

English 339: London Theatre Tour

English 339A: London Theatre Tour Travel

Dr. Ryan Claycomb
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Class meets Tu 4:00-6:50pm WDB G11

126D Honors Hall
304-293-21000 (office)
Office Hours: Tu 2:00-4:00 pm
or by appointment

Course Description

For this course, we will read several plays and discuss them as both literature and as performance texts. We will then travel to London over Spring Break to see them performed live at different types of theatrical spaces in different contexts, and in different theatrical styles. We will discuss not only the language of the plays, but their performances and the cultural contexts and theatrical spaces in which they are situated.

Traveling to a variety of high caliber productions affords the student of literature, theatre, and culture so many opportunities: to view live theatre in vibrant, world-class--professional theatre communities; to compare how spaces and styles inflect interpretation; to write about drama and theatre with a variety of live paradigms in mind for the sake of critical analysis. Prior to departure, students will read the plays we will see on our travels, will do research on theatrical spaces and styles in which such texts were developed or in which we might see them performed, and consider the broader experience of tourism in which we will be participating. On our trips, we will attend performances, and in at least one case, get additional contact with the resources of the theatre itself. After we've seen these performances, we will write and workshop several different projects in academic, professional, and popular modes of theatre-writing that integrate our experience with both the intellectual work of the academy and the public discourse of theatre.

Our **Course Objectives** will be multiple. By the end of the semester, students will:

- Apply various tactics of understanding performance as it informs, is informed by, and exceeds the practices of reading literature.
- Learn about the elements of theatre and stagecraft from the technical (architecture, scenery, costumes) to the historical (from Renaissance to the present) and the literary (from canonical works to new writing).
- Engage performances critically not as merely a passive spectator, but as part of an actively intellectual, emotional, and ethical exchange, and as a participating member of a larger theatre audience and community.
- Write for academic, professional, and general public audiences through a variety of written assignments.
- Develop oral presentation skills through class discussions and individual presentations.
- Engage in academic research to prepare for advanced literary study and for informed and critical travel.
- Have a lot of fun taking in some fantastic theatre with a great bunch of people as traveling companions.

Texts: Because our play selection is still in flux, some books have not been finalized, though the last four books have been ordered through the university bookstore. Updates will come as they are available.

- *The Jew of Malta*, Christopher Marlowe
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Mark Haddon (novel)
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Simon Stephens (play)
- *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Katherine Boo
- *The Nether*, Jennifer Haley
- Joseph Kesselring, *Arsenic and Old Lace*
- Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and her Children*
- Donald Strachan, *Frommer's London 2015*
- A.N. Wilson, *London: A History*
- Other texts may be added to our eCampus site as PDFs or via weblinks. These will be announced in in the syllabus with *** or in class as necessary, and include *The Broken Heart*, John Ford; *Behind the Beautiful Forevers (play)*, David Hare; and *Machinal*, Sophie Treadwell.

Course Requirements:

You are expected to meet the following requirements to achieve a passing grade.

1. Complete all reading by the date it is listed in the syllabus. There is plenty of reading in this course, so be sure to budget your time accordingly.
2. Complete all work by the date listed in the syllabus
 - Grades on all assignments will drop one letter grade for every weekday they are late.
 - Work handed in more than one week past the due date will automatically be graded F (55%).
 - Work handed in more than 2 weeks past the due date will earn a zero.
 - A paper is not considered turned until I have a hard copy in my hand.
 - Electronic versions via email or disk are unacceptable unless I give explicit permission beforehand.
 - Final portfolios will not be accepted after final grades have been submitted.
3. Participate in class activities in such a way that enhances learning for both yourself and your classmates.
4. Participate actively in the draft workshop process.
5. Participate in *all* travel activities during our travels, adhering to all university guidelines while abroad.
 - NB: Missing significant activities on the itinerary or violating university policy while abroad will result in a failing grade in the 1-credit travel course, and will also likely have an impact on your participation grade for the 3-credit course, depending on the degree to which it affects the classroom climate.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance for this class is required. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to gather notes or make up any material. If you accumulate more than 2 absences (two full weeks of class) for any reason, you **will forfeit your entire class participation grade**. If a circumstance arises that drastically impacts your attendance, perhaps in all of your classes (serious illness, family tragedy, etc.), I'd strongly encourage you to contact Kim Mosby, Sr. Associate Dean of Student Life, at 293-5611 or Kim.Mosby@mail.wvu.edu.

