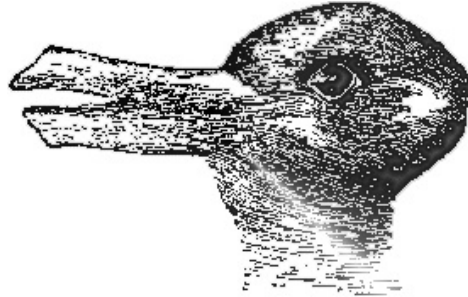


**ENGL 634: Studies in (Experimental) Drama**  
**Behold: A Stage**

Spring 2013  
Katy Ryan, Associate Professor of English  
Colson 221  
Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00-1:00  
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Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be *understood* without taking just these interactions into account—and theory is a matter of understanding.

John Dewey, *Art as Experience*

[T]oday's realism is tomorrow's melodrama.

Bert States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*

Of all the problems standing in the way of American drama being fit into the higher-education curriculum—the early extracurricular status of performance, the increasing devaluation of oratory and rhetoric, the slipperiness of the genre, the problematic cultural capital of American drama and theatre, the thick Anglophilianism of American literary study, the territorial struggle with Theatre departments, the thematic prevalence of politics at the expense of “poetry”—the most insurmountable would seem to have been the taint of emotion coloring drama in general and American drama in particular.

Susan Harris Smith, *American Drama: The Bastard Art*

Well: all that can be said is that the contrast between learning and amusing oneself is not laid down by divine rule; it is not one that has always been and must continue to be.

Bertolt Brecht, “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction”

In this course, we will read twentieth-century plays, mostly from the United States but also from Britain, France, and Germany. We will ask fundamental questions about theatrical form, the development of drama, and the popularity of performance theories. Early on, to establish a critical vocabulary, we will read Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*. Among other matters, this play will enable us to consider how aesthetics, politics, and empathy can operate in the space of a theatre.

All our plays, the obscure and the well-known, have been described as formally experimental. I have organized our dramatic readings less by chronology than by theatrical form: epic theatre, agit-prop, surrealism, expressionism, absurdism, poststructuralist theatre, environmental theatre, documentary theatre, and tragedy. Obviously, a course could be devoted to any *one* of these forms. From our encounter

with several, I hope you will find new ways of thinking about this literary genre and why humans do this strange thing of pretending to be other than they are.

### **PERFORMANCE TEXTS**

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*

Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead*

Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (Penguin)

Marita Bonner, *The Purple Flower* (handout)

Djuna Barnes, *At the Roots of the Stars*, *To the Dogs*, *The Dove* (handout)

Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*

Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play*

Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die*

Kenneth Brown, *The Brig* (film)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*

Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*

Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*

August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*

Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart*

### **GRADING**

1) Five Responses	25%
2) Participation/Performances/Reviews	15%
3) Two Essays	60%

### **LEARNING GOALS**

- Knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup>-century American drama
- Understanding of major theatrical forms
- Ability to synthesize scholarly arguments and theatre reviews
- Proficiency in research methods
- Ability to collaborate on performances and contribute to discussions
- Ability to listen to one another

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **1) Reader Responses**

On campus, everyone will post five responses to our readings (approximately 500 words each). These informal responses are an opportunity for you to gather ideas and observations. You do not need to touch on everything we have read for any particular week. Choose one idea or question to develop. Be sure to ground your responses in the language of the dramatic texts by providing direct quotations.

You might want to use your reader response to think about how you would teach a play. You could identify strategies for introducing the material or brainstorm about how you would encourage students (at the high school or undergraduate level) to delve into complex parts of the text.

Pace your responses throughout the semester and try to post no later than 4PM on Tuesday, so we all have a chance to read the responses before we meet on Wednesday.

## **2) Participation, Performances, and Reviews**

This is an interactive class that will ask you to get out of your seat, to work with others, and to take risks in your writing and thinking. Performance is not only our content but our method.

*Participation:* This class will strengthen your ability to *think*—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. There will be a variety of ways to participate: providing feedback to performers, asking questions of one another, and responding to our texts. If you have difficulty taking in class, please make an appointment early in the semester to speak with me.

