

The Catholic University of America
Drama 201-01 Theater Topics
Spirituality and Theories of Acting
Fall 2002

Catholic University is the University fully owned by the Catholic Church in the United States.

DR 201 is generally taken by sophomores in Drama.

Enrollment Fall 2002: 21 students

Pedagogical Reflections:

This course was challenging but worthwhile. The course accomplished two objectives: it familiarized the students (mostly Musical Theatre majors) with the theoretical groundwork underpinning performance art in the 20th century and it examined the resonance between the acting tradition and the spiritual tradition. All students made significant progress toward the first goal, and most were able by the completion of the course to articulate the spiritual content of the acting theory texts.

The course could be improved by eliminating much of the early theoretical material, particularly the material from Aristotle and St. Augustine, and probably some of Plato as well. While this material is of course worthwhile, it proved too difficult for most students to integrate this material into their final analyses. Instead of these assignments, an initial reflection paper on the interrelationship of spirituality and acting might be helpful. Additionally, the instructors are considering replacing this reading material with material from Theresa of Avila or John of the Cross.

This course would prove very difficult without the aid of some video presentations to demonstrate particular theatre traditions and schools of acting (e.g. Grotowski, Brook). Also, it is very important to have the students to perform the exercises described in the book. Proficiency on the part of the students, of course, is not necessary, but it is important for them to bodily experience these exercises to appreciate the depth of their thought and the spiritual significance.

Class times: Tuesday /Thursday 1:35- 2:50 Hartke 101
Instructors: Brendan McGroarty and Sally Montgomery
Offices: Hartke 105 and Hartke 107
Office Hours: 9:00-12:00 or by appointment
Phone numbers: 319-5358 and 319-5351
Email: mcgroarty@cua.edu; montgomery@cua.edu

Course Description: This course considers methods of actor training in the light of various spiritual traditions. Readings are assigned in spiritual writings as they may cast light on approaches to actor training described by key thinkers/practitioners of theatre since 1900.

Objective: Students will become familiar with concepts of acting and the actor as expressed by the authors surveyed. Having distinguished the goals of spiritual formation

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from the assigned readings, the student will be in a position to re-examine the anthropologies governing the acting techniques described by major innovators in the field of twentieth century actor training.

Goal: To inform the approach to acting with insight from spiritual writings.

Required Texts: In addition to the books listed below which may be purchased at the University bookstore, required readings will be found in a reserve folder in the Luce Library (Hartke 102) and on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library website, www.ccel.org. Students are responsible for making their own copies of the reserve packet in the Luce and returning the packet to the Luce library in a timely manner. The department copier may not be used for these copies. Similarly, students are responsible for obtaining hard copies of the texts assigned on www.ccel.org and having these texts available for class discussion. The specific URLs for the readings will be given in the reading assignments. Alternative versions of any of the texts may be used.

Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts, 1964)

The Cloud of Unknowing (Complete and unabridged) ed. Johnston (New York: Doubleday, 1973)

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1969)

St. Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*

Artaud, *Theater and its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958)

Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Touchstone, 1968)

Mamet, *True and False: Common Sense for the Actor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999)

Reading Assignments:

August 27: Introduction. Assignment of presentation topics. Handout: Readings for Plato, Aristotle, and the Greeks. Assignment of first paper.

August 29: Readings from Handout: Excerpt from Plato's "Ion" and *The Republic* (Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974] 12-31).

September 3: Readings from Handout: Aristotle and Plutarch (*Actors on Acting*, 11-14; Dukore: 31-64).

September 5: Review of Greeks. Questions from class. First paper due (see Papers and Presentations).

September 10: St. Augustine part I: *The Confessions* trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1960) 43-80, 190-203 [Book I, II, III ch.s 1-3, VIII ch.s 6-12]. Alternatively, this text may be found at <http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/confessions/confessions.html>.

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September 12: St. Augustine part II: *City of God* Book I ch.s 31-34, Book II ch.s 8-9, 14, 27-29. This text may be found in the readings or at:
<http://ccel.org/fathers/NPNF1-02/c1.1.htm>.

