

REN 812: ADVANCED ACTING FOR THE MFA

Fall 2015 - Syllabus

Professor: Matt Davies

Class time: Weds 9 - noon in Masonic Blue

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Office hours: Weds 2-5 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Following on from the REN 531: Performance of the Language collaborative rehearsal process, Advanced Acting for the MFA aims to expand the individual growth of the graduate actor. Each week, the instructor will explore and apply to monologues various rehearsal approaches and acting skills -- both classical and contemporary -- that release the full richness and possibility of early modern texts in performance.

COURSE MATERIALS

While lessons explored in class complement and expand acting choices made throughout the season, students should select two monologues, of between 1-2 minutes, from plays other than those in the MFA season. In anticipation of the professionalization focus of REN 822 in the spring, students will finish the course with two fully rounded and complex audition pieces, which will be filmed in the spring for personal websites.

COURSE RUBRIC

I shall assess your performances by how well you apply the Ten Basic Skills:

1. Scan for sense and rhythm
2. Identify figures and phrasing
3. Play your action and achieve your objective
4. Pursue the rhetoric, or argument
5. Re-act rather than act: be in the moment and listen
6. Act on the line; think ahead
7. Exploit the friction between line and sentence (verse)
8. Breathe appropriately
9. Enjoy the verbiage
10. Explore the wit

COURSE WORKLOAD

Acknowledging the extensive performance demands of the MFA calendar, REN 812 is a practicum rather than research-heavy course and much of its workload is confined to class time. As such, your participation as performer, observer, and, where called upon, commentator, is critical. You are nonetheless expected to apply class lessons, textual analyses, and performance approaches to your individual pieces and to rehearse them sufficiently for performance, whenever you are called upon to do so in class. Learning your pieces early and fully is paramount to achieving productive class work.

COURSE GRADING

70%: Class performance, which includes having monologues and dialogues fully memorized by week 4, and all textual analysis and exercises/approaches applied by the appropriate class time (generally the week following the lesson).

30%: Class participation, which includes being a good spectator and auditor, being willing to volunteer, and voluble yet generous, and maintaining a “Yes, and” attitude.

Since participation is essential to a practicum class, students will lose 10% (or one grade) per unexcused absence. Repeated tardiness (x3) shall accrue one absence.

CLASS SCHEDULE

	Date	Class topic	Description
1	Sept 2	Casting	Speech and scene selection
2	Sept 9	Fundamentals	Objectives and actions
3	Sept 16	Argument	Paraphrasing and rhetorical appeals
4	Sept 23	Phrasing	Scansion; line v. sentence; breathing and stress; Shatner trap; Mamet moments
5	Sept 30	Antithesis	Common rhetorical figures
6	Oct 7	Height	Classical to common tropes

7	Oct 14	Music	Rhythm, tempo, and pace
8	Oct 21	Juice	Verbiage and imagery
9	Oct 28	No class	Blackfriars Conference
	Nov 4	Sense Imaging	See, hear, taste touch smell
10	Nov 11	Sense imaging	Run monologues with redirects
11	Nov 18	Sense imaging	Run monologues with redirects
12	Nov 25	No class	Thanksgiving
	Dec 2	Subtext	Head, heart, guts, and groin
13	Dec 9	Performance	Showcase/mock audition

REN 531: PERFORMANCE OF THE LANGUAGE

Spring 2016 - Syllabus

REN531.S16.Davies/Bechtol
Performance of the Language SPRING 2016

Location: Blackfriars Playhouse & Masonic Red and Blue

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Class Times

M & F 9-12 Jan 11 - Feb 22

Rehearsal Times (see attached calendar)

M & F 9-12 Feb 24 - Apr 15

W 9-1 Feb 24 - Apr 15

Course Description

Following an Early Modern company model that seeks individual excellence through collaboration, this course will stage a professional-quality Shakespeare play at the Blackfriars Playhouse. Under the artistic vision and guidance of your directors, you will take responsibility for your role and for your show. In preparation for rehearsals, during the first five weeks of the semester you will expand on the work of Ren 530 through an in-depth investigation of language in performance. Simultaneously, you will engage in physical training, ensemble building, and devising work based on your play. Rehearsals will begin mid-way through the semester and will be scheduled a minimum of three days a week. Additionally, you will assume at least one of the production responsibilities listed below (see Company Objectives). The course is structured in such a way as to introduce you to several mainstays of the MFA experience: co-direction, devising original work, staging a play for the Blackfriars Playhouse.

