Class Details
Modern Drama in Performance

Prerequisites
The course is open to all students.

Class Description
The course examines the main features of modern drama from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Each week there is a theatre visit to see plays from the period in a number of different venues across the city: for example, the National Theatre, the Royal Court, selected West End houses, non-theatre spaces converted for performance, and site specific locations. The productions are chosen to illustrate the immense variety of work produced in theatre today. They also provide excellent examples of contemporary techniques in theatre making, ranging from interpretations of traditional dramas and comedies, new writing, physical theatre, cross media pieces, and other alternative forms. Significant aspects of modern drama are also considered in class through examples on DVDs, examination of critical reviews, and analysis of additional texts where appropriate.

The theatre visits are normally scheduled for Wednesday evenings. The class takes the form of a seminar involving discussions led by the students, and talks by the tutor supported by audio/visual material with contextual hand-outs. The appraisal of each performance considers the content and form of the play; production aesthetic, tone and style; the playing space and actor/audience relationship; type of venue and audience constituency. There is a scheduled individual tutorial focusing on academic progress and assignments.

Desired Outcomes
The first few sessions establish a context within which to discuss plays and develop a critical vocabulary for articulating a considered response to their performance. The student is encouraged to engage both intellectually and imaginatively with a variety of material by major dramatists of the period, contemporary playwrights and theatre makers. By the end of the course a student should have an appreciation of the following:

a) the function of theatre in society, the significance of the communal event, and the act of transformation.

b) the ways in which theatre makers tell stories, explore ideas and situations, and stimulate the imagination.

c) the nature of acting, scenographic arts, theatre language, spatial aesthetics, and the collaborative process.

d) the importance of new writing, formal experimentation and research, in developing the theatre in the future.
Assessment Components

15%: Contribution to class discussion arising from the theatre visits. A number of students are selected each week to lead certain aspects of the appraisal.

15% Theatre review of 500 words.

15%: Essay not exceeding 1,000 words related to the work of one playwright whose work you have seen in the first weeks of the course.

15% Creative writing piece of 1000 words, based on characters or themes of plays studied on the course.

40%: Project essay not exceeding 3,500 words on an area chosen by the student under tutorial guidance.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component results in failure of the class.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: Demonstrates a clear, secure grasp of the subject and content. In the case of written work, guides the reader through well-reasoned and structured argument and shows evidence of research and critical use of source material. Contributes articulate observations in discussion, treats the ideas of others with respect, and embraces new experiences and points of view.

Grade B: Demonstrates a grasp of the subject and content. In the case of written work, shows an ability to structure an argument with evidence of research and critical use of source material. Contributes frequently to discussion and responds positively to the peer group.

Grade C: Demonstrates a grasp of the subject and content, but variably so. In the case of written work constructs a coherent structure and relevant, if limited argument, with some evidence of research and critical use of source material. Contributes infrequently to discussion but shows evidence of learning from the experience.

Grade D: Demonstrates an uneven grasp of subject and content. Some sense of structure and argument in the case of written work, but research is limited with an over reliance on secondary source material. Contributes only to discussion when required. Shows little evidence of learning experientially.

Grade F: Demonstrates a very limited grasp of subject and content. Weak or incoherent structure in the case of written work, with no evidence of research or critical use of source material. Contributes only to discussion when required and then without due thought or preparation. Shows no evidence of having learnt from the experience of the course.

Required Text(s)

Hamlet, William Shakespeare
The Empty Space, Peter Brook
The Wild Duck, Henrik Ibsen translated by David Eldridge
An Actor Prepares, Constantin Stanislavski
Playwriting, An Artists’ and Writers’ Companion, Clare Bayley and Fraser Grace
When We Talk of Horses, or what do we see when we see a play? Dan Rebellato (PDF)
The Street Scene, Bertold Brecht (PDF)
Taking Care of Baby, Dennis Kelly
A Theory of Adaptation, Linda Hutcheon, introduction (PDF)
Adaptation and Appropriation, Julie Saunders chapter 1
Brief Encounter, Noel Coward (PDF)
A Dream Play, August Strindberg
The Dead in Dubliners, James Joyce
The Stolen Child, W B Yeats (PDF)
Something Borrowed, Malcolm Gladwell, New Yorker article (handout)
Critics loved The Ferryman, Sean O’Hagan, The Guardian article (handout)
Citations from Wikipedia are not acceptable at this level of study.

