



### **306 Acting III: An Actor's Approach to Modern Drama**

Tuesday/Thursday: 2:30-4:20 p.m.

Murphy Hall 354

Dr. Peter Zazzali

Office Hours: T/TH: 9:00 a.m. to 10:00

pzazzali@ku.edu

#### *COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES*

Building on the teachings of Stanislavsky covered in Acting 2, we will explore acting in modern drama: 1875-1955. We will begin by tackling the oeuvre of the so-called “Father of Modern Drama,” Henrik Ibsen, and then explore the works of Anton Chekhov for our second assignment. The third section of the course will focus on American classics written during the Interwar Years (e.g., Miller and O’Neill). Our primary learning outcome is for you to develop a technique for approaching these modern dramas, insofar as you will have the capability to truthfully create characters in service of a given play.

Modern dramas such as *A Doll’s House* and *The Crucible* pose special challenges to the actor, insofar as they possess particular criteria that must be met, such as effectively delivering elevated prose or convincingly connecting to a character’s subtext. In using Stanislavsky as the basis for our approach, you will learn to identify and solve these dramaturgical needs while addressing a character’s given circumstances, immediate and super objectives, and through-line of action.

This course should therefore be seen in association with our previous work, with the distinction that we are now applying Stanislavsky to a particular dramatic style: modern texts.

We will supplement our practical work with regular reading and writing assignments. To more fully understand the inter-textual and meta-textual forces informing the characters you will play, the worlds in which they live, and the sociocultural contexts of the writers who created them, you will study each play relative to its historical context. As such, select low and high stakes writing assignments and presentations will accompany your scene work towards developing your critical thinking and analytical skills by intellectually engaging our subject matter towards having ownership of the material as an actor. This course can therefore be seen as praxis-based with a select and supplemental deployment of theory. With respect to the latter, you will be asked to do the following:

- 1) Blackboard posts as a supplement to our course readings and practical work
- 2) A 3-5 pp. report characterizing the social, political, and historical forces relevant to each play/character you undertake
- 3) Critical review of the University Theatre's production of *A Doll's House*

In sum, these activities will challenge you to work independently and in groups within both practical and theoretical contexts.

#### *REQUIRED COURSE READING*

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**At the Bookstore:** *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, Konstantin Stanislavsky, edited and translated by Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008)

Supplementary texts will be provided on Blackboard (BB).

#### *COURSE REQUIREMENTS*

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**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. You must be on time and prepared to work for all sessions. This is an ensemble-oriented course that requires everyone's mutual support. If you are absent or arrive late you compromise not only your own experience, but that of your classmates as well. If you must miss a session, please notify me beforehand, if at all possible, and if you are missing a day on which you are supposed to present a scene you must also alert your partner in advance. If you fail to show up on a day you are scheduled to present without prior notification, you will lose credit for the assignment. After the second absence your final grade will be lowered one third of a level (e.g., a B becomes a B-).

**Preparation:** You must come to class prepared to present whatever exercise or scene has been assigned. This means that you will be spending time outside class rehearsing with scene partners, as well as completing various homework assignments. You are expected to complete all reading and writing assignments by their due dates.

**Participation:** You are expected to fully participate in all projects and exercises. This includes keeping up with course readings and participating in both class and online discussions, the latter

of which will be facilitated by Blackboard. A mid-semester evaluation will be given to you, most of which will be determined by your commitment and participation to/in our working process.

**Professional Decorum:** The nature of an acting laboratory is ensemble-oriented. Therefore, we all must demonstrate mutual respect and support, which means remaining conscientious of one another. Please be sure to turn off your cell phones before entering class. Also, there is absolutely no eating or drinking during class (water is allowed), and “side-bar” discussions are frowned upon. When a classmate is working before the group they deserve our full support, encouragement, and attention. Adherence to these considerations counts towards your participation grade.

**Attire:** Because we will be working on period dramas, it is important to dress according to the characters that you are assigned for scene work. While playing in full costumes will not be possible, you can surely find costume pieces (e.g., rehearsal skirts) and accessories (e.g., hard soled-shoes; corsets) to support the historical context of your work. Good acting is specific acting. Consider the clothes a character wears an important element of who they are and how they function in their sociocultural situation.

**Evaluation of Performance Work:** While it is commonly assumed that evaluating acting is subjective, there will be set criteria by which each student’s progress is graded. Bearing in mind that our work is process-oriented and perfection is no more sought than it is expected, growth in the following areas will ultimately determine one’s progress and evaluation:

1. *Preparation:* memorization of lines and blocking; breaking down the text into beats; understanding of character, environmental surroundings, given circumstances, action/obstacle/objective work
2. *Technique:* demonstration of physical ease and efficiency of movement; vocal clarity and intention; psychophysical concentration and attention to detail
3. *Specificity of Character:* Demonstrating a keen awareness of and connection to the character you play in the context of his/her sociocultural situation.
4. *Performance:* demonstration of a clear score of actions; listening and openness to one’s partner; emotional expressiveness and willingness to take creative risks; “truthful” representation of **theatrical** reality

*GRADING BREAKDOWN\**

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<b>Participation/Attendance:</b>	100 points
<b>Scene Work (3 projects):</b>	500 points (150 for Projects 1 and 2; 200 for Project 3)
<b>Socio-historical Reports (3):</b>	300 points
<b>Review of A Doll’s House:</b>	50 points
<b>Blackboard Posts:</b>	50 points
	<b>1000 points</b>

**Grading Ranges:** A=900-1000/ B=800-899/ C=700-799/ D=600-699. Please note that your final score will be adjusted for excessive absence, tardiness, and other matters relative to your work in the course.

