

**THGR 291:  
DIALECTICS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATER**

Professor Nadine George  
Spring 2005  
Meeting Time: T. 1:30-4:20  
Place: GH 144  
Office hours: Th 1.30-4.30  
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African American theater history is full of debates—calls and responses. This course examines the major dialectics in African American theater. Students will study the plays, history and intellectual discourses surrounding African American theater. Topics include: race theory, aesthetics, agit-prop, gender, sexuality, language, class, cross-casting, the Diaspora, canonization and performativity. Each student brings a different range of experiences, amount of exposure to these ideas, and disciplinary orientation, however the course benefits from the combination of these different perspectives. Opportunities to engage the material from creative as well as scholarly perspectives are encouraged and built into the course.

**BOOKS:**

The following books are available at UCSD Bookstore:

Elam and Krasner, *African American Performance and Theater History*

Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*

Jones, *Dutchman*

McAllister, *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Colour*

Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*

Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*

Kennedy, *Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*

Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Wolfe, *The Colored Museum*

Bean, *A Sourcebook of African-American Performance*

**COURSE PACKET**

The course packet is available from University Readers

Also, we may have occasional handouts.

**ASSESSMENT**

Seminar Presentation.....	20%
Research Paper (due Week 9 by noon in my mailbox).....	50%
(Proposals due in week 6, outline due week 7)	
Class Participation.....	30%

**Seminar Presentation:** Seminar presentation dates will be determined at the first class. Each student will take responsibility for presenting a week's discussion by introducing the material, fielding questions and facilitating post-presentation discussion on all of the week's texts. This presentation may incorporate creative work (performance, design project, creative writing, etc.).

**Research Project:** A major research paper is due June 6<sup>th</sup>. Time permitting, we will discuss the topics week 10 so that students know what others are researching. A written proposal of 2-3 pages (plus annotated bibliography) detailing the project, its methodology, and goals must be submitted by week 5. A detailed outline is due week 8. Feedback will be given on the proposal and outline.

Class Participation: Attendance at all classes is required. In addition, quality engagement is expected from everyone at all times. The class participation grade also reflects students' willingness to share ideas and function as a group for mutual learning.

## SEMINAR SCHEDULE

1. Call and Response/Dissembling: Reading between the lines
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. Roundtable discussion (Elam/Krasner)
    - ii. Elam, Introduction (Elam/Krasner)
    - iii. Krasner, Afterword (Elam/Krasner)
    - iv. Hatch, "Here Comes Everybody"
    - v. Dunbar, "We Wear the Masks"
  
    - vi. Recommended: Clark, "The Archeology of Black Theatre"
    - vii. Recommended: Wilkerson, "Redefining Black Theatre"
    - viii. Recommended: Shange, "Uncovered Losses/Black Theatre Traditions"
    - ix. Recommended: Levine, "The Slave as Trickster"
2. Genealogy of African American Theater History
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. This week each student will borrow a different book on the history of African American theater from my bookshelf. Students will provide a written report outlining the argument, scope, methodology, etc. of their book (make enough copies for everyone). Students should also be prepared to discuss the book in detail. At the end of this class students should have a good assessment of the history and current state of the field of African American theater scholarship. Students will also be better equipped for later discussions when issues raised in this week's readings resurface.
3. Black Performance Studies
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*
    - ii. Redd, "Birmingham's Federal Theater Project Negro Unit" (Elam/Krasner)
    - iii. Anderson, "Calling on the Spirit" (Elam/Krasner)
    - iv. Roach, "Deep Skin" (Elam/Krasner)
4. Art/Propaganda/Experience/Resistance
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. Jones, *Dutchman*
    - ii. Brown, *The Escape*
    - iii. Hughes, *Scottsboro Boys Limited*
    - iv. Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
    - v. Clark, *Restaging Langston Hughes Scottsboro Boys Limited*
    - vi. Elam, "The Black Performer and the Performance of Blackness..." (Elam/Krasner)
    - vii. Harlem Renaissance debates in course packet
    - viii. Sell, "The Black Arts Movement" (Elam/Krasner)
    - ix. Asante, "Afrocentricity and the Critique of Drama"
    - x. Bean, (1, 5)
    - xi. Readings on the Wilson/Brustein debates in course packet
  
