English 462 WI: Studies: Drama—Theaters of Social Critique

Craig Howes

I. Course Description

This course will focus on how British and European theatre, in a variety of generic and institutional forms, has represented, satirized, exposed, mocked, denounced, and confronted the social and cultural practices of its contemporary society. Starting with the works of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson as commentaries on the sources of power and its corruptions, the course will then examine the biting, yet often almost admiring, Restoration comedies and Augustan satiric dramas and musicals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Since Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and the Restoration and Augustan stage, represent high points in British, and even world dramatic history, particular attention will be paid to the production and institutional dimensions of the theatre in these periods as a prominent, popular, and often controversial part of the London cultural scene.

The modern British theater, however, with its institutional origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but stretching up to the present, will provide the primary focus of the course. We will examine Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the Irish plays of William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge, and the social dramas of George Bernard Shaw, paying special attention to how they respond to the theatrical revolution being carried out by Henrik Ibsen and other European dramatists. The theoretical interventions of Antonin Artaud, and the political project of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre, will also be important subjects for study.

The move into absurdism and kitchen sink movements of post-World War II drama finds its British theatrical embodiment in the plays of the Irish expatriate Samuel Beckett, John Osborne, and Harold Pinter. These jarring theatrical works prepare the way for such political and cultural dramatic interventions of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s as Peter Brook's landmark production of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*, and the careers of such prominent dramatists as Tom Stoppard, Caryl Churchill, Peter Schaffer, David Hare, and Sara Kane.

Of course, it is crucial for such a course to examine how contemporary British, theatre engages with the political and cultural issues of the day. Given the Study Abroad focus, however, I would not want to designate which current playwrights' work we will study until I know what will be onstage during our residency.

The same consideration will affect the choice of plays in other historical periods as well. Since seeing the environments for the various dramas is extremely important to understanding the social dimensions, we will seek out productions at the Globe, the Haymarket, the wide range of distinguished twentieth century theatres, the different performing spaces within the National Theatre of Great Britain ("the National," containing
the Olivier, Lyttleton, Dorfman, and the Temporary Theatres), and the many independent and often transient performance spaces, large and small, that currently produce theatre in London. As a result, productions of Shakespeare or Jonson, or Restoration drama, or classic modern theatre running during the Spring of 2017 will lead to changes in the syllabus. (For example, Farquhar's *The Beaux' Strategem* was at the National when I was in London this September; that production would have replaced *The Way of the World*, which I saw at the National the last time I represented UH Study Abroad.)

Students will be required to provide frequent e-mail postings on the course content, as well as theatrical reviews, short critical and theoretical papers, memorization exercises, and a final substantial paper. There will be individual conferences with an option for revision for all written assignments.

II. Student Learning Outcomes—Study Abroad Program and English Department

English 462 WI Studies in Drama—Theatres of Social Critique is designed to carry out the following Study Abroad Program and SAC Course Student Learning Outcomes, as well as those found in the Department of English Student Learning Outcomes Statement. In each case, the SLO's link to a course specifically designed for London will be explained.

**A. SAC Program and Course Student Learning Outcomes**

Since the Program and the Course SLOs are so integrated in their emphasis on knowledge, understanding, analysis, and respect for different national and regional cultures and disparate viewpoints, I have supplied course-specific information that nevertheless addresses the larger programmatic concerns.

1. Students will demonstrate awareness of their own cultural values and biases and how these impact their ability to work with others.

   Historically, geographically, and culturally, drama has been one of the most compelling venues for developing such awareness, because the disparate viewpoints are articulated and debated right on the stage, often with keen insights into the stakes involved in confronting and understanding the disparities. Students will analyze and evaluate such representations.

2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of diversity with a focus on the population or topic of interest in the specific Study Abroad program.

   For well over five hundred years, London drama and the London stage have been principal institutions for representing the world to Britain, and Britain to the world. These representations can be distorted, pre-emptive, imperial, and in this course, revisionist and
even polemical. Through their essays, reviews, and postings, students will assess a whole range of cultural and environmental assumptions, and analyze how such convictions are navigated on the stage.

