

## **Theatre History I: From Antiquity to Naturalism (THEA 250)**

T/TH, 2:40-4:00, in Performing Arts Building Room 332

Prof. Elliot Leffler

Email: lefflere@reed.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays (2:00-3:00), Thursdays (1:30-2:30), and by appointment

### **Course Description:**

This conference is a rigorous investigation into the study and practice of theatre history. It is an opportunity for emerging theatre artists and scholars—from designers to playwrights, from dramaturgs to actors—to think deeply together about the social and political stakes of theatre-making. Why do people make theatre? Why do people invest in theatre? Why do people watch theatre? Why do people protest theatre? What purpose does it serve in a society, and why might it be dangerous? How does theatre both reflect and challenge the status quo of a society? This course invites us to engage with those questions by interrogating how theatre has functioned in different places and times.

This conference is organized as a survey, and thus, it challenges us to investigate what “theatre” has meant for many different societies, from the ancient world to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when today’s dominant styles of realism and naturalism began to emerge. Through a variety of readings for each period we study, we will examine each historical moment and its theatre, and then move on with greater understanding to another golden moment of theatre history. The course does not propose to cover *all* important theatrical movements during that time; rather, it immerses us in eight distinct historical moments, and challenges us to reconsider “theatre” anew in each one. Hopefully, we emerge ready to reconsider what theatre might mean in our own place and time.

Throughout this conference, we will ask ourselves several key questions of each period we examine:

Who was making theatre?

Who was in the audience?

What was the status of theatre in society?

What did the physical theatres look like? What was the status of directing; design of costumes, sets, lights, sound; what was the acting style, and how did acting work as a process? Who were the actors?

As we navigate through theatre history, we will pay particular attention to constructions of race, class, and gender, as well as the status of theatre people in different historical moments, the history of theatre riots, and the strain of what Jonas Barish calls “the anti-theatrical prejudice.” Our primary texts will include plays, essays, eyewitness accounts, and historical documents.

## **Objectives:**

This conference teaches script analysis, how to read historical documents, how to read a play against a piece of theatre criticism, a rough chronology of theatre history, and basic theatre vocabulary. This conference teaches you the skills of communication and collaboration, group work, research skills, and an introduction to basic production skills in the Theatre department.

This conference provides the foundation for upper level conferences in literature and history in the Theatre department, and also introduces many of the concepts that will be key to the successful completion of the junior qualifying examination in the Theatre department.

This conference is equally compelling for non-majors, as it offers a deep investigation into how today's theatre came to be. A passionate and exuberant study of theatre history provides a window into political, social, cultural, religious, and art histories as well. Through theatre history we become better theatre practitioners, scholars, and artists. Through theatre, we will learn more about our world as it was, it is, and may be.

## **Conference Texts**

The following texts are available at the Reed College bookstore, and are on reserve at the library. It is highly recommended that you purchase your own copies of these books if possible. Additional readings may be distributed in class.

### Required:

- *Theatre/Theory/Theatre*. Edited by Daniel Gerould
- *The Norton Anthology of Drama, volume one*. Edited by J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B. Garner, Jr., and Martin Puchner
- *A Source Book in Theatrical History*. A.M. Nagler

### Additional Required Readings: (on moodle)

- Elinor Fuchs, 'EF's Visit to a Small Planet'
- Sarah Ruhl, *Passion Play* (Act I)
- Anne Bogart 'Magnetism'
- Oscar Brockett, *History of Theatre*, 1-9
- Euripides, *Medea*
- George Aiken, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- Eric Lott, "The Seeming Counterfeit": Racial Politics and Early Black Minstrelsy"
- *A Doll House* by Henrik Ibsen, translated by Rolf Fjelde

### Recommended:

- *History of the Theatre*. Tenth Edition. Oscar Brockett

In addition to these texts, students are also required to purchase tickets for the screening of *Medea* on Sunday evening, September 14. Tickets are available through the Third Rail Repertory Theatre website.

