



## **CIEE Global Institute – London**

**Course name:** Contemporary British Theater  
**Course number:** THES 3002 LNEN  
**Programs offering course:** January in London  
**Language of instruction:** English  
**U.S. Semester Credits:** 3  
**Contact Hours:** 45  
**Term:** January 2020

### **Course Description**

Contemporary British theatre is famous worldwide for numerous popular and well-known works, and most notably for the London West End. From popular musicals to daring dramas, contemporary British theatre continues to develop new, innovative, and imaginative ways of stage performance. This course promotes critical engagement with a range of cultural and political issues in contemporary British theatre including: nationality, gender, race, class, aesthetics and ideology. Students will examine the works of notable and significant dramatists including: John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane. Students will visit sites throughout London that host traditional or innovative formats of theatre, particularly in London's West End.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the course students will:

- Learn the depth, and development of theatre in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century United Kingdom
- Be able to evaluate the connection between politics and theater in the UK
- Be able to articulate how class, race, and ethnicity have historically been represented on stage
- Develop an understanding of key debates on modernity and post-modernity in British theatre
- Learn to think critically about the changing form of contemporary theater

### **Course prerequisites**

None



### **Methods of Instruction**

The methodology will be based on interpretative group work in the form of discussions about the texts read and films/plays/musicals watched, and art objects or performances observed. The more theoretical parts of class sessions will sometimes consist of lectures as well. The first week of the course will serve to establish a basic repertoire of analytical instruments – based on current cutting-edge research – with which all participants are to familiarize themselves. This repertoire may be widened as the course proceeds, for example in cases where students feel that they need additional tools to be able to analyze more adequately a certain text, performances, etc.

### **Assessment and Final Grade**

Participation	20%
Presentation	10%
Review portfolio	25%
Essay	20%
Final Essay	25%

### **Course Requirements**

**Presentation:** You will introduce the class to an aspect of Contemporary British Theatre that you have researched. You should prepare a presentation, a handout with guided reading notes, and you should devise a short exercise for the class to undertake. Presentations should be no longer than 15 minutes inclusive of the exercise and you will be assessed on the basis of preparation, accuracy and delivery of the material. Presentations will be assigned and scheduled at the beginning of the course based on what you tell me about your own interests.

**Review portfolio:** You will be asked to write two short pieces totaling 1500 words. The first should critique a review of a significant piece of contemporary theatre and in this you should show how the review demonstrates its author's own cultural preoccupations. The second piece should be a review of a production you have seen on this course.

**Essay:** You will be given a series of questions that derive from the work undertaken in the course and you will be asked to write an essay in response to one. Your essay should be between 800-1000 words long.



**Final exam:** In the last session and students will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge of key readings and topics covered throughout the course. The exam will consist of short-answer questions or scene studies and a choice of three options for an essay.

### **Participation**

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilising the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students receive grades based upon their contributions both in the classroom and in the Canvas course.

Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed by the Instructor, in advance of each class session. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials where directed.

This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

As part of your work in this course, students should demonstrate learning beyond the submission of written assignments or presentations. As such, all students receive grades based upon participation.

### **Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all unexcused absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, unexcused absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course sessions will also result in a lower final grade.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.



For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to Internship, Service Learning, or required field placement. Students who miss class for personal travel will be marked as absent and unexcused. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Unexcused absences will lead to the following penalties:

<i>Percentage of Total Course Hours Missed</i>	<i>Equivalent Number of Open Campus Semester classes</i>	<i>Minimum Penalty</i>
Up to 10%	1 content classes, or up to 2 language classes	Participation graded as per class requirements
10 – 20%	2 content classes, or 3-4 language classes	Participation graded as per class requirements; <b>written warning</b>
More than 20%	3 content classes, or 5 language classes	Automatic <b>course failure</b> , and possible expulsion

### Weekly Schedule

**Week 1** Theatre trip 1 will take place this week.

Class 1.1 Overview and Introduction: Contemporary British Theatre  
This session will set the scene for the course by reviewing competing narratives for Contemporary British Theatre. Should it be about plays and playwrights? Theatres? Musicals v. Dramas? West End v. Fringe? Revivals v. New Writing?  
How can we reconstruct an idea of the plays performed during this period?

During this session, I will also be beginning to work out your interests so that I can devise the schedule of presentations. These will begin in week 2.

