:** (300 words) on a play in production...to be handed in by Oct. 6. **20%**

**3/ Essay:** (1000 words) Critique of a play in production, relating it to the text, the theatrical tradition and the social backdrop from which the play springs.....to be handed in by Nov. 3. **25%**

**4/ Final Exam:** **25%**

**5/ Continual Assessment:** Attendance at both theatre and class is an integral part of this course, as is class participation. Attendance/Participation will be reflected in the Continual Assessment mark. There will also be a quiz, reflected in the Continual Assessment mark (5%). **15%**

## **Key Reference**

Modern British Drama The Twentieth Century  
Christopher Innes Cambridge University Press 2002.

## **Suggested Reading**

New British Drama in Performance on the London Stage 1970 – 85 R.A. Cave  
Col in Smythe 1989.

Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century Richard Eyre  
and Nicholas Wright Bloomsbury 2000

Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain. Ed. Sandy Craig Amber  
Lane press 1980.

Playtexts: Students are required to read all classic playtexts, as well as a number of additional texts pertaining to the course..... in particular....

**Birdsong** by Sebastian Faulks (Vintage 1994) - by Sept. 15.

(preferably the whole novel...but if you do not have enough time, be sure to read pp. 48-117, pp.213-240 and pp.348-352)

**Look Back in Anger** by John Osborne - by Sept. 29

**Faust Parts One and Two** by Johann Wolfgang Goethe - by Oct. 6

**Waiting for Godot** by Samuel Beckett – by Oct. 20

**Saved** by Edward Bond by Nov. 3

French's Theatre Bookshop (52 Fitzroy St) has by far the best selection of theatre books. They also provide specialist help. There is also Waterstones... and the National Theatre has a good bookshop too.

Students are requested to buy a programme for each production. They are also requested to read a selection of the production reviews in the daily papers (Guardian and Independent), the Sunday papers (e.g. Observer), the weeklies (e.g. Time Out) and any of the many theatre magazines on sale (e.g. Plays and Players, Theatre Record).

**The Schedule so far:** (plays are on Mondays unless otherwise stated)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Writer</b>	<b>Venue</b>
<b>Sept. 6 7.30</b>	<b>Earthquakes in London</b>	<b>Bartlett</b>	<b>National Cottesloe</b>
<b>Sept. 13 7.30</b>	<b>A Disappearing Number</b>	<b>Complicite</b>	<b>Novello</b>
<b>Sept. 14 (Tues) 7.30</b>	<b>Five Guys Named Moe</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Theatre Royal Stratford East</b>
<b>Sept. 20 7.30</b>	<b>Birdsong</b>	<b>Faulks/Wagstaff</b>	<b>Comedy</b>
<b>Sept. 27 7.30</b>	<b>Educating Rita</b>	<b>Russell</b>	<b>Trafalgar Studios</b>
<b>Oct. 4 7.30</b>	<b>War Horse</b>	<b>Morpurgo/Stafford</b>	<b>New London</b>
<b>Oct. 18 7.45</b>	<b>Faust</b>	<b>Goethe/Vesturport</b>	<b>Young Vic</b>
<b>Oct. 26 (Tues) 7pm</b>	<b>Krapp's Last Tape</b>	<b>Beckett</b>	<b>Duchess</b>
<b>Nov. 2 (Tues) 8pm</b>	<b>A Number</b>	<b>Churchill</b>	<b>Menier Chocolate Factory</b>

### **Grading**

4.0	94 – 100 %
3.75	89 – 93 %
3.5	84 - 88%
3.25	79 – 83%
3.0	74 - 78%
2.75	69 - 73%
2.5	64 - 68%
2.25	59 – 63%
2.0	54 - 58%
1.75	50 - 53%
1.5	49%
1.0	48%