Course Objectives

- Students will have a working knowledge of the collaborative skills necessary to work within an ensemble company
- Students will identify and engage with metrical and rhetorical tropes and embedded stage directions
- Students will demonstrate a practical understanding of Viewpoints training
- Students will develop production skills as assistants to professional consultants and mentors
- Students will exercise the basic acting skills and staging principles that serve early modern texts

Company Roles

Self-identify and assume responsibility for your production role; all roles must be approved by the

directors.

- Dramaturge
- Publicity
- Costumes
- Props
- Music
- Choreography (dance and/or fight)

Readings

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Arden Third Series
 Anne Bogart, *What's the Story*, "Collaboration" (chapter)
 Tom Markus, *An Actor Behaves* (selections)

Journal & Self-Assessment Document

Those who wish to document their process may find that a written record of classes and rehearsals may help focus conversation with instructors during office hour meetings, exit interviews, and aid the self-assessment document.. Journal contents may include a record of the following as they apply to performance:

- Preparation/Research (what you bring to the rehearsal): cuts/edits, paraphrasing, scansion, punctuation, figures of speech/rhetoric, textual comparisons, thoughts about plot and character
- Rehearsal Process (what you take away from the rehearsal): what you learn about plot, character, staging, personal habits, the creative process and artistic relationships
- Self-Assessment Document: a three to five page (double-spaced) document due a week prior to your final exit interview during finals week. In this document we ask that you assess your work in performance, your production role, and your collaborative contribution throughout the entire process.

Assessment

1) Collaboration

Throughout the semester your collaborative work ethic will be assessed on individual behaviors that affect other group members and the production as a whole, such as:

- Contribution to production activities
- Facilitation of the contributions of other production members
- Individual contributions in class and rehearsal
- Promotion of a constructive team climate

2) Rehearsal and Performance

Throughout the semester your work in rehearsal and performance will be assessed on the quality of your contributions to the artistic process, such as:

- Be off-book after the first blocking rehearsal.
- Prepare a fully scanned text, *identifying* metrical systems and major rhetorical figures related to your part(s).
- Ensure attendance, punctuality, and participation in 3-5 hours per week of production/preparation/rehearsal outside of class.
- Engage in character research.
- Apply Viewpoints training to character development and staging practices.

- Record blocking and execute in subsequent rehearsals.
- Effectively communicate the playwright's dramatic narrative and promote the production's vision.
- Engage the audience from opening line to strike.
- Maintain research/rehearsal journal.
- Participate fully and professionally in final performance.
- Contact your directors to arrange a mid-term meeting in the two weeks preceding spring break.

3) Production Roles

Each student selects one production role, which is in addition to his or her acting roles. You will be assessed on your ability to collaboratively fulfill the production duties detailed in the production checklist.

Dramaturgy

- Assist the lead dramaturge and directors in the development of a production approach.
- Create a dramaturgical notebook and/or website specific to the production that includes at least the following components: a script analysis; character breakdown; analysis of the play's use of source text(s), if applicable; overview of pertinent criticism on the play; glossary of terms and concepts; pertinent sociocultural and historical information; relevant images; and production history and reviews.
- Develop actor packets specific to the production if so requested by the director.
- Collaborate with the production team during the pre-production and rehearsal process. This includes researching material upon request, taking dramaturgical notes during rehearsals, and communicating those notes to the director.
- Assist in the development of materials for the production's program. This may include writing a dramaturgical essay and/or a synopsis.

Publicity

- Produce basic press packet (design, print, distribute fliers / posters, write press release, develop web presence).
- Create show program.
- Organize photography and videography for show in performance.
- Update actorscholar.com.
- Attend weekly production meetings

Costumes

- Collaborate with lead costume designer and directors on design approach for the show.
- Assist lead costumer with the creation of a costume list for each character.
- Assist lead costumer with design, render, pull, and, if necessary, the construction of costumes specific to production approach.
- Assist lead costumer with managing design budget, production crew, organization of costume storage, and dry cleaning.
- Assist lead costumer with fittings and preparation for a costume parade.
- Attend weekly production meetings.

