

9-2013

THTR 101L.01: Introduction to Theatre and Performance

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Recommended Citation

Morris, Kate R., "THTR 101L.01: Introduction to Theatre and Performance" (2013). *Syllabi*. 440.
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THTR 101 – 01: INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Fall 2013: Monday 6:10 – 9:00 pm, University Hall 210

Instructor: Kate R. Morris – kate.morris@umontana.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 12:00 – 2:00 pm, PARTV Green Room

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a greater understanding of Theatre and Performance Studies as a creative art form, practical craft, and critical field of study. We will engage in discussions designed to provide a deeper understanding of acting, directing, dramaturgy, devised theatre, design, and playwriting, and make connections between the art of theatre and our everyday lives. This course explores not only western theatrical practices (what most of us know as theatre) but also eastern theatre practices and performances that occur outside of a standard theater space. In the coming weeks we will be reading, analyzing, viewing and discussing seven plays: *Oedipus Rex*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Doll's House*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Angels in America*, *Distracted*, and *Avenue Q*. We will also write our own (very short) plays. Through these written records of performance, we as a class and company of individuals will explore what we read on the page and see in our minds vs. what we experience watching and making a performance happen. What is the difference between Art and Entertainment? Why do audience members care? These questions are at the core of making Theatre. This course will provide you, the student, with a strong foundational knowledge of theatrical activity, which you can use after this class to enhance your skills as a reader, writer, theatergoer, member of society, and perhaps even someone who makes theatre or performance happen in your own life.

By the end of this course you will:

- Be able to define the various roles at play within the theatrical medium: actor, director, playwright, deviser, designer, dramaturge, and producer.
- Feel comfortable making close analyses of play texts, and speaking critically about the dramatic texts you read.
- Be able to make original analyses of the social relevance of a performance.
- Possess the skills to make informed verbal and written arguments that represent your opinions about aesthetics in regard to the plays that have studied.
- Be able to develop an original play from your own ideas; first by yourself, then with others in a collaborative effort that culminates in a performance for your classmates.
- Understand theatricality and performance in a more global sense, rather than a singularly Western one.
- Understand theatricality and performance as it pertains to your own life, and what you see on stage, screen, or in line at the grocery store.

WHAT IS REQUIRED, AND HOW YOU'LL BE ASSESSED:

Your work for this course requires you to attend each class session for the full session of class. I will be leading discussions more than making power point presentations, and much

of what we learn will be through hands-on activities done in class. To earn an A in this course, your job is fairly straightforward: read the play text before we talk about it in class, participate in the in-class discussions of the play, and participate in and contribute to the forums and class presentations. Be prepared and willing to discuss what we read, see, and what the class members bring to present. Much of your writing will be your subjective opinion of the dramatic work. However, this is a college-level course and you will be given the tools to make thorough, well-constructed and textually-based analysis of what we read and experience. I am open to discussion about how I grade your work; I will listen to you and discuss grading with you if you have an issue and present it to me within a reasonable time frame.

ATTENDANCE

Punctuality and regular attendance are mandatory for a successful grade in this course. Per the University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance Policy, three absences are acceptable before grades drop. As this course is a three-hour, once-a-week class, that equates to missing three class blocks. The class blocks for our course are as follows:

Block I: 6:10 pm – 7:30 pm

Block II: 7:40 pm – 9:00 pm

Students who miss more than three (3) class blocks will have their grade negatively affected. For each subsequent absence, your final grade will drop 1/3 of a letter grade.

Class starts at 6:10 pm, and if you are late or miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed from a classmate, and making up any work that we did. If you know you are going to be absent, you must contact me a day in advance to have it excused and/or provide written formal documentation of your reasons for sudden absence: for example a note from Curry Health center with an accurate date. I understand that tragedy strikes off the stage as well, so if you experience a death in the family or similar dire emergency, email me *as promptly as possible* to discuss the absence and a make-up assignment. If you know you'll be gone in advance, I will need the work that is due when you are gone in advance of your leaving. If necessary, I can meet with you about it or you can come to my office hours, posted on the front of this syllabus.

