

# TH 203-01: Perspectives in World Theatre

Spring 2018; M/W 4:00-5:45 PM

Location: Ansin 203

Instructor: Reza Mirsajadi

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## Course Description

*What is the purpose of theatre? How have theatre artists and playwrights used this form across time and cultures to speak deeply to their concerns of the day?*

These questions are at the heart of this course, and will come up each week as we grapple with new plays, historical periods, and critical voices. The class offers students a basic introduction to dramatic literature, from Ancient Greece to modern day America, with a focus on how playwrights have evolved the dramatic form and claimed control of their identities to speak to their own lives, cultures, and histories. Performance is a form of self-expression but it is also a means by which cultures have generated and transmitted political analysis, shared knowledge and wisdom, organized communities, and galvanized resistance. Students will engage with a wide range of performance styles, from dramatic texts and films to manifestos, live theatre, music, dance, and spoken word, in an effort to promote a deeper understanding of what theatre is and how it has been used throughout world history. The class is structured to provide a foundation in both dramatic literature and adaptation studies, while also focusing on minoritarian and intersectional identities and their representation. The course aims to promote open dialogue and discussions that bridge the readings with current events, as well as fostering stronger analytic and writing skills.

## Course Objectives

- to develop a language with which to discuss issues of race, identity, and society
- to deepen and probe one's knowledge of world theatre, its origins, and its ongoing relevance
- to explore ways in which theatre can function as a site of activism, protest, and revolution
- to foster a dialogue that honestly engages with theatre, history, theory, and lived experience
- to strengthen critical reading, research, writing, and analytical skills

## Required Text

Worthen, W.B., ed. *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, sixth edition.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Careful, insightful reading or viewing of assigned plays and articles in preparation for class each day.
2. Active, thoughtful and intensive participation in class discussions and projects.
3. Reading quizzes, ten total.
4. One production response, two pages.
5. Adaptation research paper, five to seven pages.
6. Midterm exam.
7. Final exam or project.

### **Participation:**

A great deal of the learning in this course takes place in the classroom. To participate effectively, you must be present and on time for class. Be advised, however, that participation is more than simply showing up for class. To receive full credit for participation, you must be prepared to engage in classroom discussions, share your work, and show knowledge of the readings.

### **Attendance:**

- Attendance MATTERS in this course! Being absent will affect your participation grade and will make it difficult for you to keep up with assignments. You are allowed two absences throughout the semester, which can be used for whatever purpose.
- You can only make up reading quizzes that you missed with a doctor's note or in the case of a pre-approved absence that you have discussed with the professor. All assignments should be emailed to the professor by the start of class if you know that you will need to miss the session.
- Please let me know if you must miss class due to illness, travel issues, family commitments, religious observance, etc. Absences for legitimate reasons are understandable, but I must be notified IN ADVANCE, and more than two absences will lower your final grade. Emerson policy recommends that anyone with more than three absences should withdraw from the course. If there are extenuating circumstances, please discuss them with me and we can try to make arrangements for you.
- Your success in this course will depend on your engaged participation in class. Our discussions will be based on assigned readings, so it is crucial that you keep pace with assignments and prepare material for the day it is assigned.
- Regular and respectful contributions to our ongoing exploration of theatre are an essential part of this class.

### **Inclusivity and Engagement:**

Our goal is to collaboratively construct a class environment that fosters intellectual exploration and expression. We will be exploring material in this course that may include language or subject matter that is particularly emotionally charged, difficult, upsetting, or traumatic for members of the class. I ask that you be sensitive to yourself and your classmates.

I also recognize that the nature of some of our material has the potential to cause individuals to relive traumatic experiences. Please see me if you experience apprehension about approaching particular readings, assignments, viewings, or discussions that stem from this concern.

Every student in this class will be valued and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Students will be treated fairly regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, socio-economic status, or national identity. Issues of diversity will be an integral part of our class discussions, assigned readings, and assignments. We will approach our work in this course with a shared foundation of respect and a shared responsibility to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. I encourage you to ask questions and/or to state any concerns you have -- either in class for further discussion, or privately with me -- about the sometimes sensitive, uncomfortable stuff that may emerge.

