THEATER IN THE FRENCH TRADITION

Class code: FREN-UA.9929
Instructor Details: Christophe Gauzeran
Christophe.gauzeran@wanadoo.fr
06 03 49 57 22

Class Details: Theater in the French Tradition
Prerequisites: A good level of French

Class Description:
This course will examine contemporary and classical French theater from a new perspective. Far from scholarly chronological norms, we will use contemporary writings in order to better study their classical sources and inspirations. Theatre is an artistic discipline that is constantly in communication with its past. Theatre examines its roots in order to reorient and renew itself. Actors and directors reinvent the verses of Corneille, Moliere and Shakespeare so that they can better discover the writings of today. Dramaturgists reflect contemporary society, yet are always nourished by their predecessors so that they can either create a connection or break with them definitively. In this course we will examine great contemporary authors such as Jarry, Cocteau, Giraudoux, Sartre, Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Koltes, Wajdi Mouawad, etc. As for the great classical figures, we will discuss such various authors as Sophocles, Corneille, Shakespeare and Racine. How did Jean-Paul Sartre use Corneille and Racine to give credence to his theatre? How was Cocteau or Giraudoux inspired by ancient theatre? What did Koltes take from classical tragedy in order to create his own dramas? This course will examine both theatrical writings as well as current productions in order to answer these questions.

All the performances seen for the course as well as the works read will be discussed in oral presentations or written summaries.

N.B. This course may change in terms of the performances offered in Paris during the semester. Thus, the course sessions may be modified accordingly.

Desired Outcomes:
This course’s objectives will include mastering dramaturgical analysis of theatrical texts, analyzing principles of direction and possessing an overarching view of the links that unify contemporary theater with its sources or classical inspirations.

Assessment Components:
- MIDTERM: 20%
- FINAL: 25%
- QUIZZES: 15%
- PRESENTATIONS AND SUMMARIES: 25%
- PARTICIPATION: 15%.

Each student must do at least two oral presentations of 15 to 20 minutes, either on a theatrical text.
or a performance.

The written assignments will be summaries of the readings and performances (2 to 3 pages)

There will also be quizzes (20 to 30 minutes in length)

The Midterm will be an in-class essay (1.5 hours)

The Final will be a take-home assignment (subject given in class) between 7 and 10 pages in length.

**Attendance Policy**

Daily participation will be asked of the students: discussion on texts and performances

**Required Text(s)**

ALFRED JARRY, *Ubu Roi*  
JEAN GIRAUDOUX, *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu* (extraits);  
JEAN ANOUILH, *Antigone*  
SOPHOCLE, *Antigone*  
BRECHT, *Antigone*  
ANTONIN ARTAUD, *Le Théâtre et son double* (extraits)  
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Les Mains sales*  
ALBERT CAMUS, *Les Justes*  
CORNEILLE, *Le Cid* (extraits)  
RACINE, *Andromaque* (extraits)  
BECKETT, *En Attendant Godot*  
BERNARD-MARIE KOLTES, *Combat de Nègre et de chiens*  
WAJDI MOUAWAD, *Incendies*

**Supplemental Text(s) (not required to purchase as copies are in NYU-L Library)**

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY:

M. BORIE, M de ROUGEMONT, J. SCHERER, Esthétique théâtrale  (Sedes)  
JJ. ROUBINE, Introduction aux grandes théories du théâtre  (Bordas)  
A. DEGAINE, Histoire du théâtre dessinée  (Nizet)  
M. CORVIN, Dictionnaire encyclopédique du théâtre  (Bordas)  
P. PAVIS, Dictionnaire du théâtre  (Messidor)  
JP. RYNGAERT, Introduction à l’analyse du théâtre  (Bordas)  
M. PRUNER, La Fabrique de théâtre  (Nathan université).