POLICIES

Students of this class are expected to abide by the following University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance regulations:

- FOOD + DRINK: No food and drink during class except for water in a capped container. Please inform me if you have a medical need to eat or drink during class.
- Absolutely NO weapons, real or fake, are allowed in the classroom.
- LATE WORK: I do not accept late work. I will grant extensions on a case-by-case basis. I am reasonable about this: email me an explanation about the circumstances preventing you from completing the assignment on time, at least one week before the due date. Please talk to me before it becomes a problem for both of us.
- <http://umt.edu/theatredance/about/handbook> is the link to the School of Theatre and Dance Handbook, for general conduct guidelines for theatre classes.
- http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php is the link to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code; please read for information about expected conduct in all UM classes. All students must practice academic honesty, for

misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor, or disciplinary sanction by the University.

- **CELL PHONES:** Please turn off your cell phone in class. Please turn off your cell phone in class. My phone will be set to vibrate in case an emergency text message should be sent by the University. If your phone rings during class, please silence it as quickly as possible. Anyone caught texting in class will be immediately dismissed from class, resulting in an absence for the remainder of class; meaning if you are caught texting at the beginning of class, you miss two blocks, etc. You may, however, use your phone/device to refer to readings from/on Moodle. If you choose to use your phone/device for class, please put it on airplane or a mode that does not allow you to receive distracting messages.

PARTICIPATION/CONTRIBUTION

Reading the text thoroughly and making detailed notes for your own use is the best way to prepare for in-class discussion of the texts. Each week, you will hand in copies of the play text discussed with your in-text notes on them, or on a separate paper with direct references to the page numbers and line quotations for reference. Learning how to take in-depth notes while reading a play text is a standard practice for theatre practitioners, and this habit will also aid your other studies. Like all assignments, these notes must be given to me in advance if you are planning on being absent, or you will miss a grade for these, as they are factored into your participation grade.

FORUMS

For each reading assignment, I will post a series of questions/prompts on our Moodle Forum. You will make a written response to the topics and each other's comments over the course of the week. Forums will be posted each Monday after class, and the discussion period will run to the following Friday, in order to give me time to read your posted comments before we convene again on Monday. If there is no Monday Class, a forum post will most likely occur on Tuesday in order to keep our minds fresh. The readings for this semester are posted (or will soon be posted) far in advance on Moodle, to give you enough time to read the material ahead of discussion and forum sessions. This is designed to introduce you to the practice of making continual critical responses relevant to the material and your understanding of it, and to what your classmates have to offer.

READINGS

We do not have a required text for this class, only what I post on our moodle page or hand out in class. Therefore, it is your responsibility to either print the reading, or bring a device you can read the material on to class. I suggest the latter; a laptop, tablet or smart phone (in airplane mode, of course) in order to save paper and resources. The Mansfield Library Printing Center prints double-sided black-and-white documents for 20 cents a page. If you choose to print each document for this class, you will not spend more than \$90.00 on reading material for this course, which is less than buying hard copy play texts in an anthology or individually over amazon. If the above options are impossible for you, discuss with me to find a workable alternative.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

- **FORUM POSTS:** All student forum posts are due by 11:59 pm on the Friday after the prompts have been posted. Students have almost a full week to respond to the prompts and comments, and you **MUST** make two (2) responses. It is

your choice which part of the posts you respond to: either my questions or the comments your classmates have made. Each post should be AT LEAST 150 words in length, in order to accurately convey your understanding of the material being discussed and also to work on how you organize and present your own thoughts and feelings on the material. Your responses should be written in professional language, with complete sentences, proper grammar, and well-reasoned points as to why you have formed the opinions you are adding to the forum. It is surprising how short 150 words are: this paragraph, for instance, fits the bill perfectly.

→ PERFORMANCE RESPONSES: Each student is responsible for writing five (5) response papers this semester, one for each performance attended.