    - xii. Recommended: Elam, "August Wilson's Women"
    - xiii. Recommended: Shannon, "The Ground on Which I Stand"
    - xiv. Recommended: Wilson, "I want a Black Director"
    - xv. Recommended: Neal, "Toward a Relevant Black Theatre," "Any Day Now"
    - xvi. Recommended: Baraka, "What is Black Theater?," "Black Theater in the Sixties"
    - xvii. Recommended: Shannon, "Audience and Africanisms..." (Elam/Krasner)

5. Highbrow/Lowbrow (Jade presents)
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. Gates, "The Chitlin Circuit" (Elam/Krasner)
    - ii. Burrill, *Aftermath, They that Sit in Darkness*
    - iii. Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South, Plumes, Blue Blood, Blue-Eyed Black Boy*
    - iv. Matheus, *'Cruiter*
    - v. *Heaven Bound* scenario
    - vi. Stephens and Perkins, Introductions to *Strange Fruit*
    - vii. Graham, "The Origins of the Black Upper Class"
    - viii. Bean, (15, 16)
6. The Mainstream/The Diaspora (Allison presents)
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
    - ii. From: Moynihan, *The Moynihan Report*
    - iii. Wilkerson, "A Raisin in the Sun: Anniversary of an American Classic."
    - iv. Joseph, "Sycorax Mythology"
    - v. From Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*
    - vi. McMillan and SuAndi, "Rebaptizing the World in Our Own Terms..."
    - vii. Roach, "Mardi Gras Indians and Others: Genealogies of American Performance"
    - viii. Bean, (6)
    - ix. From Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence...*
    - x. From Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*
    - xi. Recommended: Hansberry, "The Negro Writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism"
    - xii. Recommended: Wilkerson, "The Sighted Eyes and Feeling Heart of Lorraine Hansberry"
    - xiii. Recommended: Hansberry, *Les Blanc*
    - xiv. Recommended: Wolfe, *The Colored Museum*
    - xv. Recommended: Euba, "Legba and the Politics of Metaphysics"
    - xvi. Recommended: Vega, "The Candomble and Eshu-Eleggua..."
7. Seeing Things in Black and White/Colorism (Elizabeth presents)
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. McAllister, *White People Do Not Know How to Behave...*(Cha TBA)
    - ii. From Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence...*
    - iii. From Lott, *Love and Theft*
    - iv. Hurston, *Color Struck*
    - v. Hughes, *Mulatto*
    - vi. Jones, *Combination Skin*
    - vii. Krasner, "Migration, Fragmentation and Identity: Zora Neale Hurston's *Color Struck* and the Geography of the Harlem Renaissance"
    - viii. Paulin, "Acting Out Miscegenation" (Elam/Krasner)
8. Gender and Sexuality (Elle presents)
  - a. Reading Assignment
    - i. Pomo Afro Homo, *Dark Fruit*
    - ii. Plum, "Attending Walt Whitman High" (Elam/Krasner)
    - iii. Shange, *For Colored Girls*
    - iv. Bean, (20, 21)
    - v. Staples, "The Myth of Black Macho: A Resonse to Angry Black Feminists"
    - vi. From Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*
    - vii. From Fusco, *The Bodies the Were Not Ours*
    - viii. Dickerson, "The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward A Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre"

- ix. Recommended: From Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*
- x. Recommended: From George, *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville*
- 9. Wrestling with Language
  - a. Reading Assignments
    - i. Dixon, "Uh Tiny Land Mass..." (Elam/Krasner)
    - ii. Parks, *Essays*
    - iii. Kennedy, *Funnyhouse, A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*
    - iv. From Kennedy, *People Who Lead to My Plays*
    - v. Bean, (19, 22, 23, 24, 25)
    - vi. Bonner, *The Purple Flower*
    - vii. Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* (video)
  
    - viii. Recommended: From Smith, *Talk to Me*
- 10. Connections to your research