“Jewish Identity and Performance in the U.S.”
ENG410, Fall 2010
Professor Jill Dolan and Professor Stacy Wolf

Fall 2010
11:00 – 12:20, T/Th
B45, McCosh

Office hours:
• Wednesdays and Thursdays, 3:00 – 4:00
• Wednesdays, Program in the Study of Women and Gender, 113 Dickinson
• Thursdays, Lewis Center for the Arts, Room 214

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Course Description
This course explores Jewish identity and performance in the 20th and 21st century United States. We begin with an historical overview of Jews and Jewish identities in the U.S., including the very question, What does Jewishness mean? Is it ethnicity, race, or religion? Identity or culture? Belief or practice? We’ll also consider theories that understand Jewishness itself as a performance. From there, we’ll focus on Jewish American theatre artists, from the Yiddish-language theatre of the early 20th century, through playwrights who defined a certain American middle-class life in the mid-20th century, to contemporary performers and playwrights who navigate the complexity of Jewish American identity in a range of genres and tones.

Course’s Integration with Symposium
The course complements the symposium, “Good for the Jews: Performance and Jewish Identity in American Theatre,” which will take place on December 11, 2010. As part of the course, students will participate in the event. Students will moderate symposium panels, respond to papers and presentations, and/or facilitate public interviews with the symposium’s artists. Participation in the symposium is required.

Course questions include:
• How has 20th century American theatre offered a forum—in different ways than literature—for political discussions of Jewish assimilation and difference from the American middle-class “norm”? How has theatre offered a site of contestation for competing narratives of “sameness” or “difference” vis-à-vis the project of American nationalism for Jews?
• In what genres of theatre—including musical theatre, performance art, melodrama, tragedy, and/or comedy—have artists fruitfully explored the themes of Jewish identity and how?
• How is “Jewishness,” as an identity position, inherently performative, from gesture to inflection, posture to gait? How has such performativity been exploited in stage productions to produce or resist a cultural stereotype of “the Jew”?
• How is Jewishness productively and necessarily crossed with other identity categories in performance—race, class, gender, sexuality, among others—to produce a Jewish subject who is multiple and diverse?

Required Texts
Reading materials are available on the course BlackBoard site. The following plays are available at Labyrinth Books on Nassau Street:
1. Sholem Asch, GOD OF VENGEANCE (new adaptation by Donald Margulies)
2. Bock and Styne, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
3. Tony Kushner, ANGELS IN AMERICA, PARTS I AND II
4. Donald Margulies, LOMAN FAMILY PICNIC
5. Arthur Miller, DEATH OF A SALESMAN
7. Wendy Wasserstein, ISN’T IT ROMANTIC?

Course Schedule

Week #1 Introduction

Thursday, 9/16
• Introduction
• Scenes from Loman Family Picnic

Week #2 Contexts, Definitions, and Approaches

Tuesday, 9/21 (58 pp.)
• Stephen J. Whitfield, “Definitions,” In Search of American Jewish Culture (Hanover, NH: Brandeis UP, 1999), 1-31 (notes, 249-255). (e-reserves)

Thursday, 9/23 (62 pp.)
• Erdman, Chapter Six, “‘Getting Reformed’: The Transition Toward Jewish Invisibility in Popular Performance,” 144-161 (notes, 182-185; 198-199). (e-reserves)

Week #3: Miller and his Legacy

Tuesday, 9/28 (19 pp. + play)
• Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman. (Labyrinth)

Thursday, 9/30 (28 pp. + play)
• Donald Margulies, The Loman Family Picnic. (Labyrinth)
• David Mamet, “The Decoration of Jewish Houses” (PDF, Blackboard course materials), 5 pp.

