

Acting III [THEA 3873]: Ensemble + Character Building with Sarah Ruhl's *Orlando*

Syllabus for Spring 2022, 4 credits / MWF 10:00-11:50am / Black and White Boxes

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Office Hours: JMAC 122, MW 2-3pm & other times by appointment

<https://theactorsmind.com/>

*As for the admirable qualities I attributed to myself, I soon learned that these were only a small part of myself and that this total self-image was a cliché. . . . It became clear that I must learn to enlarge the conception I had of myself, to gain a truer understanding of who I really am if my soul is to be of any use. . . . I could no longer refuse to examine any stupidities, neurotic impulses, fears, and ambiguities—in other words, the negative as well as the positive qualities that exist in me. -Uta Hagen's *Challenge for the Actor*, chapter 4: The Self*

The reason great actors are so compelling is that they have the courage to bring their personalities to bear on everything they do. Don't ever play a part as someone else would play it. Remember that it is you onstage, not some mythical being called the character. . . . You have the right and responsibility to bring to the stage who you are. Your humanity is an absolutely vital contribution to any play you act in. Whenever you find yourself worrying about whether you are "doing the character" correctly, reflect for a moment on the words of Stanislavsky: "The person you are is a thousand times more interesting than the best actor you could ever hope to be." -A Practical Handbook for the Actor

Later, Stanislavsky admitted that his earlier psychological methods, which had been so influential in the United States, were misguided. He then altered his emphasis from inducing emotion through affective memory to a system of psycho-physical chain-of-action, where action, rather than psychology, induced emotion and feeling. . . . Instead of forcing and fixing an emotion, Viewpoints training allows untamed feeling to arise from the actual physical, verbal and imaginative situation in which actors find themselves together. . . . Viewpoints allows us to surrender, fall back into empty creative space and trust that there is something there, other than our own ego or imagination, to catch us.

-The Viewpoints Book, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, chapter 3

Tension murders vibration. Vibration lives in relaxation. -Kristin Linklater, voice teacher extraordinaire

The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions.

-Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?"

*On 14 December 1922, Virginia Woolf met a swarthy aristocrat she described the next day as "a grenadier; hard; handsome; manly; inclined to double chin." But in spite of the double chin, this lengthy diary entry shows the "moustached" grenadier already inspiring a flood of words from Virginia. . . . Over the next six years, the encounter blossomed into a love affair and eventually a published novel, built around Virginia's fascination with Vita Sackville-West, the woman she had come to love. The day after she wrote the last word of *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf noted in her diary that it was "all a joke." -Introduction to The Cambridge Edition of *Orlando**

You're more anarchic onstage than you are anywhere else. -Helen McCrory, British actor

Course Description:

We will dedicate the whole quarter to rehearsing and performing Sarah Ruhl's play adaptation of Virginia Woolf's novel, *Orlando*. You will dig into characterization and ensemble-building with exercises that focus on character physicality, voice, text work, visualization/imagination, and given circumstances. My three big objectives are to 1) give you all a relatively equitable experience as actors; 2) continue to build your actor toolbox with high quality tools that strengthen your physicality, vocal, language, imaginative, and collaborative storytelling skills; and 3) tell the story of *Orlando* with the level of hyper theatricality it deserves, giving equal focus to physical & vocal storytelling. Every moment on stage for each of you should be boldly played, the way a child is "all in" and totally committed to the pretend world she has created for herself. I expect us to develop a strong ensemble of actors who deal proactively with the material.

This is an advanced Acting course; my expectations of your acting work are higher than in Acting I and II. As in any acting class, you will learn by doing. However, the "doing" in Acting III requires a level of commitment to competent script analysis & empathic connection to character beyond that of Acting I and II. Good acting requires a visceral and kinesthetic understanding of text and its implications. Your acting work will strengthen in direct proportion to the effort you invest, as well as your willingness to bring more than your intellect to the task of deciphering the text. I hope you will feel rewarded by successfully setting the technical aspects of your acting (staging, objectives/actions, relationship, character, given circumstances, even *style*) so that you are able to improvise and live spontaneously within those technical guidelines. Expect more focus on movement than in Acting I and II. I expect us to develop a strong ensemble of actors who deal proactively with the material.

