



Instructor: M. Revermann

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Course Number: DRE358H5S

Course Title: The Audience and the Theatre

Course description: Any actor feels the presence of the audience. They are always there (often in the dark), watching, evaluating, engaged or disengaged, granting or denying collaboration. Being “co-producers” of the theatrical event, their responses are crucial for the success or failure of a production. There is no theatre without an audience (real or imagined), and vice versa. Actors and audiences, however, are not on an equal footing in that their relationship is informed by a fundamental asymmetry of power: regardless of whether actors love or despise their audiences, they need them. The history of actor-audience interaction is, in other words, also a history of manipulation, across times and cultures. Actors, directors and playwrights cannot take the audience’s collaboration for granted: they have to “work them”.

But who are, or were, “they”? This question will be of central concern, both on a theoretical and a historical level. A significant amount of time will be spent on reflecting what makes theatre audiences different from other audiences, and what precisely happens at various stages of the playgoing experience. Ways of analysing the psychology and sociology of theatre audiences will be discussed. In addition, the focus will be on a series of historical case studies,

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ranging from Renaissance Italy, Shakespearean England and 17th - century Spain to 20th -century Germany, Britain and Italy. The course will conclude with reflections on which factors may or may not reshape playgoing in the 21st century.

Method of Instruction: Lecture and discussion

Method of Evaluation: Participation, mid-term, final exam, research paper