The mandatory responses are for *Avenue Q*, *Distracted*, and *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*. These are the School of Theatre and Dance's fall season shows, and you MUST see them. If you miss attending one of these shows, your grade will drop one full letter. If you miss two: two letters. If you miss all three of these plays, you will not pass this course. The other two response papers are to be on performances that you attend on your own (or with friends), and you can choose them. I will frequently announce in class when other performances are happening. There is a variety to choose from: a theatre or dance show besides the three listed above, a performance art in a gallery or on the street, a rock show or concert, or a cultural event such as pow-wows, weddings, protests, rodeos, funerals, Griz games, etc. I encourage you to choose two that are very different from each other and from the departmental performances. Parties are not counted for this and we will discuss why. These events MUST be live performances. Each paper should be a word-count of 600 words, (+/- 50 word leeway) and written in MLA format and submitted in stapled hard copy on the day that it is due, or before. The dates of the required performances are:

- *Avenue Q*: October 1 – 5, and 8- 12
- *Distracted*: October 22 – 26, and Oct. 29 – Nov. 2.
- *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*: November 19 – 23, December 3 – 7.

The class fee that you have already paid allows you one ticket into each of these productions. You must pick up your ticket at the box office located in the lobby of the PARTV building in person between 11:30 AM and 5:30 PM, Monday - Friday. You can only pick up your own ticket – you cannot pick up a classmate's ticket for them. You must present your GRIZ CARD to pick up your tickets and you must identify which class you are in. You are in THTR 101, section 01. Your instructor's name is Kate Morris. Seating in the Masquer Theater is general admission. Seating in the Montana Theater is reserved. The fee that you have paid does not guarantee you a ticket on a particular night, nor does it guarantee that you will be able to get a ticket if the show sells out, therefore do not wait until the evening of the performance to pick up a ticket.

→ FINAL GROUP PERFORMANCE REFLECTION: The final writing assignment you will have for this course is a reflection of the work you did building and presenting an original performance with your classmates. This paper should:

- Explain why your group chose this particular material to work with.

- Describe your process of developing the presentation or performance; what your role was, what worked, what did not, what you learned about collaboration, and what you learned in general.
- Include thoughts concerning reactions from classmates and me, and any other thoughts you had about the process.
- While this paper does not require citations, it should still be typed and coherent.

TYPES OF WORK

Theatre is a team sport: collaboration is essential to creating a piece that is culturally and aesthetically affect/effective. In this class students will participate in three types of performance and presentation: Individual, Short-Term Groups and Long-Term Groups.

- **INDIVIDUAL:** During our first theme of “Greek Theatre, Masks, Festival and Where Theatre Comes From,” you will perform an individual Masked performance. The guidelines for the performance are on Moodle Assignments, and you’ll have the first two weeks to create your performance before we present them in class. Don’t worry: you’ll do great.
- **SHORT-TERM GROUPS:** Each class session will have a period where we will split into small groups to work and then make presentations/performance at the end; some times you will have the week to work before presenting in the next class. The assignments will be outlined ahead of time, and groups are usually between 4-6 people, and will be switched-up often. Please bring your creative energy and open minds to this work each time as practice for your long-term collaboration.
- **LONG-TERM GROUPS:** I’ll also assign these in the second class, and you will meet outside of class for most of your work. This will be the team that you create your final presentation/performance with, and hopefully this group can also be peers for you to study with, talk critically and creatively with, and attend theatrical events with. The better you work together as group in this team, the stronger your product will be. Keep in mind your various individual skill sets and personalities when working within this group, as this is one of the major challenges to play-making, yet an essential part of how all theatre is created.

EVALUATION

Evaluation for this course is based on the following:

60% is External Action, 40% is Internal Action, just like the action at play within theatre. The two are almost equal. However, the audience must see more external action than internal, in order to make a greater connection with what is occurring in front of/to them. To break it down:

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION: 30% of overall grade; External Actions, what you do and say in a live setting. Note that you lose 20% of this specific grade by missing class, as you can’t discuss if you are not present.

- In-class discussions 15%

- Class Attendance 5%
- Submitted notes 5%
- Mask performance 5%

WRITING: 40% of overall grade; Internal Actions, how you think and what you do in a non-live setting.

- Final Group Performance Reflection 5%
- Performance Reviews/Responses 20%
- Forum Responses 15%

COLLABORATIVE PRESENTATIONS: 30% of overall grade; External Actions, what you do and say in a live setting.

- Small Group Presentations 10%
- Final Group Performance 20%

GRADING:

A = 90-100 B = 80-89 C= 70-79 D = 60-69 F = 59 and below

Ah yes, the SCHEDULE:

This is our breakdown for the semester, and it loosely lists what we'll be covering and your due dates. This is subject to change, of course, based on how we progress.

