

GILES RAMSAY – LECTURES

1. Beginnings: The Origins of Drama

Having successfully emerged from the primeval sludge, around 30,000 years ago mankind started to try and make sense of his place in the world through art and myth. Ranging from cave paintings to classical Greek theatre this lecture explores how the stories told in the pre-historic world can still relate to us all today.

2. Aeschylus: A Soldier in Society

Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, in a city state called Athens, a golden age of politics and poetry coincided to celebrate and reflect upon the extraordinary developments taking place in their daily lives. We now call it Democracy. Never again in human history have the arts and politics been so closely aligned. This far off century defined who we are today and Aeschylus was their chronicler.

3. Medieval: Escaping from God

Out of the so called Dark Ages emerged a new form of drama designed to save mens souls. Against the background of the black death, the medieval church and the age of chivalry Giles examines what theatre meant to society over a thousand years ago and how it played its part in the rise of the concept of the individual.

4. Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Spy

When men were prepared to murder and be martyred for their religious faith and the Elizabethan security services were zealously gathering intelligence against a militant enemy a Golden Age of Theatre emerged in England. Assassinated at the age of 29 Christopher Marlowe was very much a man of his times.

5. William Shakespeare: The Birth of Modern Show-Business

Poet, playwright and theatre entrepreneur William Shakespeare became one of the wealthiest theatre entrepreneurs of the Elizabethan age. A shrewd businessman, his career coincided with the emergence of the English playhouses and the beginnings of theatre as a commercially viable form of popular entertainment.

6. Aphra Behn: Agent 160 and the First Woman of British Theatre

“All women together ought to let flowers fall on the tomb of Aphra Behn ... for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.” Virginia Woolf. Following a successful career as one of Charles II’s spies in Europe and South America Aphra Behn returned to England and shattered the glass ceiling of London’s Restoration Theatre by becoming one of the most successful playwrights of the age.

7. David Garrick: Actor and Impresario

Following the trauma of the English Civil War came the Restoration, a period of loucheness and scandal. With the return of a King and the arrival of the first English actresses the foundations were set for a more modern theatre to emerge in the C18th under the influence of the greatest actor/manager of the age – David Garrick.

8. Oscar Wilde: Up Close and Personal

“I put all my genius into my life; I put only my talent into my works.”

Born into a moderately respectable Dublin family Oscar Wilde recreated himself as an international celebrity and wrote a series of short stories and plays that charmed the world. In 1890 he also published the last of the great myths – The Picture of Dorian Gray. Ten years later Wilde, devoured by his fame, his demons and his decadence, would be dead.

9. Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov: The Trinity

The end of the C19th saw a revolution in European drama as the theatre began to address new and controversial topics such as sex, class and social-unrest. Out of this age of upheaval emerged three of the greatest playwrights the world has ever known. This lecture looks at the reception their plays had in their own day and the legacy they have left to our own.

10. Victorians: Shakespeare and Elephants

Like children in a sweet shop the Victorians delighted in every aspect of their ever changing world. From melodrama to music hall, freak-shows to photography, this was an age of innovation and spectacle and the theatre embraced it all.

11. Pantomime: a very British Feast

Over 2500 years in the making the great British pantomime is a very potent brew indeed. Mix the earliest Greek and Roman drama with commedia dell'arte and medieval morality plays, then stir in a sprig of C17th masque, a dash of C18th harlequinade and a hefty shot of Victorian music hall and, hey presto, you have the modern Christmas pantomime. (Oh no you don't!).

12. Coward's Cocktails to the Angry Young Men: A Theatrical Revolution

Noel Coward and Terrence Rattigan dominated the pre-war theatre scene but by the 1950's had begun to fall out of favour with the British public. A revolution was taking place in the arts and new voices were beginning to be heard such as John Osborne and Harold Pinter. This lecture examines the stark contrast between pre and post-war British theatre and how we, in the C21st, can now reassess which playwrights really stood the test of time.

All of the above lectures are presented as full Keynote/Powerpoint presentations with still images and film clips.

FULL DAY COURSES

1. Cave Paintings to the Greeks (27,000 BC - 400 BC)

Over 30,000 years ago mankind began to make sense of his place in the world through art and myth. In these lectures Giles will explore how stories told in the ancient world can still relate to us today and how, in a period of just over 100 years, a city state called Athens invented a new form of communal expression called theatre and found that living amongst them happened to be four of the greatest writers the world has ever known; Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. It all starts here! (These talks contain elements of Lecture 1 & 2)

2. The Road to Shakespeare (800 AD - 1616)

This series of talks takes us on a journey from the resurgence of theatre in Western Europe during the medieval period, through the transformational period of early Tudor drama up to the emergence of the Elizabethan playhouse and the birth of show-business under the actor, playwright and impresario - William Shakespeare. (These talks contain elements of Lectures 3, 4 & 5)

3. 18th and 19th Century Theatre (1649 – 1900)

This series of talks takes us on a journey from the Restoration drama of Charles II and the emergence of the first English actresses, through the rise of great actor managers such as David Garrick in the 1700's up to the perfection of the English comedy of manners with Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" in 1895. (These talks contain elements of Lectures 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10)

4. 20th Century Theatre: 1900 to Now

In this Study Day Giles will look at the revolution in theatre that took place in the late C19th and its legacy on the European theatrical styles of the early C20th. He will examine the impact of the First World War and the Great Depression on the theatre and the extraordinary divide that emerged between the drawing-room dramas of Noel Coward and Terrence Rattigan in London's West End and the work of Lillian Bayliss, south of the river, at The Old Vic. After the Second World War a revolution took place in the arts and new voices began to be heard such as John Osborne and Harold Pinter. Giles will examine the stark contrast between pre and post-war British theatre and how we, in the C21st, can now reassess which playwrights really stood the test of time. (These talks contain elements of Lectures 9 & 12)

5. The World of Wolf Hall (1485 – 1649)

This series of four 45 minute talks takes the works of Hilary Mantel as a starting point to explore the background of the late medieval period and the rise of the Tudor state, the psycho-pathology of the main players of the day – Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII – and the influence this period had on the emergence of a modern world and a modern theatre.