

Instructor Information

Dr Ashoke Chanda

Class Times and Theatre Visits

Group 1: Monday 2 – 5 pm.

Theatre visits: Tuesday evenings

Group 2: Tuesday 2 – 5 pm.

Theatre visits: Wednesday evenings

Most shows start at 7.30 pm, and last *on average* 2 – 2.5 hours. (Always check the ticket for exact time.) Give yourselves enough time to get to the theatre. If you're late, theatres will not let you in till "an appropriate moment" which could be half an hour into the show. A few theatres will not let you in at all once the show has started because spectators would need to cross the acting areas to get to their seats.

Course Description

In this cross-listed English and Theatre course you will read a variety of playtexts and see productions of these plays in theatres all over London. The plays will be from different countries and belong to different historical periods, movements or styles, and genres of drama (e.g. the Restoration period, the theatre of the absurd, and tragedy respectively). We shall see plays on a variety of stages such as the Elizabethan amphitheatre, proscenium arch, theatre-in-the-round, and studio or black box theatre (sometimes located in pubs). We shall see plays that are 'classics' (e.g. by Shakespeare, Shaw and Ionesco) and plays that are brand new. If possible we shall see one or two musicals. We shall need to visit different parts of London to see the plays, for example the West End (the equivalent of Broadway), Kilburn (north east) and Richmond (south west). We shall be visiting theatres that receive government subsidy through the Arts Council of Great Britain (such as the National Theatre) and purely commercial theatres (such as those in the West End). And as co-curricular activities we shall be doing a workshop at Shakespeare's Globe and a backstage tour of the National Theatre.

Class Format

There will be some lecturing to give background information (e.g. historical and biographical) and to sum up after discussion. Most of the class will, however, consist of close examination of the text based on study questions and discussion of the productions. Study questions will be supplied in advance and students are expected to prepare possible answers to them before they come to class. Discussion on productions will be led either by the professor or by students.

Aims of the Course

1. To understand and evaluate playtexts through the analysis of plot, story, characters, use of language, dramatic techniques and themes.
2. To understand and evaluate productions through the analysis of all the different aspects of a theatre production: the stage and auditorium, the sets, lighting, moveable properties, costumes, sound, acting and directing. More details on 1 and 2 are to be found in the attached document, "Pointers to Writing Essay-Reviews and Presentations on Performances". Aims 1 and 2 are obviously linked, and much of the focus of the course will be on an examination of the relationship between text and performance.
3. To discuss, wherever possible, the contemporary resonance, whether political, sociological, or cultural, of the issues the play raises, even if (indeed particularly if) they are not contemporary plays. We shall ask ourselves, 'Why is a certain play (out of the thousands available) being put on now?'
4. To acquire some historical understanding of drama and theatre. While this is not a history of theatre course, we shall gain a greater understanding of some of the productions if we examine say, the theatrical conventions and/or the political situation of the period in which the play was written.

Assessment

1. **Two essay-reviews**, the first 5 pages long (20% of final grade), the second 8 -10 pages (40%). An essay-review is different from reviews that you read in newspapers. For one thing it is much longer, but more importantly it should engage with issues or themes in greater depth and be based not only on a close observation of the production but also on a careful reading of the text. The first review will be set after we have discussed 3 or 4 plays; the second will constitute your final paper.
2. **A seminar presentation on one production** (10%). For more information on presentations see the attached 'Pointers to ... Presentations on Performances'.
3. **Class participation** including contributions to discussion of Study Questions (10%).
4. **One exam of 1 hour 40 minutes** involving short answers mainly on the characters and themes of the plays (20%). This exam will be set after 7 or 8 weeks.

Pass/fail quizzes may be given on some of the texts to test knowledge and understanding of plot and characters. 75% will be the pass mark. Students who fail to achieve 75% as an average of all their quizzes will have their final grade reduced. So for example someone with a final grade of A- will receive a B+ and someone with B+ will get a B.

Course Texts

These will be the texts of the plays we shall be seeing. Plays that are classics or are being revived can be bought at most booksellers or be borrowed from university libraries you have access to. New plays are usually available at the theatres where they are being shown.

Calendar of Theatre Visits

Monday class attends Tuesday night performances, Tuesday class attends Wednesday night performances.

1. **Tuesday/Wednesday 29/30 January**
The President's Holiday by Penny Gold
Hampstead theatre, tube Swiss Cottage
2. **Tuesday/Wednesday 5/6 February**
The Vertical Hour by David Hare
Royal Court Theatre, tube Sloane Square
3. **Tuesday/Wednesday 12/13 February**
Helter Skelter/Land of the Dead by Neil LaBute
Bush Theatre, tube Goldhawk Road
4. **Tuesday/Wednesday 19/20 February**
Prayer for my Daughter by Thomas Babe
Young Vic, tube Waterloo

Backstage tour of the National Theatre on Monday/Tuesday 25/26 February at 5.30 pm.

