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THTR 101L.01: Introduction to Theatre

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THTR 101L – 01: INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Spring 2014: Monday 6:10 – 9:00 pm, University Hall 210

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

Office Hours: Wednesday 11:00am - 1:00 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 as well as performances that occur outside of traditional theater spaces.

In the coming weeks we will read, analyze, view, and discuss seven plays: *The Miracle Worker*, *Antigone*, *Book of Days*, *A Doll's House*, *Waiting for Godot*, *August: Osage County*, *Lovesong*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 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/making a performance happen. What is the difference between Art and Entertainment? Why do audience members care? Why does society 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 in multiple ways as you continue with your lives.

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 we have studied.
- Be able to develop theatrical concepts from your own ideas in individual writing and in collaborative efforts with 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 with the help of media 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 about 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 your peers bring to present. Much of your writing will be your subjective opinion of the dramatic work. However, this is a college-level course and I expect your writing to be phrased in complete sentences that express your opinion in a well-reasoned way. This class will teach you the tools to make thorough analyses 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 negatively affect their grades. 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 (24 hours) 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 any work due in advance of your absence.** If necessary, I can meet with you about it or you can come to my office hours, posted at the top 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.
 - You can bring dinner/snacks to eat in the 10-minute break between class blocks, as this class does take place during dinner hours.
- Absolutely **NO** weapons, real or fake, are allowed in the classroom.
 - If you clear it with me first, I will allow cardboard cut-outs of swords, knives, and guns for props. They must be cardboard and 2-D.

- LATE WORK: I do not accept late work. ← I Do Not Accept Late Work. I will grant extensions for papers on a case-by-case basis. I'm pretty reasonable about this: email me an explanation about the circumstances preventing you from completing the assignment on time, 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. 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 does ring during class, silence it as quickly as possible.
 - Anyone caught texting, facebooking, snapchatting, or tinder-ing in class will be immediately dismissed, resulting in an absence for the remainder of class. **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 and making detailed notes for your own use is the best way to prepare for in-class discussion of the texts. Taking notes while reading a play text is a standard practice for theatre practitioners, and this habit will also aid your other studies. We will spend a large part of each class discussing the text from an informed point of view, and I will call on everyone. Having notes allows you to participate fully. Your participation grade is vital to success in this class.

FORUMS

For each reading assignment, I will post questions/prompts on our Moodle Forum. You will make written responses to the topics and each other's comments over the course of the week.

Forums will be posted each Tuesday, 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 still most likely occur on Tuesday in order to keep our minds fresh.

The readings for this semester are usually 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 to what your classmates have to offer. In other words: talk it out.

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, Every Time. 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: my questions or the comments your classmates have made. Each forum 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. I'll repeat that these should be conversations; they are much more interesting that way. All responses should be written in professional language, with complete sentences, proper grammar, and well-reasoned points as to why you have formed the opinions, and from which parts of the play they relate to. It is surprising how short 150 words are: this paragraph, for instance, is around 150 words.

→ PERFORMANCE RESPONSES: Each student is responsible for writing five (5) Response Papers this semester, one for each performance attended. The mandatory responses are for *The Miracle Worker*, *Book of Days*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These are the School of Theatre and Dance's spring season shows, and you **MUST** see them. **If you miss attending one of these shows without pre-approved excuse from me, your grade will drop one full letter.** If you miss two: two letters. If you miss all three, 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, 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 both each other and play 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:

- *The Miracle Worker*: Jan. 24th – Feb. 1st, 6th, 8th. (Montana)
- *Book of Days*: Mar. 4th – 8th ← see it this week of the run (Masquer)

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Apr. 29th – May 3rd (Montana)

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.

TYPES OF WORK

Theatre is a team sport: collaboration is essential to creating a piece that is culturally and aesthetically 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 theme of Early Theatre (Feb 10 -24) you will create and perform an individual Masked performance. The guidelines for the performance will be on Moodle Assignments, and you'll have two weeks to create your performance before we present them in class. You will also have the opportunity to read parts for plays that we study in class. Don't worry: you'll do great.
- **SHORT-TERM GROUPS:** Certain class sessions will have a period where we will split into small groups to work and then make presentations/performances at the end. Please bring your creative energy and open minds to this work each time as practice for your long-term collaboration.
- **LONG-TERM GROUPS:** This will be the team that you create your final presentation/performance with, and hopefully this group can also be peers with whom you can study, talk critically and creatively about theatre, and attend theatrical events. The better you work together 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. To break it down:

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION: 30% of overall grade;

External Actions: what you do and say in a live setting.