If you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the classroom climate, please do not hesitate to speak with me, or to contact the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at 617-824- 8528 or by email at [diversity\\_inclusion@emerson.edu](mailto:diversity_inclusion@emerson.edu). If you have a disability that may warrant accommodations in this class, please register with the Disability Services Coordinator at 216 Tremont Street, 5th Floor, (617-824- 8415), so that, together, we can work to develop a plan for providing necessary accommodations.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignments are due by the start of class on the date stated, unless otherwise specified; they cannot be made up unless there has been an excused absence, upon the discretion of the instructor. For every week day (not class day) an assignment is late, the grade for the assignment will be reduced by one full letter.

### **Readings and Quizzes:**

There will be reading assigned for most classes, which may encompass plays, films, soundtracks, critical/historical analyses, live performances, or online videos. Readings are subject to change at the discretion of the professor, but students will be notified in advance if that is the case. All reading must be completed before the start of class, and students must be able to discuss them in depth! There will be ten reading quizzes throughout the semester, as indicated on the syllabus. These will be multiple-choice tests, ten questions each, covering important plot or character details, themes, etc. from the assigned plays.

### **Production Response:** (2 pages)

You will be required to attend a performance of the Emerson Stage production of *Antigone Project: A Play in 5 Parts*, which is being done in the Semel Theatre from February 22-25. Afterwards, you will write a short paper about the piece, how the various playwrights chose to adapt Sophocles' work, and how the production explored these themes through design elements, acting choices, and direction.

The response should NOT be a summary of what occurred. Rather, it should be thoughtful reflections on the production, its themes, and its relation to our discussions on theatre and cross-cultural

adaptation. The response should be *descriptive* and *reflective*: not a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” judgment, but a consideration of the how the event fits within our classroom conversations.

The critique should be handed in at the start of class on Wednesday March 14, with your ticket stapled to the front.

### **Adaptation Research Paper:** (5-7 pages)

*How do stories evolve and transform in order to appeal to new audiences and reflect contemporary social and political issues?*

For this project, you will select one of the below topics and write a 5-7 page (1550-2200 words) paper that explores how the source text was adapted into a new context and/or form. Read (or watch) both the source text and the adaptation closely, noting what the newer version maintains from the original as well as the major changes that were made. *Why were these changes necessary and important for the work that the writer was doing? What themes are evident in both? How are those themes molded to fit a new context?* In addition to a textual analysis, you will engage in historical research to gain a deeper understanding of both the world of the adaptation and the source text. *How does each work comment on the social and political realities of its writer? What was the original intent or purpose of the source text? What about the adaptation? How were each received by audiences or critics when they were first produced?* In addition to your primary texts, you should consult FIVE outside sources, including at least one book or academic journal article. A successful paper will evince not only a detailed look at both pieces and how they relate/differ, but also position both within their greater societal contexts, arguing what is the lasting relevance of this piece of theatre.

### Timeline and Deadlines:

PAPER TOPIC: Monday, March 12

PAPER OUTLINE: Wednesday, March 28

FINAL PAPER AND PRESENTATIONS: Monday, April 9 (via email)

If you would like to submit a rough draft to me for review, comments, and edits, it should be emailed to me by Sunday, April 1

### Grading:

Paper Topic	5%
Paper Outline	15%
Presentation	15%
Final Paper	65%

### Final Paper Breakdown:

Thesis	20%
Support	20%
Organization	20%
Style/Mechanics	15%
Research	15%
Citations	10%

The following will give you a 100% in each of the above categories:

Thesis: Controlling thesis is strong, specific and arguable; it directs the reader precisely toward the argument at hand

Support: Examples and ideas are well chosen, rooted in concrete detail, and well analyzed without being redundant

Organization: The piece is well organized with smooth transitions, paragraphs clearly build on each other to develop the main line of thinking.

Style/Mechanics: The prose is clear, mature, and engaging; sentences use precise word choice, syntax, and grammar.

Research: At least five sources of sound quality, following the rules listed above and excluding the central artistic pieces and anything assigned in class.

Citations: Citations in Bibliography/Works Cited/In-Text citations are all correct according to either MLA or Chicago Style

Possible Topics:

*Desdemona* (Toni Morrison) and *Othello* (Shakespeare)

*Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* (Vogel) and *Othello* (Shakespeare)

*A Tempest* (Aime Cesaire) and *The Tempest* (Shakespeare)

*Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Jane Taylor) and *Ubu Roi* (Alfred Jarry)

*Hamletmachine* (Heiner Müller) and *Hamlet* (Shakespeare)

*Bare: A Pop Opera* (Hartmere and Intrabartolo) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare)

*West Side Story* (Laurents, Bernstein and Sondheim) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare)

