

Theatre and Society – essay questions Spring 2020

You should answer ONE of the following questions in an essay of 2,000 words. These topics will be explored during the relevant lectures, but you will need to carry out your own research and further reading.

Your essay should be word-processed, printed double-spaced in 12-point font and accompanied by appropriate references and bibliography. The deadline for your essay is 12 noon on Thursday 27th February 2020.

In assessing your work, we will be looking for evidence of your ability to:

- critically assess the relationship between theatrical production and its particular social/historical contexts
- illustrate and elaborate your thinking with a close reading of appropriate examples of theatrical practice
- write clearly and persuasively, with appropriately formatted references and bibliography
- make use of further research and reading in support of your arguments and ideas

For further advice, please see the course guide or attend an essay surgery (dates to be confirmed).

Questions:

1. To what extent does the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage become bound up in market affairs? Discuss the extent to which the theatre in early modern England can be seen to respond and adapt to the socio-economic climate of the period. You may wish to illustrate your answer with reference to *Epicoene* or another play from the period.

2. “Such things are committed at plays and theatres as cannot be thought upon, much less uttered without sin...there can be no stronger engine to batter the honesty than the hearing of common plays.” – Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from the Plaies and Theaters*, 1580.

Would you agree with Munday’s claim that the theatre in early modern England can be seen to encourage spectators to challenge and undermine the social hierarchy? You should illustrate your answer with appropriate textual and contextual evidence.

3. Examine and assess the idea that political theatre is most often attended by those ‘who are already interested and engaged with the issues at hand, and already agree with the politics of a given work’ (Bissell and Overend 2015). How have post-1968 British theatre-makers sought to engage with audiences beyond those who might already agree with their values?

4. In *Theatre Censorship in Britain*, Helen Freshwater argues that 'judgments about whether a show is acceptable or not are often generated by the context in which it appears, rather than content alone' (2009: 161). Assess this claim with close reference to the staging and public/critical reception of at least two works of post-1968 British performance.

5. What does Antonin Artaud mean by 'cruelty', and how can it be applied to either *The Balcony* or *India Song*?

6. In contemporary French theatre, politics is as much a matter of form as it is content? Discuss with reference to *The Balcony* and *India Song*.