



SYLLABUS

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Instructor: Althea Stewart
Contact Hrs: 45
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 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, all of which offer a way of increasing our understanding of each other. This kind of theatre is often funded by donations and in the UK may be in part funded by the taxpayers.

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 ways that 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) Understand the collaborative process that makes good theatre.
- 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.

Students will be encouraged to read academic critical prose 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. Additionally each student will write a play (no longer than ten minutes) as a result of taking part in a group improvisation.

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 question paper on the production of *Oslo* at The National Theatre should be answered and handed in on Thursday 28 September. 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 of *The Play That Goes Wrong* and/or *Jane Eyre*. It will be written in exam conditions on Thursday 19 October. 25% of the mark
- 3) A paper in which you write in four sections as follows:
 - A) no more than 300 words about what you have learned from your fellow students in discussions about *Wings* and *Poison*
 - B) no more than 150 words about the performance of the play *Young Marx*
 - C) no more than 250 words on what you have learned from your fellow students during the improvisation exercise.
 - D) A short play script, written as a result of improvisation exercises. This will not be marked in the usual way but comments on the script will be provided and five marks will be deducted **from your overall mark** if it is not handed in on Wednesday 29 November with the other sections of this paper which will be marked in the normal way. 25% of the mark
- 4) An unseen examination consisting of one question:
You will be asked to write an account of how you would direct a hitherto unseen piece of play text. Examination date Thursday 07 December 25% of the mark

COURSE OUTLINE

Classes take place at 6 Great James Street except when there are field trips.

This will act as a Calendar for students and may be subject to change

Wednesday 06 September 12.30 – 1.30

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

Tuesday 12 September 1.00 – 3.00

An introduction to *Oslo* by J.T Rogers.

After a ten-minute break, we will look at a power point on the shape of the stage.

Wednesday 13 September 12.30 - 1.30

Question sheets will be handed out and we will discuss them. A short introduction to the National Theatre, its charter, its founding and its funding.

Wednesday 13 September

An evening visit to The National Theatre to see *Oslo* by J. T Rogers.

PLEASE GET TO ALL THEATRES IN GOOD TIME. LONDON THEATRES DO NOT ALLOW LATECOMERS IN UNTIL A SUITABLE BREAK IN THE PERFORMANCE, WHICH MAY BE THE INTERVAL AND NOT ALL PLAYS HAVE INTERVALS.

Tuesday 19 September 1.00 – 3.00

Field trip 1 –backstage tour of a theatre TBC

Wednesday 20 September 12.30-1.30

A discussion about *Oslo*.

Tuesday 26 September 1.00 – 3.00

Preparation for seeing *The Play That Goes Wrong* by Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer and Henry Shields.

After a ten-minute break, we will watch a power point on Tragedy and Comedy followed by a discussion on different kinds of comedy and its purpose.

Tuesday 26 September

An evening visit to the Duchess Theatre to see *The Play That Goes Wrong*

Wednesday 27 September 12.30 - 1.30

A discussion about *The Play That Goes Wrong*. **Hand in your papers on *Oslo*.**

Tuesday 03 October 1.00 – 3.00

Field trip 2 – Street Theatre and St Paul's Church TBC

Wednesday 04 October

NO CLASS YOU ARE IN SCOTLAND

Tuesday 10 October 1.00 – 3.00

Preparation for seeing *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte adapted by Sally Cookson and Company

After a ten-minute break, **essay questions will be handed out** and we will hold an essay writing workshop.

Tuesday 10 October

An evening visit to The National Theatre to see *Jane Eyre*

Wednesday 11 October 12.30 – 1.30

A discussion about *Jane Eyre*

WEEK STARTING 16 OCTOBER HALF TERM

Tuesday 24 October 1.00 – 3.00

A power point about women in the theatre and then after a ten-minute break – **you will write your essay in class time.**

Wednesday 25 October 12.30 -1.30

Preparation for seeing *Wings* by Arthur Kopit

Wednesday 25 October

An evening visit to The Young Vic Theatre to see *Wings*.

Tuesday 31 October 1.00 – 3.00

Field trip 3 – Meet Ros at Scene and Heard TBC

Wednesday 01 November 12.30 – 1.30

A discussion about *Wings*

Tuesday 07 November 1.00 – 3.00

A character building exercise and after a ten-minute break we will start first improvisation session.

Wednesday 08 November 12.30 – 1.30

Preparation for seeing *Poison* by Lot Vekemans translated by Rina Vergano.

Wednesday 08 November an evening visit to The Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond to see *Poison*.

Tuesday 14 November 1.00 – 3.00

A discussion about *Poison*.

Our second improvisation session

Wednesday 15 November 12.30 – 1.30

Our third improvisation session.

Tuesday 21 November 1.00 – 3.00

Preparation for seeing *Young Marx* by Richard Bean and Clive Coleman

We will watch each-others improvisations and prepare for Thanksgiving

Tuesday 21 November an evening visit to The Bridge Theatre to see *Young Marx*

Wednesday 22 November 12.30-1.30

A discussion about *Young Marx*

Thursday 23 November: THANKSGIVING

Tuesday 28 November

Preparation for our visiting speaker and after a short break

a visiting speaker will talk about some aspect of working in the professional theatre.

Wednesday 29 November 12.30 – 1.30

A chance to finish writing your play in the classroom. **Hand in your papers and your plays.**

Thursday 30 November Swan Lake for amusement only – hopefully a Christmas treat

December 01, 02 or 03 A visit to performance at Scene and Heard. You will be expected to make your own arrangement for visiting on a day that suits you, details of booking arrangements will be provided. The performance is free but you need to book. THIS IS A MANDATORY PART OF THE COURSE.

Tuesday 05 December

Exam preparation including a video of a professional director at work

Wednesday 06 December unseen exam

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.

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 Laggatt, *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.