



GEO

Study Abroad

SYLLABUS

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Instructor Name: Althea Stewart
Contact Hrs: 40
Language of Instruction: English

LONDON, UK

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The plays the thing,

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king

says Hamlet. Theatre traditionally speaks truth to power. We shall be looking at the way classical and contemporary plays do this in Britain today. Some are serious others funny. We will discuss the significant differences between live and recorded theatre. In the theatre we willingly agree to believe in a carefully constructed imaginary world. 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. 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 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 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 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. Students will be expected to analyse and debate objectively and emotional responses will be respected by everybody. 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 play viewing will also be penalised by a loss of five marks for each absence, which will be deducted from your **final mark**. Work must be sent 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 short piece comparing the verse and language used by Shakespeare in a speech from *Much Ado About Nothing* and the verse and language of one of Shakespeare's sonnets. No more than 700 words.
25% of the final mark.
- 2) This consists of two parts and will take place in class time by zoom. A) A verbal presentation in which you describe a live performance that you have seen or taken part in and enjoyed.
B) A verbal response to the others' presentations and to discussions held in class. How much are we all learning from each other?
25% of the marks.
- 3) A speech of no more than 300 words written as a monologue for the character you will have invented in class. 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. 25% of the marks

COURSE OUTLINE

This will certainly be subject to change. It depends on the availability of actors; this cannot be predicted at this time and in these circumstances. .

The work of the Royal National Theatre in London

Class 1

Getting to know each other and an introduction to the course.

Class 2

A talk about the Royal National Theatre and other subsidized theatres – their founding and facilities.

A discussion about what plays you think a National Theatre should be staging.

A talk about the shape of the stage in all theatres from Greek and Roman theatres to the little black box, with especial references to the stages available in the National Theatre complex.

Class 3

The National Theatre does much youth theatre work on its own premises. It also runs a competition for youth theatres throughout the country. It is hoped that a young actor who took part in this year's competition will explain how the competition operates and what happened when Covid 19 closed the theatres and the competition went digital.

In the early seventeenth century frequent outbreaks of plague closed the London Theatres.

Shakespeare's Sonnets published in 1609 are thought by Katherine Duncan-Jones to be the result of these periods when there were no plays and no money coming in.

We will look at some of these. If you have a favourite Shakespeare sonnet please bring it to the zoom class.

By the end of this class everyone will have a sonnet to study.

Class 4

Please read your sonnet to the class.

We will talk about the poetry and prose in Shakespeare's plays.

We turn our attention to *Much Ado About Nothing* and think about the play in the context of Shakespeare's time and our own.

We will watch *Much Ado About Nothing* as performed recently at Wyndhams Theatre in London's West End with Catherine Tate as Beatrice and David Tennant as Benedick

Class 5

We will arrange for your presentations, which will take place later. Professional UK actors will read an abbreviated play in the zoom class. They will discuss the text and answer your questions. This performance will be produced especially for you.

Class 6

A discussion about the reading we have heard.

A talk about the early twentieth-century class system in the UK and about the way J.B Priestley represents this in *An Inspector Calls*.

We will talk about TV drama in the UK and how it developed from live theatre.

We will watch *An Inspector Calls* in the version adapted for TV by Helen Edmundson.

We will discuss crucial difference between live theatre and filmed drama and the relevance of this play in our own time.

Class 7

If we are allowed to go out and about in London we will look at street theatre in Covent Garden Market and The South Bank.

Students will talk about live performances they have witnessed or been in at home.

Class 8

The darker side of London Life is represented by refugees arriving here in a container.

Preparation for seeing the digital production of *The Container* by Clare Bailey.

This play is presented so naturalistically that it was performed in a container, first at the Edinburgh Festival and then outside The Young Vic Theatre in London. It draws our attention to the tragedy of refugees and their plight in the twenty-first century world and **contains bad language and an off-stage rape. We will watch *The Container* digitally.**

Class 9

A discussion about *The Container*.

Sometimes plots demand particular characters, sometimes characters drive plots.

A talk about Scene and Heard a children's theatre in London, just up the road from GEO's London base. A workshop on making a character.

Class 10

A summary of the course and a discussion about which play you liked best.

A discussion about the director's job and how you will write about directing an unseen piece of text.

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 of writer and director.**
- 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.

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