

Department of English & Writing Studies
Theatre Studies Program

Understanding Performance

Theatre Studies 2201F (001)

Fall 2019

DRAFT SYLLABUS

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Instructor: Dr M. J. Kidnie
Email: mjkidnie@uwo.ca
Office hours: M & W 2:30-3:30 and by
arrangement, UC 4420

Course Location: University College 3220

Course Date/Time: Mon 10:30-12:30 &
Wed 11:30-12:30

Prerequisites: Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of any 1000-level or above “E” or combination of two 1000- level or above “F/G” courses from any department in the following Faculties: Arts and Humanities, School of Humanities (Brescia), Information and Media Studies (FIMS), or Music; or from any of the following additional Departments: Anthropology, English (King’s), English and Cultural Studies (Huron), History (Main and Affiliates), Philosophy (Affiliates), Political Science (Main and Affiliates), the Religious Studies (Affiliates), or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

This course will equip students with the primary tools necessary to conduct basic performance analysis. From costumes to lighting and sound effects to textual alterations, students will learn to analyze a production while exploring the social, political, and aesthetic meanings of the required texts. Much of our work will be pursued through hands-on engagement with live and archived theatre: there are four trips outside of classtime interspersed throughout the term in which you are required to participate. Two are evening shows here in London at the Grand Theatre and Palace Theatre, one is a Tuesday evening performance at the Stratford Festival, Stratford (bus transportation provided; we will leave Western at 6pm), and one is a Tuesday afternoon field trip to the Stratford Festival archives, Stratford (bus transportation provided; we will leave Western at 12 noon). It is your responsibility to be on time for the bus departure – we can’t wait for latecomers.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Recognize and analyze the component parts of live or archived performance;
- Use specialized terminology relevant to the study of performance;
- Engage with scripts as blueprints for performance and theorize that interpretive strategy;
- Think critically about the reception of performance;
- Locate and search library databases to find critical and theoretical analyses relevant to a topic of study;
- Write an essay about a piece of theatre that contains an effective thesis

Course Materials

Materials for purchase (texts are available at the bookstore)

- 3 theatre tickets, which you order online, by phone, or buy at the box office
 - Book *Birds of a Kind* at the Stratford Festival, Stratford, before September 13, when our reserved tickets are released back to the general public (\$21, no handling fees, \$20 return bus transportation – phone 1-800-567-1600, and follow the prompts to Groups and Schools to book both ticket and transportation)
 - Our visit to the Stratford Festival Archives, Stratford, is free, but return bus transportation is \$20. Pay for this when you purchase ticket and transportation to *Birds of a Kind* – phone 1-800-567-1600, and follow the prompts to Groups and Schools. Tell them you are on the *Othello* bus trip, but *not* buying a ticket to *Othello*.
 - Book *The Runner* at the Grand Theatre, London, before October 13, when our reserved tickets are released back to the general public (\$20, use promo code: ???). Book online at thegrandtheatre.com (insert the promo code at the top right of the landing page) or phone 519-672-8800.
 - Book *The Designated Mourner* through the Palace Theatre, London
- Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance*
- Wallace Shawn, *The Designated Mourner*
- Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (also available free through OWL Resources, but without introduction or commentary)
- Wajdi Mouawad, *Birds of a Kind* (performance script available free through OWL Resources, but it may *only* be used for teaching-learning purposes)

Materials posted under “Resources” on OWL

- Elaine Aston and George Savona, “Semiotics of Performance,” in *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 99-122
- Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. Mowat and Werstine (text only)
- Performance script for Wajdi Mouawad, *Birds of a Kind*

Submission of Assignments

All submission dates are listed below. In case of seeming discrepancies, the dates below will be taken as final.

Written coursework will be submitted the day it is due at the beginning or end of lecture. You must also submit written coursework on the due date through our OWL website. OWL will confirm the day and time of submission. Please note that in case of dispute about when your essay was submitted, the OWL submission date will be taken as final.

Late (or early) submissions may be handed in at the Department of English dropbox, which is accessed from the hall outside UC 2401. The secretary will date-stamp your work and put it in my pigeonhole. Anything submitted to the dropbox before 8:30am will be date-stamped with the *previous* day's date. You must also submit any late or early work through the OWL website, which will also provide you with a date-stamp. Please note that in case of uncertainty, the online OWL date-stamp will be taken as final.