3. Students will demonstrate an increased capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints.

The theatre is a laboratory for coming to understand the motivations, the needs, and the desires that drive individuals and cultures. Because London arguably has the world's most active and culturally diverse theatre communities, it provides an ideal environment for exploring, and coming to terms with, diversity of gender, class, race, and cultural origins. In fact, it will be the subject of all the plays read or attended, and the class assignments.

**B. English Department Student Learning Outcomes**

The English Department general Student Learning Outcomes statement indicates that "students develop advanced skills as readers, writers, and interpreters of texts across a variety of genres and rhetorical situations . . . as part of a challenging program in literary and cultural studies, English language studies, composition and rhetoric, and creative writing." As a London Study Abroad course, English 462 WI: Studies in Drama will not directly address the English SLO that students will "recognize Hawai‘i’s geographic and cultural location in the Pacific," although we certainly will draw on the students’ experience as residents of Hawai‘i and the Pacific, and as students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, to explore the contrasts and commonalities between actions of social critique and their targets in British and European theatre, and in historical and contemporary Oceania.

Here are the SLOs from the English department's undergraduate curriculum map that will govern English 462 WI.

1. Students will use secondary sources in the interpretation of texts

The theoretical writing of Bertolt Brecht on epic theatre, and of Antonin Artaud on the Theatre of Cruelty, will be important for placing modern texts within theatrical critical traditions. Peter Brook's writing on staging will be important as well. Contemporary reviews and later literary and dramatic analysis will be mandatory for the final paper.

2. Students will develop skill in reading

We will be reading a large number of plays, and supporting critical and theoretical writing; students will also be collectively reading the postings that they prepare for the class.
3. Students will develop skill in writing

Because English 462 is a writing intensive class, there will be a substantial number of writing assignments—essays, reviews, postings. All essays and reviews will be discussed in individual conferences with the instructor, followed by detailed revision, insuring that students will be receiving instruction at all stages of the writing process.

4. Students will develop skill in interpretation of texts

Not only will close attention be paid to the published texts of the plays, which will focus students' interpretive skills, but the live performances attended will also strengthen the students' abilities to analyze and evaluate the plays as living artistic endeavors, and to discuss these evaluations with other individuals who have seen the same productions.

5. Students will become familiar with a wide variety of genres and rhetorical situations

Since one of the main emphases of this class is the huge range of forms and venues associated with and still available in the London dramatic scene, the students will evaluate a variety of plays and performance strategies, and also the physical circumstances of the production, which are exceptionally important for many performance genres.

The following Student Learning Outcomes for Writing Intensive courses will also shape the course curriculum.

1. Students will write postings about and formal reviews of productions attended; after conferences with the instructor and revision, these will be shared with other class members for further discussion.

2. Students will write and revise a final essay that integrates secondary sources, close textual analysis, conclusions drawn from firsthand experience of a production, and argued opinions.
Course Syllabus for Faculty Resident Directorship, London Program Spring 2017

ENGLISH 462 WI: STUDIES IN DRAMA: THEATERS OF SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Instructor: Craig Howes

Pre-requisites: Consent of the Instructor

3 Credits, 45 contact hours

Texts

William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*
Ben Jonson, *Volpone* and *Bartholomew Fair*
William Congreve, *The Way of the World*
John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*
Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*
Henrik Ibsen *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*
William Butler Yeats and Augusta Gregory, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*
John Millington Synge, *Playboy of the Western World* and *Riders to the Sea*
George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession, Pygmalion, Saint Joan*
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and her Children*
John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*
Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming, Celebration*
Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade*
Peter Schaffer, *Equus*
Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*
Caryl Churchill *Cloud Nine*
Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*
David Hare, *Skylight*

A significant amount of dramatic, critical, and theoretical reading, including Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, will be supplied by the instructor.

