CAT/COM/HSP 6007: Avant-Garde Theatre in Europe

Semester: 2
Level: 6

Credit Value: 15 credits

Module Organizer: John London (Room 1.33, Arts One; Email: j.london@qmul.ac.uk)

Pre-requisite: Any level 4/5 literature module.

Assessment:
This module is assessed by coursework only (i.e. there is no examination), but not all the writing you produce will count towards the final mark. Assessment works as follows:

- **25% of the final mark** will come from one 1,000-word essay to be submitted during the semester.
- **75% of the final mark** will come from a 3000-word essay to be written after the end of the module.

Precise submission dates and questions for these assessments will be provided: at least two weeks before submission (for the first essay); at least four weeks before submission (for the second essay). In addition, students will be required to present talks based on the seminar questions in the following Schedule and Bibliography.
All students must ensure that they obtain a copy of the School handbook and follow the School’s guidelines and regulations in all matters regarding this module. Students must note that failure to do so may result in de-registration from the module, which may have a significant impact on their overall degree classification.

Description
Why should characters behave illogically on stage or not exist at all? How can image rival plot? And what is the point of shocking audiences? This module introduces some fundamental styles and plays from European avant-garde theatre and sets them within an artistic and socio-political context. Futurism, Dada, Expressionism and the Theatre of the Absurd are included. Special attention is paid to Spanish and Catalan drama. We will at all times try to see texts as excuses for performance and use other aspects of culture to understand the challenges of this new drama.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the module, students should understand several major currents in avant-garde drama in Europe and have a knowledge of specific avant-garde plays, as well as a knowledge of specific concepts related to avant-garde drama. They should be able to engage in close critical readings and analysis of plays on the page and for performance, in addition to evaluating arguments within class discussion and in written work. Students should be able to write clearly and concisely about fundamental issues concerning avant-garde drama and to construct cogent written arguments through the use of textual and artistic evidence. They should be able to demonstrate an ability to analyze texts within their aesthetic and performative context.
Module Schedule: Spring 2021

* Primary texts to be read before the corresponding lecture each week carry an asterisk *.

**Week 1:** 25 January: Lecture: Introduction; From the Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of a New Age: * Maeterlinck, Interior.

**Week 2:** 1 February: Seminar: * Maeterlinck, Interior.

**Week 3:** 8 February: Seminar: *Boccioni, Genius and Culture; *Cangiullo, Detonation; *Marinetti, Feet; *Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra, ‘The Futurist Synthetic Theater, 1915’; * Tristan Tzara, The Gas Heart (1920); Tzara, ‘Dada Manifesto, 1918’.
Lecture: Expressionism: * Kokoschka, Murderer Hope of Womankind; * Stramm, Awakening.

**Week 4:** 15 February: Seminar: * Kokoschka, Murderer Hope of Womankind; * Stramm, Awakening.
Lecture: * Pirandello, Six Characters in Search of an Author

**Week 5:** 22 February: Seminar: * Pirandello, Six Characters in Search of an Author

**Week 6:** 1 March: Seminar: * Valle-Inclán, Bohemian Lights.
Lecture: * García Lorca, The Dream of Life / Play without Title; * Artaud, ‘The Theatre and the Plague’.

**Week 7:** 8 March: READING WEEK.

**Week 8:** 15 March: Seminar: * García Lorca, The Dream of Life / Play without Title; * Artaud, ‘The Theatre and the Plague’.

**Week 9:** 22 March: Seminar: * Pedrolo, Men and No; * Ionesco, The Bald Prima Donna.
Lecture:* Arrabal, Guernica and Picnic on the Battlefield (with Dr Gonçal López)

**Week 10:** 29 March: Seminar: * Arrabal, Guernica and Picnic on the Battlefield.

**Week 11:** 5 April: Bank Holiday.
Recorded Lecture: * Belbel, Caresses or * After the Rain.

**Week 12:** 12 April: Seminars: * Brossa, The Quarrelsome Party; * Belbel, Caresses or * After the Rain. Separate session for essay discussion.
Reading List

QMUL Library codes (where available) are given after the items listed. Note that many items are available in Senate House, University of London library, Malet Street or in UCL. More items will be uploaded to QMPLUS in the course of the module.

When an item is indicated as ‘on order’ you should verify the current state of the catalogue in QMUL and, if no code is yet available, ask a librarian to see if the item can be processed quickly.

* Primary texts to be read before the corresponding lecture each week carry an asterisk *.
A sample of the relevant bibliography for each topic will help you further.

Introduction to Avant-Garde Theatre in Europe

Ibsen, Henrik, A Doll’s House (1879):
https://myetudes.org/access/content/user/mazu48009/PDF%20Files/DollsHouse_full01.pdf; or: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2542/2542-h/2542-h.htm

Symbolism


Secondary Reading

Maeterlinck, “The Modern Drama”, in Cardullo and Knopf, pp. 55-61. EBooks: online resource; and PN 6112 THE.