Props

- Collaborate with lead Props Master and directors on the design approach for the show.
- Create a prop list for the production.
- Design, pull, and, if necessary, manage the construction of props and/or scenery specific to production approach.
- Create a props table with all props labeled, organized, and kept clean.
- Manage design budget and production crew.
- Attend weekly production meetings

Music Assistant

- Collaborate with director and dramaturge on design approach for the show.
- Assist music director with creating a list of all musical references called for in the script.
- Assist the music director with the design, orchestration, and, if necessary, composition of music specific to the production.
- Assist the music director with arranging music rehearsals and managing musicians and instruments.
- Attend weekly production meetings.

Choreographer

- Collaborate with director and dramaturge on design approach for the show.
- Assist the lead choreographer with the creation of a list of all fight or dance references called for in the script.
- Assist lead choreographer with the choreography of fights and/or dances.
- Arrange fight /dance rehearsals, and serve as fight / dance captain.
- Attend weekly production meetings.

The following is a guideline for earning a grade:

A Acceptable attendance (0 absences), active and enthusiastic participation, exceptional demonstration of collaborative skills, full understanding of movement vocabularies, fully realized textual work, thoughtful journals, noticeable contribution to production role, exceptional work in final performance.

B Adequate attendance (1 absence), active participation, adequate demonstration of collaborative skills, general understanding of movement vocabularies, effortful textual work, acceptable journals, adequate contribution to production role, decent work in final performance.

C Poor attendance (2 absences), passable participation, average demonstration of collaborative skills, some difficulty understanding of movement vocabularies, incomplete or unrealized textual work, insufficient journal entries, little contribution to production role, average work in final performance.

D/F Unacceptable attendance (more than 2 absences): lack of participation, inability to demonstrate collaborative skills, inability/unwillingness to understand movement vocabularies, incomplete/unrealized textual work, incomplete/unacceptable journals, does not fulfill requirements of production role, average work in final performance.

REN 531 Tentative Schedule**WEEK ONE****Monday, Jan 11: BLACKFRIARS**

- **Discuss Syllabus**
- **Read Through *Macbeth***
- **Group Brainstorm / Discussion**
 - Why this play now? How does it speak to our world today?
 - What does the play look like?
 - What does the play sound like?
 - What does the play smell like?
 - What is the most tender moment/action?
 - What is the most violent moment/action?
 - What is the most heartbreaking moment/action?

- What is the most beautiful moment/action?

Friday, Jan 15: MASONIC RED

- **Viewpoints Training**
 - Physical Training (movement of the center, across the floor, sticks w/partner, text) 50 min
 - Intro to Viewpoints (group consensus, jump, sun salutations) 35 min
 - Break 10 min
 - Intro to Viewpoints (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, spatial relationships, architecture, floor pattern) 45 min
 - Intro to Viewpoints (spatial relationship exercise + shape + gesture + text) 40 min

WEEK TWO

Monday, Jan 18: BLACKFRIARS

- **Matt: Scoring Time: meter and rhythm**
 - Overview of dramatic prosody
 - Examine the play's use of meter, tempo, rhythm, and how these elements influence the narrative
 - Discuss the interaction of verse and prose forms
 - Homework: Prepare 1-4 line metrical signatures for 2 characters
- **Doreen: Physical Dramaturgy of Time**
 - Physical Training (center shifts w/text, sitting statues) 20 min
 - Review Viewpoints of Time (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition) 50 min
 - Discuss properties of time and how it relates to performance 15 min
 - Homework: Time Composition. Students will divide into groups and research one act from *Macbeth* and make a list of all references to time within each scene, discussing its function, implications, influence on the action of the play. Each group will create a presentation that teaches the class how time operates within the act (presentation = performance).

Friday, Jan 22: MASONIC RED

- **Matt: Perform character metrical signatures**
- **Doreen: Perform Time Composition**

WEEK THREE

Monday, Jan 25: BLACKFRIARS

- **Matt: Rhetorical Systems**
 - Locate the play's defining rhetorical structures
 - Discuss dramatic rhetoric and playable figures
 - Nominate a key figure in each of the characters you play
 - Homework: Prepare a short passage (max 6 lines) for one of your characters in which major figures offer character choices
- **Doreen: Physical Dramaturgy of Space**
 - Physical Training (sitting statues, walks) 20 min

- Review Viewpoints of Space (architecture, floor pattern) 50 min
- Discuss the role that space plays in performance 15 min
- Homework: Space Composition. Students will divide into groups and research one act from *Macbeth* and make a list of all references to space/place/environment within the scenes, discussing its function, implication, influence on the action in the play. Each group will then create a presentation that teaches the class the role that space plays within the scenes (presentation = performance).

