



Boston University Study Abroad
London

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Modern British Drama: A Critic's Perspective
CAS EN 357 (*Elective B*)
SPRING 2018

Instructor Information

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| A. Name | Dr Aleks Sierz |
| B. Day and Time | Fridays, 9.30am-1pm, with one class on Thursday 19 April, and another on Tuesday 24 April, plus six class visits on Monday/Tuesday evenings to see current theatre performances |
| C. Location | |
| D. BU Telephone | |
| E. Email | |
| F. Office hours | By appointment |

Course Objective

To provide a broad study of the major developments in British drama over the past 70 years; to relate drama to the changes in British society; to examine the work of specific writers in detail; to stimulate critical analysis through written work and discussion.

Course Overview

This course provides you with a thorough introduction to postwar British theatre, along with key information about British theatre today. Particular attention is given to drama history; milestone playtexts – from Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952) to Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009) – and the way they relate to their wider social, political and cultural context. In particular, the notion of national identity (Britishness) in postwar history will be explored. Practical information about how to write theatre reviews, plus six theatre visits, will enhance the ability of students to discuss modern British drama in an informed and balanced manner. The ultimate aim is to increase awareness of contemporary and modern British theatre and develop practical critical skills, which will enable you to address the question of whether or not a new play is any good.

Methodology

Each of the classes will be devoted to analysis of a particular play, writer or theatrical movement in their social, political, economic and cultural context. The students will be expected, in advance, to have done sufficient background reading to be familiar with the subject under discussion. They will also be required to visit six performances of plays in London which will be related as closely as possible to the theme of Modern British Drama.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Classes

All Boston University London Programme students are expected to attend each and every class session, seminar, and field trip in order to fulfill the required course contact hours and receive course credit. Any student that has been absent from two class sessions (whether authorised or unauthorised) will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

Authorised Absence:

Students who expect to be absent from any class should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorized Absence Approval Form 10 working days in advance of the class date (except in the case of absence due to illness for more than one day. In this situation students should submit the Authorised Absence Approval Form with the required doctor's note as soon as possible). The Authorised Absence Approval Request Form is available from:

<http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester/>

Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Form does not guarantee an authorised absence

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- **Illness (first day of sickness):** If a student is too ill to attend class, the student must phone the BU London Student Affairs Office (who will in turn contact the student's lecturer).
- **Illness (multiple days):** If a student is missing more than one class day due to illness, the student must call into to the BU London Student Affairs Office each day the student is ill. Students must also provide the Student Affairs office with a completed Authorised Absence Approval Form and a sick note from a local doctor excusing their absence from class.
- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor)
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

The Directors will only in the most extreme cases allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break.

Unauthorised Absence:

Any student to miss a class due to an unauthorised absence will receive a **4% grade penalty** to their final grade for the course whose class was missed.

This grade penalty will be applied by the Academic Affairs office to the final grade at the end of the course. As stated above, any student that has missed two classes will need to meet with the Directors to discuss their participation on the programme as excessive absences may result in a 'Fail' in the class and therefore expulsion from the programme.

Religious Holidays

Boston University's Office of the University Registrar states:

'The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays and observances, intends that students observing those traditions be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for cancelled classes to be rescheduled.'

Lateness

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class) will be required to meet with the Associate Director for Academic Affairs and if the lateness continues, may have his/her final grade penalised.

Reading

The main emphasis of the class will be on practical analysis. I expect students to read the text of the plays being discussed in class, and those they have been sent to see, if available. For the first session, every student must read Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*.

Additional readings may be posted on Blackboard: <https://lms.bu.edu>

Main textbooks: Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War*, Yale University Press (1999), Michael Billington, *State of the Nation*, Faber (2007) and Kenneth O'Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP (2000).

Also useful: Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, *Changing Stages*, Bloomsbury (2000), Stephen Unwin and Carole Woddis, *A Pocket Guide to 20th-Century Drama*, Faber (2001) and the Methuen Decades series (2012-13). The best general overview of postwar political, economic and social history is Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2008).

