



# **GEO**

*Study Abroad*

## SYLLABUS

### **THE PLAY'S THE THING: PRE-FRESHMEN**

**Instructor Name: Dr. Susie Thomas**

**Contact Hrs: 40**

**Language of Instruction: English**

**LONDON, UK**

"If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction." (*Twelfth Night*; 3.4. 126-127)

### **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 imaginary world, 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.

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) Read professional reviews of live performances with discernment.
- 2) Read, and analyse a play script.
- 3) Write an academic essay on a play or plays.
- 4) Make informed choices about their own involvement in theatre, based on the knowledge acquired.
- 5) Be willing and able to implement and/or appreciate innovative theatre whenever the opportunity arises.
- 6) To be able to share enthusiasm about theatre with others.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY**

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

We will read critical responses and reviews and will look at different ways to analyse a play in text and performance. A particular focus will be on the environment the play is being performed in and the audience it addresses. How do certain aspects of a performance (e.g. the performance space, the audience and their perception of the play, casting, set and lighting design, soundscapes and music, costume design, the director's approach and concept) offer a distinct interpretation of the play text?

### **THEATRE VISITS**

Please make sure you arrive at the theatre on time as latecomers will not be admitted most of the time. There is no need to dress up, but please ensure that your mobile phones are completely switched off during the performance. Please refrain from eating (including sweets) and drinking during the show as it disturbs other audience members and the performers.

### **METHOD OF EVALUATION (GRADING)**

Late work will result in a deduction of 10% from your final grade for every day that your work is handed in after the due date. Absence from the class or a theatre trip will also result in a loss of 5% of your final grade for each absence.

Participation, including reading and preparing the play texts, is extremely important as this is in large part a seminar-style course. It is a good idea to take notes after seeing the production so that you can remember important details. Grades will be given only for outstanding work.

Please email your work to Susie and bring a printed copy into class.

### **Class participation 15%**

Attendance and participation in class, including the occasional quiz. Zoom can be a barrier to free and easy communication but I am hoping that we will all make our voices heard.

**Group presentation 20%**

Each group will prepare a list of 10 questions on one production to be distributed to the rest of the class. These questions will form the basis of our post-show discussion. Please read and research your play carefully in preparation for the seminar.

**Performance Analysis (90 minutes) 20%**

This is an in-class assignment on 18<sup>th</sup> August: you may bring in the text, the programme, and notes (one page).

Your introduction should cite the venue, play title, writer, director, main actors, plus a very brief summary of the main action and genre (comedy, tragedy, naturalistic, postmodern). The main body of the paper should cover the points listed below in order to analyse how the page has been translated to the stage.

- Themes: what themes/issues does the play explore?
- Performance space: proscenium arch, thrust stage, amphitheatre, in the round
- Set: is it naturalistic or non-naturalistic?
- Lighting: do the lights suggest a time of day or season?
- Sound: how do sound effects or music create atmosphere?
- Costumes and props: how do costumes convey the time period and each character's personality and status?
- Acting: How convincing did the actors seem in their portrayal of their characters? What is their relationship with the other characters on stage and how well do they work together? How well did they use their voice, movement or gestures to express their character?
- Audience reception.

**Review (1,000 words) 20%**

This is an opportunity for you to write in a more personal style and to develop your own voice. You should try to include the main elements of performance analysis, but here you are thinking about how to engage your reader with a lively prose style. Conclude your review with why you think an audience would enjoy this production, or not! Here are some tips for how to do this:

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/oct/04/theatre-criticism-cat-hot-tin-roof>

Due: 26<sup>th</sup> August

**Final examination (2 hours) 25%**

Choose ONE of the following questions:

1) "Injustice everywhere and no rebellion!" Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) argued that theatre should not simply reflect reality but attempt to change it by making an audience question its values and assumptions. To what extent have the plays we've seen had a political element and how effective is theatre as a form of social critique? What role do you think theatre should play in contemporary society?