- Class 1.2      An overview of Contemporary British Theatre  
Three theatres part 1: The campaign for a National theatre and the building of the Globe  
The arguments made for establishing these theatres in the C20th give an insight into the value that was placed on theatre in British society. We will look at the narratives of these two theatres and some of the controversies that they have caused.  
Readings: *Romans in Britain*, Howard Brenton; Emma Rice's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- Class 1.3      Three theatres part 2: The Court / Royal Court Theatre  
The narrative of the Court / Royal Court theatre exposes the theatre's relationship with theatre censorship and post-censorship 'In Yer Face' plays. This session will introduce you to some of the key reasons why its work has shaped Contemporary British Theatre.  
Readings: *Saved*, Edward Bond; *Blasted*, Sarah Kane.
- Class 1.4      Tour of the Royal Court Theatre OR Shakespeare's Globe
- Class 1.5      Theatre and the playwright's demand for control  
From Harold Pinter's 'dot and dash' rehearsals to the legal limits placed on reimagining Samuel Beckett's plays, this session will discuss those playwrights who refused to cede control over their plays. We will ask why some playwrights felt compelled to assert their rights over their work, and what reaction managers, actors and audiences had to their demands.  
**Assignment:** Review 1

## Week 2

- Class 2.1      Tour of the Theatre Collection, Victoria & Albert Museum.
- Class 2.2      Theatre and censorship  
After more than 200 years, a group of C20th playwrights and managers produced plays that forced the abolition of theatre censorship. In this session, we will look at a sample of

these plays and appraise key arguments made for and against the abolition of censorship.

Readings: John Osborne, *A Patriot Like Me*, Edward Bond, *Early Morning*

Class 2.3 **Assignment:** Presentation

Class 2.4 Theatre, obscenity and riot

After the abolition of censorship, a number of plays challenged their audiences so profoundly that they caused either a real riot or a riot of outraged critical response. In this session, we will study two of these plays and think about the responses they elicited.

Readings: Mark Ravenhill, *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing*, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, *Behzti*

Class 2.5 The theatre and the gay community

In this session, we will look at the changing presentation of homosexuality on the British stage. From the policing of language and performance during the time of censorship, to plays that dealt openly with gay themes, the session will examine the theatre's role in dramatizing the gay community.

Readings: Martin Sherman, *Bent*, Peter Gill, *Certain Young Men*.

**Assignment:** Essay

**Week 3** Theatre trip 2 will take place this week.

Class 3.1 Theatrical snobbery: drama and the West End Musical

This session will consider the cultural interest in the popularity of the Musical. We will consider its exclusion, until recently, from the academic study of theatre and performance and think about why it has become so important to the landscape of British theatre.

Class 3.2 Diversity on the Contemporary British Stage 1

The desire to challenge the centrality of London, of the West End, of revivals and of largely white casts has been critical to changes in recent theatrical work. This session will explore how the Government has supported and even insisted upon diversity.

**Assignment:** Review 2

Class 3.3 Diversity on the Contemporary British Stage 2

From all-male and all-female casts to gender, disability and colour-blind casting, the contemporary British stage has sought to challenge itself and its audiences to re-imagine performance.

Readings: we will look at accounts of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Phyllida Lloyd and Deborah Warner's ensembles and groups such as Deafinitely Theatre.

Class 3.4 Course conclusions and revision session  
In this final session, we will review the plays and performances studied on the course ahead of the final exam.

Class 3.5 **Assignment:** Final Exam 25%

### Course Materials

#### Readings

Claire Cochrane. 2014. *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*. Cambridge.

Nicholas Grene. 2014. Home on the Stage: Domestic Spaces in Modern Drama.

Dan Reballato. 2013. Exit the Author, in Vicky Angelaki (editor) *Contemporary British Theatre: breaking new ground*

Chris Megson. 2013. 'And I was Struck Still By Time': contemporary British theatre and the metaphysical imagination, in Vicky Angelaki (editor) *Contemporary British Theatre: breaking new ground*

Marissia Fragkou and Lynette Goddard. 2013. Acting In/Action: staging human rights in Debbie Tucker Green's Royal Court plays, in Vicky Angelaki (editor) *Contemporary British Theatre: breaking new ground*

Helen Freshwater. 2013. Children and the Limits of Representation in the work of Tim Crouch, in Vicky Angelaki (editor) *Contemporary British Theatre: breaking new ground*

Mireia Aragay. 2014. To Begin to Speculate: theatre studies, ethics and spectatorship, in Aragay and Monforte (editors) *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*

Clara Excodá. 2014. Violence, Testimony and Ethics in Martin Crimp's *The Country and The City*, in Aragay and Monforte (editors) *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*

Hanna Scolnicov. 2014. How to Mourn: Kane, Pinter and theatre as monument to loss in the 1990s, in Aragay and Monforte (editors) *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*

Karim-Cooper. 2012. The Performance of Early Modern Drama at Shakespeare's Globe, in Aebischer and Prince (editors) *Performing Early Modern Drama Today*

Coen Heijes. 2012. Shakespeare's Contemporaries at the Royal Shakespeare Company, in Aebischer and Prince (editors) *Performing Early Modern Drama Today*



Jacquelyn Bessell. 2012. The Actor's Renaissance Season at the Blackfriars Playhouse, in Aebischer and Prince (editors) *Performing Early Modern Drama Today*