Tardiness:

Excessive tardiness (or habitual early departure) is also a problem and will negatively impact your class participation grade. When you are not in the class, you miss important class announcements, handouts, and the framework for the day's in-class work, or preparation for the next class. Assignments turned in late because of tardiness will be considered late, and it is your responsibility to request and gather missed material.

Assignments and Grading:

- 100pts. (4x25) Travelogues and Historical Presentations: At three separate instances over the first part of the semester, you will research and present on a site in London of specific interest. For each "Travelogue" you will write up a brief description of the site, information on reaching and visiting the site, and the significance of the site as a destination. It should encompass no more than 1 page, and it might even be niftily designed (hint, hint). Consider it a brochure for the class. Additionally, in week 5, each student will present for 5-10 minutes on a chapter or two of A.N. Wilson's *London: A History*, including a short handout for student reference.
- 150 pts. In-Class Participation See course requirement #3. Attendance will also factor into this grade, so please see the attendance policy. I will assign a class participation grade every five weeks based on attendance, preparation, meaningful contribution to classroom discussion and in-class activities, and absence of disruptive behavior.

- 650 pts, inclusive** **FINAL PORTFOLIO:** You will submit the following revised assignments as part of a final portfolio of work.
- 300 pts (4 x 75 pts) **Performance Reviews:** For four of the seven plays we see this semester, you will draft a newspaper-style theatre review of 500-750 words (roughly 1.5-2.5 pages). The first, for *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the CAC, will come in before Spring Break, and will get feedback directly from me. You will workshop two of the Spring Break performances with your peers immediately upon our return, and the remaining pieces will be submitted over the course of April. While you may draft as many as all seven reviews, you must select the four that you want to be graded in your portfolio. (HONORS students are graded 4x 50 points for 200 total)
- 250 points **Page to Stage Paper:** This paper of 1500-2000 words (5-7 pgs), will primarily engage in textual analysis to first articulate an interpretation of the text in question, and then propose a set of different performance and production choices might reveal/express this interpretation in live performance. Due before Spring Break, and revisable for the final portfolio. (HONORS Students are graded on 200 Points)
- 200 Points **Cultural Analysis Paper:** This paper of 1000-1500 words (3-5 pages) will choose and critically examine one cultural site visited in London for both its central cultural purpose and its underlying circulation of cultural capital. (Honors Students are graded on 150 Points)
- Honors Section **Season Proposal:** Our final project for the semester will be a presentation packet that proposes a four+ play season to a real theatre company. You will take at least two plays we read/saw and at least two plays you find in your own research, and develop a series of materials to propose your season. Such materials might be: A rationale for the thematic grouping of the plays, an analysis of the company's audience and mission, a page summarizing the plays in question, a press release announcing the season, sketches of sample promotional materials, etc. The assignment sheet will sketch out some required components, but the shape of the overall packet will be up to you. 1800-3000 words is a rough ballpark but ultimately, the length of the project will be determined by your creativity, and your ambition for it. We will workshop it individually in final conferences. You will turn it in with your final portfolio. (200 points)

Format for Papers:

All out-of-class assignments must adhere to the following criteria: Typed, Times 12-point (or equivalent) font, double spaced (unless guided otherwise), 1-inch to 1.25 inch margins, page numbers and stapled or paper clipped. Since paper assignments are based on word counts, a good rule of thumb is that each page is approximately 300 words. Please head your papers with your name, the date, the course, my name, and the word count, followed by a (creative) title that is centered above your essay. Submissions that do not meet these requirements will be dropped as much as a letter grade. Please note: messing with the physical appearance of the paper to achieve the illusion of length assumes that I cannot tell the difference between quantity and quality. A paper that is shorter than the assigned length but presented in an honest way will earn far more respect.

Grading Written Work

Grades on written work will follow the guidelines laid out below, guidelines used by the University's writing program:

A (90-100% of available points): This is an outstanding essay that reflects a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. It is well organized with excellent development of its ideas. It reflects the writer's command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.

B (80-89.99% of available points): This is a very good essay that fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing that do not interfere with reading the essay.