Friday, Jan 29, MASONIC RED

- **Matt: Present rhetorically-figured characters**
- **Doreen: Perform Space Compositions**

WEEK FOUR

Monday, Feb 1: BLACKFRIARS

- **Matt: Rhetoric of Sound**
 - Discuss phonemic tropes and identify chief examples in *Macbeth*
 - Practice various phonemic exercises
 - Begin to shape one of your character's voices based on dominant phonemic clues
 - Homework: prepare a short passage (max. 6 lines) phonemically
- **Doreen: Physical Dramaturgy of Sound**
 - Physical Training (standing statues, walks) 20 min
 - Review Viewpoints of Sound (tempo, pitch, volume) 50 min
 - Discuss gesture as a function of character and story 15 min
 - Homework: Students will divide into two groups and each group will select a scene from *Macbeth* and make a list of all references to sound within the scene, discussing how sound creates mood, sets the locale, affects the action, etc. Students will create a soundscape in the style of a radio play that teaches the class how sound functions within the scene (presentation = performance).

Friday, Feb 5: MASONIC RED

- **Matt: Perform phonemic passages**
- **Doreen: Perform Sound Composition**

WEEK FIVE

Monday, Feb 8: BLACKFRIARS

- **Matt: Mining the Text**
 - Discuss Characters Lists (Alfreds; Hagen)
 - Consider the value of Givens, Reportage, Personal Opinion, Rumor
 - Homework: prepare a short biography of one of your characters based upon his or her lists
- **Doreen: Physical Dramaturgy of Gesture**
 - Physical Training (slow tan) 20 min
 - Viewpoints Training (shape, gesture, expressive & descriptive) 50 min
 - Discuss how gesture affects character and story

- Homework: Character Gestures + Character Relationship. Working individually, students will create snapshots or tableaux for six gestures that demonstrate: 2 telling actions, 2 intuitive actions, 1 gesture that demonstrates personality or culture, and 1 gesture that expresses the essence of your character's conflict, or an internal propelling force. In addition, students will select a partner and create a short composition that traces the relationship of the characters from beginning to end.

Friday, Feb 12: MASONIC RED

- **Matt: Present 2 min first person biographical sketch of one of your characters**
- **Doreen: Perform Gesture Score and Character Relationship Score**

WEEK SIX

Monday, Feb 15: BLACKFRIARS

- **Matt: Objectifying the Text**
 - Discuss the two traditions: consider the convergence between Formalism and the Method
 - Method analysis: objectives, beats, and actions
 - Homework: score a brief dialogue (allocated), titling your beat(s) and identifying actions

- **Doreen: Physical Dramaturgy of Ritual, Magic, Otherworldly Creatures**
 - Physical Training (walks) 20 min
 - Viewpoints Training (spatial relationships in 7 + text + gesture)
 - Homework: Divide into groups and choose either a heightened ritualized action (i.e. sleepwalking sequence, witches conjuring demons, etc.), or a moment of magic that employs otherworldly creatures (ghosts, demons, witches, spirits) and using the viewpoints vocabulary boldly stage the ritual or otherworldly spectacle, while making clear stylistic choices.

Friday, Feb 19: MASONIC RED

- **Matt: Perform scored dialogues**
- **Doreen: Stage scored rituals**

MACBETH REHEARSAL & PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Rehearsal Dates:

February 24 – April 18 (no rehearsal on Monday, February 22 thesis festival, no rehearsal during spring break)

Rehearsal Times and Locations:

Monday from 9-12 at the Blackfriars + Wednesday from 9-1 at Masonic Red + Friday from 9-12 at Masonic Red

Production Meetings will be held once a week; time and date TBA.

***Extra rehearsals may be called for music, movement, fights**

Performance Date:

Monday, April 18 at 7:30pm at the Blackfriars Playhouse