

**THAR 274-401 2020C: Acting Shakespeare (Topics in Renaissance Drama)**  
**Cary Mazer**

**Description:** *This course will be taught remotely in Fall 2020, with some synchronous classes on Zoom (on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Noon), combined with asynchronous sessions and assignments.*

The course has two reciprocal goals: 1) to teach the student how to approach the features of Shakespeare's dramatic language (particularly rhythm, antithesis, alliteration, consonance, assonance, and rhyme) and the theatrical conventions of his stage, and to learn to regard these features, not as obstacles, but as muscular tools actors can use to find their character and to play their characters' objectives; and 2) to take the discoveries that actors make about the actions and objectives of individual speeches and scenes and to use these as the building blocks from which the class, as a group, can construct an interpretation of an entire play.

**Level:** The prerequisite for the course (THAR 120: Introduction to Acting) makes it more likely that the students enrolled will be sophomores, juniors, and seniors. But students may take the course, with the permission of the instructor, if the student has experience in the methods and vocabulary of contemporary American acting, and it is not inappropriate or unusual for first-year students with that experience and vocabulary to enroll, and to thrive, in the course.

Class Structure for Fall 2020:

- This course will be taught remotely, with some synchronous classes on Zoom (on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Noon), combined with asynchronous sessions and assignments.
- Synchronous Sessions:

The principal activities of synchronous class time will be warmup and actor exercises, group voice work, group verse work, and the students' performance of speeches and two- and three-person scenes. Students learn not only from the speeches and scene work they have prepared, but from discussing and coaching one another's work in real time; and all writing assignments, which center on a single script from which the speeches and scenes are drawn, use as evidence the student's own performance work and the performances of their classmates, so attendance and participation in synchronous sessions is essential. All classes will be taped (students are implicitly consenting to being recorded when they enroll) and will be available for later viewing, in the event that a student is obliged to miss an occasional synchronous class session. If a student misses a synchronous session at which a classmate's speech or scene is being presented, the student must post on Canvas an assessment of the performances, describing the interventions that were employed during that class session that improved their classmates' work, and suggesting other strategies and interpretations.

Some of the discussions of historical and analytic question, and the process of constructing an interpretation of the play based on the building blocks of the students' individual speeches and

scene work, will take place during synchronous class time; much of it will be conducted via guided questions and discussions on the discussion board of Canvas.

- Asynchronous Activities:

All advance preparation and rehearsals for speeches and scenes will be arranged by the participating students at their own time and convenience, outside of scheduled class time. Working independently in pairs and small groups, even if remotely, will help build working artistic relationships and encourage collaborative artistic decision-making.

- Schedule reflecting the workload for a typical week:

Continually through the semester, students can expect to be memorizing sonnets and speeches, to be used in class for individual and group work; to be memorizing and rehearsing scenes to be presented with one or two scene partners; and to continue working on the speeches and scenes after their initial presentation in class, for repeat presentations later in the semester. Every class session will include group physical and vocal warm-ups (so students will need to have a space where they can move and make sounds without interference from their roommates or housemates), group verse work; and individual presentations (normally only two or three individuals or groups in any one class session.) All reading assignments (about staging conventions, the relation of the extant published scripts to performance, etc.) are available on Canvas.

#### Outline of Assignments & Assessments:

- Types of assignments & assessments:

There are three written assignments: two take-home essays (approximately five pages each), and a final term-paper/project (12-15 pages), all drawn from a single play.

- Points of value for assignments & assessments:

The grade will be based on the following:

- 20% first take-home assignment
- 20% second take-home assignment
- 40% final term-paper project
- 20% class participation in critiquing and analyzing their classmates' and their own performances, demonstrating their grasp of the course's fundamental concepts.

(Note that 0% of the grade is based on the student's talent or the quality of their performance, but rather their grasp of the actor's tasks, regardless of their ability to execute them.)

#### Essential Course Policies

- Required books, equipment or special items to engage in class

Students will be assigned to watch several episodes of the television series, *Playing Shakespeare* on Canvas, and may be asked to see live-capture theatrical performances on video (from the

National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare's Globe, and elsewhere), through the Library's numerous contracted online resources.