Learning Objectives:

*You will be able to identify, understand, and apply various acting tools to our rehearsals and performances of *Orlando*.

*You will be able to articulate and demonstrate the work habits necessary to the successful development & practice of the actor's craft.

*Building upon the principles and experiences of Acting I and II, you will deepen your skills in dynamic & truthful characterization, text analysis, given circumstances, objectives and actions, listening and spontaneity, and being an all-around trusting and trusted scene partner.

*You will improve your ability to incorporate and balance technical requirements with visceral instinct.

*You will surprise yourself (and me) by your measurable growth as an actor by the end of the quarter.

Tips for Success:

- Arrive to class a little early and ready to work. Two late arrivals equal one absence.
- Wear clothes and shoes you can move in comfortably. Be prepared to be on the floor and/or barefoot. Bring water, and please silence phones. No phone use unless it assists with the class work.
- Participate in discussions. Your thoughts and observations are integral to our development, and I expect you to share them. Ask questions. Decide to have fun and enjoy the work we do together.
- Be respectful of your classmates and listen to them, even if you disagree. Be responsible for taking care of one another.
- Always communicate with me about any concerns or questions you have regarding the course, your progress, further areas of exploration, how this connects to other coursework you're doing, etc.

Required Reading, all available on Canvas:

- **Orlando*, Sarah Ruhl’s play adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s novel
- **A Challenge for the Actor*, by Uta Hagen, various chapters
- **The Viewpoints Book*, by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, various chapters
- **A Director Prepares*, by Anne Bogart, “Stereotype” chapter
- **Freeing the Natural Voice*, by Kristin Linklater

Required Viewing:

Orlando film, available on the DU library website, starring Tilda Swinton (1992)

Required Listening:

The Actor’s Mind podcast, multiple episodes

Recommended Books:

- **Respect for Acting*, by Uta Hagen
- **Practical Handbook for the Actor*, by Melissa Bruder et al
- **Actions: The Actors’ Thesaurus*, by Caldarone & Williams

ATTENDANCE and GRADING POLICY

Attendance

You learn by doing in this class, so attendance is crucial. Class begins on time. However, I’d rather have you late than absent.

- Arriving any time after 10am = late
- 2 lates = one absence
- 3 absences = 3% off final grade for each additional absence

Participation, weeks 1-9

3% per week = 27% total

Success depends upon your consistent embrace of the following practices:

- 1) Individual focus & preparation;
- 2) Willingness to play, to try new things, to risk your ego;
- 3) Interdependence, reliance on others, vulnerability, teamwork;
- 4) Full commitment to all assignments, hearty work ethic;
- 5) Full engagement in discussion of the play, other readings, and exercises.

Applied Practice: Run Throughs & Final Performances

40% total

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| 1) Run first half of play, week 4 | 5% |
| 2) Run second half of play, week 7 | 5% |
| 3) Run through whole play #1, week 8 | 6% |
| 4) Run through whole play #2, week 9 | 6% |
| 5) Dress Rehearsal, week 10 | 8% |
| 6) Two Final Performances, weeks 10/11 | 10% |

Seeing & Writing About Plays

3% each = 6% total

You are required to see 2 of the 4 options listed below. Please email me a 300-word response that considers the success of these productions through the perspective of this course’s focus on clear storytelling. We are attempting to perform a play in which the actors do everything they can with their bodies and voices to tell

the clearest story possible. How do the shows you see succeed, or not? How do the actors make the story clear, or not? Are the actors fully committed moment-to-moment?

