Yale School of Drama  
Paul Walsh  
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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. Students usually 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 exceptional 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 before the semester that Drama 6 is offered in their department curriculum.

The exemption examination for Drama 6B: “From 1700” (Spring 2014) will be offered in early January at a time and place set by the registrar. Students wishing to test out of Drama 6B (Spring 2014) must take the exemption examination at the time scheduled by the registrar: no accommodation can be made for students who are unavailable to take the exemption exam at the officially scheduled time.

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

1. Discuss key individuals and events in the history of world drama and theater, and be generally familiar with dramatic texts considered central in the world repertory (since 1700);

2. Discuss and compare principle characteristics of theatrical performances in different periods and cultures, including both dramatic and performance conventions, the means of theatrical and dramatic production (including playwriting, acting, design, theater organization and management, and theater architecture), the place of theater in individual cultures and societies, and the changing functions that theater and theatrical performance served in different historical periods and cultures;

3. Discuss and compare theatrical and dramatic trends and activities in major periods and forms, naming key individuals and describing principle characteristics with regard to dramatic conventions and genres, the means of theatrical production, and the changing place and function of theater and theatrical performance in individual societies;

4. Discuss and compare representative plays and performances from each of the major periods, schools or tendencies in the history of world drama since 1700 (including thematic resonances, dramatic conventions and performance strategies);
5. Make comparisons and connections among major theatrical trends, periods, styles, approaches and functions.

The exemption examination for spring 2014 will be divided between short answer questions and essay questions. While students are expected to be able to discuss key individuals, concepts and terms, the examination will require more than simple memorization and identification. Students will be expected to demonstrate their ability to think critically, comparatively, analytically, and historically about aspects of the history of theater and drama.

For example, students might be asked to do some or all of the following:

1. Discuss and compare the importance to the history of world theater and drama of selected playwrights, actors, designers, managers, political figures, and theorists since 1700 (e.g., David Garrick, Maurice Maeterlinck, José Quintero, George Pierce Baker, Ramón del Valle-Icíán) identifying the period and country in which the individual was active and his or her importance to the history of theater and drama (referencing at least one play by major playwrights, naming the most significant theoretical texts of major theorists, and discussing major contributions by significant actors, managers, and designers).

2. Discuss and compare aspects of major periods or movements in the history of world theater since 1700 (e.g., Weimar classicism, symbolism, naturalism, theater of the absurd), placing each in its historical context, identifying salient features, and naming pertinent plays and individuals associated with each movement.

For example:

a. Discuss the basic principles, tenets and aesthetic beliefs of Weimar Classicism, naming two playwrights and plays associated with it. What later developments might be seen as having been prefigured in or influenced by it?

b. Discuss romanticism in Germany and France, naming playwrights and plays associated with the movement in each country and comparing the salient features and differences of Romanticism in Germany and France.

c. Discuss and exemplify the most salient features of the “Theater of the Absurd” with specific reference to at least two appropriate plays by different playwrights.

3. Define and identify the significance of key terms, genres, or places in the history of theater and drama with appropriate reference to personalities, plays, and events, including identifying the country, general time period, and key individuals and plays associated with the terms and concepts you are discussing (e.g., Theater of Cruelty, Moscow Art Theater, verfremdungseffekt, biomechanics).

4. Write two or three speculative essays on specific topics, supplying significant examples and details as appropriate, and arguing a particular thesis that demonstrates thoughtful integration of information and speculation about the history of theater and drama since 1700. Such essays may ask students to:
A) Compare theater and drama in different periods or countries, considering differences in theater architecture, staging and dramatic conventions, acting styles and approaches, as well as the relationship of theater to society. For example:

a. With specific reference to at least three appropriate plays, discuss the emergence of stage realism and the changes it underwent in Europe and America between 1848 and 1950.

b. With specific reference to at least three plays of the period, discuss the reaction against Realism and Naturalism in the European and American theater between 1890 and 1930.

c. Discuss changes in theatrical architecture and notions of scenic space (including fictional space vs. performance space) during the 20th century as illustrated in selected plays and performances from at least three different decades and three different countries.

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

a. Discuss the links between nationalism and theater in 18th and 19th centuries. Mention important people, events, and innovations as appropriate.

b. Define and discuss at least three distinct examples of avant-garde theater and/or performance, drawing examples from three different countries.

c. With specific examples from and reference to plays, people, and events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, discuss the emergence of the director in western theater.

I have appended here a “study guide” of names and terms to help direct your preparation. This “study guide” is not intended to be inclusive, complete or sufficient in itself. While students may be able to identify and discuss key individuals, concepts, and terms, the examination will require more than simple memorization and identification. Students will be expected to demonstrate their ability to think critically, comparatively, analytically, and historically about aspects of the history of theater and drama.

Students intending to take the exemption examination will be wise to review the basics of theater history since 1700. Many of you will already own Oscar Brockett’s iconic *History of the Theatre* (10th ed., Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2008). Other useful textbooks include:


