



SYLLABUS

LONDON THEATRE

Althea Stewart

Contact Hours: 40

Language of Instruction: English

LONDON, ENGLAND

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this course is to encourage students to learn about non-musical theatre and how it works. In the theatre we willingly agree to believe in a carefully constructed pretence, so the audience's contribution to each performance is crucial. Once we have joined an audience we allow ourselves to be manipulated and the experience may help us to know when we are being manipulated against our wills. The theatre is a place of learning and there we learn most about ourselves, our desires, our fears, our prejudices. How do playwrights, directors, actors, designers and crews acquire the techniques to achieve this and how does each production of each play express a unique truth? This course offers an opportunity to answer these questions after viewing a wide variety of plays.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

These offer students an understanding of several theatrical companies, play genres, and performance techniques. British theatre companies are diverse in the way that they raise funds and in the way they serve their respective communities. Students will be encouraged to examine theatre as a way of challenging the status quo and to think and write analytically about theatre.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students should look forward to increasing their ability to appreciate the way that writers and performers both respond to and challenge their audiences. By the end of the course students should be able to:

- 1) Write reviews of live performances and read them with discernment.
- 2) Write, read, and analyse a play script.

- 3) Make informed choices about their own involvement in theatre, based on the knowledge acquired.
- 4) Be willing and able to implement and/or appreciate innovative theatre whenever the opportunity arises.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

Theatre is always a subjective experience as well as an intellectual and objective one, so it is often disturbing and challenging. Students will be expected to analyse and debate objectively and emotional responses will be respected by everybody.

We shall also study community theatre and hear about an organisation called Scene and Heard (the London version of The 52nd Street Project). This organisation has a particular way of helping children to write short plays. In order to examine the material aspects of putting on a play we shall take a back stage tour of a theatre. The theatre is a place of illusion and sometimes spectacle. Success depends upon all practitioners knowing what is possible.

Students will be encouraged to read academic critical prose, newspaper and internet reviews and will acquire an ability to analyse a play in performance with a view to what techniques are used to engage the audience. Elements of production to be considered are: performance space; audience and actors; set; lighting; sound; costume; actor's performance techniques; directorial interpretation; audience reception.

METHOD OF EVALUATION (GRADING)

Late work will be penalised. A mark will be deducted for every day that your work is handed in after the due date. Absence from the class or a theatre trip will also be penalised by a loss of five marks for each absence, which will be deducted from your **final mark**. Work must be handed in either written or typed. It is not accepted by email. **In the event of you or your tutor being ill these conditions do not apply and appropriate arrangements will be made.**

The course will be examined as follows:

- 1) A review of a performance that we have seen (no more than 1,000 words). 25% of the final mark.
- 2) An essay to be written in exam conditions. This is a prior disclosure paper and a choice of questions will be provided in advance relating to performances we have seen. 25% of the marks.
- 3) An account of what you have learned from your fellow students during the presentations, and the discussions. (no more than 1,000 in length) and a short essay answering a question to be provided (no more than 1,200 words in length). 25% of the marks.
- 4) An examination in which you will be asked to write an account of how you would direct a hitherto unseen piece of play text and a second unseen question in which you will be asked to write a paragraph or two in answer to a question relating a performance that we have seen. The exam lasts for two hours. 25% of the marks

COURSE OUTLINE

This will act as a Calendar for students and may be subject to change. Classes take place at 6 Great James Street except when there are field trips. We will see at least 5 plays over the course of the programme.

Week One

- A brief introduction to the course and a look at the course outline and calendar.
- *Evening play 1*

Week Two

- A review workshop. A talk about women in the theatre.
- Some work on a script. A research workshop.
- *Evening play 2*

Week Three

- A talk about the shape of the stage. Preparation for seeing a performance.

Week Four

- A talk on political theatre. A workshop based on a performance. **REVIEWS TO BE HANDED IN PLEASE.**
- A backstage tour of the National Theatre.
- *Evening play 3*

Week Five

- A discussion about a performance.
- Preparation for our presentations. A workshop on the work of a playwright.

Week Six

- **We shall write our essays in class time.**
- **Wednesday 18 May:** A discussion about a performance. Then we will start the Presentations: Each student will talk for ten to fifteen minutes about some play or performance that they have witnessed that is not part of the course. This need not cost any money you will find plenty of street theatre and other free entertainment on your travels or you can talk about something you have been in or seen at home. You will be expected to make comments on what other students have said in your paper on what you have learned from each other.
- *Evening play 4*

Week Seven

- A talk about the work of Scene and Heard (the London version of New York's 52nd Street Project). Some work on creating a character.
- Preparation for seeing a performance.

Week Eight

- A discussion about plotting and adapting plays from other plays and novels.
- A talk on tragedy and comedy. A discussion comparing and contrasting the staging of the plays we have seen so far.
- *Evening play 5*

Week Nine

- A discussion about the crucial differences between opera and musicals. A short talk about three British opera houses.

Week Ten

- Examination preparation including a video following the work of a professional director.
- **Examination.**

COURSE READINGS

Essential Bibliography:

Where possible the published text of each play will be provided. Occasionally we see a play that has not been published, because it is so new; then it is provided as soon as possible after the first night. Where no printed script is available students will need to pay even closer attention to the performance than usual. Some students do not like reading the play before going to the theatre, but the play should always be read before written work is undertaken. Additional critical works will be recommended as the course progresses. Reading other plays by the same author is always encouraged.

Further Reading:

- Aristotle *The Art of Poetry* - any decent paper back translation. **Essential reading for any theatre professional.**
- Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945*, London: Faber and Faber, 2007.
- Enoch Brater (editor), *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990. **A twentieth-century classic.**
- Claire Cochrane, *Twentieth Century British Theatre: Industry, Art and Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012
- John Drakakis and Naomi Conn Leiber, (editors) *Tragedy*, Harlow/NY: Longman, 1998
- Richard Eyre, *National Service: Diary of a Decade*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 2003. **About the National Theatre.**
- Jonathan Kalb, *Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theatre*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012
- Alexander Leggatt, *English Stage Comedy 1490 -1990: Five Centuries of a Genre*, London: Routledge, 1998.
- Peter Mudford, *Making Theatre from Text to Performance*, London/New Jersey: The Athlone Press, 2000. **An academic work and also pragmatic.**
- Katie Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama*, Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2004.
- M.S.Silk, (editor) *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Don Taylor, *Directing Plays* London: A& C Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1996

- **Taylor was a writer, a translator and a director of both theatre and TV plays so this is a very useful view of the relationship between the two roles.**
- Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theatre*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008

Shakespeare:

- Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Oxford: Picador, 1997.
- A.R.Braunmuller & Michael Hattaway eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- John Drakakis ed. *Alternative Shakespeares*, London: Routledge, 1996.
- Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, London: Allen Lane, 2000.
- Kiernon Ryan, *Shakespeare (Second Edition)* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995.
- David Scott Kastan, *The Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Leah Scragg, *Shakespeare's Mouldy Tales: Recurrent Plot Motifs in Shakespearean Drama*, London: Longman, 1992
- James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, London: Faber & Faber, 2005
- -----Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* London: Faber & Faber, 2010.
- Kevin Sharpe & Peter Lake, *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, London: The Macmillan Press, 1994.
- Nick de Somogyi (editor) *Shakespeare on Theatre*, London: Nick Hern Books, 2012.
- Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare and Co.* London: Penguin Books, 2007.