I also recommend these selected books, of value in understanding modern British drama:

Mark and Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot*, Continuum (2008)

Michael Billington, *One Night Stands*, Nick Hern Books (1993)

Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain*, Intellect (2007)

Harriet Devine, *Looking Back: Playwrights at the Royal Court*, Faber (2006)

Kate Dorney and Frances Gray, *Played in Britain: Modern Theatre in 100 Plays*, Bloomsbury (2012)

Dominic Dromgoole, *The Full Room: An A—Z of Contemporary Playwriting*, Methuen (2002)

David Edgar, *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting*, Faber (1999)

John Fleming, *Tom Stoppard's Arcadia*, Continuum (2009)

Jim Fowler, *Unleashing Britain: Theatre Gets Real 1955-64*, V&A (2005)

Amelia Howe Kritzer, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing 1995—2005*, Palgrave (2008)

Helen Iball, *Sarah Kane's Blasted*, Continuum (2008)

David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama*, Edinburgh University Press (2010)

Martin Middeke, et al (eds), *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*, Methuen (2011)

Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, Manchester University Press (2002)

Graham Saunders, *Patrick Marber's Closer*, Continuum (2008)

Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, Faber (2001)

Aleks Sierz, *John Osborne's Look Back in Anger*, Continuum (2008)

Aleks Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today*, Methuen (2011)

John Smart, *Twentieth Century British Drama*, Cambridge University Press (2001)

Alicia Tycer, *Caryl Churchill's Top Girls*, Continuum (2008)

Kenneth Tynan, *Theatre Writings*, Nick Hern (2007)

Michelene Wandor, *Postwar British Drama: Looking Back in Gender*, Routledge (2001)

Andrew Wyllie, *Sex on Stage: Gender and Sexuality in Post-War British Theatre*, Intellect (2009)

Useful websites:

www.theatrevoice.com

www.sierz.co.uk

www.inyerface-theatre.com

The library also has DVDs and videos of movie versions of significant plays such as *Look Back in Anger*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Birthday Party*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and more recent plays such as *Beautiful Thing*, *Closer* and *The History Boys*.

Assessment

The students will be assessed in a variety of ways. They will be asked to write detailed weekly critiques of each of the plays visited. They will also be asked to make an oral presentation to the class based on the work of an individual playwright whom they have discovered for themselves. There will not be a single final examination, but a substantial course essay instead. The students will be assessed on their written progress during the semester and on their contribution to class discussion. Classes will also involve reading of scenes from modern British plays. Videos will also be shown, where relevant, of historic productions.

The breakdown of marks is as follows:

1 x 10% for class participation **(10%)**

4 x 10% for reviews **(40%)**

1 x 20% for class presentation **(20%)**

1 x 30% for the course essay (Deadline, hand in at the exam) **(30%)**

Two copies of all assessed work are required.

Grading

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism:

<http://www.bu.edu/london/current-semester>

* *Final Grades are subject to deductions by the Academic Affairs Office due to unauthorised absences.*

Course Chronology

Over the semester the classes will be as follows:

NB: Every week, students must read the plays which will be discussed in class (as specified below), as well as understanding background information from the main course books, by Dominic Shellard, Michael Billington and Kenneth O’Morgan (as given in the bibliography).

Session One: Friday 2 March. AGE OF AUSTERITY (1945—54): Introduction to Modern British Drama, with discussion of British history and society after 1945 (the Welfare State), actor Laurence Olivier, critic Kenneth Tynan, theatre censorship, JB Priestley’s *An Inspector Calls* and Terence Rattigan’s *The Deep Blue Sea*. **REQUIRED READING:** *The Deep Blue Sea*; Shellard, 1-36; Billington, 5-72; O’Morgan, 45-64.

Session Two: Friday 9 March. AGE OF AFFLUENCE PART I (1955—63): Prime Minister Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis, Harold Macmillan and affluence, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and the Royal Court theatre. With a video of British 20th-century drama before 1956, and an introduction to theatre criticism. REQUIRED READING: *Look Back in Anger*; Shellard, 37-57, 69-70; Billington, 72-103; O'Morgan, 65-73.

Session Three: Friday 16 March. AGE OF AFFLUENCE PART II (1955—63): Cold War tensions, migration and the invention of the teenager, Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, and Joan Littlewood's Theatre Royal Stratford East. With a video of the Angry Young Men and Kitchen-Sink Drama, and group discussion of one new play which students have been sent to in the preceding week. REQUIRED READING: *A Taste of Honey*; Shellard, 59-94; Billington, 103-22; O'Morgan, 65-73.

