Program Directors: Victoria Olwell and John O’Brien
Draft Syllabus

London possesses a theatrical culture famed for its vibrancy and distinction. Some of the most gifted playwrights, actors, set designers, and directors in the English-speaking world thrive there today, just as they have for 500 years. Here we will explore the exciting work produced by today’s most important artists, as well as the rich heritage of performed drama that lies behind it. We will immerse ourselves in London’s theatrical world, attending as many plays as possible in the course of the term. Most importantly, we will focus on what distinguishes London as a “theatrical city”: its history, its approaches to performance and interpretation, its institutional structure.

We have not yet firmed up exactly which plays we will study, and at point in time we are writing this syllabus, not all theatres have yet publicly announced their offerings. When they have, tickets will be subject to availability. So far, however, here are several plays that have been announced that we are particularly excited about and that are likely to form part of the syllabus: Shakespeare’s Richard III, done by a young, experimental theatre group called The Faction, a theatrical version of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, at Britain’s National Theatre, a wildly popular and critically esteemed theatrical version of Mark Haddon’s novel, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time at the Gielgud Theatre, a play titled Botallack O’Clock, playing in the small theatre above one of London’s oldest pubs, a comedy titled The Play That Goes Wrong, at the Duchess Theatre, Wallace Shawn’s The Evening Talkhouse at the National Theatre, and Shakespeare’s Macbeth at the Young Vic.

Objectives:

• to see as wide an array as possible of kind of performances on the London stage, from classic to contemporary, avant-garde works;
• to meet London theatre professionals and learn from them about how they go about translating dramatic texts into performance, addressing questions of interpretation and dramaturgy;
• to experience the central place that theatrical excellence has in British culture;
• to understand the history of the evolution of the London theatre;
• to understand the role of London theatre not only in Great Britain’s national culture but also in the global literary and dramatic public sphere;
• to understand how globalization and the resulting complex cosmopolitan, post-colonial culture of London are shaping theatre today;
• to practice both textual analysis and performance criticism
• to understand the institutional structure of the London theater, with its distinct, but complementary worlds of commercial, subsidized, and fringe theaters;
• to work towards excellence in analytical essay writing

How the class will work:

Most mornings, the class will meet for two hours for intensive group discussion. Part of each session will be devoted to analysis of the performance we saw the previous evening, while the rest will be devoted to a preparatory and critical discussion of the play we are seeing that night, which everyone will have read in advance.

In the afternoons, we will do practical activities. We will tour significant theatrical sites, including the reconstructed Shakespeare Globe Theatre on the South Bank and backstage at the modern National Theatre complex. We will have workshops with London theatre professionals to gain understanding from the inside of characteristically British approaches to interpretation, direction, and performance. Finally, we will conduct writing workshops devoted to gaining skill in writing performance reviews and critical essays.

In the evenings we will go to plays; drawing from the best of what is available for us to see, we will sample a range of performances from the West End to pub theater, including at least one performance of something by Shakespeare and some brand-new, contemporary works as well.

Requirements:
Attendance and participation in all classes, workshops, and events (20%)
Journal contributions to class blog: (10%)
Reading quizzes: (10%)
Review of a performance (20%)
Critical Essay (40%)

Readings:

• playtexts to be determined, based on the plays we will see
• secondary material also in part to be determined by the menu of plays on offer, but will include historical background relevant to the plays, where applicable, as well as some theoretical underpinnings
Schedule of class meetings (subject to change)

Late November/early December (specific date and place to be determined):
Introductory session: what we expect, what students should expect, how to prepare, discussion of safety issues, general advice on study abroad, specific advice on travel planning and on London.

Week One
January 2 (Saturday)—Arrival at Citadines Trafalgar Square
   Welcome dinner
   Evening performance (TBA)

3—Afternoon: Class meeting and discussion

4—Morning: Tour and Workshop at Globe Theatre
   Evening: Performance (TBA)

5—Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon: working workshop: How to write a review of a performance
   Evening: Performance (TBA)

6—Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon: Tour of National Theatre
   Evening: Performance (TBA)

7: Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon: unstructured time
   Evening: Performance (TBA)

8: Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon: Unstructured time
   Evening: Performance (TBA)

9: Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon and evening unstructured

Week Two
10 (Sunday) Free day—no class meetings

11—Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon: Writing Workshop: How to write a critical essay about drama
   Evening: Performance (TBA)
   First writing assignment due—review of performance

12—Morning: Class meeting and discussion
   Afternoon: Unstructured
   Faction Theatre performance—Richard III

13—Morning: Unstructured
   Afternoon: Workshop with Faction Theater Company
   Evening: Performance (TBA)
14—Morning: Class meeting and discussion  
   Afternoon: Unstructured  
   Evening: Final performance

15 (Friday) Morning: Class meeting and discussion; course evaluations  
   Closing dinner, site to be announced

**Critical essay due on Friday, January 22**