- In-class Discussions 15%
- Class Attendance 10%
- 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 (7) 20%
- Forum Responses (7) 15%

COLLABORATIVE PRESENTATIONS: 30% of overall grade;

External Actions: what you do and say in a live setting.

- Small Group Performances 10%
- Final Group Presentation 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 – Jan. 27

Intro to Class, Syllabus and Expectations

Discuss/Lecture: What is Theatre and Why Do We Care?

Read: *The Miracle Worker*

Week 2 – Feb. 3

Discuss Text: *The Miracle Worker*

Lecture: Storytelling on Stage

Info Session: What is a response paper? What is textual analysis?

Go see: *The Miracle Worker*

Read: *Antigone*

Week 3 – Feb. 10

Discuss Performance: *The Miracle Worker*

Lecture: Early Theatre: Greece to Rome, India to China and Japan

DUE: *The Miracle Worker* Response Papers

Read: *Antigone*

Assignment: Make a Mask performance

Week 4 – Feb. 17

President's Day! NO CLASS

Read: *Antigone* if you haven't yet!

Week 5 – Feb. 24

Discuss Text: *Antigone*

Lecture: Blood Trails: Early Theatre styles into Contemporary Theatre traditions

Individual Performances: Masks

Read: *Book of Days*

Week 6 – Mar. 3

Discuss Text: *Book of Days*

Mini Lecture: Tell the Story without Words: Design in the Theatre

Small Group Work: In groups, choose one of the plays we've studied and propose a design for it. Include Lights, Costumes, Set, Sound, and Media.

DUE: Outside Performance Response Papers #1

Go See: *Book of Days*!! Go see it this week!

Week 7 – Mar. 10

GUEST TEACHER, AS KATE WILL BE IN CHICAGO

Discuss Performance: *Book of Days*

Lecture: Ways of Making Theatre: Directing and Dramaturgy

Read: *A Doll's House*

Week 8 – Mar. 17

Discuss: *A Doll's House*

Lecture: Conversations with our Parents:

Modern and Post-Modern Theatre vs. Contemporary Theatre.

DUE: *Book of Days* Response Papers

Read: *Waiting for Godot*

Week 9 – Mar. 24

Discuss: *Waiting for Godot*

Lecture: Beckett and the Envelope ← what envelope?

Workshop: Play Creation using haiku poetry.

Final Project Groups Announced

Read: *August: Osage County*

Write: One 10-minute Play

Week 10 – Mar. 31

Spring Break! NO CLASS

Write: your Ten-Minute Plays

Read: *August: Osage County*

Week 11 – Apr. 7

Watch: *August: Osage County*

Discuss: *August: Osage County* in: Text, Live Performance, and on Screen

DUE: 10-Minute Plays

Read: *Lovesong*

Week 12 – Apr. 14

Watch: *Lovesong*

Discuss: *Lovesong*, Physical Theatre and Devising

DUE: Outside Performance Response #2

Read: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act I, sc.1 through Act III, sc. 1

Week 13 – Apr. 21

Lecture: Shakespeare: Billy Big Deal and Universal Themes

Discuss: Verse in Theatre

Also: Final Project questions and meeting time

Read: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act III, sc. 2 through End of Play

Week 14 – Apr. 28

Discuss Play Text: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Final Lecture/Discussion: What do we do with knowledge of Theatre?

Go See: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* **THIS WEEK**

Week 15 – May 5

Last Day of Class

Discuss Performance: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Watch: Final Performances/Presentations

DUE: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Responses

We do not have class on Finals Week, but:

DUE MONDAY MAY 12:

Final Response Paper about Final Group Performances
Submit these to my mailbox in PARTV on Monday, no later.

Submit all other (late) materials for grading by 5/12 (for reduced credit)