

USC DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH SUMMER 2020

ENGL-660

Studies in Genre: Performance Studies and Theatrical Time

Anderson, Emily

TWTH | 1:00-3:50P.M.

SECTION: 32850

*"at the uttermost consummation of performance...
we are seeing what we have seen before"*

—Herbert Blau

Theatrical performance, as many scholars of the discipline have explored, bears a unique relationship to time. "Performance's only life is in the present," performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan asserts; "theater is...a function of remembrance," contends the theorist Herbert Blau. On one hand, theatrical performance is of the moment—an experience of liveness, transience, and ephemerality. On the other hand, theatrical performance is of the past—a receptacle for history, memory, and tradition. Dramatic action thus involves actors and spectators alike in a temporal "telescoping," as we oscillate constantly between an awareness of where we stand, where we have stood, and who else has stood there before.

Our seminar will explore these temporal oscillations in theory and practice, and by doing so students will receive a thorough grounding in the academic field known as performance studies. Our primary text, and the backdrop for our theoretical readings, will be Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. How, and why, do performance theorists from all scholarly backgrounds regularly choose this play to illustrate their claims about performance? Our theoretical

readings on performance (work by Peggy Phelan, Marvin Carlson, Joseph Roach, Herbert Blau, among others) will be organized according to signal "keywords" in performance studies (re-enactment, ghosting, liveness, script). We will then be observing how these terms operate in our primary text (*Hamlet*), in our theoretical texts, and in the course of our daily lives. As structured, this course should appeal to students interested in early modern studies, Shakespeare, and adaptation, but it should also speak to scholars with a broader interest in performance studies and the relationship that exists among literature, cultural memory, and time. While our class investigations will be guided by the general example of Shakespeare, students are invited for their final projects to explore the issues raised in our discussions via any text or performance event.

The class will meet as a group on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Wednesday afternoons will be set aside for individual conferences as needed and independent exploration of various LA-based performance events. Assignments consist of a four tiny papers, an abstract and oral presentation, and a final seminar-style paper that builds on the two prior assignments. Contact Emily Anderson (ehanders@usc.edu) with any questions about the course.