Week 1 – Aug. 26

Oedipus the King, Masks, Festival and Where Theatre Comes From

Getting to know you, The Syllabus, philosophy and expectations, Moodle
 Discussion of Drama and Theatre,
 Introduce Mask assignments, talk about Masks.

Reading: *Oedipus the King*.

Week 2 – Sept. 2 – Labor Day

NO CLASS

Read and take notes on *Oedipus the King*,
 Work on your Individual Mask assignments
 Post in Forums

Week 3 – Sept. 9

Oedipus the King, Masks, Festival and Where Theatre Comes From

Discuss Oedipus the King
 Lecture: Festival: Where Theatre Comes From
 Perform Masks
 Discuss Performances and Connections to Text
 Introduce the Performance Response Paper

Reading: *Much Ado about Nothing*

Week 4 – Sept. 16

Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare and How Plays are Made

Lecture – Shakespeare: Big Billy The Bard, and why he matters so much.
 Discuss Shakespeare in our own lives

In Class Activity and Performances of Shakespeare

Reading: Continuing *Much Ado about Nothing*

Week 5 – Sept. 23

Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare and How Plays are Made

Watch *Much Ado About Nothing*

Discuss *Much Ado About Nothing*

Reading: *A Doll's House*

Week 6 – Sept.30

A Doll's House, and Theatre that Challenges Social Constructs

Watch *A Doll's House*

Discussion: *A Doll's House*

DUE: Response to your Outside Department Performance

Reading: *Avenue Q*

Week 7 – Oct. 7

Avenue Q and Musical Theatre: Spectacle Spectacular

Transition Lecture: Modern Modes of Western Theatre: Out the Doors of *A Doll's House* and into Musical Land

Activity: Spectacle Spectacular

Reading: *Avenue Q*

Week 8 – Oct. 14

Avenue Q and Musical Theatre: Spectacle Spectacular

Discuss *Avenue Q*, musicals and expectations.

Trans. Lecture: Introduction to Haiku, and the Three Act Structure.

Discuss why people write plays about certain topics

DUE: Response to *Avenue Q*

Reading: Haiku Poetry

Assignment: Write Haiku Poems

Week 9 – Oct. 21

Haiku, Storytelling and Playwriting

Discussion of Playwriting, Storytelling and What Haiku even has to do with it.

Presentation of Haiku Poems

Workshop: Make a Play

Readings of Haiku Plays and feedback for revisions

Reading: *Distracted*

Assignment: Revise Short Plays

Week 10 – Oct. 28

Distracted, and Contemporary Theatre

Lecture: Contemporary Theatre Forms in the U.S.

Discussion: Compare *Distracted* with what you have seen and Learned from writing your own plays.

DUE: Readings of Short Plays

Week 11 – Nov. 4

Distracted, and Contemporary Theatre

Discuss *Distracted*

Lecture: Contemporary Theatre and its Dad, Samuel Beckett

DUE: *Distracted* Response Papers

Reading: *Waiting For Godot*

Week 12 – Nov. 11 – Veteran’s Day

NO CLASS

Read *Waiting For Godot*

Week 13 – Nov. 18

Waiting for Godot, Beckett and Reality on the Stage

Watch *Waiting for Godot*

Discuss *Waiting for Godot*, and Reality on the Stage

Lecture: “World of the Play” and Bending Reality

DUE: Response to Second Outside Performance

Reading: *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*

Week 14 – Nov. 25

Angels in America, and Theatre as Everyday Parable

Discuss *Angels in America pt I*

Lecture: Theatre as Parable

Reading: *Angels in America: Perestroika*

Week 15 – Dec. 2

Angels in America, and Theatre as Everyday Parable

Discuss: *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*.

Group Activity: How would you produce a UM School of Theatre and Dance performance of *Perestroika* next semester?

Present Group Proposals.

Week 16 – Dec. 9 – FINALS WEEK

Present Final Performances!

Discuss: Final Performances in Talk-Backs

DUE: Final Performance Reflection and Self-Assessment Papers

DUE: Response to *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*