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Introduction to Theatre Arts: More to the Stage Picture than Meets the Eye (& Ear)

Alvin F. Eng
CUNY City College

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Introduction to Theatre Arts

MORE TO THE STAGE PICTURE THAN MEETS THE EYE (& EAR)

THTR 13100 / Section F / Course Code 24776
FALL 2019 / MON & WED 3:30 - 4:45pm, NAC 7/312

Instructor: Alvin Eng

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Mailbox: C-G 311

Office Hours: I am available by email or in person by appointment.

Course Description

This course is organized to introduce you to the various elements of the theatre with particular attention to the following inquiries: What is theatre? How is it created? What are the various occupations in the theatre? What is the position of theatre in society? We will also explore Theatre as a universal means of observing, processing and interpreting the world around us. These are vital “real world” skills that can be applied to the study of any major, as well as the pursuit of any personal or professional path.

As per our course theme, there’s “more to the stage picture than meets the eye (& ear).” Before an actor even enters a rehearsal studio or first steps onto the stage, months and often years of creative work and research will have gone into that play and production. In this course we will explore and try our hand at some of that pre-production creativity, as well as improvising, adapting, performing and writing short scenes and monologues that will be created and presented in small groups as part of your Final Project.

Attending Performances at CCNY

Of course the study of theatre cannot be complete without attending and seeing live performances. Thus, it is mandatory for CCNY Theatre students to attend four performances right here on campus. A complete schedule and box office information follows at the end of this syllabus. We will also read three of these scripts before attending performances of *THE FANTASTICKS*, *THE MOTHERFUCKER WITH THE HAT* and *URINETOWN*.

Through the above, students will learn to recognize how meaning is constructed or deconstructed in the theatre, as well as in the drama of everyday professional and personal life. So, whether you plan to pursue theatre as your calling or have it as a casual interest, this course is for you. Finally, as you arrive with varying degrees of theatrical knowledge and experience, you will be graded on the progress you make throughout the semester from where you now stand in relation to theatre. *Welcome!*

General Education and Artistic Proficiencies

As part of the College’s General Education Curriculum, this course is designed to enhance your understanding of artistic issues and how they are studied. Students successfully completing this course will develop the following proficiencies:

- Oral and Written Communication Skills (CS): You will have had multiple experiences in communicating ideas in writing and speaking. You will complete assignments totaling at least 3,500 words of writing.
- Artistic (A) and Critical Analysis (CA): You will have had multiple experiences in critically and constructively analyzing and assessing artistic issues.
- Information Literacy (IL): You will have had multiple experiences in finding information in the library, on the Internet, and in other places and in evaluating the reliability of this information.

Course Learning Outcomes

- To gain knowledge of what constitutes theatre and what makes it a unique art form.
- To begin to understand the ways in which theatre is a collaborative art form, putting the talents of various artists and craftspeople to work.
- To see a number of productions (both on campus and off) and write about them analytically.
- To gain knowledge of the various possible audience/performer relationships and theatrical spaces.
- To gain knowledge about the development of a theatrical project from creative inception to production.

Course Structure

The course curriculum is structured into Five Units. Each Unit will consist of both creative and analytic/research assignments. Assignment criteria, deadlines and inevitable schedule updates will always be posted on Blackboard.

- The final Unit V focuses on a Two-Part Final Group Project: one small group Research Pre-Production presentation and one Creative Presentation, followed by an Individual Final Reflection.
- In lieu of midterms and exams, students will give In-Class Presentations.
- During Units 1 & 5, all students will present in class.
- Students will also give one presentation TBA during Units 2-4.

Open Educational Resource/Zero Text Course (OER/ZTC)

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As such, there are no textbooks or play scripts to purchase and all required and supplemental readings will be posted to Blackboard. As student tickets cost \$5.00. Thus, the total of \$20 in ticket purchases for all four CCNY productions will be the only cost of this class.

Chapters from *The Enjoyment of Theatre*, by Jim Patterson and Tim Donohue, as well as all scripts and supporting readings will be posted to Blackboard

UNITS of STUDY

Required Readings and Performance Attendance

UNIT I: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE and CREATING CHARACTERS:

How Playwrights and Actors Transform Words into Action (Weeks 1-4)

Play Readings

“Symbiosis” a skit from THE COLORED MUSEUM by George C. Wolfe (USA, 20th Century)

The Enjoyment of Theatre

Chapter 3: How To Read a Play

Plus: Introduction from THE EMPTY SPACE by Peter Brook

Creative Assignment: Writing a Character Monologue and Acting Improvisation.

UNIT II: THE DIRECTOR, DRAMATURG and STAGING A PLAY

How do we take a script from the page to the stage

... from the past to today and beyond? (Weeks 5-7)

Play Readings

THE FANTASTICKS

a musical by Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones (USA, 20th century)

(Also see performed @CCNY, 9/26-29)

(Including Stage Spaces)

The Enjoyment of Theatre

Chapter 4: How To See a Play

Chapter 9: Directors

Creative Assignment:

Create a Director’s Concept and Dramaturgical Dossier for an alternate staging of this musical, including description of stage spaces.