## **Workload:**

- Readings for each class
- Short weekly writing assignments
- In-class leadership of one conference unit (to be completed in partnership with one peer)
- One research project (to be completed in partnership with one peer)
- One end-of-term performance project (in small groups)
- One 10-page critical analysis of your end-of-term project

## **Readings and Short Weekly Writing Assignments**

In most units of this class, we will devote one class period to the study of an historical era (including a particular focus on the theatrical practices of that era), and another class period to one play of that era. For the first class of each unit, you will be required to read a number of short texts, which will typically include historical narratives *about* the time period and primary-source documents *from* the time period. Usually, these readings will also include a brief orientation to the play we are about to read (for the second day of each unit). In addition to these readings, the class requires you to write a 1-2 page bio of someone who may have lived in this era. This is a creative, research-based assignment, asking you to use your imagination in combination with the texts you have read. The person you create can, but need not, be based on a real historical figure. S/he should have a high-stakes relationship to the theatre of that era. This means that some of your characters may be theatre artists (playwrights, actors, designers, etc), some may be patrons, some may be audience members, and some may feel threatened by the theatre. As you craft these short bios, you should plan to consult other sources, beyond the required reading, in order to enhance your understanding of the circumstances in which the people of that era lived. At the end of your bio, you should reference the sources that you consulted. For the second day of each unit, you will be required to read a play, and to come to conference ready to discuss that play – both from your own perspective (as an emerging historian in 2014) and from your character’s perspective.

## **In-Class Leadership of One Conference Unit**

You and a peer will work together to lead the conference discussions for one unit (typically two class periods). To prepare, you will carefully design 3-4 questions to elicit discussion. Some of these questions can be posed to the group in their “real” identities as Reed students in 2014; others can be posed to the group in their assumed identities as people of the time period (based on the roles that they have created for themselves in each unit). I encourage you to work together creatively and analytically to decide how you will challenge us to think deeply and arrive at rich, new insights about the time period and the play. You do not need to lead class as I lead class, or as your peers (who have done this assignment earlier in the semester) have done it. You do need to meet with me at least 24 hours in advance of the first day of your unit to discuss your four questions and your leadership of the unit. Failure to contact me by this deadline will result in no credit for this assignment.

On the week that you lead the conference, you do not need to write a character bio.

## Research Project

After leading the conference with your partner, you have a week and a half to complete a research project regarding the play that you taught about. At the core of the research project is an imagined production of your play in the U.S. in 2014. The project has four major parts: (1) a 1-page director's program note, explaining the rationale for the production of the play (2) a 2-page set of notes from the dramaturg to the design team, at the start of the rehearsal process, (3) a 2-page set of notes from the dramaturg to the actors, at the start of the rehearsal process, and (4) a dialogue between the dramaturg and one of the creative artists (probably either a designer or an actor), written either as an email exchange or as a dialogue, in which they disagree with one another about a particular artistic choice and attempt to convince one another of their own point of view. In all four pieces, you must draw on your historical research about the time period and the play, and on your own artistic sensibility about how a contemporary production of the play might be constructively informed by the research.

The research project is due by 12 noon on the Monday approx. 1½ weeks after you lead your final class of the unit. We will discuss this project in greater detail on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> days of class.

## End of Term Performance Project and Final Reflection Paper

This class capstone project is an attempt to put onstage what we have studied throughout the term. Right after mid-term, I will assign each of you to a group for the end of term project. Each group will then be given the name of one of the moments in theatre history that we have studied during the semester (for example, your group might be the Theatre of Dionysus, or the Hôtel de Bourgogne or the Saxe-Meiningen Players). Your task as a group is to work together to create a performance in the spirit of your subject—your goal is to put theory and history into practice and embody what we have learned.