You can access archival footage of past theatre productions in the following ways:

National Theatre archives – contain records (production details, photos, programmes) of all National Theatre productions, and many video recordings. Contact them by email to arrange a viewing

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-the-national-theatre/archive

Digital Theatre - films new work and many contemporary productions of classical plays (including my play The Container), all available to download cheaply

www.digitaltheatre.com

The V&A Performance Archive – contains video of Jerusalem among others. Contact them to arrange a viewing

www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/nvap/

Session 1

Introductions; the legacy and influence of Shakespeare on British theatre today, playwriting traditions and the value of theatre in the 21st century. We’ll study reviews and consider how to write about theatre.

Please read David Eldridge’s version of Ibsen’s The Wild Duck.
Please read the article When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play? By Dan Rebellato (handout).

No visit this week.

Session 2

Contemporary realism; the influence of Ibsen. Stanislavski and the concept of dramatic action and objectives.

Please read Reflections on the history of playwriting 2: Modern and contemporary, pp. 43-73 in Playwriting: A Writers’ and Artists’ Companion.

Trip to Beginning by David Eldridge, Ambassadors Theatre, 7 February
Please write a short (350 word) review of Beginning, and post it as a blog before class next week.

Session 3

Evaluating Beginning as a play and a production. British playwriting in the 1980s and now; fact-based, verbatim and ‘faction’ theatre. Caryl Churchill’s Top Girls.

Please read the article in the New Yorker by Malcolm Gladwell, Something Borrowed.
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/11/22/something-borrowed
Visit to Frozen by Bryony Lavery, Theatre Royal Haymarket.

**Session 4**

Discussion of Frozen. The monologue; creative writing exercise.

Please read Taking Care of Baby by Dennis Kelly for next week’s class.

**Assignment:** Please write a 500 word review of one of the plays we have seen.

Visit to Girls and Boys by Dennis Kelly, Royal Court Theatre.

**Session 5**

The influence of Brecht; post-dramatic theatre and contemporary British playwriting. Dennis Kelly’s oeuvre: excerpts from his TV comedy Pulling, from his dystopian drama Utopia and from his award-winning musical, Matilda.

Please read the introduction to A Theory of Adaptation by Linda Hutcheon for next week’s class.

Visit to Girls and Boys by Dennis Kelly, Royal Court Theatre.

**Session 6**

Discussion of Girls and Boys. An introduction to adaptation theory, with reference to Hutcheon and Julie Sanders, Adaptation and Appropriation. Noel Coward’s Brief Encounter, the play and the 1946 film.

**Assignment:** Please write a 1000 word essay of one of the playwrights discussed in this course so far.

Visit to Brief Encounter by Kneehigh, at the Empire Cinema, Haymarket.

**Session 7**


Please read Yeats’s poem, The Stolen Child and read the short story, ‘The Dead’, in James Joyce’s Dubliners

Visit to Hamlet, RSC production at the Hackney Empire.

**Session 8**

Discussion of Hamlet, the play within a play, the fuction of theatre in Elizabethan and contemporary society. Introduction to Irish theatre: Yeats and the foundation of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin; Irish history, the Easter Uprising and Sean O’Casey. We will watch extracts from the film Michael Collins dir. Neil Jordan, discuss ‘The Dead’ by James Joyce and Yeats’s poetry.

Please read Strindberg’s A Dream Play for next week’s class.

Visit to The Plough and the Stars by Sean O’Casey, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

**Session 9**

Discussion of The Plough and the Stars. Preparation for Fanny and Alexander, including extracts from Ingmar Bergman’s 1982 film, further consideration of the representation of theatre and theatrical people in film and theatre. Strindberg’s A Dream Play, and its significance in Fanny and Alexander.