1. Senior Capstone Festival, Cycle 1 – week 4
2. DU Theatre’s staged reading of *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, April 29 – week 5
3. Senior Capstone Festival, Cycle 2 – week 8
4. Off-campus professional production, TBD

Canvas Discussion Board, weeks 2-7

2% per week, weeks 2-7 = 12% total

Mondays of weeks #2-#7 some combination of reading, listening, watching is due. For each weekly assignment, please post 3 compelling ideas on the Canvas discussion board.

Journaling, weeks 3 + 7

5% each = %10 total

Twice during the quarters (Fridays, weeks 3 + 7), please hand in a typed or handwritten journal entry, responding to the following 3 prompts. Typed is preferred, but handwritten OK if it’s legible.

- 1) ACTING TOOLS: Which acting tools are you finding useful and applying to the *Orlando* rehearsal process? Think back to ones you used a lot in Acting I and Acting II. I’ve roughly organized our reading into various categories: character, self/imagination, body, voice, script analysis, and collaboration. Feel free to let these categories organize your thinking if helpful. (2%)
- 2) SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES: Write about one way you’re succeeding and one way you’re being challenged by the course work. How are you organizing your time to succeed in class? How are you succeeding with memorizing, collaborating, building characterization, integrating voice and movement exercises into your work? (2%)
- 3) What non-acting aspect of the course engages you? I’m especially thinking about your role as assistant director or designer. Or perhaps there’s something else as well. (1%)

Extended Character Exercise (if time)

Final Written Reflection

5%

Guidelines TBD

Extra Credit

Feel free to ask me about extra credit opportunities throughout the quarter (but not after final class meeting).

100% / 1,000 points total

	93.5-100 = A	90-93 = A-
87.5-89 = B+	83.5-87 = B	80-83 = B-
77.5-79 = C+	73.5-77 = C	70-73 = C-
60-69 = D	0-59 = F	

We will rehearse the play every day we meet. Expect a physical and/or vocal warm up at the start of Monday/Wednesday classes. Expect a brief production meeting near the end of each Friday class, during which we’ll discuss our no-budget production as equal collaborators playing various roles—actors, directors, designers, and stage managers.

SCHEDULE:

Wk#1 Mon 3/28 Introductions, Syllabus, Physical + Vocal Exercises, Script, Cuts, Audition Forms

Tuesday, 3/29, 4pm, JMAC – Department of Theatre Meet + Greet

Wed 3/30 **DUE: prepare 1-2 audition pieces**
DUE: one-page Audition Form
Warm ups + auditions

Fri 4/1 **DUE: “CHARACTER” reading—“Stereotype” chapter, *A Director Prepares* (no posting today)**
Play is cast, assign assistant director + designer roles
Read-through of whole play; table work discussion

Wk#2 Mon 4/4 **DUE: “SELF/IMAGINATION” reading—chs. 4 + 5, *Challenge for the Actor*; discussion board post**
Extra Credit: listen to Actor’s Mind podcast, episode #2 on Substitution; discussion board post
Warm up + character exercises

Wed 4/6 Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 4/8 Rehearsals + production meeting

Wk#3 Mon 4/11 **DUE: “BODY” reading—chs. 1, 2, 3, *Viewpoints Book*; discussion board post**
DUE: listen to Actor’s Mind podcast, episode #3 on Physicality; discussion board post
Warm up + rehearsals

Wed 4/13 Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 4/15 **DUE: journal #1**
Rehearsals + production meeting

Wk#4 Mon 4/18 **DUE: “VOICE” reading—ch. 9, *Viewpoints Book*; TBD *Freeing the Natural Voice*; discussion board post**
Warm up + rehearsals

Wed 4/20 Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 4/22 **DUE: run through first half of staged play, as memorized as possible**
Rehearsals + production meeting

+++Week 4: see DU Theatre’s Senior Capstones, Cycle One

Wk#5 Mon 4/25 **DUE: written response to Capstones, Cycle 1**
DUE: “ANALYSIS” reading/listening—chapter 24, *Challenge for the Actor* + Actor’s Mind podcast, episode 1; discussion board post