*The Frogs* (Shevelove and Sondheim) and *The Frogs* (Aristophanes)

*Phedre* (Jean Racine) and *Hippolytus* (Euripides)

*My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant) and *Henry IV (1 and 2)* and *Henry V* (Shakespeare)

*Gospel at Colonus* (Lee Breuer) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (Sophocles)

*The Island* (Athol Fugard) and *Antigone* (Sophocles)

*Mojada* (Luis Alfaro) and *Medea* (Euripides)

*The Gods Are Not to Blame* (Ola Rotimi) and *Oedipus Rex* (Sophocles)

*Play On!* (Duke Ellington and Cheryl West) and *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare)

*True Love* (Charles Mee) and *Phedre* (Racine) and *Hippolytus* (Euripides)

*Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (Tom Stoppard) and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (Shakespeare)

*Iphigenia 2.0* (Charles Mee) and *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Euripides)

*Electricidad* (Luis Alfaro) and *Elektra* (Sophocles)

*Black Medea* (Wesley Enoch) and *Medea* (Euripides)

*Medea, Queen of Colchester* (Marianne McDonald) and *Medea* (Euripides)

*The Donkey Show* (Dianne Paulus) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare)

*Were the World Mine* (Tom Gustafson) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare)

*The Bubble* (Eyton Fox) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare)

**The research paper will be due at the start of class on Monday, April 2, and everyone will give a 5-minute presentation of their findings to the rest of class.**

**Midterm and Final Exams:**

These will be administered in class on the days noted on the syllabus. They will cover material from

the assigned readings, as well as our discussions in class, so be sure to take notes! Before each exam, students will receive a study guide to help them prepare, which will include information about the format.

### **Optional Final Project:**

Instead of taking the final exam, students have the option of submitting a final creative project. For this assignment, you will be creating your *own* adaptation. Building off the conversations we have been having this semester about adaptation and the lasting relevance of culturally ingrained stories, you will craft an artistic composition that brings renewed relevance to an existing piece of dramatic literature or fictional cultural narrative. You may work individually or in pairs, but the length or scope requirements for a two-person project will be greater.

First, you will develop a project proposal that is to be turned into the instructor for approval. Then, you will submit your completed project on the final day of class (Monday, April 30), either via email or by handing in a hard copy in person. Finally, you will write a reflection on the experience and your final product, to be emailed to the instructor.

The following are acceptable examples of potential final projects:

- A **short story, screenplay, or short film** that modernizes a classical play with an expressed goal (e.g. a contemporary intersectional feminist retelling of *Medea* set in Ferguson, MO; a surreal reinvention of *As You Like It* in a genderqueer world)
- A **podcast** that goes in depth on a classical play (maybe combining spoken word or short stories with clips of music or other forms of aural material)
- A piece of **visual art, music, or dance** that is inspired by (*and commenting on*) a piece of classical dramatic literature or theatrical form
- A **play script** that reinterprets a piece of literature, film, fairy tale, or popular culture with an expressed goal (e.g. rework an episode of *The Simpsons* to address its racial insensitivities; change *The Little Mermaid* to give power back to the princess character; rewrite *Fight Club* so it comments on gun violence; a modern-day *Animal Farm* about the Trump administration)

Feel free to suggest other project ideas in your proposal! However, it is important that your project somehow encompasses *theatre* – either the product you create should be a piece of theatre, or your source material should be a piece of dramatic literature.

### **Part One: Project Proposal:**

DUE Friday April 13

Email me a one-page, double-spaced proposal that explains your intent with the project. Make sure that your proposal answers the following questions:

- What is the source material that you will be adapting? What will be the final product?
- How does this project encompass theatre or dramatic literature?
- What do you hope to *say* with this adaptation? (You should be doing more than “modernizing,” think about *why* you are choosing this work and what you want to express *through* it)
- What is the scope of your project? (How many pages will your final screenplay be? How many minutes do you project the podcast or short film to be? How in depth will the piece of

music/dance/art be? It is important that you do *enough* so that I would feel comfortable counting it as 20% of your semester grade)

- How will you deliver it to me as a final product? (Will it be a filmed piece of dance? A script in a Word document? An mp3 file? A physical piece of art or a scan?)
- Are you working alone or as a group? If you are working as a group, what will be each person's contribution to the final product?

#### Part Two: Creative Project:

DUE Monday April 30

After your proposal is approved, you will submit your final creative project to me in the way that was agreed upon. I will not be on campus after class ends at 5:45pm on Monday, so if you need to give me a physical copy of something, it should be turned in by that time. If you are submitting it via email, you may have until 11:59PM.