*Performance:* Everyone will be in two performance groups. Each group will collaborate on a ten-minute performance that engages with our week's reading. Performances are ungraded (but count toward participation), informal, and great fun. Usually groups meet at least once outside of class to prepare. Feel free to rearrange the classroom, incorporate the audience, bring in props, costumes, music, etc. You do not need to memorize anything (though we'll all be impressed if you do). Your performance should provide us with an interpretive take on a play. At the end of the performance, the audience will have a chance to respond, and the performers can say a few words about their process and intent. (Also see handout for ideas.)

*Reviews:* In addition to the performing groups, you will sign up for one day on which you will bring in a review of a play from a newspaper, magazine, or other reliable source. Be prepared to provide us with the time and place of the reviewed performance and to summarize the critic's response to the play. The review might be from the first run of a play or its revival; it might be from its country of origin or not. The point of the review summary is simply to share with us a particular production of the play under discussion. You can find reviews through the library's databases or through an Internet search.

## **3) Writing Projects**

Your major writing projects will be two research essays (approx. 10 pp) that develop a critical or theoretical argument based on course material. I will collect proposals two weeks before the due date, and we will have an in-class writing workshop the week before the final essay is due.

### **REQUIRED READING (available on ecampus; click "View" clockwise or counterclockwise)**

- Bertolt Brecht, from *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1957
- Michael Denning, from *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Verso 1997.
- Douglas McDermott, "The Workers' Laboratory Theatre: Archetype and Example," *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1930*. Wesport, CT: Greenwood P, 1985.
- Susan Harris Smith, from *American Drama: The Bastard Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Michael Rohd, from *Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- Bert O. States, from *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. 80-115.
- Dwight Conquergood. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *Performance Studies Reader*. 311-322. Available at <http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/301/psinterventions-tdr.pdf>
- Langston Hughes, "Trouble with the Angels" (1935), *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: The Short Stories*. Vol 15. Columbia MD: U of Missouri P, 2002.
- Arnold Aronson, Chapter 3 in *American Avante-Garde Theatre: A History*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Erika Munk, "Only Connect: The Living Theatre and its Audiences." *Restaging the Sixties:*

- Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*. Eds. James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006: 33-55.
- Martin Esslin, from *Theatre of the Absurd*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Vintage, 2001.
- Carey Perloff, "Three Women and a Mound: directing *Happy Days*." *Directing Beckett*. Ed. Lois Oppenheim. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. 161-169.

### **Recommended Reading**

- Carol Dawn Allen, *Peculiar Passages: Black Women Playwrights 1875-2000*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Chapter Two. 57-82.
- J.L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962.
- Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?" *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969. 147-154.
- Herbert Blau. *The Audience*. John Hopkins UP, 1990.
- . *Take Up the Bodies: Theatre at the Vanishing Point*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1982.
- . "Universals of Performance; or amortizing play" in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*. Eds. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel. Cambridge UP, 1990. 250-272.
- Marvin Carlson. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Sue-Ellen Case. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Randall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- Ryan Claycomb. *Lives at Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2012.
- Elin Diamond. "The Violence of "We": Politicizing Identification." *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992.
- Harry Elam and David Krasner, eds. *African American Performance and Theater History*. Oxford UP, 2001.
- Jill Dolan. *Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988/91.
- Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan, eds. *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993. 55-84.
- Kim Marra and Robert A. Schanke, eds. *Staging Desire: Queer Readings of American Theater History*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2002.
- José Esteban Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Alan Reed. *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, eds. *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992.
- Nicolas Rideout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.
- Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, eds. *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005.
- Richard Schechner. *Performance Theory*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Jenny Spencer, *Political and Protest Theatre after 9-11: Patriotic Dissent*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Judith L. Stephens, "The Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement." *Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights*. Ed. Brenda Murphy. Cambridge UP, 1999: 98-117.

