ACM LONDON & FLORENCE: ARTS IN CONTEXT
London Theatre and Theatricality
Spring 2016

INSTRUCTOR: Constance Walker, Carleton College: cwalker@carleton.edu
CREDITS: 4 credit hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION
London is arguably the home of the finest theatre in the world, and during our seven weeks together we will see a wide variety of the best productions on offer in the winter and spring of 2016. We’ll attend plays at venues ranging from the National Theatre, the Barbican, the Donmar Warehouse, and the Almeida, to the experimental work going on in the Hampstead, Tricycle, and Gate Theatres, and to even more intimate productions staged in makeshift quarters above pubs and bakeries. We’ll also travel to Stratford-upon-Avon to see several performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company. In addition to attending performances, we’ll have the opportunity to talk with critics, actors, and directors of several of the plays we’ll see, and to tour the Globe, the Rose, and the National Theatres. In class we’ll analyze and discuss the productions we see, working closely with their scripts, considering their interpretive choices, and thinking together more broadly about the means and ends of performance.

Moreover, if we consider performance even more generally as “any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed,” as Richard Schechner defines it in Performance Studies, then we may also observe similarities between the performances enacted inside London’s theatres and those that take place throughout the city at large. In conjunction with the other ACM London course, “London as Visual Text,” we will consider the city itself as a vast theatre, the setting and impetus for dramas real and imaginary over the centuries. London has served as the stage of spectacles historical and modern, of scandals, riots, criminal trials, and public executions, of devastating fires and bombings, of historic debates in the Houses of Parliament, and of majestic royal weddings, pageants, and funerals. And it is intimately bound up as well with the highly dramatic exploits of iconic literary characters scarcely less real—Oliver Twist, Sweeney Todd, and Sherlock Holmes, for example. In addition to studying London theatre, then, we will also explore its theatricality, looking at the staging of the city’s rituals, ceremonies, and dramas. We will pursue several key questions in particular: who stages London’s varied spectacles, and to what ends? What about the city’s distinctive urban identity lends itself to its dramas and spectacles? How does that drama manifest itself, and what can we learn about the city and about performance from the spectacles that are staged outside of London’s theatres?

COURSE OBJECTIVE
The purpose of this course is to explore both theatre in London and the ways in which London itself functions as a theatrical space calculated for political, economic, cultural, and aesthetic display.

REQUIRED TEXTS
We will read the scripts for several of the plays we will be attending, the titles to be announced once the productions are booked in the fall of 2015. As background for our study of theatre, we will read Peter Brook’s The Empty Space; as background for our study of theatricality, readings will include Richard Schechner’s essay “What is Performance?,” Susan Bennett’s “The City as Tourist Stage,” and selections from Peter Ackroyd’s London: The biography. In addition to our study of real London spectacles, we
will also explore the city as spectacle in such literary depictions as Conan Doyle’s A Study in Scarlet and Moffat’s adaptation “A Study in Pink” (Sherlock, episode 1, season 1).

Other readings will be added to the syllabus as it nears its completed form late in 2015. The essays and selections will all be available on the course website; books and scripts will be available for purchase in London.

**COURSE CONTENT**

Format: Classes will meet twice a week at Monticello House, 48 Russell Square, from 10-12 on Monday and Wednesday mornings. There will also be occasional afternoon visits to such sites as the Museum of London, Dennis Severs’ House, and the Theatre Collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, as well as tours of the Globe and National Theatres. In the evenings we will attend approximately 2-3 plays per week, and, as mentioned above, there will be an overnight excursion to attend plays at the Royal Shakespeare and the Swan Theatres at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Assignments: There will be three written assignments and one oral presentation due for the course, as follows:

1. Throughout the course, everyone is to keep a theatre journal devoted to observations and analysis of the plays we see. Entries should comment on significant aspects of the production and their effect upon the work as a whole. You should also describe what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the production, discussing what works and why. Your analyses should thus be evaluative rather than merely descriptive, and should address the quality of the acting, directing, and technical design and execution.

2. Reading back over your journal entries towards the end of the course and thinking about the plays you have seen, you are to write a 5-7-page paper in which you discuss what you have learned about theatre from this particular set of productions. Be sure to include details from plays that proved to be especially memorable and illuminating.

3. Everyone is to choose one of London’s many spectacles—e.g., the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, the Notting Hill Festival, the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, the Lord Mayor’s Show, etc. Visiting the spectacle or its site if possible, you should go on to write a 5-7-page paper researching the background and analyzing the elements of theatricality involved in your spectacle of choice. What is being performed, and to what ends? What does your chosen spectacle add to London’s identity?

4. Your oral presentation should present an illustrated version of your findings (i.e., PowerPoint, Keynote, etc.) to the rest of the class. It should be approximately ten minutes long, and should summarize your major points.

**ASSESSMENT**

Grading

Grading will be based upon the following criteria:

- Theatre journal: 20%
- Theatre paper: 20%
- Theatricality paper: 20%
- Theatricality presentation: 20%
- Class participation and attendance: 20%
N.B. Attendance is mandatory for all classes and all performances, except in cases of emergency. An unexcused absence will result in the loss of half a grade. The papers, the journal, and the presentation must all be completed in order to pass the course. Late work is not acceptable.

Grading standards
Written and oral work will be graded according to the following standards:
A denotes work that is cogent, insightful, and original. An A paper develops a coherent thesis into a significant argument well supported by evidence from appropriate sources and located in relevant contexts. Papers exhibit sophisticated analysis and an extremely effective structure; they are precisely written and are almost entirely free from mechanical error.

B denotes work that is strong and well-focused. A B paper develops a sensible thesis into a coherent argument and supports it with adequate and relevant evidence. Its organizing structure is effective, it demonstrates a good commend of the material, it is clearly written, and it is largely free from mechanical error.

C denotes work that is adequate. A C paper addresses the topic, although usually not in great depth or detail, and includes some supporting evidence. Its structure is inconsistently effective, and while it is acceptably written, it is frequently marked by mechanical error.

D denotes work that is below average. A D paper is ineffectively structured, it lacks a coherent focus, and it shows little command of the material or ability to generate, develop, and support an argument about it. Generally underdeveloped, a D paper is poorly written and is encumbered with mechanical error.

F denotes work that is seriously flawed: it fails to make and support an argument and it shows virtually no understanding of the topic. It is often incoherently written and plagued with mechanical error.

ACM POLICY ON ACADEMICS
A complete listing of ACM policies can be found in your student handbook.

Class attendance and participation: You are expected to attend and participate fully in all classroom sessions, site visits, and field trips.

Academic honesty: Actions of dishonesty are destructive to the well-being of the academic community, and ACM staff respond to them vigorously. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic theft will result in a failing grade for that assignment and may result in failure for the course.

ACM POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION
The Associated Colleges of the Midwest does not discriminate in the operation of its educational programs, activities, or employment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, color, religion, national origin, age, veteran status, marital status, or disability.