

“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 thematics 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
6. Wendy Wasserstein, THE SISTERS ROSENSWEIG
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.)

- Henry Bial, Chapter One, "Performance Studies, Mass Culture, and the Jewish Problem," *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2005), 1-29 (notes, 159-163). (e-reserves)
- 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.)

- Bruce Kirle, Chapter Two, "The Star as Co-Creator: Performing Jewishness during the Melting Pot," *Unfinished Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-in-Process* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2005), 41-74 (notes, 208-212). (e-reserves)
- Harley Erdman, Introduction, "'The Memory of that Agony,'" *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1960-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997), 1-13. (e-reserves)
- 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)
- Andrea Most, "Opening the Windshield: Death of a Salesman and Theatrical Liberalism," *Modern Drama* 50:4 (Winter 2007): 545-564. (e-reserves)

Thursday, 9/30 (28 pp. + play)

- Donald Margulies, *The Loman Family Picnic*. (Labyrinth)
- Linda Ben Z'vi, "Generational Shifts in American Jewish Theatre," in Edna Nashon, ed., *Jewish Theatre: A Global View* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 215-238. (e-reserves)
- 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)
- Joel Schechter, *Messiahs of 1933: How American Yiddish Theatre Survived Adversity Through Satire* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2008), Chapter Seven, "Menasha Skulnik Becomes a Bridegroom: Popular Yiddish Theatre Reconsidered," 141-156 (notes, 265-266). (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)
- Scene Presentation Group #1

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
- Gilman, Chapter Seven, "The Jewish Nose: Are Jews White? Or, The History of the Nose Job," 169-193 (plus notes). (e-reserves)

Thursday, 10/14 (63 pp. + e-book selections, your choice)

- Karen Brodtkin, Chapter One, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1998), 25-52.
- Brodtkin, Chapter Five, "A Whiteness of our Own? Jewishness and Whiteness in the 1950s and 1960s," 138-174 (plus notes). (e-reserves)
- Abigail Pogrebin, *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk about Being Jewish* (New York: Broadway Books 2005); selections. (e-book, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/princeton/Doc?id=10101533>). Choose a selection or two or three that interest you to read and share with the class.

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 (play)

- 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.)

- David Savran, "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation," in Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger, eds., *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 13-39.
- Alisa Solomon, "Wrestling with Angels: A Jewish Fantasia," in Geis and Kruger, eds., *Approaching the Millennium*, 118-133.

Thursday, 10/28 (play)

- Emily Mann, *Annulla* (online e-book, <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?WODR;PL024383>)
- 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.)

- Riv-Ellen Prell, Chapter Five, "Strangers in Paradise: The Devouring Jewish Mother," *fighting to become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 142-176.
- 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)
- Nancy Franklin, "Profile: The Time of Her Life," *New Yorker*, April 14, 1997, 63-71.
- "Wendy Wasserstein," in David Savran, *The Playwright's Voice: American Dramatists on Memory, Writing, and the Politics of Culture* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 289-310.
- 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)
- Jill Dolan, "Seeing Deb Margolin: Ontological Vandalism and Radical Amazement," introduction to Deb Margolin's *Index to Idioms* and "A Slave to Synaesthesia," an interview with Margolin in *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* 52.3 (Fall 2008, T199): 98-102; 105; and 108-117. (e-reserves)

Thursday, 11/25 Thanksgiving

Week #12: New Holocaust Theatre

Tuesday, 11/30 (play)

- Lisa Kron, *2.5 Minute Ride*, in *2.5 Minute Ride and 101 Humiliating Stories* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001).
- 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)
- Seth Wolitz, "The Americanization of Tevye or Boarding the Jewish Mayflower," *American Quarterly* 40:4 (December 1988): 514-536. (e-reserves)
- *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