

Course Proposal

Theatrical Haunts: Ghosts and Ghosting Onstage

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Course level: undergraduate upper-division

Envisioned enrollment: 15-20 students

Catalogue description:

Traditional folk wisdom holds that all theaters have ghosts. From the ‘ghostlight’ that stays on when we leave the theater at night to superstitions about what may or may not be spoken in a theater, the idea of haunting in theatrical space is remarkably persistent. Using Marvin Carlson’s *The Haunted Stage* as a theoretical framework and examining a variety of ‘ghost’ plays from around the world, this course examines the associations between the theater and ghosts, broadly defined as memory, history, and repetition alongside their more traditional definition as the returned spirits of the dead. Over the course of this class, we will explore multiple ways to understand haunts and ghosting, ultimately creating our own collective understanding of theater as an art form uniquely suited to calling up the ghostly echoes of the past.

Course format:

This course is designed to introduce advanced undergraduate majors to the study of performance theory by blending hard-hitting but accessible theoretical readings with in-depth study of specific plays relating to the course topic. Readings will alternate weeks between theory/context and theatrical case studies—for example, one week we might read and discuss Carlson’s chapter on how the reuse of actors creates a ghosting effect, paired with some contextual reading on the double casting of actors in Kabuki, then in the following week examine how those phenomena manifest in the famously double-cast Kabuki play *Yotsuya Ghost Stories*. Assignments will focus on analytical writing that draws links between theory and actual theatrical practice. The final paper will require students to go see a live performance and write about how ghosting inflected their experience as audience members.

Selected readings:

Theory:

Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*

Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*

Plays:

Ama Ata Aidoo, *Dilemma of a Ghost*

Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*

Stephen Mallatratt, *The Woman in Black*

Tsuruya Namboku IV, *Yotsuya Ghost Stories*

Miguel Rubio Zapata, *Adiós Ayacucho*