Warm up + rehearsals

Wed 4/27 Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 4/29 *No class today. Feel free to rehearse if you desire.*

+++Week 5: see DU Theatre's staged reading of *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, Friday, April 29, 7:30pm / FREE

Wk#6 Mon 5/2 **DUE: written response to staged reading**
DUE: "COLLABORATION" reading—ch. 10, *The Viewpoints Book*; discussion board post
Warm up + rehearsals

Wed 5/4 Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 5/6 Rehearsals + production meeting

Wk#7 Mon 5/9 **DUE: watch *Orlando* film, located on DU library website; discussion board post**
Warm up + rehearsals

Wed 5/11 **DUE: run through second half of the play, as memorized as possible**
Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 5/13 **DUE: journal #2**
Rehearsals + production meeting

Wk#8 Mon 5/16 **DUE: run through whole play #1 (hard deadline for full memorization)**

Wed 5/18 Warm up + rehearsals

Fri 5/20 Rehearsals + production meeting

+++Week 8: see DU Theatre's Senior Capstones, Cycle Two

Wk#9 Mon 5/23 **DUE: written response to Capstones, Cycle Two**
DUE: run through whole play #2

Wed 5/25 Rehearsal

Fri 5/27 Rehearsal

Wk#10 Mon 5/30 *No class: Memorial Day*

Wed 6/1 *Anne absent for children's school continuation. Class meets to rehearse.*

Fri 6/3 **DUE: dress rehearsal**
[Evening TBD Performance #1]

Wk#11 Mon 6/6 Performance #1 or #2
[Evening TBD Performance #2]

I encourage you to visit www.coloradoheatreguild.org for local audition listings. General Auditions for next year's seasons take place throughout the spring for various local theatre companies. Check out Denver Center Theatre Company, Curious Theatre Company, Arvada Center, BETC (Butterfly Effect Theatre Company), Benchmark Theatre, Aurora Fox, and ask me about others.

HONOR CODE/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of violating the Academic Misconduct policy, refer to the University of Denver website on the Honor Code (www.du.edu/honorcode). See also <http://www.du.edu/studentconduct> for information about conduct expectations from the Office of Student Conduct.

INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: In this class, we will work together to develop a learning community that is inclusive and respectful. Our diversity may be reflected by differences in race, culture, age, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and myriad other social identities and life experiences. The goal of inclusiveness, in a diverse community, encourages and appreciates expressions of different ideas, opinions, and beliefs, so that conversations and interactions that could potentially be divisive turn instead into opportunities for intellectual and personal enrichment. A dedication to inclusiveness requires respecting what others say, their right to say it, and the thoughtful consideration of others' communication. Both speaking up and listening are valuable tools for furthering thoughtful, enlightening dialogue.

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS: As part of the University's Culture of Care & Support we provide campus resources to create access for you to maintain your safety, health, and well-being. We understand that as a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug concerns, depression, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These stressful moments can impact academic performance or reduce your ability to engage. The University offers services to assist you with addressing these or ANY other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any challenges, you should reach out for support. You can seek confidential mental health services available on campus in the Health & Counseling Center (HCC) and My Student Support System (My SSP). Another helpful campus office is Student Outreach & Support (SOS).

[Health & Counseling Services](#)

[My SSP 24/7 confidential services for students \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Student Outreach & Support \(SOS\) and SOS Referrals](#)

TITLE IX: Gender violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, class, age, appearance, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The University of Denver is committed to providing an environment free of discrimination on the basis of sex (gender), including sexual misconduct, sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking. [The Center for Advocacy, Prevention and Empowerment \(CAPE\)](#) provides programs and resources to help promote healthy relationships, teach non-violence and equality, and foster a respectful and safe environment for all members of the University of Denver community. All services are confidential and free of charge. For assistance during business hours, call 303-871-3853 and ask to speak to the Director of CAPE. After hours, please call the Emergency & Crisis Dispatch Line at 303-871-3000 and ask to speak to the CAPE advocate on call.