BIBLIOGRAPHIE ON CONTEMPORARY THEATER:

AZAMA, Michel, Anthologie du théâtre contemporain, (ed. Théâtrales), 3vol.  
A. ARTAUD, Le Théâtre et son double  (folio essais).
C. DESHOULIÈRES, Le Théâtre au XXème siècle (Bordas)
F. ANDERS, Jacques Copeau et le Cartel des quatre (Nizet)
J. VILAR, Théâtre service public (Gallimard)
JP. SARRAZAC, L'Avenir du drame (Aire théâtrale)
D. BRADBY, Le Théâtre français contemporain 1940-1980 (P.U. de Lille)
G. SERREAU, Histoire du nouveau théâtre (Idées gallimard)
JP. RYNGAERT, Lire le théâtre contemporain (Dunod)
B. DORT, La Représentation émancipée (Actes Sud)
IONESCO, Notes et contre-notes (Folio essais)
JP SARTRE, Un Théâtre de situations (Folio essais)
CAHIER DE L'HERNE, Samuel Beckett (Livre de poche)
VINAVER, Ecrits sur le théâtre, Ecritures dramatiques (Actes Sud).
A. UBERSFELD, Vinaver dramaturge (Librairie théâtrale).
A. UBERSFELD, Bernard-Marie Koltes (Actes Sud).
B.M. KOLTES, Une part de ma vie (ed. de Minuit).

S1.

S2.
Methodology: dramaturgical and performance analysis

S3.
_Ubu Roi d'Alfred Jarry and its links to Shakespeare_
We will examine how Alfred Jarry was influenced by Shakespeare (by satirizing Macbeth) as a standard of modernity in order to revolutionize French theatre and abandon realist theories making the theatre a place for the imaginary, where all is possible.

S4.
1930s: A “Theater of Ideas”
This concept was influenced by a generation of neoclassical authors who used antique sources in order to illuminate current issues that were particularly problematic and dangerous in these years preceding World War II
Review of _La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu (extracts)_ by Jean Giraudoux: how did the author use the figures of Hector and Ulysses to illustrate and reflect on the European negotiations that only succeeded in stalling an inevitable war?

S5.
Review of _Antigone_ by Jean Anouilh. How did the author adapt and modernize Sophocle's work in order to address the ideological confrontation between the Vichy regime and the Resistance movement.

S6.
The influence of Brecht on French and European theater in the 1950s.
Examination of critical theatre and the distancing principle theorized by Brecht, which would revolutionize theatrical conceptions up until the 1980s. How did Brecht establish the foundations of an academic, critical and political theatre capable of changing society? The importance of a theory, which for the first time would question the ancient theories of Aristotle.
We will closely examine Brecht’s *Antigone*. How did the German author use this myth in order to focus on the figure of Creon, a tyrannical mirror image of Hitler?

**MIDTERM.**

**S7.**

The « Theater of Cruelty » by Antonin Artaud.

We will examine this important theatrical theory of the second half of the 20th century, which is based on examples of ancient and Elizabethan theatre and uses an extreme catharsis in order to influence people through an emotional and, almost spiritual, purging.


**S8.**

The 1950s: “The Engaged Theater” of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Sartre theorized and practiced a new style of political theatre, which helped France reconstruct itself in the wake of the war. Indeed, in a country largely destroyed morally, a new political theatre forged new moral and philosophical values that were freely questioned on the stage.

In developing his theory, Sartre aligned himself in the tradition inherited from Corneille and in opposition with Racine, a situational theatre in opposition with psychological theatre.

We will examine two emblematic texts of this engaged theater: *Les Mains sales* by JP Sartre and *Les Justes* by A Camus.

**S9.**

In order to better understand the references to French classicism, we will study two models that Sartre opposed: *Le Cid* (extracts) by Corneille and *Andromaque* (extracts) by Racine.

**S10.**

Beckett, *Waiting for Godot.* Is it possible to reread this important work of “new theatre” or the “theater of the absurd” in the light of metaphysical interrogations on *Hamlet* by Shakespeare? This eternal question of human’s existence was treated four centuries earlier with similar dramaturgical principles: stretching and slowing down the notion of time, in other words the abolition of action.

**S11.**

Bernard-Marie Koltes, *Combat de Nègre et de chiens.*

How did the great contemporary French dramaturgist adapt the fundamental principles of former traged in his work in order to construct a veritable contemporary tragedy? Conflicts are created, from the very f scene, announcing an inevitably tragic end: the desire and the righteousness of one can only happen through the destruction of the other

**S12.**

Wajdi Mouawad, *Incendies.*

More than any other contemporary author, this Francophone author (Lebanese-Canadian) is certainly an inheritor of ancient tragedy and inspired by Sophocles. We will examine how he reclaimed ancient themes in order to show the horror of a contemporary war infused with the excess and abolition of taboos that create a modern society

**S13.**

General conclusion.

Return of final papers.