Exemption Examination in the History of Theater and Drama

All students at the Yale School of Drama are expected to have a working knowledge of the history of theater and drama. Usually students fulfill this expectation by satisfactorily completing Drama 6, a year-long introduction to the history of world drama and theater as an art form, as a profession, as a social event, and as an agent of cultural definition through the ages.

Occasionally students come to the Yale School of Drama with an excellent knowledge and understanding of the history of theater and the world repertory. These students may seek to be exempted from one or both semesters of Drama 6 by satisfactorily passing (with a score of at least 80 out of 100) the three-hour exemption examination offered before the start of the semester.

The exemption examination for Drama 6A: “To 1700” (Fall 2011) will be offered during orientation week in September 2012. The exemption examination for Drama 6B: “Since 1700” (Spring 2012) will offered during work week in January 2013. Students wishing to test out of either term of Drama 6 must take the exemption examination at the scheduled time.

While the format and content of the examinations change each year, students are expected to be able to do the following:

1. Identify key names and events in the history of world drama and theater, and be generally familiar with dramatic texts considered central in the world repertory (to 1700 for the fall examination and after 1700 for the spring examination);

2. Identify and discuss theatrical and dramatic trends and activities in major periods of theatrical history and describe the principle characteristics of these periods with regard to dramatic conventions and genres, the means of theatrical production (including playwriting, theater organization and management, acting, design, and theater architecture), and the changing place and function of theater and theatrical performance in society;

3. Discuss representative plays of each of the major periods, schools, or tendencies in the history of world drama;

4. Make comparisons and connections between major theatrical periods and styles;

5. Discuss theater and drama with intelligence, imagination, insight, and commitment.

The fall 2012 exemption examination will be comprised of short answer and essay questions. Students might be asked, for example, to do some or all of the following:
1. Identify the importance to the history of world theater and drama of selected playwrights, actors, designers, managers, political figures, and theorists (e.g., Thomas Middleton, Thespis of Icaria, James Burbage, Aristotle, Sòr Juana Inés de la Cruz, Kalidasa, Inigo Jones, Aeschylus, Horswitha), identifying the period and country in which these individuals were active and their importance to the history of theater and drama (referencing at least one play by major playwrights and naming the most significant theoretical text of major theorists);

2. Define and discuss major periods or movements in the history of world theater, placing each in its historical context and mentioning, as appropriate, at least two important figures (actors, directors, playwrights, personalities) and two plays associated with each. (e.g., neoclassicism, Commedia Erudite, court drama, Hellenistic theater, liturgical drama);

3. Define and/or identify the significance of key terms, genres, character types, or places in the history of theater and drama with appropriate reference to personalities, plays, and events (e.g., satyr play, ekkyklema, pastoral, Kathakali, Atellan farce, pageant wagon, onmagata, autos sacramentales, Abydos Passion Play, vraisemblance, Deus ex Machina, Teatro Olimpico, corrales);

4. Write two or three speculative essays supplying your own examples, thesis and structure. Such essays may ask students to:

   A) Compare theater and drama in different periods or countries, discussing differences in theatrical architecture, staging and dramatic conventions, acting styles, and approaches, as well as the relationship of theater to society.

   **Sample Essays (Type A)**

   a. With particular examples from at least two characteristic plays from each period and including consideration of dramatic and staging conventions, discuss the differences between English comedy during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods (1558-1613) and English comedy from the Restoration to 1700.

   b. With reference to at least two characteristic plays from each period and including considerations of dramatic and staging conventions, discuss similarities and differences between ancient Attic tragedy of the 5th century B.C.E, and 16th-17th century French tragedy.

   c. With reference to at least two plays of the period discuss the effects of the Italian Renaissance on theatrical production in England, France or Spain to 1700 (including considerations of staging, playwriting, design, theory, etc.)

   B) Compare major trends in theater and drama in different countries and/or different centuries, mentioning important people, events, ideas, innovations, etc. as appropriate.

   **Sample Essays (Type B)**
a. Discuss the part theater played in the emergence of civic identity and culture in Athens during the 5th century B.C.E. and either Spain or England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

b. With particular reference to at least three different cultures (before 1700), discuss ritual, liturgical and/or sacred drama.

c. Compare and contrast court theater and courtly patronage of theater from 1550 to 1700 with specific reference to theatrical culture in at least two of the following: England, France, Spain, India, China, Japan.

d. Discuss the emergence of the professional actor in three of the following: Italy, England, France, Spain, Japan.

e. Discuss innovations in the use of moveable scenery from classical Greece to 1700.

To assist in your preparation for the fall exemption exam, I have appended here a “study guide” of names and terms. In addition, students are encouraged to review the basics of theater history. Anyone who has taken courses in the history of theater and drama (and presumably most of you have) probably has a standard theater history textbook. The following are all good for review: