



Study abroad.

SYLLABUS

Fall Semester 2011

THE PLAY'S THE THING: AHA THEATRE COURSE

Instructor: Althea Stewart

Contact Hrs: 40

Language of Instruction: English

LONDON, ENGLAND

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this course is to encourage students to learn about 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 does the playwright acquire the techniques to achieve this and how does s/he find a voice to express a unique truth?

In Noel Coward's play *Present Laughter*, the experienced actor advises the young would be playwright to take a menial job in a theatre, so that he can watch a wide variety of plays and watch the same play being performed night after night. The repertory system in Britain, at the time that Coward's play was written, enabled all theatre professionals to have this experience. These regional theatres did the same play every night for one, two or three weeks and then replaced it with another play. Nowadays the novice playwright and the inexperienced theatre professional can only hope to see such a wide variety of plays as members of the audience, and this course provides such an opportunity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

These offer students an understanding of a wide variety of theatrical companies, genres, and techniques. Students will also be encouraged to examine theatre as a way of challenging the status quo and to analyse and write critically about theatre as well as writing for the theatre.

Course Learning Outcomes:

Students should look forward to increasing their ability to analyse and 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. The course is designed to give students experience of the widest possible variety of theatre available in London, which has a tradition of presenting classics both British and foreign alongside new plays.

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. By the end of the course students will have gained knowledge of different kinds of London theatre companies. These are diverse in the way that they raise funds and in the way they serve their respective communities.

In order to examine the material aspects of putting on a play we shall take tours of a theatre and a museum. Every playwright should have some experience of backstage work. The theatre is a place of illusion and sometimes spectacle. Success depends upon knowing what is possible.

A theatre professional will speak to us about some aspects of theatre. For those students who wish, there will be an opportunity to write a short play during the course. Many significant contemporary plays have been written as a result of actors improvising and we shall have an opportunity to do this. 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) An essay no more than 2,500 words in length. A choice of questions will be provided. To be handed in on 12 October. 25% of the marks
- 2) Two reviews one of each of the first two plays that we see.
A. Write a review of *Dr Faustus* for a local paper, where it is essential to encourage theatre attendance. (700 words)

B. Write a review of *The Mysteries* for an academic journal. (1,000 words) Both reviews to be handed in on 12 October. 25%

3) Two papers.

A. An account of what you have learned from your fellow students during the improvisation exercise and the discussions, no more than 1,000 in length.

B. You have a choice here: **either** write notes as if to be published in a programme for the performance of *How to be Happy* at The Orange Tree Theatre (to include a biography of the author, a selective production history of the play and some notes about the production about 1,500 words) **or** write a short play based on the improvisation we have done. (about 10 minutes in duration) To be handed in on 30 November. 25%

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 also answer a short essay question. For the second question there will be a choice of topics. The exam lasts for an hour and a half. 25%

Course Outline which will act as a Calendar for students.

This calendar may be subject to change.

Classes will take place on Tuesdays from 3.30 to 5.30 & Wednesdays from 4.30 to 5.30

At 6 Great James Street except when there are field trips.

Wednesday 07 September: Introduction ‘The Play’s The Thing’. A discussion about the playwright as the ‘brief chronicler of our time’. A look at the course calendar and requirements.

Tuesday 13 September: Preparation for seeing *Dr Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe and *The Mysteries* in a version by Tony Harrison.

Wednesday 14 September: A review workshop.

Wednesday 14 September: An evening visit to Shakespeare’s Globe to see *Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare. I shall not be teaching this play but all playwrights should study Shakespeare and this is an opportunity to see the play in a reproduction of the theatre where it would have been first performed. PLEASE WEAR SENSIBLE SHOES FOR STANDING IN THE YARD AND TAKE WARM CLOTHING AND PROTECTIVE COVERING AGAINST THE RAIN. THE THEATRE IS OPEN TO THE ELEMENTS AND BESIDE THE RIVER, WHERE THERE IS ALWAYS A BREEZE.

Thursday 15 September: An evening visit to Shakespeare’s Globe to see *Dr Faustus*.

