As Shakespeare’s Hamlet reminds us, “The play’s the thing ….” Playwrights often turn to the theater for their subject matter, use plays within plays to further their plots, and explore the theatricality that underlies many aspects of human behavior.

In exploring the phenomenon of “theater on theater,” we will read and discuss Euripides’ *Bacchae* (405 BCE), where Dionysus (the god of theater) plays a major role; Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1599), which uses the theater to expose a nefarious murder; Anton Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (1895), where a psychological battle finds its analogue in the clash between the theater of the future and the drama of the past; Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), where benighted characters search for direction in the half-finished drama in which they find themselves; and Noël Coward’s *Hay Fever* (1925), *Present Laughter* (1939), and *Star Quality* (1967), where the drama of the theater invades the “real world” with wonderfully comic results. We also will discuss Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman’s *Stage Door* (1926), Ronald Harwood’s *The Dresser* (1980), Stephen Jeffrey’s *The Libertine* (1994), and Amy Freed’s *The Beard of Avon* (2001). Enroll after April 15, 2015 at continuingstudies.stanford.edu.

In addition to lectures on the assigned plays, the class will attend a special preview performance of SRT’s production of Noël Coward’s *Hay Fever*, as well as the *Cowardy Custard*. Students will attend our free film series on Monday nights, focusing on Coward’s work as film director, actor, and screenwriter. Students also will be enrolled in the symposium “Art, Style, and Decadence in the Work of Noël Coward.”

The course includes a ticket to the symposium and reserved seats for the preview performance of *Hay Fever*, Wednesday July 15, 2015 and the *Cowardy Custard* on Wednesday August 12, 2015.

**Class sessions:** Wednesday June 24, July 1, July 8, July 22, July 29, August 5, 7:00 – 8:50 pm

**Symposium:** “Art, Style, and Decadence in the Work of Noël Coward,” Saturday August 1, 2015, 9:30 am - 5:00 pm

**Film Series:** “Noël Coward on Film,” Monday nights, June 29 – August 10, FREE, 7:00 pm, CEMEX Auditorium, 641 Knight Way, Stanford

**Performances:** *Hay Fever*, Wednesday July 15, 2015  
*Cowardy Custard*, Wednesday August 12, 2015
Preliminary Syllabus

June 24: Introduction; Hamlet and Richard III. Shakespeare and the theatrical metaphor. From “play within a play” to the theater as politics. The purpose of playing is to hold a “mirror up to nature.”

July 1: Chekhov’s The Sea Gull and Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author. The theater as the art of the future.

July 8: Noël Coward’s backstage drama and a life on stage; Hay Fever; Present Laughter; Private Lives

July 15: Class sees preview performance of SRT’s Hay Fever

July 22: Discuss production; films; screen Coward’s Star Quality

July 29: Modern theatrical turns: Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman’s Stage Door (1926), Ronald Harwood’s The Dresser (1980), Stephen Jeffrey’s The Libertine (1994), and Amy Freed’s The Beard of Avon (2001)

August 5: Euripides’ Bacchae. The theater as tragic illusion.

August 12: Class sees preview performance of SRT’s Cowardy Custard