## INSTRUCTOR POLICIES

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- I encourage you to visit during my office hours (T/TH 9:00 am to 10:00 am) or by requesting an appointment.
- I am always available by email and promise to respond to your messages within 48 hours.
- Acceptance of late assignments is at my discretion, and if accepted, your grade will be penalized.
- KU Accessibility Resources (<http://www.disability.ku.edu>) coordinate accommodations and services for our students. If you have a disability for which you may request an accommodation, please contact AR as soon as possible.
- Any written work you submit must be your own. Plagiarism is in serious breach of academic honesty and will be treated according to KU policy. For more on this matter, please see [http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism\\_guidelines.sh](http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism_guidelines.sh); also <http://www.studenthandbook.ku.edu/>

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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**Scene Work:** Like any acting class, our work is based in performance practice. Throughout the term will be working on three separate projects each consisting of a 5-7 minute scene from a modern play. The three scene study units will be organized accordingly: Project 1) Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*; Project 2) Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*; Project 3) An American play written during the interwar years. **500 points.**

**Socio-historical Reports:** To supplement your scene work and to encourage you to be specific in your creation of a character, you will write a 3-5 pp. report detailing the social, political, economic, and cultural forces defining your role and the play itself. This inter/meta textual analysis will allow you to get inside the heads of your characters—as well as the playwrights—towards achieving greater ownership of your work as an actor. Guidelines for this assignment will be provided on Blackboard and discussed as needed. **300 points. DUE DATES: 10/1; 11/5; 12/10**

**Review of A Doll's House:** While you are required to attend each of the 4 UT productions this semester, you will write a critical review of your impressions of our offering of *A Doll's House*. Since we are studying this play as part of a unit on Ibsen, naturally, this assignment is an opportunity to reinforce our coursework. Again, specific guidelines will be provided on Blackboard. **50 points. Due Date: 12/10**

**Blackboard Posts:** In keeping with the course's commitment to wed theory and practice, you will be responsible for regular Blackboard posts to underscore our reading assignments and class discussions. The prompts will be posted by Friday 12:00 PM, thereby giving you ample time to formulate your answer by its due date: 12:00 PM the following Monday. You

are also expected to read one another's posts. We will be using these posts to start and supplement our in-class discussions. **50 points (5 points per post).**

### *CLASS SCHEDULE*

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Tuesday, August 25 (1)

**Class Topic**

How can we identify modern drama? Who are its signature playwrights? Is there a prevailing dramaturgical style to these plays? How can social, political, economic, cultural, and historical inquiries provide insights to actors in performing modern works?

Thursday, August 27 (2)

**Class Topic**

Introducing Unit One: "The Father of Modern Drama," Henrik Ibsen

**Assignment Due**

Reading on Ibsen (Blackboard)

Tuesday, September 1 (3)—Thursday October 1 (12)

**Class Topic**

Ibsen Unit: *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*

**Assignment Due**

Read *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*; Workshop Ibsen scenes in class (3 times each pair); Ibsen socio-historical report, **DUE DATE: October 1**

Tuesday, October 6 (13)

**Class Topic**

Introducing Unit Two: The Master of Modern Drama, Anton Chekhov

**Assignment Due**

Reading on Chekhov (Blackboard)

Thursday, October 8 (14)—Thursday, November 5 (21)

**Class Topic**

Chekhov Unit: *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*

**Assignment Due**

Read *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*; Workshop Chekhov scenes in class (3 times each pair); Chekhov socio-historical report, **DUE DATE: November 5**

Tuesday, November 10 (22)

**Class Topic**

Introducing Modern American Drama (the interwar years)

**Assignment Due**

Reading on American drama during the interwar years (Blackboard)

Thursday, November 12 (23)

**Class Topic**

Continue analysis of US theatre and drama during the interwar years; How do art and society interrelate? How has theatre historically reflected American culture? What is our responsibility as actors to be aware of the social, political, and cultural representations of our work?

**Assignment Due**

Readings on art and society (Blackboard)

Tuesday, November 17 (24)—Thursday December 10 (30)

**Class Topic**

Modern American Drama Unit: Plays from the Interwar Years (e.g., Odets, Miller, O'Neill)

**Assignment Due**

Workshop scenes in class (3 times each pair); *A Doll's House* Review, **Due Date: November 23**;  
Interwar drama report, **Due Date: December 10**

December 14-18

**Final Exam**

Presentation of Modern American scene for invited audience