Monday 19 September: An evening visit to Shakespeare’s Globe to see *The Mysteries*.

Tuesday 20 September: A discussion about *Dr Faustus* and *The Mysteries*. Essay questions will be handed out.

Wednesday 21 September: No class because you are in Scotland.

Tuesday 27 September: Please meet at the National Theatre by the Information Desk at 3.45. We shall look at the exhibition showing the history of The National Theatre and there will be a brief introduction to *The Kitchen*. At 5.15 we shall tour the backstage facilities. There will be time to get something to eat before attending the Evening performance of *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker. **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.**

Wednesday 28 September: It is hoped that Matthew Pidgeon will talk to us about performing at The Globe either today or during Jean's class on Thursday or next week.

Tuesday 04 October: An essay writing workshop and a discussion about *The Kitchen*.

Wednesday 05 October: Creating a character. Preparation for our improvisation.

Thursday 06 October: You are all going to Stratford Upon Avon and will be seeing *Macbeth* in the evening.

Tuesday 11 October: Please meet me at the Information Desk in the Victoria and Albert Museum at 4.00 so that we can visit the Theatre Gallery.

Wednesday 12 October: Two reviews and an essay must be handed in before you leave for the Coliseum where you are hearing a pre-performance talk at 5.15 and then attending a performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

MID TERM BREAK FROM 17 – 21 OCTOBER

Tuesday 25 October: Preparation for seeing *The Veil* by Conor McPherson. After this we shall go to The National Theatre to hear Conor McPherson talk about his play *The Veil* at 6.00.

Wednesday 26 October: A discussion about Conor McPherson's talk.
An evening visit to the Haymarket Theatre to see *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare
I shall not be teaching this play.

Tuesday 01 November: Our first improvisation session.
An evening visit to The National Theatre to see *The Veil*.

Wednesday 02 November: Preparation for seeing *How To Be Happy* by David Lewis.

Thursday 03 November: 6.00 An evening visit to The Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond to hear Sam Walters (Artistic Director) talk about his theatre and *How To Be Happy*. There will be time to get something to eat before seeing the play in the evening.

Tuesday 08 November: Our second improvisation session.

Wednesday 09 November: A discussion about *How To Be Happy*. Preparation for seeing *The Last Duchess* by Nicholas Wright.
An evening visit to Hampstead Theatre to see *The Last Duchess*.

Tuesday 15 November: Our last improvisation session.

Wednesday 16 November: A discussion about *The Last Duchess*.

Tuesday 22 November: Presentations made to the class relating to what you have written based on the improvised play. These plays should be no longer than ten minutes each. If you prefer you can present an account of how you researched your programme notes for *How To Be Happy*.

Wednesday 23 November: We will talk about character and plot. We have written plays in which the characters were most significant. Let us also think about plays we have seen where the plot is paramount.

An evening visit to The Young Vic to see *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. I shall not be teaching this play.

Tuesday 29 November: Some thoughts about adapting old plays with reference to *The Mysteries* and *One Man, Two Guvnors* by Richard Bean based on *The Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni.

Wednesday 30 November: An introduction to the work of Scene and Heard. **Hand in your plays or your programme notes and your papers on what you have learned from your fellow students during the classes, theatre visits and improvisation sessions.**

Thursday 01, Friday 02, Saturday 03 or Sunday 04 December: An evening visit to Teatro Technics to see the work of Scene and Heard. This will cost nothing and you are expected to make your own individual arrangements with Scene and Heard. Telephone 020 7388 9008. The visit is mandatory. If you all want to go on the same night please avoid Thursday. At any performance one person may not book more than four tickets but the seats are not numbered so you can sit with your friends if you get there early enough.

Monday 05 December: A visit to The Adelphi Theatre to see *One Man, Two Guvnors*.

Tuesday 06 December: Examination preparation.

Wednesday 07 December: Examination. TBC.

COURSE READINGS

(Additions will be made as the course progresses)

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.**

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.**

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.**

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.