5. **Tuesday/Wednesday 26/27 February**
Women of Troy by Euripides
National Theatre, tube Embankment
6. **Tuesday/Wednesday 4/5 March**
The Homecoming by Harold Pinter
The Almeida Theatre, tube Highbury and Islington
7. **Tuesday/Wednesday 11/12 March**
Dealer's Choice by Patrick Marber
Trafalgar Studios, tube Charing Cross

Weeks beginning 17 and 24 March Mid-term Break

8. Tuesday/Wednesday 1/2 April

Blackbird by David Harrower

Rose Theatre, Kingston, National Rail Kingston

9. To be announced

10. Tuesday/Wednesday 15/16 April

Speed the Plow by David Mamet

Old Vic, tube Waterloo

Plays for succeeding weeks to be announced. It will include **King Lear** at Shakespeare's Globe.

Course Calendar

January 28/29

Introduction to the course, the theatrical scene in London, the literary analysis of playtexts, and the reviewing of productions.

Introduction to the historical background of Penny Gold's *The President's Holiday* and to Political Theatre.

ASSIGNMENT: Read *The President's Holiday* and David Hare's *The Vertical Hour*

February 4/5

Discussion of production of *President's Holiday*.

Introduction to **The Vertical Hour**. Play-reading of extracts from David Hare's **Stuff Happens**.

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare answers to Study Questions on **The Vertical Hour**.

February 11/12

Discussion of production of *The Vertical Hour*.

Discuss broadcast of interview with David Hare on Front Row (BBC 4).

ASSIGNMENT: Read Neil LaBute's **Helter Skelter** and **Land of the Dead** and prepare Study Questions.

February 18/19

Student presentation on and discussion of production of *Helter Skelter* and *Land of the Dead*.

Introduction to Greek Tragedy and *Women of Troy*

ASSIGNMENT: Read Thomas Babe's *Prayer for my Daughter* and prepare Study Questions on *Women of Troy*.

February 25/26

Student presentation and discussion of *Prayer for my Daughter*.

Hand in first essay-review. National Theatre Backstage tour.

ASSIGNMENT: Read and prepare Study Questions on Pinter's *The Homecoming*.

March 3/4

Student presentation on *Women of Troy*.

Screening of Pinter's *The Caretaker*.

ASSIGNMENT: Read *The Caretaker*

10/11 March

Student presentation on *The Homecoming*.

Finish screening of *The Caretaker*. Discuss *The Caretaker*.

ASSIGNMENT: Read and prepare Study Questions on Patrick Marber's *Dealer's Choice*

Mid-term break.

31 March/1 April

Student presentation on **Dealer's Choice**.

Introduction to David Mamet. Screening of part of Glengarry Glen Ross

ASSIGNMENT: Read David Harrower's **Blackbird**.

April 7/8

Examination on a selection of texts.

Presentation on **Blackbird**.

Rest of course schedule will be announced once bookings have been made for the rest of the semester.

Policy on Academic Integrity

The University of Maryland has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity. This Code sets out standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. The code prohibits students from cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit

<http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>

The University of Maryland is one of a small number of universities with a student-administered Honors Code and an Honors Pledge, available on the web at

<http://www.jpo.umd.edu/aca/honorpledge.html>. The code prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. You will, therefore, be required to write the following signed statement on each assignment and examination: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination".

Pointers to Writing Essay-Reviews and Presentations on Performances

1. **Describe the theatre, i.e. the stage and auditorium.** (Schematic drawings of stage, sets, main props etc. sometimes help.) What is our experience of the relationship between the type of stage (classical amphitheatre, Elizabethan/Jacobean amphitheatre, thrust/apron, proscenium arch, in-the-round, traverse, promenade etc.) and the play? How does the latter exploit or adapt itself to the former? How would your experience of the play be different if it were produced on a different stage?