In the groups, you may choose to work in the style of your artists. You need not perform; if the idea of being onstage does not suit you, feel free to take on the role of designer, director, dramaturg, etc... *as those roles are relevant to your artist/group.*

Your group will perform further research into your subject, reading more plays and essays, and digging deeper into the historical context and theory. As the base text for your project, you will be asked to alter an existing scene (from a play outside of your period that I will choose) to suit your purposes. All groups will be given the same scene as a base text. You will then focus on production design (taking into account our limited resources), and work on rehearsals. Your performance should be 10-15 minutes long, and can take place anywhere on campus (**note: you must get relevant permissions for anywhere beyond our classroom**). It is highly possible that the end text of your performance may not bear any resemblance to the assigned scene. Part of the goal of the project is for you to use the scene as a springboard—think broadly about how you can make this scene fit your group's assigned theatre historical moment/movement.

The goal of your performance is to make living and present the history and theory we have studied. That may mean invoking the historical circumstances and performances we know about your group; that may mean taking your performance style/theory to the next level and asking

how your movement could be embodied today. These should be of high production values, extremely high level of intellect and creativity, and these projects will be taken very seriously in the evaluation of your work in this conference.

You are expected to work on these performances outside of class. This is part of the participation component of this conference. You will present your project in class on one of the last two days of the semester.

Your final paper is a 10-page critical analysis of your process and performance. In it, you will describe and analyze your process in creating your performance—from the first meeting to the final performance, encompassing further research, questions and problems posed along the way, your goals, audience reaction, etc... Your paper should largely focus on discussing the production choices you made and WHY you made them. All of this should be rooted in the texts we read in class, as well as further research you encountered while preparing your project. Finally, your paper will culminate in a discussion and analysis of how the movement you tackled in your final project fits into the larger trajectory of theatre history.

Your paper should include a bibliography of works you investigated in the course of your research and production. Wikipedia entries are not acceptable sources. You should use MLA citation style.

This paper is due on December 17 at 10am. No exceptions.

### **Evaluation and Attendance**

This is your class, and you are responsible for its success or failure. Your fellow conference participants rely on you, as do I. You will be graded on how you contribute to the success of our conference, as well as on your written work, presentation, and participation and excellence in the end of term projects. Participation and thoughtful inquiry are the most important components of your grade, as is the timely completion and responsible composition of all of your assignments.

Your evaluation breakdown is as follows:

#### **I. *Participation* (40%)**

There are two components of participation:

1. Coming prepared to class. This means: doing the reading thoroughly, coming to conference with discussion topics, making connections with earlier readings and general conference themes. This also means collaborating in planning, rehearsals, and performances for major projects.
2. Theatre is a communal and participatory act. Your presence is vital, as is your voice. Questions are good. Curiosity and an open spirit are paramount. As we know from theatre, being an active listener is also a form of participation, and key to the success of our conference.

#### **II. *In-Class Leadership of your Unit* (10%)**

#### **III. *Research Project* (15%)**

#### **IV. *End of term performance project and final reflection paper* (35%)**

## **Conference Schedule:**

### **Unit 1: Introduction**

Tuesday, September 2

- introductions
- class guidelines
- why make theatre?
- received narratives about theatre history

Thursday, September 4: a meditation on theatre in context, and clarification of major assignments

- Anne Bogart, "Magnetism"
- Norton, 1-4
- Elinor Fuchs, "Visit to a Small Planet"
- Sarah Ruhl, *Passion Play*, Act I
- Course syllabus

Tuesday, September 9: Research Methodology (Elliot away)

- Guest speaker Erin Conor, performing arts librarian, to discuss research methodologies for theatre history as they relate to your papers and projects for this conference.
- (no reading assignment for this class)

Thursday, September 11: No Class (Elliot away)

*Note: We will see Medea as a class on Sunday evening, Sept 14, at 7 pm, at the World Trade Center Theater in downtown Portland. If you cannot get there that evening, please be sure you get tickets for another screening that weekend.*

### **Unit 2: Ancient Greece**

Tuesday, September 16: Theatre in Ancient Greece

- Read Norton, 1-12
- Read Norton, 139-143
- Read Nagler, 2-15
- Recommended Reading: Brockett, 12-31
- Write character bio for Ancient Greece unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 9/15)

Thursday, September 18: *Medea*

- Read *Medea* (moodle)

Tuesday, September 23: *Oedipus the King*

- Read *Oedipus The King* (Norton 143-186)