September 17: Shakespeare: Scenes from *Hamlet* and *Henry V*.

September 19: St. Ignatius. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, read The 20 Annotations and The First Week. In addition to
<http://www.ccel.org/i/ignatius/exercses/exercises.html>, *The Exercises* may be found at http://www.jesuit.org/pilgrim/Pages/loyola_exercises.pdf in a continuous text.

September 24: St. Ignatius. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, read The Second Week, The Contemplation to Gain Love, The Three Methods of Prayer, The Rules for Perceiving Movements Caused in the Soul, and the Rules to have the True Sentiment in the Church.

September 26: Stanislavski, 1-94

October 1: Stanislavski, 127-222, 261-313. Second paper due (see Papers and Presentations). Handout: readings for October 8.

October 3: Freud: "Creative Writing."

October 8: Antonin Artaud, 1-52. Third paper due (see Papers and Presentations).

October 10: Antonin Artaud, 53-100. Artaud and Balinese dance.

October 15: Peter Brook, 1-64. Final paper assigned.

October 17: Peter Brook/*Mahabarata*: Scene: "BhagavadGita." Brook, 98-141.

October 22: Thomas Merton, "The Inner Experience" in *Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master: The Essential Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 19xx) 294-356.

October 24: Thomas Merton, continued.

October 29: Japanese Noh Theatre. Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives* (New York: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983) Introduction, 1-69

October 31: Method. Fourth Paper due (see Papers and Presentations).

November 5: Method: Stassberg and Meisner. Scene from *On the Waterfront*.

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November 7: *The Cloud of Unknowing. The Cloud*, Introduction, 7-75 (ch.s 1-20)

November 12: *The Cloud*, 76-146 (ch.s 21-75).

November 14: St. Francis and Walter Hilton. Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*
trans. Clark and Dorward (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 86, 123-
130, 154-155, 219-230, 267-285.

November 19: Jerzy Grotowski, *Toward a Poor Theatre*, 12-59.

November 21: Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, readings T.B.A.

November 26: Drafts for final paper due.

December 3: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* trans. Bernard Frechtman
(New York: Braziller, 1963) 584-599 (“Please Use Genet Properly”), 611-
625 (Appendix 3: “The Maids”); Sartre, “The Actor” and “The Comic
Actor” in *Sartre on Theatre*.

December 5: David Mamet, *True and False*,

Papers and Presentations: Each student will be required to give one presentation, write four short papers and one final paper, and turn in a short list of questions (at least three) that came up during the preparatory reading for each day of class.

Presentation: Each student will be assigned responsibility for presenting a succinct (5-10 minute) synopsis of the reading material for one class day, to be given orally at the beginning of class. Students will be graded on their fidelity to the text, comprehensiveness, and succinctness.

Short papers: Four 1-2 pages papers will be due on the dates listed in the reading assignments. These papers will be assigned on the first day of class. Students will be graded on their fidelity to the text, comprehensiveness, and succinctness. Papers must be fully documented (footnoted: see Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*). More detailed instructions will be given as each paper is due (see Reading Assignments).

Final Paper: Each student will prepare one 8-10 page paper comparing at least one thinker from the spiritual tradition and at least one acting theorist. Drafts of the final paper are due by the final class before the Thanksgiving break. Papers must be fully documented (footnoted: see Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*). The final draft is due the last day of classes. More detailed instructions will be given on or around midterm.

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Questions: Each student will submit a short list (at least three) of questions on the reading assignments for each day of class. Questions will not be accepted after the class has discussed the readings.

Grading: This course will use the University grading scale (i.e. A= 93-100, A-=92-90, B+=87-89, B=83-86, etc.)

Final Paper:	40 points
Presentation:	15 points
Written Questions:	5 points
Four short papers	10 points each
	40 points
	100 base points

Attendance and participation will be noted throughout the semester. Final grades will be adjusted according to attendance and participation.