Battle of the Sexes: love, desire, and war on the stage and beyond.

The theme of love is possibly one of the oldest in world literature. This course examines the ways this theme has been manifested on the stage and in poetry, spanning the period from antiquity to today. From the classics onwards what we may today consider as primarily a private expression and activity transpires as deeply embedded in broader historical and political narratives. This course looks at the constitutive relationships between private desire and public politics. The family unit and all its multiple manifestations acts as a microcosm that at once mirrors but also challenges dominant power structures. The relationships between the genders, between siblings, between parents and children all provide a fertile ground that helps to shape our personal subjectivity, but also our civic identity. This course looks at the ways great plays and poems have approached the theme of love in both its private and public dimensions, and also examines the formal and aesthetic experiments that resulted from this engagement. Authors covered will include: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats, Gertrude Stein, Lillian Hellman, Caryl Churchill and Tony Kushner.

Olga Taxidou is Professor of Drama and Performance Studies at the University of Edinburgh and since 2015 she has been a Visiting Professor with Hellenic Studies at NYU for the Spring semester. She works on the relationships between the ‘ancients and the moderns’ and the ways this dialogue has helped shape modernity. She has written extensively on modernist theatre and on theories of tragedy. Her books include: The Mask: a Periodical Performance by Edward Gordon Craig; Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning; Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht. She has co-edited Modernism: a Anthology of Sources and Documents and Post-War Cinema and Modernity. She is Series Editor of Edinburgh Critical Studies in Modernism, Drama and Performance (EUP and OUP). She also writes adaptations of Greek tragedies, some of which have been performed.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Students will be evaluated on their attendance at classes, completion of assigned readings, participation in classroom discussion, and writing of a series of brief response papers and a midterm and final paper.

Written work and presentations

All work will be the student’s own, and follow NYU guidelines. Extensions ordinarily will not be granted.

Students will be expected to do all the assigned reading (2-3 plays per week, 1-2 poems).

Students will be assessed on their ability to engage critically with the material presented and on the clarity and originality of their argument.

Class participation 10%
Weekly written reports and oral presentations (1-2 pages) 15%
Short first paper (2-3 pages) 15%
Mid term paper (5-6 pages) 25%
Research Skills exercise and bibliography 5%
Final paper (8-10 pages) 30%

1. Happy Families
   i. Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll’s House* (1868), *Ghosts* (1881)
   ii. August Strindberg, *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888)

2. Love, War and Empire
   i. Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*
   ii. Sophocles, *Ajax*
   iii. Euripides, *Trojan Women*
   v. Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9*

3. The Muse
   i. Euripides, *Helen*
   ii. Robert Browning, ‘My Last Duchess’ (1842)
   iii. Christina Rossetti, ‘In an Artist’s Studio’ (1856)
   iv. H. D. *Helen in Egypt* (1961)

SPRING BREAK

4. Brothers and Sisters/ Sons and Daughters
   i. Sophocles, *Antigone*
   ii. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

5. Mad Love
   i. Euripides, *The Bacchae;* The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*
   ii. Oscar Wilde, *Salome* (1891)

6. The Love that Dare not Speak its Name
   i. Christina Rossetti, ‘Sappho’ (1858)
   ii. Gertrude Stein, ‘Sacred Emily’ (1913)
   iii. Lillian Hellman, *The Children’s Hour* (1934)
All editions of plays are acceptable. Single poems will be made available to students.