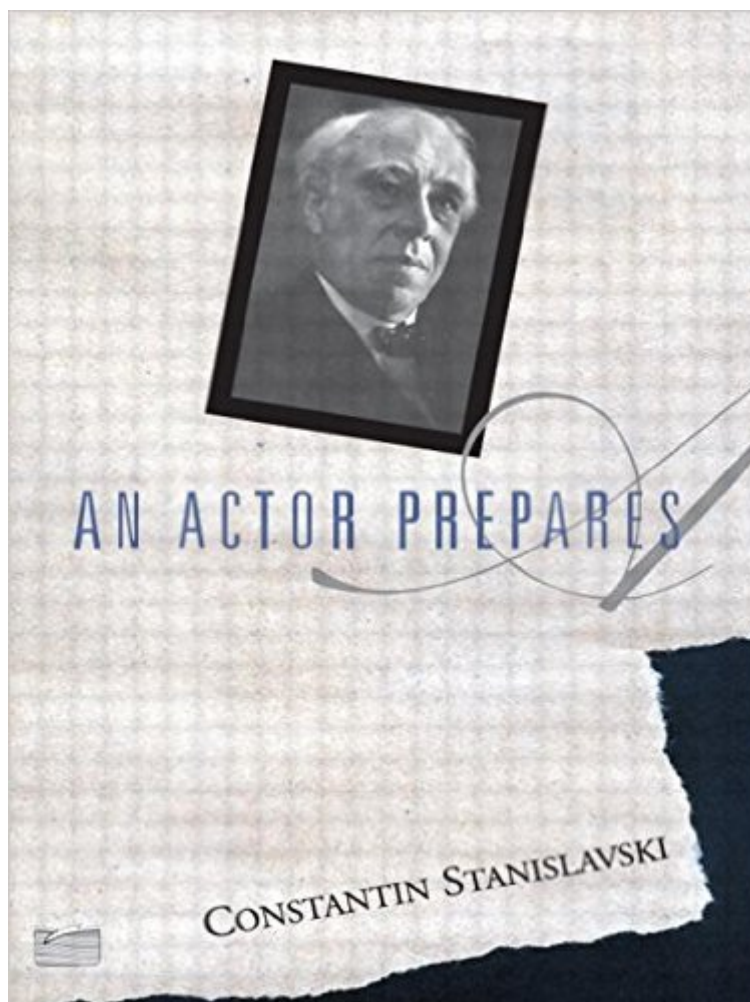


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An Actor Prepares



Synopsis

Stanislavski's simple exercises fire the imagination, and help readers not only discover their own conception of reality but how to reproduce it as well.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Stanislavski is a familiar name in theatre circles. The legendary director of the Moscow Art Theatre wrote perhaps some of the most influential books on acting in the last century. I could list the big names who cite his influence (most famously, Marlon Brando and Sir John Gielgud), but the fact is his teachings have become so much a part of the way we approach theatre, that almost any actor in the English-speaking world (and abroad) can claim at least some influence. Elizabeth Hapgood's translation of Stanislavski's work (featured on this page) remains the most widely circulated among English speakers. Unfortunately, it is also highly problematic. By publishing her translations as two separate books "An Actor Prepares" and "Building a Character", Hapgood unintentionally misrepresented Stanislavski's original intentions. In actuality, "An Actor Prepares" and "Building a Character" were both written as two parts of a single book, called "An Actor's Work on Himself." Hapgood had worked with Stanislavski on an early version of Part One. However, Stanislavski continued to revise his manuscript even after Hapgood had returned home to America. What would eventually be published as "An Actor Prepares" was actually a much-abridged version of what she received from Stanislavski. Not only that, but it is missing Stanislavski's subsequent revisions. The translation itself is especially difficult to get through. The diction is quaint and Victorian and brings to mind Constance Garrett's dowdy translations of Dostoevsky. What's more is that

Stanislavski's sense of humor is largely censored, in favor of contriving a more flowing narrative. While this is understandable, this drastically alters the reader's understanding of Stanislavski's system.

It cannot be doubted that Stanislavski's Trilogy is a must for any aspiring actor. Stanislavski was the pioneer in creating a coherent system of practices and concepts to aid in strengthening the art of acting. I would, however, advise anyone who has not yet read the book to be cautious. It is important to understand that Hapgood's translation is sketchy in places, and tends to run around in circles. As a supplement to this book, I would recommend reading Sonia Moore's The Stanislavski System. She worked directly with Stanislavski and understands his system much better than E. Hapgood. Not that the book's vagueness is all her fault. It seems that Stanislavski goes to great lengths to explain things that are, nowadays, common sense. He certainly wasn't the first to ever think of these concepts; he was merely the first to organize them and give them names. Much of what is contained in this book is merely a modernized translation of Hamlet's "Speak the speech I pray you". The Magic If is simply a codified means of make believe. That is fundamentally what it all boils down to. I relished the situation of the student and teacher relationship, and did find myself growing and evolving with him. It really makes you think of acting in a whole new perspective. But, as with any method, you must be cautious to use only what works for you. There is a common desire to make An Actor Prepares the bible of all actors. I won't argue that Stanislavski's system is the basis of almost all other methods that have risen in the last century, but there are other effective texts available. Respect of Acting and To the Actor, to name a couple. Don't just read Stanislavski; read several to help put it all in perspective.

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