Sir David Hare is arguably England’s most prestigious writer of political and social theatre. Chiefly noted for his carefully crafted satires examining British society in the aftermath of World War II, he has had seventeen of his works staged at the National Theatre of Great Britain. In this course, we will study eight great plays from his canon including *Slag, Teeth ‘n’ Smiles, Plenty, A Map of the World, The Secret Rapture, The Judas Kiss, My Zinc Bed* and *Skylight*.

Required books:

*David Hare: Plays 1* by David Hare (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996, ISBN-13 978-0571177417)

*David Hare: Plays 2* by David Hare (Faber & Faber, 1997, ISBN-13 978-0571178353)

*David Hare: Plays 3* by David Hare (Faber & Faber, 2008, ISBN-13 978-0571241132)

**March 30** – Read and discuss *Slag*

Reputedly written by Hare in three days’ time while working out of the back of a van, this play examines the lives of three female teachers at a tiny and isolated boarding school. In comic fashion, it also takes on women’s rights, revolutionary feminism, hysterical pregnancy, hockey and sex. This was Hare’s breakthrough play that led to a startling and productive career.

**April 6** – Read and discuss *Teeth ‘n’ Smiles*

Set in and around the performance of a failing rock band fronted by a lead singer named Maggie Frisby, this play with songs takes place at the May Ball on the night of June 9, 1969 at Jesus College in Cambridge. The original production starred Dame Helen Mirren who was attracted to the central role because of her character’s “balls and guts.”
April 13 – Read and discuss Plenty

This masterwork focuses on Susan Traherne, a British woman who has a very good war and a very bad peace. At the age of seventeen, she works behind enemy lines as a Special Operations Executive courier in Nazi-occupied France. After the war, she returns to England where she becomes the wife of a diplomat and is increasingly bored. The decline of her mental health mirrors the crisis in the ruling class. Hare’s inspiration for the work came from the fact that 75 percent of the women engaged in wartime SOE operations divorced in the immediate post-war years.

April 20 – Read and discuss A Map of the World

The New York Times called this play “an extraordinarily clever, if erratic, comedy about the perilous intersection of literary esthetics, global politics and private lives.” Hare himself describes it as “a play which argues with itself, a play full of worry and confusion.” Officially set at a Unesco conference on poverty held in Bombay in 1978, it unfolds simultaneously on a sound stage in present-day England, where a crew is filming an adaptation of a novel about the conference’s backstage events.

April 27 – Read and discuss The Secret Rapture

An antiquarian bookseller has died at his home in the country and his two daughters have come to tend to his estate. Isobel, who has been nursing him through his sickness, is a partner in a small design studio, while Marion is in politics and already a junior minister. The struggle between these two siblings creates what Irving Wardle of The Times called “a fine and impassioned play which pushes social comedy to the boundary of spiritual inquiry.”

May 4 – Read and discuss The Judas Kiss

In two parts titled “Deciding to Stay” and “Deciding to Leave,” Hare dramatizes the relationship between Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas at pivotal moments in their lives. The first act takes place after the loss of a lawsuit that opens up the way for Wilde to be criminally indicted for gross indecency. The second act sees him reuniting with his selfish lover after two difficult years of incarceration.

May 11 – Read and discuss My Zinc Bed

A successful entrepreneur known as Victor Quinn employs, Paul Peplow, a young poet with a drinking problem, to decorate the legend of his fast-growing internet business. But neither man is prepared for Paul’s attraction to Victor’s wife Isobel nor Isobel’s interest in Paul. An intense and disturbing play about love and alcohol, Michael Billington of The Guardian found it “dense, rich and engrossing.”
May 18 – Read and discuss Skylight

On a winter night in north London, a teenage boy calls on a young and solitary teacher named Kyra Hollis and begs her to reconcile with his middle-aged father, the wealthy restaurateur Tom Sergeant. But the past that these two adults share may prevent the fulfilment of the young person’s stated wish. This play revolves around two extremely different people trying to make sense of their passions while taking apart their relationship to see if it can ever be put back together again.

This syllabus is subject to change.