Late Paper Policy

If you submit a paper after the due date, the paper will be counted as late. The grade will be reduced by a penalty of two marks (2%) for each calendar day that it is late. Note that when a paper is late, every day counts (including weekends), but that the arrangements for date-stamping essays in the Department of English essay box are accepted for late essays. Extensions on any assignment will only be considered if supported by a request for accommodation sent by students' Academic Counsellors in their home faculty (see below, "Accommodation").

Methods of Evaluation (assignment descriptions are below)

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

3 performance analyses:

- Analysis 1: 15% (1000 words) – *Birds of a Kind*, due October 18
- Analysis 2: 20% (1500 words) – *The Designated Mourner*, due November 11
- Analysis 3: 20% (1500 words) – *The Runner*, due December 4

Archives writing assignment (50 min, in-class): 20% (Monday, October 2)

- You will research one of a few available stagings of *Julius Caesar* in the Stratford Festival archives from ONE of these angles:
 - How did your production stage "ordinary Romans" during and immediately following Caesar's murder (Brutus addresses them first, followed by Marc Antony)? What do you infer from these choices in terms of this production's attitude towards the play's nameless citizens?
 - How did your production stage the murder of Cinna the poet? What do you infer from these choices in terms of civic disobedience?
 - Did your production use doubling or cross-gender casting? Focus on one or two scenes and consider how specifically these strategies of casting helped to shape interpretive effect.
 - Was the stage commanded by a striking prop or onstage set piece in one or more scene(s)? If so, how did this design feature shape an interpretation of one or two scenes?
 - How does your production stage Caesar's ghost? How do these choices shape a perception of the drama (e.g, moral conscience, supernatural, stage theatricality)?
- Research your production online before going to the archives (you should keep detailed notes on this stage of your work, including a Works Cited list of any reviews you find). What can you learn about the show in relation to your specific topic without recourse to the Festival archives?
- Research your production at the archives (you should keep detailed notes on this stage of your work). What can you find in the archives, and how does this material further shape your answer to the research question you chose?
- You will upload a Works Cited list of reviews to OWL, specifying which ones you found online before going to the archives, and which ones you could only get in Stratford.

- You will then have 50 mins to write about your findings.
- You will identify the show, who starred in it, its year of production, in which theatre it was staged, the type of stage (proscenium, thrust, etc), and its period setting. You will then write a short essay in response to the research prompt, and conclude with a short reflective answer on your experience of working in the archives. You're welcome to bring your notes into class.
- A basic familiarity with *Julius Caesar* is recommended for this project. An excellent (free) online edition of the play is available at <https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Ham.html> (no notes or introduction). You can also buy the Folger edition of *Julius Caesar* at the bookstore.

5 in-class tests (reading comprehension, mostly fill-in-the-blank; 10 min each): 5 x 3% = 15%

Class participation: 10% (considered contributions to discussion, post-performance discussion, Q&A sessions, and classroom writing exercises)

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies for adjudication.

Additional Information:

LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES

I do not permit the use of laptops or cell phones in lectures. Students may tape-record lectures if they have difficulty taking notes by hand – feel free to talk to me about this option outside of class. If you choose to read *Julius Caesar* online, please download and print off the text to bring to class.

Please note: The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <https://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

PERFORMANCE ANALYSES

[Live performance is] an event for that moment in time, for that [audience] in that place – and it's gone. Gone without a trace. There was no journalist; there was no photographer; the only witnesses were the people present; the only record is what they retained.

—Peter Brook

We will be seeing three live productions this winter. The purpose of these analyses is to strengthen your critical analysis of live performance. You will write an essay-style analysis of each of the three live performances we will see as a group on this course. The first is 1000 words and worth 10%; the subsequent two analyses are 1500 words and worth 15%. The emphasis is on the staging itself, but you are required to build into your analyses production information available in the theatre program, and in available reviews. You should also consult production information available on the theatre's website.