Over the SPRING BREAK, read about the making of The Encounter on Complicite’s website http://www.complicite.org/encounterresource/

**Assignment:** write a creative response to one of the plays, themes or characters of the plays you have encountered so far. The response can be prose, monologue or dialogue of 1000 words.
Visit to *Fanny and Alexander*, Old Vic Theatre.

**Session 10**
Tutorials to discuss your progress and your 1,000 word essay. We will also start to consider the subject of your 3,500 word essay due at the end of the course.

**Assignment:** You will be given a choice of questions or you can frame your own question.

Visit TBC.

**Session 11**
Discussion of *Fanny and Alexander*. Preparation for *The Encounter* including devising, use of technology, multi-media performance and the history of Complicite.

Please read Julia Kristeva’s essay, *Word, Dialogue and Novel* in time for next week’s class.

Visit to *The Encounter*, Complicite.

**Session 12**
Discuss *The Encounter*. Discussion of intertextuality. Preparation for *The Ferryman*, including an extract from Steve McQueen’s film *Hunger*, an extract from Jez Butterworth’s play *Jerusalem*.

Please read Sean O’Hagan’s article on *The Ferryman* in the *Guardian* (after watching the play) for next week’s class.

Visit to *The Ferryman* by Jez Butterworth,

**Session 13**
Discussion of *The Ferryman*. Visit from playwright and actor Natasha Gordon, to speak about her new play *Nine Night* at the National Theatre.

Visit to *Nine Night*, National Theatre, Dorfman.

**Session 14**
Discussion of *Nine Night*. Final thoughts.

**Session 15**

**Required Co-curricular Activities**
Theatre visits on Wednesday nights. Theatre visits each week. Directions to the venues will be given in the preceding class. Please be punctual for each performance allowing sufficient time to travel to the venue. Some theatres do not allow admittance to latecomers. For full schedule see separate sheet.

**Estimated Travel Costs**
Tube and bus fares only.
Further visits to the theatre, cinema, concerts, museums, exhibitions and other places of cultural interest. Watch British television, listen to BBC Radio 4 and read the newspapers.

Clare Bayley is a playwright whose plays have been staged in London (National Theatre, Young Vic and Hampstead Theatre), Edinburgh, Cardiff and internationally (Baltimore, Toronto, Melbourne, Rome and Mexico). She is the co-author of *Playwriting: An Artists’ and Writers’ Companion* (Bloomsbury) and her plays are published by Nick Hern Books. Her next production will be *On The March*, a site-specific promenade production to celebrate the centenary of women’s partial enfranchisement, for Oxford Playhouse’s 1725 company in March 2018. Before starting to write for the theatre, Clare was a theatre critic and arts journalist for *The Independent* newspaper and other London publications. She teaches Creative Writing at London South Bank University and mentors MA students in playwriting at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. For Tisch/NYU London she teaches Advanced Playwriting, and Modern Drama in Performance for NYU London.

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**NYU GLOBAL ACADEMIC POLICIES**

Policies and procedures for Global Academic Centres, including policies on academic integrity and the Study Away Standard, can be found here: [https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/student-services.html](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/student-services.html)

Absences: Key information on NYU London’s absence policy, how to report absences, and what kinds of absences can be excused can be found here: [http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/attendance-policy.html](http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/attendance-policy.html)

NYU London work submission policies can be found here: [http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/academic-policies.html](http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/academic-policies.html)

**Classroom conduct:** Academic communities exist to facilitate the process of acquiring and exchanging knowledge and understanding, to enhance the personal and intellectual development of its members, and to advance the interests of society. Essential to this mission is that all members of the University Community are safe and free to engage in a civil process of teaching and learning through their experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Accordingly, no student should engage in any form of behaviour that interferes with the academic or educational process, compromises the personal safety or well-being of another, or disrupts the administration of University programs or services.

Please refer to the [NYU London Disruptive Student Behaviour Policy](https://goo.gl/NvtSVu) for examples of disruptive behaviour and guidelines for response and enforcement.