## SCHEDULE

### January 16: Thinking about Performance

Rectangle game. Circle game

Introductions

Eric Bentley: Theatre = "A performs B for C"

Aristotle, *Poetics*

Sign up for Performances and Review Days

### January 23: Agit-Prop / Strike Plays

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)

Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (1936)

Douglas McDermott, "The Workers' Laboratory Theatre: Archetype and Example," *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1930*. Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1985. (ecampus—can skip pp 132-136 on 1960s theatre)

Michael Denning, Chapter 5, "'The Literary Class War': Rethinking Proletarian Literature" in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. 200-229. (ecampus)

John Lahr, "Waiting for Odets," *New Yorker* 10/26/92 (EbscoHost)

"Theatre: Agit-Prop." *Time* 25.24 (June 17, 1935): 42 (Academic Search Complete)

*Recommended:* Michael Denning, Chapter 10, "The Politics of Magic," in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> c.*

### January 30: Epic Theatre:

#### Plato: "Only the dead have seen the end to war"

Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (1941, 1949)

All the introductory material to the Penguin edition

Selections from *Brecht on Theatre*: "Theatre for Pleasure, or Theatre for Instruction"; "The Street Scene"; "From the Mother Courage Model" (ecampus)

"Mother Courage and the Future of War." *Social Analysis* 52.2 (2008): 165-184. [Only required to read through 168.] (EbscoHost)

*Recommended:*

*From Brecht to Beckett* [documentary film]

Gitta Honnegger, "Gossip, Ghosts and Memory: Mother Courage and the Forging of the Berliner Ensemble." *TDR (Drama Review)* 52.4 (2008): 98-117.

More from *Brecht on Theatre*: "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre"; "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting"; "Interview with an Exile"

Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?" *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969. 147-154.

### **February 6: Expressionism**

Djuna Barnes, Introduction to *At the Roots of the Stars: The Short Plays: At the Roots of the Stars, To the Dogs, The Dove* (1920s) (handout)

Marita Bonner, *The Purple Flower* (1929) (handout)

Douglas Messerli, "Djuna Barnes's Roots"

[http://www.writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/messerli/essays/messerli\\_barnes\\_roots.html](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/messerli/essays/messerli_barnes_roots.html)

Allison Berg and Merideth Taylor, "Enacting Difference: Marita Bonner's *Purple Flower* and the Ambiguities of Race." *African American Review* 32.3 (1998): 469-480. (Project MUSE)

### **February 13: Surrealism, or the Memory Play**

Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)

Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (1996)

Bert States, "Expressionism and After," from *Great Reckonings* (ecampus)

Susan Harris Smith, Chapter 4, "Did She Jump or Was She Pushed?" in *American Drama: The Bastard Art* 114-138; 149-158 (ecampus)

**\*\*\*Due: Proposal for First Essay due—750 words**

### **February 20: The Autobiographical (and Not to be Published)**

Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (publ 1956)

Tony Kushner, "Eugene O'Neill: The Native Eloquence of Fog"

<http://www.hotreview.org/articles/nativeeloquence.htm>

Terry Teachout, "America's Greatest Playwright?" *Commentary* 1 Mar 2011: 75-78. (EBSCOHost)

**\*\*\*Due: Draft of Essay to writing partner by Sunday, Feb 24 at 4PM**

### **February 27: Meta-Theatre**

Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1989)

Langston Hughes, "Trouble with the Angels" (1935) (handout)

James S. Moy, "David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and Phillip Kan Gotanda's *Yankee Dawg You Die*: Repositioning Chinese American Marginality on the American Stage." *Theatre Journal* 42.1 (1990): 48-56. (JSTOR)

W.B. Worthen, "Disciplines of the Text: Sites of Performance." *Performance Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Bial. London: Routledge, 2004. 10-24. (JSTOR)

Writing Workshop

### **March 6: Documentary Theatre (or Blowtorch Realism)**

Kenneth Brown, *The Brig* (1963) – watch in class

Dwight Conquergood, “Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty.”