Whether or not you liked the production is not especially relevant. This sort of evaluative judgement might emerge over the course of your essay, but the primary emphasis must be on *analysis*. In particular, focus on one or two production choices that you consider especially important in terms of the company's staging. You might be struck by costuming decisions, lighting and sound effects, striking gestures or unexpected emphases introduced by actors that introduced a reading of the play that hadn't occurred to you – the list of production choices to which you might attend is endless. In your essay, describe the production choice(s) concisely, and then analyse how it or they shaped a certain interpretation of the action, either in terms of the overall action, or in that particular scene. You might analyze the choices in terms of the tone of the production (happy, melancholy), power dynamics between characters on stage, individual characterisations, homoerotic tensions, the treatment of revenge – again, the potential interpretive significances are endless.

Your essay will be graded according to the following criteria:

- An ability to notice and build into your analysis significant production details;
- An ability to construct an argument that analyses how these staging choices shaped a particular interpretation;
- An ability to communicate your insights effectively: I will be looking for grammatically correct sentences, coherent essay structure, and careful presentation (no typos, titles italicized, pages numbered, essay titled, footnotes and bibliography presented according to MLA guidelines, etc).

I would recommend taking a notepad and pen into the theatre with you, so you can jot down striking details as they occur: you might otherwise have trouble remembering how exactly a scene or moment was played. You should also keep the theatre programme that you'll be given when you enter, as it will tell you who played which parts, who directed the show and wrote the music for it, and perhaps also provide some insight into what the company was trying to achieve. We'll discuss each of the productions in class.

IN-CLASS ARCHIVES WRITE-UP

This archives writing assignment will last the duration of the 50-minute class, and is worth 15% of your grade. You will work as part of a group, but the material you present for grading will be your own. A basic familiarity with *Julius Caesar* is recommended for this project. An excellent (free) online edition of the play is available at <https://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Ham.html> (no notes or introduction). You can also buy the Folger edition of *Julius Caesar* at the bookstore (the print version includes both notes and an introduction).

- You will research one of a few available stagings of *Julius Caesar* in the Stratford Festival archives from ONE of these angles:
 - How did your production stage “ordinary Romans” during and immediately following Caesar’s murder (Brutus addresses them first, followed by Marc Antony)? What do you infer from these choices in terms of this production’s attitude towards the play’s nameless citizens?
 - How did your production stage the murder of Cinna the poet? What do you infer from these choices in terms of civic disobedience?
 - Did your production use doubling or cross-gender casting? Focus on one or two scenes and consider how specifically these strategies of casting helped to shape interpretive effect.

- Was the stage commanded by a striking prop or onstage set piece in one or more scene(s)? If so, how did this design feature shape an interpretation of one or two scenes?
- How does your production stage Caesar's ghost? How do these choices shape a perception of the drama (e.g. moral conscience, supernatural, stage theatricality)?
- Research your production online before going to the archives (you should keep detailed notes on this stage of your work, including a Works Cited list of any reviews you find). What can you learn about the show in relation to your specific topic without recourse to the Festival archives?
- Research your production at the archives (you should keep detailed notes on this stage of your work). What can you find in the archives, and how does this material further shape your answer to the research question you chose?
- Each of you will upload a Works Cited list of reviews to OWL, specifying which ones you found online before going to the archives, and which ones you could only get in Stratford.
- Each of you will then have 50 mins to write about your findings. The first section will ask you to identify the show, who starred in it, its year of production, in which theatre it was staged, the type of stage (proscenium, thrust, etc), and its period setting. You will then write a short essay in response to the research prompt you chose, and conclude with a short reflective answer on your experience of working in the archives. You're welcome to bring your notes into class when you write up this assignment.

FIVE IN-CLASS TESTS

Short reading comprehension assessments based entirely on the day's assigned reading – 10 minute quizzes. Dates for all assigned readings and tests are included in the syllabus below. The reading is available either through Western's Bookstore (the McAuley textbook) or on our OWL Resources page.

Timetable

This class outline is subject to change. Students are expected to stay abreast of coursework through regular attendance at class.