#### Part Three: Written Reflection:

DUE Wednesday May 2

You will submit a two-page, doubled spaced explanation of your creative project. What was the experience of adaptation like for you? What were some obstacles that got in your way? How did the source text inspire you creatively and positively contribute to your work? What were you trying to say with the adaptation, and do you think you successfully made this point? EACH PERSON SHOULD SUBMIT THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION. This must be emailed to me by 11:59PM.

#### Note on Written Assignments:

The production response and research paper should be 12-point font, Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri, double-spaced, and with one-inch margins all around. These should be given to me at the start of class on the day they are due. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all instances of this will immediately result in a failing grade for the course.

### **GRADING**

Participation (attendance, effort, and involvement)	20%
Reading Quizzes	20%
Production Response	10%
Research Paper	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

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Wednesday, January 17      **Introductions and Overviews**

### WEEK 2: THINKING THEATRE

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Monday, January 22      **Theatrical Origins**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: Euripides, *Medea* (Wadsworth 98-110)
- IN CLASS: *The Abydos Passion Play*, rituals and performance, City Dionysia, Seneca's *Medea*

Wednesday, January 24

#### **Theorizing the Theatre**

- READ: excerpts from Aristotle's *The Poetics* (Canvas)
- IN CLASS: excerpts from Plato's *The Republic*

### WEEK 3: USING THEATRE

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Monday, January 29

#### **Humor, Satire, and Politics**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (Wadsworth 113-128)
- IN CLASS: Aristophanic Comedy, Gender/Class and Performance, Terence and Plautus

Wednesday, January 31

#### **Understanding Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

- IN CLASS: watch Spike Lee's *Chi-Raq*, discuss adaptation theory, Linda Hutcheon

### WEEK 4: EARLY JAPANESE THEATRICAL FORMS

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Monday, February 5

#### **Noh Drama and a Japanese Theatrical Aesthetic**

- READ: Kan'ami Kiyotsugu, *Matsukaze* (Wadsworth 199-203)
- IN CLASS: Zeami Motokiyo, excerpt from "A Mirror Held to the Flower" (Wadsworth 224-233), watch Noh clips, discuss Noh performance technique, Kyogen theatre

Wednesday, February 7

#### **Kabuki Performance and Popular Entertainment**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: Matagoro, *Chushingura: The Forty-Seven Samurai* (Wadsworth 206-223)
- IN CLASS: discussion of intersections of Kabuki with Japanese History, Gender and Sexuality, watch Kabuki clips, discuss Peking Opera

## WEEK 5: EPIC PERFORMANCE AND THEATRE RITUALS

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Monday, February 12

### **On the Indian Subcontinent**

- READ: excerpts from *The Mahabharata*
- IN CLASS: the *Natya Sastra* (excerpts), discussion of rasa and performance, watch clips of *The Mahabharata*

Wednesday, February 14

### **Islam and Performative Mourning**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: *The Ta'ziyeh of the Martyrdom of Hussein*
- IN CLASS: discussion of Orientalism, Iranian and Middle Eastern theatrical performance, watch clips of ta'ziyeh

## WEEK 6: EARLY ENGLISH PERFORMANCE

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Monday, February 19

### **NO SCHOOL (President's Day)**

Tuesday, February 20

### **Passion Plays and the European Middle Ages**

- READ: Anonymous, *Everyman* (Wadsworth 284-293)
- IN CLASS: read *Dulcitius* (Hrotsvitha), discussion of pageant plays and the intersection of Middle Ages society/culture with theatre

Wednesday, February 21

### **Shakespeare and Elizabethan England**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Wadsworth 358-400)
- IN CLASS: discussion of Shakespearean textual analysis, ambiguity and adaptation, evolution of the theatrical form

## WEEK 7: MODERNIZING THE THEATRE

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Monday, February 26

### **Theatre and Women**

- READ: Aphra Behn, *The Rover* (Wadsworth, 538-570)
- IN CLASS: discussion of English restoration, gender identity on the early British stage

Wednesday, February 28

### **French Neoclassicism**

- READ: Molière, *Tartuffe* (Wadsworth 496-516)
- IN CLASS: discussion of *commedia dell'arte*, the Italian Renaissance, the *Le Cid* controversy, theatrical form and the Alexandrine

