

EL 485: The Black Atlantic: Performance, Politics and Diaspora

Fall 2015

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Course Description

In his 1993 book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, British cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy argued that thinking about black intellectual history involved recognizing the presence of a wide-spread diaspora: the African peoples dispersed across the Atlantic world by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Gilroy argued that whereas black intellectual, literary and artistic history is generally studied in the context of *national* traditions and borders, a broader interpretive framework would involve recognizing the *trans-national* dimensions of African experience and thought. The aim of this course is to identify traces of a black Atlantic diasporic consciousness in 19th and 20th century dramatic writing from the United States, the Caribbean, West Africa and Europe. Our goals will be to

- Pay close attention to how playwrights work with the idea of an African diaspora and imagine black experience beyond their national borders
- Place these imaginings in the wider context of processes of racialization and related forms of difference and identity making such as gender, sexuality and class
- Develop a language for thinking, talking and writing about race and representation.

Rather than begin with Gilroy's theoretical musings, we will study the work of playwrights Dion Boucicault, Suzan-Lori Parks, Maryse Condé, Derek Walcott, Koffi Kwahulé and Ama Ata Aidoo to form a basis for understanding Gilroy's formulations. Throughout, we will pair our literary texts with theoretical and historical essays on black history, politics and performance.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation	%15
Quizzes and/or Short Assignments	%15
Four Response Papers*	%35
Final Paper	%35

* The scheduled Response Papers will take the place of a traditional midterm and provide opportunities for close reading. They will consist of one single-spaced page or approximately 750 words. The due dates are marked below with (*).

Course Schedule

Week 1

Introduction

Wed, Sept. 30th

Introduction: The Case of Rachel Dolezal

Fri, Oct. 2nd

Thinking (and talking) about “Race”

Week 2

Minstrelsy, Miscegenation and Melodrama

Wed, Oct. 7th
Fri, Oct. 9th

Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon*
Boucicault cont.

Week 3

Wed, Oct. 14th
Fri, Oct. 16th

Boucicault cont.
Linda Williams, “Trials of Black and White”
* Response Paper 1 Due

Week 4

Agency, Visuality and the Body

Wed, Oct. 21st
Fri, Oct. 23rd

Suzan-Lori Parks, *Venus*
Parks cont.

Week 5

Wed, Oct. 28th
Fri, Oct. 30th

Cumhuriyet Bayramı
Writing Workshop: A Focus on Close Reading

Week 6

Wed, Nov. 4th
Fri, Nov. 6th

Parks cont.
Sander Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies”
* Response Paper 2 Due

Week 7

Transatlantic Moves and the Issue of Performance

Wed, Nov. 11th
Fri, Nov. 13th

Maryse Condé, *The Tropical Breeze Hotel*
Condé cont.

Week 8

Wed, Nov. 18th
Fri, Nov. 20th

Tyler Stovall, “The New Woman and the New Empire”
Derek Walcott, *Pantomime*

Week 9

Wed, Nov. 25th
Fri, Nov. 27th

Walcott cont.
Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man”
* Response Paper 3 Due

Week 10

Memory, Diaspora and the “Return”

Wed, Dec. 2nd
Fri, Dec. 4th

Koffi Kwahulé, *That Old Black Magic*
Kwahulé cont.

Week 11

Wed, Dec. 9th
Fri, Dec. 11th

Harvey Young, "Between the Ropes"
Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*

Week 12

Wed, Dec. 16th
Fri, Dec. 18th

Aidoo cont.
Sandra Richards, "What Is To Be Remembered?"
* Response Paper 4 Due

Week 13

The Black Atlantic

Wed, Dec. 23rd
Fri, Dec. 25th

Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Excerpts)
Gilroy cont. + Conclusion