Week #4: Yiddish Theatre
Tuesday 10/5  (48 pp.)
• Ruth Gay, “Inventing a Jewish Theatre in America,” The Jewish King Lear: A Comedy in America, Jacob Gordin (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), 73-106 (notes, 165-166). (e-reserves)

Thursday 10/7  (33 pp. + play)
• Sholem Asch, God of Vengeance, adapted by Donald Margulies. (Labyrinth)
• Alisa Solomon, Chapter Four, “Queering the Canon: Azoi toot a Yid,” Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Gender and Theatre (New York: Routledge, 1997), 91-124 (plus notes). (e-reserves)

Week #5: Jews & Race

Tuesday, 10/12  (51 pp.)
• Sander Gilman, Chapter One, “The Jewish Voice: Chicken Soup or the Penalties of Sounding Too Jewish,” The Jew’s Body (New York: Routledge, 1991), 10-37

Thursday, 10/14  (63 pp. + e-book selections, your choice)
• Brodkin, Chapter Five, “A Whiteness of our Own? Jewishness and Whiteness in the 1950s and 1960s,” 138-174 (plus notes). (e-reserves)

Week #6: Tony Kushner, the Jewish/American/Gay/Political Icon

Tuesday, 10/19
• Class begins at 1:00 p.m.; lunch will be supplied.
• Watch Wrestling with Angels (DVD, 98 minutes)

Thursday, 10/21  (98 minutes)
• Tony Kushner, Angels in America, Parts I & II (Labyrinth)
• Scene Presentation Group #2

Week #7: Kushner and Mann (Midterm week)

Tuesday, 10/26  (51 pp.)
Thursday, 10/28  (play)  
  • Scene Presentation Group #3  

**Week #8: Fall Break**

Tuesday, 11/2  
Thursday, 11/4  

**Week #9: Representations of and by Jewish Women**

Tuesday, 11/9  (65 pp.)  
  • Prell, Chapter Six, “The Jewish American Princess: Detachable Ethnicity, Gender Ambiguity, and Middle-Class Anxiety,” 177-208 (notes, 287-302). (e-reserves)

Thursday, 11/11  (20 pp. + play)  
  • Wasserstein, *Isn’t it Romantic* (Labyrinth)  
  • Harley Erdman, Chapter Two, “Taming the Exotic Jewess: The Rise and Fall of the ‘Belle Juive,’” *Staging the Jew*, 40-60 (notes, 188-190). (e-reserves)  
  • Scene Presentation Group #4

**Week #10: Representations of and by Jewish Women**

Tuesday, 11/16  (8 pp. + play + interview TK)  
  • Wasserstein, *The Sisters Rosensweig* (Labyrinth)  
  • Scene Presentation Group #5

Thursday, 11/18  
  • Proposal workshop

**Week #11: Fiddler on the Roof**

Tuesday, 11/23  
  • Deb Margolin, *O Wholly Night and Other Jewish Solecisms*, in Deb Margolin and Lynda Hart, *Of All the Nerve: Deb Margolin Solo* (New York: Cassell, 1999), 137-155. (e-reserves)  

Thursday, 11/25 Thanksgiving  

**Week #12: New Holocaust Theatre**
Tuesday, 11/30 (play)
- Scene Presentation Group #6

Thursday, 12/2 (play)
- Margulies, *The Model Apartment* (Labyrinth)
- Scene Presentation Group #7

**Weekend assignment:** Meet with symposium presentation groups to develop questions

**Week #13: Symposium Rehearsal and Fiddler on the Roof**

Tuesday, 12/7
- Day to talk about symposium preparation and questions
- Rehearsal and planning

Thursday, 12/9 (22 pp. + play + film)
- Bock and Styne, *Fiddler on the Roof* (Labyrinth)
- *Fiddler on the Roof* (film, on e-reserves)

***Saturday, December 11th: Jews & Performance Symposium***
9 – 5:30, James Stewart Theatre, Lewis Center for the Arts, 185 Nassau
**Attendance Required**

**Week #14: Debriefing and Wrap-up**

Tuesday, 12/14
- Symposium debriefing

Thursday, 12/16
- TBA

**Course Requirements and Assignments:** separate appendix, will be posted

**Grade Breakdown:**
- 15%: Attendance and participation
- 15%: Three critical questions
- 20%: Symposium participation
- 20%: Scenes and dramaturgical program
- 30%: Final Projects/Papers