Course Requirements

A. Attendance, Participation, Assignment Reading, Posting Readings
B. Attendance at several mandatory performances and public events
C. Six Postings on the course materials, read by all students, and due every other week
D. Two memorizations, with some blocking, and critical framing
E. Two reviews of plays currently in production in London
E. Two five-page papers—with revisions
F. A substantial (10 page) final research project, drawing on primary, critical and theoretical materials, with a staging component.
G. Mandatory conferences with the instructor for all papers.
H. A final examination
**General Weighting for Grades**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postings (Six)</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Memorizations</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Reviews</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two short papers, with optional revision</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Project, with revision</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>10%</td>
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A = 85%  B = 75%  C=60%  D=50% +  F = less than 50%

Because of the nature of the Study Abroad Program, attendance is assumed; if students miss more than two classes, 2% will be taken off for each absence.

**Additional Guidelines**

1. This course will essentially be a group directed reading. You will have a substantial number of texts to read and plays to attend. Please keep up with the reading; you will receive detailed instructions about what you're responsible for every day.

2. You must complete ALL the assignments to receive a grade in the course. I will also be using pluses and minus for the individual assignments, and for the concluding grade. I do not take marks off for late assignments, largely because I've found that students do a very good job of penalizing themselves. I will not, however, accept an assignment until I have received the previous assignment, and we have conferenced about it.

7. Postings should be submitted by midnight of the due date. If they are late, you get half credit, and you still must still complete them.

4. There will be mandatory conferences for all papers, and two conferences for the final paper. Revisions turned in within a week of the conference will get the second grade.

5. Especially since I will be working with you closely on your writing, and supervising revisions, academic honesty is important. Plagiarized materials will result in an automatic F for any assignment; anything further will result in an F on the course. Just don't.

6. Many of the materials in this class deal with such issues as ethnicity, race, gender, class, sexual identity, and relationship to land and place. Precisely because these all affect us personally, and differently, mutual respect and consideration in the classroom is essential so that we can all have an intellectually safe and unthreatening environment.
Week by Week Syllabus for English 462 WI:

Studies in Drama, Theatres of Social Critique

The will be at five mandatory trips to London theatres for productions, with a number of optional opportunities as well. In addition, students will be selecting their own plays for review, which will be attended separately.

This syllabus is based on a fourteen week semester. Since I do not know the number of classes a week, or the specific days, I will describe what will happen each week.

Week One: Introduction to Course, and Initial Work on Early Modern London Theatre


After an explanation of the writing assignments, field trips, and course management, we will start with a discussion of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays that comment explicitly on social and political mores. Though the plays might be set elsewhere, the subject is clearly the audience, and the social environment of class and power they inhabit.

Discussion will also center on the different performance venues during this period—from the open public theatres most famous from the Globe, to the smaller, in-door theatres like the Blackfriars that were Ben Jonson’s favored space, to the opportunities for command performances at the court of the monarch, or other high ranking officers and nobility.

Week Two: More on Early Modern Theatre, and a Transition to Restoration Drama


Nothing testifies to the force of drama as a critique more than the closing of English theatres during the English revolution of the mid-17\(^{th}\) century. With the return of Charles II came the restoration of the theatre, and the comedies in particular became important forms of commentary on the social and political mores of the era—so much so, that by the mid-eighteenth century, the Licensing Act severely restricted the production of plays that questioned or mocked public authority. Congreve and Gay represent two of the most famous instances of social critique and satire, and are also fine examples of the dramatic conventions of the time regarding plot, subject matter, the integration of music, and so on.

Week Three: More on Restoration Drama and Eighteenth Century Drama

Continuing discussion of the theatre as world, and the world as theatre. To what extent were audiences the inspiration for the actions and characters? How did stagecraft—props, lighting, acting styles—reinforce these senses of identification and critique?

First Class-Assigned Dramatic Production Attended

Week Four: Modern Drama, Comedy, and Social Commentary

Texts: Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, and *Ghosts*; Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

The realist social drama associated with Ibsen soon made its way to the British stage, where it encountered equally cutting social commentary, though in a dramatic form closer akin to the traditions of Restoration and eighteenth century comedy. We'll examine the controversies surrounding this theatrical innovation.

Week Five: Continuation of Modern Drama, and the Creation of an Irish National Theatre


The national theatre of Ireland was an important intervention into the British theatre scene. As the Abbey Theatre developed its belief in drama as a force for national self-determination and decolonization, the English theatre was engaging in its own creation of a theatre that critiqued English social and political assumptions as a major imperial power.