**NO SCHOOL March 5 and 7 (SPRING BREAK WOOHOO)**

## WEEK 8: MODERNISM

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Monday, March 12

**Understanding Naturalism and Modernism**

READING QUIZ

- READ: Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll House* (Wadsworth 669-691)
- IN CLASS: discussion of Scribe's well-made play, melodramatic form, the emergence of modernism

Wednesday, March 14

**An Array of Feminisms**

DUE: Production Response

- IN CLASS: watch Mehrjui's *Sara* and the Mabou Mines *Dollhouse*, read excerpts from *A Doll's House, Part Two* (Lucas Hnath)

WEEK 9: PERFORMING AMERICAN IDENTITY

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Monday, March 19

**The American Dream, Part 1**

READING QUIZ

- READ: Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Wadsworth 1242-1274)
- IN CLASS: read "Tragedy and the Common Man," discussion of capitalism and neoliberalism, watch clips of *DoaS*

Wednesday, March 21

**Willy Loman in Iran**

- IN CLASS: watch Farhadi's *Salesman* and Nader Borhani's production of *Death of a Salesman*, discussion of the play's message outside of the U.S.

WEEK 10: AFRICAN-AMERICAN THEATRE

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Monday, March 26

**The American Dream, Part 2**

READING QUIZ

- READ: Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Canvas)
- IN CLASS: read "The Negro Writer and His Roots," watch clips of *A Raisin in the Sun*, discuss the early history of African-American theatre and this play as an adaptation of *Death of a Salesman*

Wednesday, March 28

**Critiquing Race on the American Stage**

- READ: Wilson's "The Ground on Which I Stand" and Brustein's "Subsidized Separatism" (Wadsworth 1489-1497)
- IN CLASS: watch Wolfe's *The Colored Museum*, discussion of racial politics in theatre

WEEK 11: FLIPPING THE CLASSROOM

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Monday, April 2

**Research Project Presentations, Part One**

DUE: Research Papers

- IN CLASS: Present your findings!

Wednesday, April 4

**Research Project Presentations, Part Two**

- IN CLASS: Present your findings!

## WEEK 12: LATINX THEATRE

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Monday, April 9

### **El Teatro Campesino**

- READ: Luis Valdez, *Los Vendedos* (Wadsworth 1288-1291)
- IN CLASS: discuss Latinx theatre history, Latinx media representation, agitprop theatre, watch *Los Vendedos*

Wednesday, April 11

### **Queer (of Color) Feminisms**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: Cherríe Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (Wadsworth 1443-1467)
- IN CLASS: read excerpt of Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, work on dramaturgy worksheet for *The Hungry Woman*, discuss intersectionality

## WEEK 13: ASIAN-AMERICAN THEATRE

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Monday, April 16

### **NO SCHOOL (Patriot's Day)**

Wednesday, April 18

### **Performing Race**

#### READING QUIZ

- READ: David Henry Hwang, *Yellow Face* (Canvas)
- IN CLASS: discussion of casting and race, read "The Nuances of Racism in Theatre School," discussion of history of Asian-American theatre

## WEEK 14: WHY THEATRE TODAY?

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Monday, April 23

### **Storytelling and Postmodernism**

- READ: Anne Washburn, *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play* (Canvas)
- IN CLASS: discussion of the evolution of theatrical forms, postmodernism, adaptation and popular culture

Wednesday, April 25

### **Study Guide**

- REVIEW: Study Guide
- IN CLASS: Perspectives in World Theatre JEOPARDY

## WEEK 15: FINAL

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Monday, April 30

### **FINAL EXAM**

## **APPENDIX: ON TITLE IX**

Please be advised that I am a “Responsible Employee” not a “confidential resource” according to Emerson’s Sexual Misconduct Policy (SMP – for more information please see <http://www.emerson.edu/policy/sexual-misconduct>). As such I am required to report any information that may violate the SMP to Emerson’s Title IX Coordinator. If you would like to have a confidential conversation regarding an incident that may violate the SMP please contact one of the following confidential resources: Violence Prevention and Response (VPR) at 617-824- 8857; Emerson Counseling and Psychological Services (ECAPS) at 617- 824-8595; the Center for Health and Wellness at 617-824-8666; or Emerson's Director of Spiritual Life and all College chaplains at 617- 824-8036. If you would like to report an incident directly to the Title IX Coordinator, please contact Pamela White at 8 Park Plaza, Room 230; phone: 617-824-8999; email: [titleix@emerson.edu](mailto:titleix@emerson.edu)