Thursday, September 25: Class cancelled (Rosh Hashannah)

### **Unit 3: Classical India**

Tuesday, September 30: Classical Indian Theatre

- Read Norton, 16-19
- Read Norton, 361-366
- Read Gerould, 84-95
- Recommended Reading: Brockett, 605-613 (on moodle)
- Write a character bio for Classical India unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 9/29)

Thursday, October 2

- Read *The Little Clay Cart* (Norton 366-426)

### **Unit 4: Classical Japan**

Tuesday, October 7: Classical Japanese Theatre

- Read Norton, 22-25
- Read Norton, 461-466
- Read Gerould, 96-107
- Recommended Reading: Brockett, 649-639
- Write a character bio for Classical Japan unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 10/6)

Thursday, October 9: Classical Japanese Theatre

- Read *Atsumori* (Norton, 466-476)

### **Unit 5: Medieval European Theatre**

Tuesday, October 14:

- Read Norton, 25-31
- Read Norton, 427-431
- Read Norton, 477-481
- Read Nagler, 39-54
- Recommended Reading: Brockett, 71-91
- Write a character bio for the Medieval unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 10/13)

Thursday, October 16: *Dulcitius* and *Second Shepherd's Play*

- Read Hrosvitha's *Dulcitius* (Norton, 431-438)
- Read *The Second Shepherd's Play* (481-508)

October 18-26: Fall Break

### **Unit 6: England, 1576-1642**

Tuesday, October 28: Theatre in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. England

- Read Norton, 38-42
- Read Norton, 609-613
- Read Nagler, 113-120

- Read Gerould, 117-127
- Recommended Reading: Brockett, 105-135
- Write a character bio for the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. England unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 10/27)

Thursday, Oct 30: *Doctor Faustus*

- Read Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (Norton 613-650)

### **Unit 7: 17<sup>th</sup> c. France**

Tuesday, Nov 4: Theatre in 17<sup>th</sup> c. France

- Read Norton, 45-48, 1233-1238
- Read Nagler, 203-208, 219-226, 240-241
- Gerould, 168-178
- Recommended Reading: Brockett: 201-224
- Write a character bio for the France unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 11/3)

Thursday, Nov 6: *Tartuffe*

- Read Moliere's *Tartuffe* (Norton, 1238-1290)

### **Unit 8: Early American Theatre**

Tuesday, Nov 11: Theatre in 19<sup>th</sup>-century United States

- Read Norton, 54-60
- Read Brockett, 323-327 (moodle)
- Read Nagler, 541-575
- Read excerpts from John Frick's *Uncle Tom's Cabin on the American Stage and Screen* (moodle)
- Write a character bio for the U.S. unit (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 11/10)

Thursday, Nov 13: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

- Read Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (moodle)

### **Unit 9: The Beginnings of Naturalism**

Tuesday, Nov 18: Beginnings of Naturalism

- Read Norton, p. 60-62
- Read Gerould, p. 351-367
- Read Nagler, p. 579-582
- Read Brockett, p. 372-375 (moodle)
- Recommended Reading: Brockett, 369-389 (moodle)
- Write a character bio for the Realism (upload to moodle by 12 noon, 11/17)

Thursday, Nov 20: No Class (Elliot at the American Society for Theatre Research)

Tuesday, Nov 25: *A Doll House*

- Read Ibsen's *A Doll House* (moodle)



Thursday, Nov 27: No class (Thanksgiving)

Tuesday, Dec 2: Final Projects

Thursday, Dec 4: Final Projects

Tuesday, Dec 9: Last day of Class, Reflection

Thursday, Dec 11: Optional but strongly recommended class trip to see *Richard III* at Northwest Classical Theatre Company (details forthcoming)

Wed, Dec 17 at 10am: Final Papers Due

## **Miscellaneous Policies Related to the Course, the Department, and the College:**

### **About the PAB and space reservations**

All requests to use any of the PAB spaces for class projects, rehearsals, or performances must go through Sarah Dodson: [dodsons@reed.edu](mailto:dodsons@reed.edu). No space in the PAB may be used without proper permission. For end-of-term projects, you **must** secure permission, and clear this with your professor, for any space you use on campus.