Wilde, Oscar, “The Decay of Lying” (1889), at:
http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Abstracts/Wilde_1889.html

Seminar Questions

1) In which ways can Interior be considered Symbolist?
2) How can Oscar Wilde’s essay/dialogue “The Decay of Lying” be considered to define a new sort of literature and drama?
3) What is Interior about?
4) How do the staging and symbolism of Interior define its meaning?
Futurism and Dada

* Umberto Boccioni, *Genius and Culture* (1915)
* Francesco Cangiullo, *Detonation* (1915)
* F.T. Marinetti, *Feet* (1915)
* Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra, ‘The Futurist Synthetic Theater, 1915’
* Tristan Tzara, *The Gas Heart* (1920) AND ‘Dada Manifesto, 1918’ (all in *Theater of the Avant-Garde: 1890-1950*, ed. by Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001)). EBooks: online resource; and PN 6112 THE.

Secondary Reading
Varisco, Robert, extract from ‘Anarchy and Resistance in Tristan Tzara’s Gas Heart’, in Cardullo & Knopf, pp. 266-71. EBooks: online resource; and PN 6112 THE.

Seminar Questions
1) To what extent do the Futurists and Dadaists fulfil the intentions of their manifestos?
2) What are Dada and Futurism rebelling against and how do they enact this rebellion?
3) Are the innovations of Dada and Futurism essentially antitheatrical?
4) Which movement is more innovative theatrically, Futurism or Dada?

Expressionism

* Oskar Kokoschka, *Murderer Hope of Womankind*.

Secondary Reading
Pam, Dorothy, ‘Murderer, the Women’s Hope’, *Tulane Drama Review/The Drama Review*, 19, no. 3 (1975), 5-12. Electronic Journal Via JSTOR


Seminar Questions
1) Why do Expressionist characters act as they do?
2) How can the art of Expressionism help us understand the drama of Kokoschka and Stramm?
3) Does emotion or melodrama dominate Expressionist drama?

**Pirandello**


Secondary Reading


Thompson, Doug, *An Introduction to Pirandello’s ‘Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore’* (Hull: Department of Italian, University of Hull, 1985). Senate House: Stack: XMT (PC 1).

Seminar Questions
1) In which ways does *Six Characters in Search of an Author* challenge existing, realist theatre?
2) Is *Six Characters in Search of an Author* merely about theatre?
3) How might you need to change *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in order to stage it now?
Ramón María del Valle-Inclán


Secondary Reading

Seminar Questions
1) Does Bohemian Lights adhere to any of the stylistic features of avant-garde drama studied up until now in the module?
2) How does the structure of Bohemian Lights function? Does it help to convey the meaning of the play?
3) What are the challenges to staging Bohemian Lights and how could you solve them?
4) To what extent is Bohemian Lights a picture of Spain in the 1920s?

García Lorca and Artaud


**Secondary Reading**


**Seminar Questions**

1) Do Lorca (in *The Dream of Life*) and Artaud share the same vision of the theatre?
2) How do Lorca and Artaud redefine the notion of realism?
3) Why does Artaud write about the plague?
4) In what way is Lorca’s *The Dream of Life* Pirandellian?
5) How does Lorca represent Spanish political life?

**Pedrolo and Ionesco**


**Secondary Reading**


**Seminar Questions**

1) Does Pedrolo share the same vision as Ionesco?
2) How does Pedrolo reflect on Catalan reality in *Men and No*?
3) In which ways does *The Bald Prima Donna* conform to Esslin’s definition of the Theatre of the Absurd?
4) Is there any real humour in the *The Bald Prima Donna* and/or *Men and No*?

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**Fernando Arrabal**


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**Secondary Reading**


**Seminar Questions**

1) Does Arrabal’s style sever any connection with reality?
2) What is the effect of the attitude of Arrabal’s characters?
3) Are *Guernica* and *Picnic on the Battlefield* funny or essentially serious?
4) In which ways can *Guernica* and *Picnic on the Battlefield* be considered Spanish?
Joan Brossa


Secondary Reading
http://www.fundaciojoanbrossa.cat/engl/index.html
Brossa, Joan and Antoni Tapis, Novel.la (Barcelona: Curial, 1975). Senate House: Stack: VLGU TAP.
Guerrero, Manuel, ed., Joan Brossa or the Poetic Revolt (Joan Brossa o la revolta poètica (Barcelona: Departament de Cultura, Generalitat de Catalunya/Fundació Joan Brossa/Fundació Joan Miró, 2001). PC3941. B76. Z5. BRO.

Seminar Questions
1) How can Brossa’s art help us to understand his theatre?
2) In which ways are the acts of The Quarrelsome Party linked? Do the links create meaning or undermine it?
3) Is it helpful to see The Quarrelsome Party in the context of 1960s Barcelona?

Sergi Belbel


Secondary Reading
Faulkner, Sally, Literary Adaptations in Spanish Cinema (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004), pp. 72-77. PN1993.5 S7. FAU; Senate House: YXP3g Fau.


**Seminar Questions**

1) Is Belbel innovative or essentially traditional?
2) To what extent can we define Belbel’s style as realist?
3) Does it matter that Belbel writes his plays in Catalan?