First Five-Page Paper Due—Conference

Second Class-Assigned Dramatic Production Attended

Week Six: Modern Drama, Comedy, Social Realism, and Political Commentary

Texts: George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Pygmalion*, and *Saint Joan*. Betolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre"

Plays that commented directly on the British social scene were among the most successful in the first forty years of the twentieth century, and George Bernard Shaw was the most prominent playwright and critic of this period. There is probably no more famous story about class and geography in London that Shaw's *Pygmalion*, thanks to the later musical *My Fair Lady*. Drawing Brecht into the discussion, we will examine closely how writers such as Shaw, and many others managed to draw and entertain huge audiences with plays that often pointed to the hollowness, pretention, and cruelty of the British social scene.
First Memorization Assignment Due

Also: A field trip to Covent Garden, the South Bank, the East End— in short, the various settings for plays already studied, and the districts where they were performed.

Week Seven: Pre-and Post WW II, Epic Theatre, Cruelty, Absurdism, and the Kitchen Sink


Brecht's theories of epic theatre pervaded socially- and politically-engaged drama everywhere, and Artaud began laying foundations for other aspects of modern European drama. The importation of the Theatre of the Absurd from Europe in the 1950s was led by an expatriate Irish writer, Samuel Beckett. England's own champion of this movement was Harold Pinter, whose early absurdist yet menacing plays find their culmination in *The Homecoming*, which explores class, gender, and generational tensions in a realistic environment that periodically explodes into violence and absurdity. Paralleling this form of commentary were the social realist plays of Osborne and others, who focused attention on the inequities and the despair of postwar England, and especially for the working classes.

Third Class-Assigned Dramatic Production Attended

Week Eight: Continuation of Post World War II, Absurdism, and the Kitchen Sink

Texts: Everything read to this point in the semester, dramatic, critical, and theoretical

We will use this week to synthesize our discussions of the plays, criticism, and productions to this point. This will also be a major week for mandatory student conferences on individual performance, and on the writing assignment due at the beginning of this week.

First Review of a Production

Week Nine: Marat, Shaffer, and Stoppard

With the creation of the National Theatre, and the surging to prominence of formally and socially innovative playwrights, British theatre entered another generation of prominence. With *Marat/Sade*, Peter Brook brought Brecht and Artaud together in an English production. Peter Shaffer's explorations of theatrical conventions, empire, and contemporary society, most notably in *Equus*, were influential. And Tom Stoppard's long running commentary on the fate of ideas in the world began in the mid-1960s. We will also discuss how the institutionalization of theatre as a national treasure affected the direction and possibilities of critical engagement and dissent.
Fourth Class-Assigned Dramatic Production Attended

Second Five Page Paper Due

Week Ten: Caryl Churchill, Sarah Kane, and a Feminist, Antagonist Theatre

Plays like Cloud Nine and 4.48 Psychosis were not only searing engagements with issues of race, gender, class in contemporary society, but also highly innovative in terms of stagecraft, and dramatic process. We will look at how Churchill, Kane, and others innovate in terms of production and artistic collaboration throughout the process.

Weeks Eleven through Fourteen: As It Happens Contemporary British Theatre

Texts: To be announced, depending on current productions

Taking the pulse of what is happening in British Theatre in London during our time of residency will be a crucial part of the course. Innovations in subject matter, the remarkable diversity of the playwrights' and performers' backgrounds, and the remarkable range of venues and forms of performance need to be noticed as they are happening. In fact, throughout the semester, if an especially notable production of a British classic, or a contemporary play, is ending its run, or only appearing briefly, the class will make sure to see that, even if it doesn't fit perfectly with the chronology of the course.

Week Eleven: Second Memorization Assignment Due

Second Review Due

Fifth Class-Assigned Dramatic Production Attended

Week Twelve: First Draft of Research Paper Due—Conferences early in Week Thirteen

Week Fourteen: Final Research Paper Draft Due

Final Examination