SEPTEMBER

- 9 Introduction to course. Screening part of *Julius Caesar*, Donmar Warehouse
- 11 The language of theatre: Types of Stage
- 16 Framing the Event: Making *Julius Caesar* "Mean" (politics of staging – compare and contrast Donmar and Central Park staging – reviews, performance analysis)
FIRST TEST: Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1999), chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-89)
- 18 Stage Space, Presentational Space, Fictional Space, and Production Choices: *Julius Caesar* and "Performances of the Mind"
- 23 The Work of Theatre Historians: Archives and Archive Materials

Tuesday, September 24, 12-6pm:
FIELD TRIP TO STRATFORD FESTIVAL ARCHIVES (bus transportation provided)
(I will reach out to other profs if you need special permission to attend this one-off trip)
- 25 Class cancelled (replaced by previous day's field trip)

- 30 Performance Analysis: Archives debrief, and Interpreting Signs
SECOND TEST: Elaine Aston and George Savona, "Semiotics of Performance," in *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 99-122. Available in OWL Resources.

OCTOBER

- 2 In-class archives write-up

- 7 Introduction to *Birds of a Kind*

Tuesday, October 8, 6pm-midnight (show at 8pm)
BIRDS OF A KIND, STRATFORD FESTIVAL (bus transportation provided)

- 9 *Birds of a Kind* – post-performance discussion, and focus groups

- 14 THANKSGIVING MONDAY (no class)

- 16 Performance Analysis: Movement and Energy

THIRD TEST: Gay McAuley, "Energized Space: Moving Bodies," in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1999), pp. 96-125.

Birds of a Kind analysis due 18 October

October 17-27 – *Designated Mourner* in performance at Palace Theatre (London). Students must see the show before post-performance discussion on 28 October.

- 21 Performance Analysis: Objects onstage (making meaning; provisional or changing meanings; "invisible" objects; substitutions, theatrical license, and the "adaptation" trap)
FOURTH TEST: Gay McAuley, "Objects in Performance," in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1999), pp. 167-209

- 23 The Performance Critic's Subjective "Voice": exploring writing styles.

Please read Ava Wong Davies' *Exeunt Magazine* 2018 review of Sam Shepard's *True West* (<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-true-west-vaudeville-theatre/>, 5 December 2018), and Kirsty Sedgman's defence of Davies ("How can we talk about 'thirst' in theatre?", *Exeunt Magazine*, <http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/thirsty-audiences/>, 19 December 2018). Both of these are *very* short, and *very* accessible.

- 28 *Designated Mourner* – post-performance discussion. Please make sure you have seen the show at the Palace before this class (it opens 17 Oct). Director Jeff Culbert will visit the second half of class for a Q&A.

- 30 *Designated Mourner* inkshed

READING WEEK – NOVEMBER 4-8

Designated Mourner analysis due 11 November

NOVEMBER

- 11 Authors, Players, and the Making of Meaning: exploring scripted drama and "clues" to performance, authorial control over meaning, and issues of "fidelity" (e.g., modern dress, how far is "too far", staging and/vs "adaptation")
FIFTH TEST: Gay McAuley, "Space in the Written Text," in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1999), pp. 210-34

Recommended reading: Gerald Rabkin, "Is There a Text on This Stage?", in *Performing Arts Journal* 9:2-3 (1985): 142-59

- 13 Exploring the stage directions in *Julius Caesar*, *Birds of a Kind*, and *Designated Mourner*

Wednesday November 13, 7:30pm – *THE RUNNER*, Grand Theatre, London
"Speak-Easy" (Q&A) immediately following performance

- 18 *The Runner* – post-performance discussion and art exercise

- 20 Workshopping *The Runner* performance analyses

- 25 Theatre Audiences: The seeing eye/s, and accounting for perspective; interpretive communities and horizon of expectation; live theatre and "live" theatre: the "imperative" of presence in an age of digital mediation

REQUIRED READING: Gay McAuley, "The Spectator in the Space," in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1999), pp. 235-77

Recommended Reading: Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 125-51

- 27 Live theatre and political activism: Exploring the "purposes" of live theatre (comparative discussion of *The Runner* and *Birds of a Kind*)

DECEMBER

- 2 Quanti-qualitative audience research: Ways Forward in Theatre Research

Recommended Reading: Kirsty Sedgman, "Audience Experience in an Anti-expert Age: A Survey of Theatre Audience Research", *Theatre Research International* 42:3 (2018): 307-22

- 4 "Destination Theatre" and survey of Theatre Studies courses

The Runner analysis due 4 December

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:
<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.