**An Introduction to Theatre History**

**Shanghai Theatre Academy**

**November-December 2020**

**Lecturer:**  Ashley Marinaccio

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The Graduate Center, CUNY

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This class will provide an overview of theatre history, primarily focused on English language plays and Western theatre genres, while keeping a global perspective in mind throughout our consideration of key developments, themes, and ideas that have shaped theatre as we know it today. In our exploration of theatre history and exemplary works we will consider such questions as: what makes theatre, theatre; how have different forms and genres evolved; what is the impact of the theatrical space; how does theatre intersect with religion, with politics, and with daily life; what is the relationship between text and performance; and how have certain works been interpreted and reinterpreted throughout history and by different theatre artists?

Throughout the class, we will join these questions to close reading of important plays and performances, as well as a few additional primary and secondary texts. The class will conclude with student performances based on a topic we covered in the class.

The class is designed structurally and thematically to follow our central required text:

Carlson, Marvin. *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press (2014).

Class meets: 13:30 to 16:30

11/14, 11/21, 11/26, 11/28, 12/5, 12/10 12/12, 12/19

**Class 1 – Introduction and What is Theatre?**

Read Chapter 1 in *Think Theatre*, “Theatre: A Global Experience” (p. 1-19)

Read Chapter 9 in Think Theatre, “Theatre Spaces and Environment” (p. 211-233)

**Class 2 – What is Theatre (continued)?**

Carlson, *Theatre –* Chapter 1

Euripedes, *The Trojan Women*

(Look at excerpts from Trojan Women Syria; Trojan Women, Brazil; LAMAMA)

<http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/troj_women.html>

**Class 3 – Religion and Theatre**

Carlson, *Theatre –* Chapter 2

Read: Anonymous, *Everyman*

<http://www.astorialand.com/geeks/scripts/everyman.pdf>

 Presentation

 Exercise: *Stage Your Own Origin Story*

Watch:

*Ta’zieh* Performance

**Class 4 – Theatre and Drama**

Carlson, *Theatre –* Chapter 3.

Improvisation (Exercises)

William Shakespeare *Romeo and Juliet*

**Class 5 – Theatre and Performance**

Carlson, *Theatre –* Chapter 4

Arthur Laurents, *West Side Story*

<http://www.bmyp.com/WSS%20audition%20pieces/WSS%20script.pdf>

**Class 6 – The Makers of Theatre**

Carlson, *Theatre –* Chapter 5

Read: *Twilight: Los Angeles*  (Anna Deavere Smith)

**Class 7 – Other Authors, Other Texts, Other Forms**

Read Chapter 6 in Think Theatre, *Other Authors, Other Texts, Other Forms* (p.128-155)

 **Class 8 – Course Wrap-up**

Final discussion of key areas and developments in global theatre history and their application to the plays considered in class.

**Creative Project:**  in groups, students will create a 7-10 minute creative project inspired by something we talked about in class.

**International Play Analysis**

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This course is an in-depth analysis of four plays from the “global” canon. We will do a deep dive into four canonical plays, analyzing text, stage directions, adaptations, context and intertext.

Class meets: 17:30 – 20;30

11/13, 11/19, 11/20, 11/26/, 11/27, 12/3, 12/10, 12/17

**Class 1 – Macbeth**

* Synopsis of *Macbeth*
* Adaptations
* Key Scenes and Plot Analysis
* Reading from the Text (Exploring the *dagger speech*)
* Themes: “fate versus free will”, “appearance versus reality”, “corruption of power and unchecked ambition”, “nature of evil”

Assignment Due: Read *Macbeth*

**Class 2 – Macbeth**

* Research and Development Activity: In this activity students will break out into groups of 3. One person will be the director, costume designer, and scenic designer. Students adapt their own version of *Macbeth.*

**Class 3 – Fires in the Mirror**

* History of the play
* Structure of the play/documentary theatre
* Watch excerpts from the show
* Documentary theatre exercise

Assignment Due: Read *Fires in the Mirror*

**Class 4 – Fires in the Mirror**

* Students will perform their own “documentary theatre” pieces
* Discussion about art and social commentary

Assignment Due: Everyone must come in with their own documentary theatre piece

**Class 5 – Antigone**

* Who is Sophocles
* What is Greek Theatre (discuss elements of Greek Theatre)
* <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/sophocles>
* Read excerpts from *Antigone* in class. Discuss themes, key plot points and any questions students may have about the play.
* Neutral mask exercise (bring neutral masks)

**Class 6 – Antigone**

* Adaptations of Antigone
* Watch scene from Fugard’s *The Island*

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/scene-athol-fugards-island-2012>

Inspired by a true story, Athol Fugard’s apartheid-era play is set in an unnamed prison resembling Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela languished for 27 years.   The play’s two main characters spend their days engaging in hard labor and their nights preparing to perform Antigone before the entire prison population.

-Watch scene from Opera Antigonae by Carl Orff (1949)

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/opera-antigonae-carl-orff-1949>

Hanna van Niekerk sings *Antigonae* by Carl Orff

* Watch scene from BAM’s Antigone (2015) dir. Ivo Van Howe

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/play-antigone-new-transl-anne-carson-prod-bam-perf-juliette-binoche-2015>

Ivo van Hove directs a stellar cast including Juliette Binoche, Obi Abili, Kirsty Bushell, Samuel Edward-Cook, Finbar Lynch, Patrick O’Kane and Kathryn Pogson in Anne Carson’s striking new translation of Sophokles’s great tragedy.

Assignment Due: In groups, students will begin discussion around their own adaptation of *Antigone.* These will be presented at the very last class.

**Class 7 – Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone**

* Discuss history of the play
* Discuss the ways in which the playwright adapted the original text
* Talk about choices in this adaptation that differ from the first one we’ve read
* Read excerpts in class

Assignment Due: Read *Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone* by Sylvain Bemba

 **Class 8 – Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone**

Assignment Due: Students will present their short adaptations of *Antigone*.