As long as there has been art, there have been people who were offended by it, and tried to affect what they were exposed to and what others were allowed to see. This class will look at the ways that the theatre has been pressured, both productively and repressively, by individuals, religious groups, and political institutions over the past two millennia.

We’ll start with the birth of Western theatre in classical Greece and finish off by exploring the forces at work in our own society. In between, we’ll move from the Mediterranean to North America, from Shakespeare’s England to Moscow’s bloody purges, and through the “witch hunts” of the McCarthy era. We’ll read important plays from each period, and some of the responses they elicited from both appreciative audience members and sometimes violent critics.

In addition to examining the economic, political, or religious pressures at work in a particular era, we’ll look at the theatre’s response, how it adapted to the forces seeking to control it, and what the theatre of today has (or hasn’t) taken from those lessons.