

Department of English & Writing Studies  
Theatre Studies Program

**Theatre Studies 3205F (001)**  
**History of Performance Theory**  
Fall 2025

**Instructor:** Prof M.J. Kidnie, UC4201  
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**Office hours:** TU 12:30, and by appointment  
(Zoom)

Course Description

Performance is one of the most controversial of human activities – because it is also one of the most mundane, ordinary, and pervasive of human activities. Thinkers around the world and across the span of centuries have fretted over who should be represented on stage and how, over whether those representations are good or bad for us (especially if they are spectacular and fun!), over how audiences should respond to performances they see (with heart or with head?), and much more. The history of performance theory is therefore a history of debates about what it means to represent and be represented, about who watches and who acts, and most importantly about who decides the answers to those questions. This course introduces students to major statements and treatises about theatre and performance from Aristotle through to twentieth-century thinkers such as Artaud, Brecht, and Boal. Students will apply theories of practice to specific dramatic texts.

Land Acknowledgement

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

**Objectives:**

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Articulate the key components of select theories and situate them within a historical continuum;
- Compare and contrast major statements about performance through to the mid-twentieth century;
- Apply these statements to select scripts to create new critical writing or live theatre.

Course Materials

We'll be reading and studying the work of eleven practitioners. Most of the reading is in our course textbook, *Theatre Theory Theatre*, ed. Daniel Gerould, which is available online through the Weldon catalogue. Any essay not included in Gerould is posted on Brightspace. We'll also be reading three plays and watching two more plays in live performance at the Stratford Festival. The three scripts are available through Drama Online (Weldon database).

Each student should book their two Stratford theatre tickets using the promo code below; you can book return bus transportation to Stratford using the same promo. If you're not available to attend the group trips to the Stratford Festival, then please see these two shows in your own time, but *before* we discuss them in class.

#### BOOKING STRATFORD TICKETS AND RETURN BUSSING:

*Macbeth* and *Anne of Green Gables* are playing at the Avon Theatre. Students can choose one of three discounted price brackets (subject to availability – book early!):

B zone - \$50+tax

C zone - \$39+tax

Bravo zone - \$34+tax

The return bus to each show costs \$23.50 (tax included).

Phone 1-800-567-1600 and select “4” for Groups and Schools. Use a credit card to book tickets and bus transportation. Use promo code: TBD. Book early for best availability – the Stratford Festival will hold our booking until TBD and then release any unsold seats back to the general public.

#### Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

- 10-minute staging developed out of course material (play + theory) including 1,000-word write-up that explains and analyses your production choices in light of one (or at most two) theories studied on course – 20%
- In-class writing assignments (3 x 10%) – 30%
- 12-minute in-class presentation (in pairs) – 10%
- Participation (4 quizzes rolled into grade) – 10%
- Exam – 30%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

#### Additional Information

##### **Late Paper Policy**

If you submit a paper after the due date, the paper will be counted as late. The grade will be reduced by a penalty of two marks (2%) for each calendar day that it is late.

Extensions will only be considered if supported by a request for accommodation sent by students' Academic Counsellors in their home faculty (see below, “Accommodation”).

#### Statements

##### **Academic Consideration**

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.

2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
  - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
  - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
  - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to staged scenes in final three weeks of the course **must** be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

### **Gender-Based and Sexual Violence**

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

### **Intellectual Property/Copyright**

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law

and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

### **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

### **Support Services**

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:  
<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence**

The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools/software/apps is not acceptable on this course.

### Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at  
[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized use of AI tools such as ChatGPT to create content that is submitted as one's own. In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. Students must however critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration, however students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.

### **Plagiarism Checking**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

### Schedule of Classes and Assignments

November 25 and 27: 10-minute staging

December 9: 1,000-word staging analysis (based on in-class production)

Throughout term: 12-minute in-class presentation (working in pairs)

Throughout term: Three in-class writing assignments

Throughout term: Participation (4 scheduled quizzes are rolled into this grade)

Exam period – 2-hour exam

### **Presentation Schedule**

PRESENTATION 1 (Sept 9, Aristotle):

PRESENTATION 2 (Sept 25, Zola):

PRESENTATION 3 (Oct 7, Stanislavski):

PRESENTATION 4 (Oct 14, Meyerhold):

PRESENTATION 5 (Oct 16, Brecht, "Epic Theatre"):

PRESENTATION 6 (Nov 11, Artaud):

PRESENTATION 7 (Nov 13, Boal):

PRESENTATION 8 (Dec 2, Schechner):

PRESENTATION 9 (Dec 4, Bharucha):

### **Timetable**

#### **SEPTEMBER**

4 Introduction. What is Performance Theory and Why Study It?

9 Aristotle, *The Poetics*

PRESENTATION 1: Aristotle, *The Poetics*

11 *The Poetics* and Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. Quiz.

16 *Macbeth*

18 In-class writing assignment. Denis Diderot, "Conversations on the Natural Son" and "The Paradox of Acting"

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 8pm – STRATFORD THEATRE TRIP –  
*Macbeth*, dir. Robert Lepage

23 Post-performance discussion.

25 Emile Zola, "Preface to *Thérèse Raquin*" and "Naturalism in the Theatre"

PRESENTATION 2: Zola, "Naturalism in the Theatre"

#### **SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER**

30 National Truth and Reconciliation Day (no class)

2 Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, trans. Helen Edmundson. Quiz.

7 Jean Benedetti, Introduction to Konstantin Stanislavski

PRESENTATION 3: Stanislavski's System

9 Theory in Practice: Stanislavski workshop

14 Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Uber-Marionette" and Vsevolod Meyerhold, "The Fairground Booth"

PRESENTATION 4: Meyerhold, "The Fairground Booth"

16 Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" and "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting". Quiz.

PRESENTATION 5: Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre"

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2pm – STRATFORD THEATRE TRIP –  
*Anne of Green Gables*, dir. Kat Sandler

21 Post-performance discussion

23 In-class writing assignment (building on *Anne of Green Gables* at Stratford). *The Good Person of Szechwan*.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

28 Theory in Practice: Brecht workshop

30 *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Studio time: Group work on staging

NOVEMBER 3-9 – READING WEEK

11 Antonin Artaud, from *The Theatre and Its Double*

PRESENTATION 6: Artaud, from *The Theatre and Its Double*

13 Augusto Boal, from *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Quiz.

PRESENTATION 7: Boal, from *Theatre of the Oppressed*

18 In-class writing assignment.

20 Theory in Practice: Boal workshop. Studio time: Group work on staging

25 Production day

27 Production day

DECEMBER

2 Richard Schechner, "Ethology and Theatre"

PRESENTATION 8: Schechner, "Ethology and Theatre"

4 Rustom Bharucha, "Collision of Cultures"

PRESENTATION 9: Bharucha, "Collision of Cultures"

9 Review