2. How do the following contribute to the production of meaning and effects:

- a) **Sets- describe their function.** How many set changes are there? What is the function of the location? What information about the story, characters, relationships do the sets/locations provide? Are sets used in an expressive, metaphorical or symbolic way? What imaginary off-stage locations are created? (Cycloramas or video screens for projecting images to indicate location or for other functions are being increasingly used. Does this medium clash with the medium of sets or is it integrated? Is its use justified?)
- b) **Lighting - describe its function.** How does it help to create time of day or season? Is it used to highlight? To create mini-spaces on the stage? Is it expressive, say of general mood or character's emotion?
- c) **Props (i.e. moveable properties).** How do they contribute to narrative, characterisation and themes? If the props are scripted (i.e. in the text), you need to consider how they are used, whether they have the effect they're meant to have. If unscripted, what are they and why are they introduced? Some props are set or scenic props; most are hand props.
- d) **Costumes.** Are they expressive of historical period, occupation, status, character and character changes? Or are they contemporary and neutral, not important? Costumes can be discussed with characterisation (see above).
- e) **Sound. Diagetic** sound is sound that emanates from and is part of the world of the play whether coming from on-stage or off-stage. **Non-diagetic** when it doesn't belong to the world of the play, but has been added to create mood or express character's emotion or define historical period or place or change scenes.

It is often useful to compare the stage directions the author provides in the text with how the production stages the play, ignoring, modifying or transforming these directions.

When discussing the components of a production try not to spend too much time on the *realism* of sets, props etc. Yes, that fridge in "Death of a Salesman" really does look like a 1940s fridge, but what role does it have in the play? Yes that toppled apple tree in the Keller's front yard in "All My Sons" really does look as though it's been hit by lightning, but what symbolic meaning does the event and stump accumulate as the action progresses?

3. **What observations do you have about how actors characterise their roles?** Are the actors effective in their roles? *Describe the character that comes across.* As your experience of theatre

develops you can push the analysis further. You can consider various aspects of non-verbal communication (gesture, facial expression, movements and other stage business, miming) that contribute to the representation of character. Acting is difficult to talk about, but you should evaluate it. Sometimes it helps to concentrate on the acting in just two or three key scenes.

4. How does the literary analysis of the dramatic text help you to understand the play? For example, does the playwright use juxtaposition, dramatic irony, suspense (e.g. with cliff-hanger ending to scenes or acts), and narrators (the difference between 'show and tell'. Are the categories of Aristotelian poetics useful for discussing the play e.g. the three unities, anagnorisis, peripeteia, hamartia and catharsis or are they irrelevant? Literary analysis consists of examining the use of such techniques and terms as above, as well of story and plot, characters and relationships, style, and themes.

5. What are the issues the play raises? That is, what is the play about? These issues may be interesting from an historical and/or from a contemporary standpoint. (All the technical aspects of the production, the acting and characterisation all contribute to, and converge on, the meaning of the play.) This is sometimes the most difficult aspect of the production/play to discuss, but also the most important. After all, why do we go to the theatre? Not just to have an intense experience, but to make sense of that experience, to say something about it, to discuss it with others or debate it in one's own mind. When we discuss a non-contemporary or modern play, such as one by Shakespeare, we also need to discuss what the play might have meant during the historical period during which it was written.

6. What is the overall interpretation of the play that the production is trying to communicate? How interesting is it? (How different from other versions that you might have seen?) How does it differ from other possible interpretations of the play?
A good knowledge of the text is essential for understanding the potential for multiple interpretations that it possesses.

Essay-reviews and presentations that you make in class are different from theatre reviews in newspapers in that they require you to write or present at much greater length and more comprehensively. In particular they require you to engage with the issues the play raises in greater depth. *In order to do this, references to the text, in particular quotes are essential both for presentations (always have the text to hand) and essay-reviews.*

The key to a good review is a detailed re-creation and analysis of the main aspects of the production. Detailed description is a good starting point. But you then need to discuss **function**. We're not interested in techniques for themselves; we're interested in how we produce meaning and effects from them, how we read them, how we experience them. After all theatre reviewing is an intellectual distillation of our total experience in the theatre.

Criteria for Grading

1. Detailed, specific, if possible, vivid, verbal re-creation of the production.
2. In-depth analysis of significant details of production, including acting or the effectiveness of the characterisation. Concentrate on analysing **function, meaning and effects**. Don't forget dramatic techniques used by the playwright e.g. narration, chorus, miming, video.
3. The issues of the play must be discussed at some depth. Try to focus on the central and governing issues rather than minor subsidiary ones. Much of your discussion of the issues will arise out of a literary critical analysis of the text in i.e. plot, character, technique and theme. *However it is always important to remember that you are writing about a*

production of this text, about the relationship between text and production and not about the text per se.

4. Independent response and thinking supported by evidence. This does not mean that you ignore what has been discussed in class, but that you go beyond or diverge from it.
5. Clear, logical, fluent, correct, concise and well-organised writing using vocabulary appropriate to the subject.
6. Additional criteria for presentations only are fluency and clarity of speech, the ability to lead a discussion by e.g. posing searching questions and dealing in a constructive manner with opposing views, and the ability to sum up. The professor will co-chair the discussion, inserting himself if necessary into the discussion to steer it or ask supplementary questions.