2) The influential theatre director Peter Brook (1925-) wants to take theatre back to its roots and argues that all that is needed is an empty space, actors and an audience. To what extent would you agree that an elaborate mise-en-scène (set, lighting, costume, music and sound effects) might detract from our understanding of the play?

You do not need to discuss all the productions but you should include a detailed analysis of at least two, and make reference to the others as appropriate. Bring in copies of the plays and an outline of what you plan to write (one page). I am looking for a clearly developed thesis, which is supported by specific examples from the productions. The good news is that there is no right or wrong answer to these questions, only more or less coherently argued claims.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Every class (whether on- or off-site) must be attended. Absence will only be accepted on the grounds of sickness. Sickness must be notified in advance in person (by phone, note or email) either to Amanda or Mary. Any absence, other than sickness, will affect your grade.

### **COURSE OUTLINE**

#### **Week One**

##### **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 13:00-15:30**

Getting to know each other.

Introduction to the course.

BREAK

Brief introduction to theatre in London.

Background to *Twelfth Night*

Read the first act of *Twelfth Night* and please always have your copies of the play to hand for our classes. Quarantine is the perfect opportunity to brush up our Shakespeare. The other play scripts are short and easy to read, but Shakespeare can be a little difficult to follow at first. Don't worry if you don't understand every word.

##### **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> August, 9:30-12:00**

How to analyse texts and performances: theatre spaces and conventions.

Break

Discussion of Act I.

Read Act II

##### **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> August, 13:00-15.30**

Workshop on Shakespeare's verse

Break

Discuss Act II

Read Act III

**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> August, 9.30-12.00**

Reviewing the reviewers  
Break  
Discuss Act III  
Read Acts IV and V

**Week Two**

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> August, 9:30-12:00**

Fingers crossed, we will meet IRL at last! Recap of expectations for assignments: please feel free to raise any questions you have.  
Quiz on *Twelfth Night*  
Break  
Walk through Bloomsbury to see the British Library's literary treasures, including Shakespeare's First Folio.

**Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* at the Globe. Starts 7pm. (2 hours and 30 minutes, no interval.)**

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> August: Tour of the Globe. Meet outside main entrance at 10.30**

**13.30-16.00**

Post-show discussion of *Twelfth Night*  
Break  
Background to the Windrush generation.

**Thursday 12 August**

**Lolita Chakrabarti, *Hymn* at the Almeida. Starts 7.30. (90 minutes, no interval.)**

**Week Three**

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> August, 13:30-16.00**

Post-show discussion of *Hymn*  
Break  
Q&A with actor and director Burt Caesar: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burt\\_Caesar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burt_Caesar)

Burt has performed in a wide variety of plays, from contemporary classics on Broadway to Shakespeare at the Globe. He has directed stage and film productions and is an artistic adviser at RADA. He is currently curating a series of films featuring Earl Cameron, Britain's first Black screen star, at the BFI. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to learn from an experienced practitioner: please prepare questions you would like to ask.

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 10:30-13:00**

Performance analysis of either *Twelfth Night* or *Hymn*

Break

History of the National Theatre

Background to *Constellations*

**Nick Payne, *Constellations* at the Vaudeville Theatre. Starts 2.30. (70 minutes, no interval)**

#### **Week Four**

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 9:30-12:00**

Post-show discussion of *Constellations*

Break

Background to Greek Tragedy

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> August**

**Kae Tempest, *Paradise* at the Oliver National Theatre. Starts 8pm (2 hours, no interval)**

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> August, 13.30-16.00**

Post-show discussion of *Paradise*

Break

Course review

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August, 10.00-12.00**

Final Exam

Due: Review of either *Constellations* or *Paradise*

#### **COURSE READINGS**

Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

Lolita Chakrabarti, *Hymn*

Nick Payne, *Constellations*

Kae Tempest, *Paradise*