C (70-79.99% of available points): This is a standard, satisfactory essay that fulfills the assignment and is adequately developed. This is the basic grade from which all others are derived. Higher grades than this *exceed* the expectations for the assignment, and grades lower than this fail to meet some major component of the assignment. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength that would distinguish an above-average essay.

D (60-69.99% of available points): This is a below-average essay that fulfills many components of the assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. It may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

F (less than 60% of available points): This is an essay that relates to the topic but is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard American usage. Such an essay may have sentence boundary problems, poor use of idiom, inappropriate diction (words used incorrectly), agreement errors, or verb tense problems.

0: This is an essay that is either completely unrelated to the assignment, or that represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not one's own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

Draft Workshops, Feedback, and Deadlines

At specified times before the due date for selected assignments, students will bring to class a complete draft of that assignment—by complete I mean that it meets the minimum word-count requirements, and makes a complete argument, including conclusion. Peer Review will be conducted in the following way: In class, students will meet in pairs or in groups, read one another's papers, and give feedback guided by a worksheet distributed in class. The written feedback from the worksheet and oral feedback from discussion should provide a direction for revisions.

Because draft workshops are an integral part of the writing process, you are required to come prepared and to participate. Not only do you get feedback on your own writing, but you also learn more about the revision process itself, learn by reading others' work, help others polish their writing, and teach others by sharing your work with them. These activities are all crucial to the writing community of the class. **Coming unprepared to a workshop will cost 1 letter grade on each assignment.**

All assignments will receive feedback from the professor at some stage: Some will be group-workshopped in class (meaning students will present drafts to the entire class, and will receive verbal and written feedback from all classmates and the professor), others will be turned in for written feedback (and usually will be returned in one-to-two class sessions), and others will be discussed in conference with the professor. Some assignments will go through multiple stages of revision. Nonetheless, each student submission produced on time will receive ample feedback, and ample revision time. Students who miss submission deadlines by up to two weeks may turn in final drafts in the portfolio, but without the benefit of detailed feedback from the professor. After two weeks, the student will earn a zero for that assignment, and may not submit a final draft as part of the portfolio.

Office Hours:

My office hours are times when I am committed to being available to consult with students. Please note that I am often willing to review drafts with students in office hours above and beyond designated draft workshopping dates and times, as well as to discuss any other concerns you may have about the class, its content, and its procedures. Or to, you know, hang out. I think that you will find that over the course of the semester, the group will cohere as a sociable one, and so the formality of office hours may dissolve into something a bit more organic.

Social Justice:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Academic Dishonesty:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code:

http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code.

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Statement on Sexual Misconduct and Resources

West Virginia University (WVU) does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence [BOG Policy 44]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff, but keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator. If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the CarruthCenter, 304-293-9355 or 304-293-4431 (24-hour hotline), and locally within the community at the Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center (RDVIC), 304-292-5100 or 304-292-4431 (24-hour hotline). For more information please consult WVU policies at <http://titleix.wvu.edu>.

Class Schedule/ Syllabus

Some dates are subject to change pending final theatre scheduling, and possible weather conflicts.

W k	Class Schedule, Readings, Assignments	
1	1/13	Intro to course: Page to stage and beyond
2	1/20	Play #1: Christopher Marlowe, <i>The Jew of Malta</i> <u>Read: Marcia Ferguson, <i>Writing About Theatre, Chapter 1</i>***</u> <i>In which we discuss the idea of a performance as an interpretation of a text, and how performance choices might express different interpretive stances.</i>
3	1/27	Theatre Towns: London History/ Theatre History <u>Due: Read and Present on A.N. Wilson's <i>London: A History</i></u> <i>In which we begin our study of London as a venue for our theatrical travel and study by reading a history of London as a city. The class will begin with student presentations on segments of A.N. Wilson's <i>London: A History</i></i>
4	2/3	Play #2: John Ford, <i>The Broken Heart</i> <i>In which we will discuss the play as both a literary document and as a product of the architecture of the space it inhabits, and think about theatre history as connected to the history of its place. In the second half of class, students will present travelogues on an historical site they'd like to visit while in London</i> <u>Due: Travelogue #1: Historical Site</u>
5	2/10	Theatre Spaces: Theatres, Communities, Buildings, Stages <u>Read: Ric Knowles, <i>Reading the Material Theatre</i>***</u> <i>In which we discuss how the space of a performance—from the stage it's on, to the city it's in inflects the performance we see, and may inflect the text that we read. We'll also take a brief tour of some of the specific spaces and theatres of London's rich theatrical history, through student travelogues, and some gentle professorial guidance. And finally, in which we are introduced to The "Competing Interpretations" paper.</i> <u>Travelogue #2: Theatrical site</u>
6	2/17	Play #3: Haddon/ Stephens: <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i> <i>In which we discuss literary contexts for theatrical stories through the idea of adaptation from a literary medium to a performance medium—in this case, the move from a novel to a play. Students will be asked to take on the daunting task of reading BOTH novel and playscript. We'll close class with a final set of travelogues on cultural sites that might catch our interest.</i> <u>Due: Travelogue #3: Cultural site</u>