*Theatre Journal* 54.3 (2002): 339-367. (Project Muse)

Arnold Aronson, Chapter 3 in *American Avante-Garde Theatre* (ecampus)

Erika Munk, “Only Connect: The Living Theatre and its Audiences.” (ecampus)

\*\*\**Final Essay Due*

### **March 13: Parliament Funkadelic**

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play* (1994)

Shannon Jackson, “What is a Black Play? Tales from my Theoretical Career.” *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005): 603-605. (JSTOR)

Suzan-Lori Parks, “new black math,” *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005): 576-583. (JSTOR)

Dwight Conquergood. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *Performance Studies Reader*. 311-322. <http://www.csun.edu/~vcspc00g/301/psinterventions-tdr.pdf>

### **March 20: Environmental Theatre**

Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977)

Ann M. Fox and Joan Lipkin, “Res(crip)ting Feminist Theatre Through Disability Theatre: Selections from the DisAbility Project.” *NWSA Journal* 14.3 (2002): 77-98. (Project MUSE)

Elin Diamond, “Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism.” *TDR (Drama Review)* 32.1 (1988): 82-94. (JSTOR)

Recommended: Maria Irene Fornes. Interview with Una Chaudhuri. *Speaking On Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*. Eds. Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1996. 98-114.

### **Spring Break**

#### **April 3: Epic Theatre (and Angels)**

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (The Millennium Approaches and Perestroika)* (1993)

Michael Rohd, *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue*, Preface, 97-111 138-140 (ecampus)

Recommended: Tony Kushner, Interview with David Savran, *Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*. Eds. Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1996. 291-313.

### **April 10: Tragedy**

August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982)

August Wilson, "The Ground On Which I Stand." *Callaloo* 20.3 (1998): 493-503. (Project Muse)

Lloyd Richards, "Lloyd Richards: Reflections from the Playwrights' Champion." Interview with Caroline R. Raymond. *The Drama Review* 47.2 (2003). (EBSCO Host)

### **April 17: the Absurd, or Poststructuralism?**

Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (1961)

Martin Esslin, from *Theatre of the Absurd*. 2001 Foreword. 1961 Preface. 1965 Introduction. Available at GoogleBooks.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=J7iQNBOP7Q4C&pg=PP1&lpg=PP1&dq=esslin+theatre+of+the+absurd&source=bl&ots=xFEcfk7DDd&sig=kJ0-cqY7E9PSe7rfjFRoiKiR7IE&hl=en#>

Carey Perloff, "Three Women and a Mound: Directing *Happy Days*." *Directing Beckett*. Ed. Lois Oppenheim. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. 161-169. (ecampus)

**\*\*\*Proposal for Final Essay due**

### **April 24: Surreal Structuralism**

Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart* (1997)

Toril Moi, "They practice their trades in different worlds: Concepts in Poststructuralism and Ordinary Language Philosophy." *New Literary History* 40.4 (2009): 801-824. (ProjectMUSE)

**\*\*\*Due: Draft of Essay to writing partner by Sunday, April 28**

### **May 1: Final Thoughts**

Writing Workshop

**\*\*\*Final essay due by May 8 at noon**

### **WVU Creative Arts Center Schedule**

**Carmen** by *Georges Bizet* Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre February 8 – 10, 2013

**Dance Now!** Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre March 14 – 16, 2013

**The Cherry Orchard** by *Anton Chekhov* Gladys G. Davis Theatre April 19 – 28, 2013



Performance Schedule

**January 23: Agit-Prop / Strike Plays**

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)

Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead* (1936)

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**January 30: Epic Theatre**

Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (1941, 1949)

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**February 13: Surrealism, or the Memory Play**

Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)

Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (1996)

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**February 20: Autobiographical**

Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (publ 1956)

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**February 27: Meta-Theatre**

Philip Kan Gotanda, *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1989)

Langston Hughes, "Trouble with the Angels" (1935) (ecampus)

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**March 13: Parliament Funkadelic**

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play* (1994)

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Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977)

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August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982)

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**April 17: the Absurd, or Poststructuralism?**

Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (1961)

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## Review Days

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Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935)

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