



## **SYLLABUS**

**Winter Term 2012**

**AHA: LONDON 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 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?

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 several theatrical companies, play genres, and performance techniques. Students will also be encouraged to examine theatre as a way of challenging the status quo and to think and write analytically about theatre.

#### Course 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 52<sup>nd</sup> 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. 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) An essay no more than 2,000 words in length. A choice of questions will be provided. To be handed in on 08 February. 25% of the marks
- 2) Write a review of *Hamlet* for a local paper, where it is essential to encourage theatre attendance. (700 – 1,000 words) 25%
- 3) An account of what you have learned from your fellow students during the presentations, and the discussions. (no more than 1,500 in length). To be handed in on 13 March. 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 a second question in which you will be asked to write a paragraph describing your response to one of the plays we have seen in the second half of term. The exam lasts for two hours. 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 3.30 to 5.30  
At 6 Great James Street except when there are field trips.

**Wednesday 11 January:** A very brief introduction to *Hamlet* and *The Comedy of Errors*, both by William Shakespeare.

**Thursday 12 January:** A visit to The Young Vic Theatre to see Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

**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.**

**Monday 16 January:** A visit to the National Theatre to see Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*.

**Tuesday 17 January:** An introduction and a look at the course calendar and requirements. A discussion about *Hamlet*.

**Wednesday 18 January:** A review workshop. A discussion about *The Comedy of Errors*. **Essay questions will be handed out.**

**Tuesday 24 January:** Essay writing workshop. A short talk on the York Mystery Cycle.

**Wednesday 25 January:** No class because you are in York.

**Tuesday 31 January:** Please meet at the National Theatre by the Information Desk at 4.15. We shall look at the exhibition showing the history of The National Theatre and examine the use of the foyer at the National Theatre. At 5.15 we shall tour the backstage facilities. **PLEASE NOTE THIS CLASS WILL END LATER THAN USUAL AT ABOUT 6.30.**

**Wednesday 01 February:** We will listen to Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* in class. A short discussion about the responsibilities of publicly funded theatre companies.

**Tuesday 07 February:** Preparation for seeing the play *The Kreutzer Sonata* adapted for the stage by Nancy Harris from Leo Tolstoy's novella of the same title.

**Tuesday 07 February:** An evening visit to the Gate Theatre in Notting Hill Gate to see Nancy Harris's version of *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

**Wednesday 08 February:** Please hand in your review and your essay. We will have a discussion about *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and make arrangements for the presentations that take place after half term.

**MID TERM BREAK FROM 10 - 17 FEBRUARY**

**Tuesday 21 February:** 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.**

**Wednesday 22 February:** Preparation for seeing *Bingo* by Edward Bond.

**Wednesday 22 February: An evening visit to the Young Vic to see *Bingo* by Edward Bond.**

**Tuesday 28 February:** A discussion about *Bingo*. A few words about The Old Vic and The Young Vic Theatres.

**Wednesday 29 February:** Preparation for seeing *Muswell Hill* by Torben Betts.

**Thursday 01 March: 6.00 An evening visit to The Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond to hear Sam Walters (Artistic Director) talk about his theatre and *Muswell Hill*. There will be time to get something to eat before seeing Bett's play.**

**Thursday 01 March: An evening performance of *Muswell Hill*.**

**Tuesday 06 March:** Preparation for seeing *Lay Down Your Cross* by Nick Payne. A discussion about *Muswell Hill*.

**Tuesday 06 March: An evening visit to Hampstead Theatre to see Payne's *Lay Down Your Cross*.**

**Wednesday 07 March:** A discussion about *Lay Down Your Cross*. A short talk on structure, comedy and tragedy.

**Tuesday 13 March:** A talk about the work of Scene and Heard (the London version of New York's 52<sup>nd</sup> Street Project). Some work on creating a character. **Hand in your paper on what you have learned from your fellow students.**

**Wednesday 14 March: A visit to The Victoria and Albert Museum to visit The Theatre Gallery. Please meet me at 4.00 in the main entrance hall.**

**Tuesday 20 March:** A discussion about the Museum and how theatre professionals use museums and galleries. Examination preparation and summing up the course.

**Wednesday 21 March: Examination TBC.**

## **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 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 usually be read before written work is undertaken. Critical works will be recommended as the course progresses. Reading other plays by the same author is always encouraged. Students should read Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Comedy of Errors* before attending the performances if at all possible. These will be provided at the start of term, with a brief prose summary of each scene. Should students wish to start reading before the course commences any good modern text with notes may be used, such as The Arden or The Oxford Editions.

### **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.**

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.**

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.

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.

Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare and Co.* London: Penguin Books, 2007.