Session Four: Friday 23 March. SWINGING SIXTIES (1964—70): Prime Minister Harold Wilson's reforming Labour government, Swinging London and the hippie counterculture, the National Theatre, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Edward Bond's *Saved* and the abolition of censorship, and Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw*. With a video of British political theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, and group discussion of one new play which students have been sent to in the preceding week. REQUIRED READING: *What the Butler Saw*; Shellard, 95-146; Billington, 162-204; O'Morgan, 72-76.

Session Five: Friday 6 April. DECADE OF DECLINE (1970—79): Political, economic and social crises, rise of feminism, alternative theatre and the state-of-the-nation play, Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, the National Theatre and David Hare's *Plenty*. With a group discussion of one new play which students have been sent to in the preceding week. REQUIRED READING: *Plenty*; Shellard, 147-85; Billington, 205-82; O'Morgan, 76-85.

Session Six: Friday 13 April. THATCHERISM (1979—90): Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's three administrations, the rise of Andrew Lloyd Webber and the West End musical, women's playwriting, Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. With a group discussion of one new play which students have been sent to in the preceding week. REQUIRED READING: *Top Girls*; Shellard, 186-209, 217-223; Billington, 283-323; O'Morgan, 79-94.

Session Seven: Thursday 19 April [NOTE DAY]. HERITAGE CULTURE (1990—95): Conservative government after Thatcher, Heritage Culture and nostalgia, Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III*, David Hare's *Trilogy*, Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*. With a group discussion of one new play which students have been sent to in the preceding week. REQUIRED READING: *Arcadia*; Shellard, 210-12, 223-24; Billington, 324-52; O'Morgan, 95-110.

Session Eight: Friday 20 April. COOL BRITANNIA (1995—99): Tony Blair's New Labour, Cool Britannia, in-ya-face theatre, Philip Ridley's *The Pitchfork Disney*, Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and F***ing*, Bosnia and Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. With a group discussion of one new play which students have been sent to in the preceding week. REQUIRED READING: *Blasted*; Shellard, 225-29; Billington, 362-83; O'Morgan, 95-110.

Session Nine: Tuesday 24 April [NOTE DAY]. NEW MILLENNIUM (2000—present). New Labour in power, the Iraq War, the rise of verbatim theatre, and of black and Asian playwrights, Ayub Khan Din's *East Is East*, Roy Williams's *Fallout*, Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies*, Debbie Tucker Green's *Stoning Mary*, and Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem*. With course revision. REQUIRED READING: *Jerusalem*; Shellard, 223-26; Billington, 383-411.

* **Contingency Class Date: Wednesday 25 April.** Students are obligated to keep this date free to attend class should any class dates need to be rescheduled.

Plus exam: Thursday 26 April. Oral class presentation by students of a British postwar play that they have discovered for themselves. Exam times and locations will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates.

EN 357 SCHEDULE OF THEATRE VISITS SPRING 2018

12 March (MONDAY): The Mousetrap by Agatha Christie at St Martin's Theatre. Nearest tube: Leicester Square (Piccadilly/Northern Lines).

19 March (MONDAY): Humble Boy by Charlotte Jones at the Orange Tree Theatre. Nearest tube: Richmond (District Line).

26 March (MONDAY): Misty by Arinze Kene at the Bush Theatre. Nearest tube: Shepherd's Bush (Central Line).

3 April (TUESDAY: NOTE DAY): Vincent River by Philip Ridley at the Park Theatre. Nearest tube: Finsbury Park (Victoria Line).

9 April (MONDAY): The Birthday Party by Harold Pinter at the Harold Pinter Theatre. Nearest tube: Piccadilly Circus (Piccadilly/Bakerloo Lines).

16 April (MONDAY): Half Breed by Natasha Marshall at the Soho Theatre. Nearest tube: Oxford Circus/Piccadilly Circus (Central/Piccadilly/Bakerloo Lines).

Students must check their email and the weekly Student Newsletter for field trip updates and reminders.

**I really do hope you enjoy the course
Aleks Sierz, Spring 2018**