

## REN 553. DIRECTING FOR THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

Professor Matt Davies  
Office: 221 Rose Terrace  
Office hours Thursday 2-5 and by appointment  
Phone: (540) 887-7248/(512) 751-7718  
Email: mdavies@mbc.edu

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

REN 553 offers students a foundational training in directing early modern texts. Working in the Blackfriars, we will focus primarily on staging for the thrust stage, although we will consider alternative set-ups. Similarly, we will explore contemporary approaches to directing Shakespeare within the context of the received practices of Shakespeare's staging conditions. Blending practical application with textual preparation and literary reflection, this course seeks to create an environment in which students augment their own tools, skills, and unique outlooks as trainee directors.

## DIRECTING ASSIGNMENTS

You will direct four scenes lasting 1-10 minutes, *all from the same early modern play*. In three class scenes -- monologue, dialogue, and problem scene -- you will develop your "close" directing skills in the staging of various common set-ups. Your final scene, or apprentice piece, which you will work on both in and outside of class throughout the semester, should demonstrate your developing directorial style and skills in a fully realized dramatic scenario. You are encouraged to cast from the M.Litt student body and beyond, and to reach out to both undergraduate and postgraduate actors in town. Cut, scanned, and cast scripts are due at the beginning of the class period prior to performance. The four scenes are:

1. Monologue: 1-2 mins
2. Dialogue: 2-3 mins
3. Problem scene: 3-4 mins
4. Final scene (and showcase): 7-10 mins

## DIRECTING RUBRIC

In this graduate entry-level course students are encouraged to focus on mastering the basics of effective directing in the early modern playhouse. I will evaluate scenes on the appropriate combination of the following elements. Please consider each and all of these elements as you rehearse your actors:

1. **Plot.** Tell the story of your scene, be it a soliloquy or a complex fight sequence, with clarity and logic.
2. **Character.** Establish the journey of every character, from the king to the spear-carrier, in scenes with momentum and moments of "discovery."

3. **Setting** (mise-en-scene). Beware the “big idea” or critical theory, which all too often creates an abstraction of, or distraction from, the dramatic narrative.
4. **Staging** (dramatic rhetoric). Articulate the argument of the scene and suit the action to the word (blocking and picturation). Deploy costumes and/or props in service of the argument.
5. **Articulation**. Ensure that each character inhabits the metrical, rhetorical, and contextual choices in the text.
6. **Stakes**. Within the bounds of credibility, encourage actors to make the boldest choices possible.
7. **Repetition**. Allow time for actors to play, to explore, and to own their actions.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Email all assignments as word documents by the beginning of the due class date. Where appropriate, written assignments should be composed in clear, grammatical prose and formatted in double-space, 12-point, simple font. The assignments are as follows:

1. Four scenes with strikethrough/gray scale cuts, scansion, and primary figures
2. Doubling and scene chart [*plus titling three consecutive scenes*]
3. Routledge *Directors' Shakespeare* chapter summaries (2-3 sentences each)
4. Two play reviews, *one non-ASC*, focusing on directorial choices: 2 pp. each.
5. Director's Notes on final scene: 1 p. to be assembled in a showcase program
7. Final paper: 5-7 pp. Based on your experience of directing your final scene, explain which of the directors (3-5) in the *Director's Shakespeare* you have emulated and why.
8. Respond weekly to the class blog, offering at least one sentence of commentary or questions regarding the week's assigned reading.

## COURSE READING

- *The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown (Routledge: London, 2010)
- Course reader (purchase for \$10 from Julie Fox)

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Analyze and break down a script formally and Methodically in a legible style and format.
2. Cut scripts in a manner sensitive to the material form and mood, and deliver them to actors in a clear and timely fashion.
3. Plan, deliver, and maintain a clear and logical rehearsal schedule.
4. Create a secure, productive, and challenging rehearsal environment.
5. Work with costume and/ or property designers to achieve your mise-en-scene.
6. Create compelling stage compositions that clearly tell the play's story and the production's point of view.
7. Write an articulate Director's Note.
8. Mount (in partnership with your peers) a dynamic final scene showcase.