If you would like to book rehearsal time in the PAB, you must do so in advance. Please e-mail Sarah Dodson with the following information at least 24 hours prior to the start time:

Your Name:

Which class is this related to?

Event Title: (ex: Sarah Dodson's Thesis Rehearsal)

Date:

Start Time:

End Time:

Number of People:

Setup or A/V needs?:

### **A Note on Correspondence**

My doors are open to you, and I look forward to getting to know you over the term and beyond. However, a few things will help us in our journey:

- Please be conscientious and efficient in your email correspondence. If you have a question, please give me at least 24 hours to respond. Emails received over the weekend might not be responded to until Sunday evening.
- Please think before you email. I would prefer one concise email containing several questions to four different emails sent over 24 hours.
- Please take advantage of my office hours. I highly and emphatically prefer that we communicate in person as opposed to on email.
- If you have questions about research, finding plays, or anything similar, please contact our Performing Art Librarian, Erin Conor. She is here to help you! [Econor@reed.edu](mailto:Econor@reed.edu)
- If you would like a recommendation letter, now or in the future please give me at least three weeks notice, as well as detailed information about the program/fellowship/award for which you are applying.

### **How to miss class responsibly:**

Consistent attendance is of absolute importance. However, students occasionally have extenuating circumstances, and they need to miss class. If this only happens once or twice in a semester, and if it is not on days when the student is presenting, it is acceptable. When this happens, it is your responsibility to ascertain what you missed and what you need to do for subsequent classes. I suggest you do the following:

1. If possible, before the class, check in with me and let me know not to expect you. This can help me prepare for class and I will appreciate your communication. Please don't ask me if it is "okay" to miss class; rather, if you are concerned about my reaction, please simply communicate to me that it is an extenuating circumstance and that it will not become a habit.
2. After the class, please begin by checking in with a peer, and asking what you missed and what upcoming assignments have been explained. Ask them when they are not rushed, and can give you a full and thoughtful answer. If you don't get a thorough and thoughtful answer from them, ask another peer.
3. If you have specific questions for me, based on your conversations with your peers, feel free to ask me. The best way to ask me these questions is to come to my office hours. The second-best way to ask me is to email me. If/when you email me, please try to be specific about your concerns. It is better to ask a question like "What exactly does Aristotle mean by 'catharsis?'" than "What did I miss?"

### **The DoJo (Writing Assistance)**

Writing assistance is available through The DoJo (Dorothy Johansen House). Students can always contact the DoJo via Julie Maxfield at 503/517-7722.

This is a wonderful resource that just got better for students in Theatre History. There are now two DoJo tutors – Helena Pennington and Zoe Rosenfeld – who have taken Theatre History and who are available to assist you with questions and concerns about writing.

### **Accommodation Statement**

Please speak with me as soon as possible if you will require any additional accommodations; this policy might apply to students with disabilities, student parents, and others whose personal situations affect their ability to participate in class or complete assignments on time.

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your professor and the Office of Disability Support Services, [disability-services@reed.edu](mailto:disability-services@reed.edu) or 503-517-7921 as early as possible in the semester. Please be aware that requests may take several weeks to implement. Help me help you by informing me as soon as possible about any situations that arise that may impact your class performance. The sooner I know, the more able I am to work with you to reach a solution.

### **A Note on Plagiarism**

To plagiarize means to represent someone else's work as your own. This means lifting passages from books or the Internet and inserting them into your paper. This means rewording passages read or heard elsewhere. This means working in groups on a project intended to be carried out individually. This means staging a scene that is a replica of a scene you've seen elsewhere. At Reed, plagiarism has serious consequences including suspension and expulsion.

Plagiarism can be a fuzzy area. It can be difficult to know if you are plagiarizing when you are learning things from reading and seeing them, and then applying what you are learning to your own writing and staging. If you have any doubts about your work and how you are using someone else's material, please ask me. It is better to ask than to inadvertently plagiarize.