- 7 2/24 **Play #4: Sophie Treadwell: *Machinal***
In which we discuss Treadwell's modernist masterpiece, and modernist/ expressionist theatre in general. We will also consider what production of the play in an educational setting means for our expectations of the production. After the break, we will workshop drafts of your page-to-stage paper.

Draft Workshop: Page-to-Stage Paper

Due: Complete draft of Page-to-Stage paper (~1500-2100 words)

- 8 3/3 **Play #5: *Arsenic and Old Lace* (at the CAC)//Writing the review**

In which we discuss realist theatre and the possibilities for interpretation with more specific boundaries on what is plausible within what is prescribed by the text. Also, in which we discuss the customs and conventions of attending the theatre, and some guidelines, tips, and tactics for writing theatre reviews. Finally, in which the Theatre Review assignment is distributed.

Due via email: Revised Draft of Page-to-Stage Paper

Read also: Ferguson Chapters 2-3***; Selected sample play reviews

Attend *Arsenic and Old Lace* at CAC

- 9 3/10 **Play #6: Jennifer Haley, *The Nether***
*In which we warm up by discussing the local production of *A&OL*, and perhaps mulling over the challenges and successes of writing a play review (at which point, you submit your draft of the review for A&OL. And after which we read and discuss our fourth play of the semester, Jennifer Haley's potentially controversial 2012 play, *The Nether*).*

Due: Draft of Theatre Review for *Arsenic and Old Lace*

- 10 3/17 **Travel and Tourism: Practical Preparation and Intellectual Approaches**
Read: Selections from Susan Bennett, Dennis Kennedy, and John Urry

In which we are visited by the Office of International Programs for our mandatory travel orientation (note: should you miss this class, you MUST make up the meeting with OIP before we leave next week!). After which, we shall discuss in great depth some of the broader cultural implications of tourism as an intellectual and economic practice. We may feel vaguely uncomfortable about that practice. At which point we shall discuss the parameters for the cultural analysis assignment.

SPRING BREAK

Travel to London for a great week!

Please read both versions of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers!*

- 11 3/31 **Class Cancelled:** *Really, we just spent a week together in London, and you want to come back to class already? Take a break already!*

12 4/7 **From Experience into Writing**
Reading TBA

In which we discuss the wonder, magic, and awesome that was the last week of March, and in which we look ahead to the writing that we will do in response. In which we workshop two reviews for plays we saw in London, and in which the Season Proposal assignment is detailed for students completing the Honors section.

Due: Complete drafts of two London play reviews (~500-750 words each)

13 4/14 **Play #7: *Mother Courage and Her Children*, by Bertolt Brecht**
Also, Brecht, "Street Scene" ***

In which, mildly astonished, we read one last play, and make plans to see it performed at the CAC. In which we discuss the particular theatrical mode of Bertolt Brecht, and the place of political theatre in the historical and contemporary theatre scene. After which, we shall do a group workshop of our Cultural Analysis papers, and discuss the construction of the final portfolio.

Due: Complete draft of Cultural Analysis Paper (1000-1500 words)

14 4/21 **Theatre and the World**
Reading TBA

A discussion of the concentric circles around a play: literature, performance, theatrical space, theatrical community, national and global histories, economics, culture, politics, ethics, and writing. You know, just the little stuff. At which students will also submit their Cultural Analysis paper. Other events of a less-well-defined nature may also (as they say) go down.

Due via email before class: Cultural Analysis Paper

15 ***Class Canceled for individual conferences***

In which, for roughly one hour (or less), we shall discuss your collective work for the semester.

Ex R Final Drafts due in my office during exam time