## GRADING

- “A grade” students complete their assignments, prepare their texts, engage with their actors, respond to critique, and reflect upon their work and others’ with honesty and sensitivity.
- Scenes will be graded on evidence of: sufficient and well-organized rehearsal (3-5 hours p/w); a courteous yet disciplined approach to working with actors; the application of the directing rubric (see above); and an ability to give notes, receive critique, and enact change.
- Written work, appropriately formatted, well researched and well written, should be handed in on time.
- Students should organize a half-hour mid-term meeting with me to discuss their progress and their concerns.
- In this practicum class, regular participation is essential; each unapproved absence will cost a student 10% of his or her grade.

## GRADING RUBRIC

10%: Class participation, which includes being open and willing to volunteer, voluble yet generous, and maintaining a “Yes, and” attitude.

50%: Directed scenes will be prepared and researched, fully and appropriately cast, and well rehearsed and presented. Students will be willing to rework scenes or passages when requested by the professor.

40%: Written work will be timely (a “first-night” attitude should prevail in all aspects of a graduate’s work), complete, thoughtful, correctly formatted, and proofread.

## CALENDAR

	Date	Class	Discussion and <i>workshop</i> topics (80 minutes)	Workshop scenes (90 minutes)	Reading and written assignments due this week (start of class)
1	Mon 31 Aug	Introduction	Syllabus and play choice/pitch	Staging self-expression	Read Ball 1. Learn Shakespeare sonnet
2	Mon 7 Sept	The Pitch	Setting and casting. <i>The re-direct (sonnets)</i>	Final scene play pitch (3-5 mins)	Read R. Berry 1 and Ball 2. Submit monologue, cut
3	Mon 14 Sept	Pre-production	Script analysis; scene & doubling charts	Monologues A	Read Alfreds 1 and Levins. Submit final scene, cut & cast
4	Mon 21 Sept	Table work	Paraphrasing, and phrasing	Monologues B	Edelstein 1 and C. Berry. Submit act/scene titles, and final scene units

5	<b>Mon 28 Sept</b>	Early rehearsal	<i>Blocking and picturation</i>	Final scenes 1A	Read Ball 3 and Hodge. Submit final scene mini-paraphrase
6	<b>Mon 5 Oct</b>	Early rehearsal	Orchestration & <i>Focal Points</i>	Final scenes 1B	Read Kaiser and Hauser. Submit dialogues cut and cast
7	<b>Mon 12 Oct</b>	Mid-rehearsal	Objectives & actions	Dialogues A	Read Merlin, Ball 4, and Stafford-Clark
	<b>Mon 19 Oct</b>	Fall break			Submit Routledge analysis
8	<b>Mon 26 Oct</b>	Mid-rehearsal	Verse argument; <i>the shared line</i>	Dialogues B	Read Block, Barton and Edelstein 2. Objectify final scene
9	<b>Mon 2 Nov</b>	Later rehearsal	Prose argument; <i>rhetorical tropes</i>	Final scene 2A; B students take notes	Read Hall and Edelstein 3. Objectify final scene
10	<b>Mon 9 Nov</b>	Later rehearsal	Re-acting; <i>playing the white space</i>	Final scene 2B; A students take notes	Read Van Tassel and Edelstein 4; Submit Problem scene cut and cast
11	<b>Mon 16 Nov</b>	Problem scenes	Group B critique A final scenes	Problem scene A	Read Ball 5 and Ford Davies. Submit Director's Notes
12	<b>Mon 23 Nov (Red)</b>	Problem scenes	Group A critique B final scenes	Problem scene B	Read Alfreds 3; submit theater reviews
13	<b>Mon 30 Nov</b>	Tech/dress	Run scenes & re-direct	Final scenes 3	Submit final paper
14	<b>Mon 7 Dec</b>	De-brief	Blackfriars	Final showcase	Time tbd