(Also attend performance @CCNY, 9/26-29)

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER by Oliver Goldsmith (UK, 18th century)

UNIT III: CRITICS, REPRESENTATION AND CULTURAL POWER IN THEATRE

In 21st Century USA and 17th Century France (Weeks 7-9)

YELLOW FACE by David Henry Hwang (USA, 21st century)

TARTUFFE, a verse play by Molière (France, 17th century)

The Enjoyment of Theatre

Excerpts from Chapter 16: The Triumph and Decline of Neoclassicism

Plus:

“The Battle of ‘Miss Saigon’: Yellowface, Art and Opportunity”

By Michael Paulson from *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

UNIT IV: FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION:
COMEDY & THE SYMBOLISM of SOUND and SET DESIGN (*Weeks 10-13*)

Play Readings

THE COLORED MUSEUM by George C. Wolfe (*USA, 20th century*)
THE MOTHERFUCKER WITH THE HAT by Stephen Adly Guirgis (*USA, 21st century*)
(*Read and see @CCNY, 11/7 – 11/9*)

The Enjoyment of Theatre

Chapter 10: Designers and Technicians,

Creative Assignment:

Create a Symbolic Concept for Sound and Set Design

UNIT IV: FINAL PROJECT

The fifth and final unit of the course is devoted to your Final Project

Including Reading and Attending @ CCNY, 12/5-7:
URINETOWN, A Musical by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis

FINAL PROJECT PART ONE:

Group Creative Research and Adaptation Presentation

Creative Teams of 3-4 students will collectively devise a well-researched and designed In-Class Group Presentation. Utilizing theatre craft fundamentals explored in THTR 13100, Creative Teams will curate a season of plays from ones studied, to create a Thematic Season that speaks to a 21st century Artistic, Social or Political Concern of a city or region for the 2020-21 season.

- Theme for season—what 21st century social or political concerns does this theme address?
- Region or City for production
- Venue or Theatre Company
- Reasons for Casting and Creative Team appointments
- Set, Sound and Costume Design Concepts (symbolism) with audio and visual samples (found or composed)

FINAL PROJECT PART TWO:

Group Creative Adaptation Presentation

To support and expand their season's theme, the Creative Team will also research, write and perform short scenes or monologues adapted from existing material.

FINAL PROJECT PART THREE:

Individual Reflection Paper

This will be an extension of your Creative Team's IN-CLASS PRESENTATION and involve further research on the season's theme.

Course Requirements

Presentation Criteria

An exceptional presentation will condense a good deal of research into a clear, well organized and concise report that stays within 10 minutes. The presentation will introduce the subject matter, satisfy the basic assignment criteria and most importantly, offer a point-of-view from the presenter.

An exceptional presentation will utilize:

- Handouts
- Power Point or performed/video examples to illustrate salient points of the topic
- The presenter should also be prepared for a question-and-answer session and should be able to cite research sources beyond the assigned readings and Internet searches.

Paper Criteria

- Craft your responses to the prompts into a cohesive and comprehensive essay.
- Give your essay/paper a thesis-based title
- Cite passages from the assigned text, as well as your own research sources, to support your thesis and analysis
- Include at least 2 sources of your own in addition to the assigned readings in a bibliography
- All assignments are to be typed, double-spaced, and in a reasonably sized font like Times New Roman 12 pt.
- Please number and staple your pages—lost pages will just make your assignment incomplete.
- Also, include the assignment number and due date on the front page.
- Title ALL of your work; it helps to focus your writing thematically
- Please bring a hard copy of each writing assignment to class on its due date, and also send it to me as an attachment.

Evaluation/Grade Breakdown:

25% Classroom contribution, discussion, participation, attendance and growth
—no unauthorized or excessive usage of cellphones in class

25% Written Work

25% Creative Work and Research Presentations

20% Final Project

5% Karma

Missing two assignments will result in a failing grade.

ASSIGNMENT EXTENSIONS will only be considered up until 72 hours before an Assignment is due.

The make-up period for missed assignments is two-weeks after the due date

Late Assignments with a step-down can only be made-up within one week of assignment

Remember: Written work can be made up, missed absences and class participation cannot

Extra credit. This course is designed with multiple opportunities to share your work and ideas as well as opportunities to revise most assignments in order to make improvements. “Extra credit” is therefore built into the makeup of the class assignments, and no additional assignments will be considered. Staying on top of your work is far better than adding extra assignments to make up for missed work.

Academic integrity. With regards to written homework assignments, this Department takes the matter of plagiarism very seriously. All written homework is expected to be your own, and not copied from other sources. Evidence of cheating can lead to serious consequences, which may include failure of the particular assignment, failure of the entire course, and expulsion from the school. So don't do it. Be creative. Be original.

For further information, read the **CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity** at: <http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-procedures/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

Attendance and lateness policy. The Department of Theatre and Speech adheres to City College's strict attendance policy. Consistent attendance is an absolute requirement for success in this course. City College specifies that if a student misses five regularly scheduled class meetings, then he/she will either have to drop the class or fail. Punctuality is also important, and lateness will result in a significant lowering of the final grade.

SCHEDULE OF STUDY

Note: Because each group of students is different, the following schedule is subject to change.

UNIT I:

DRAMATIC STRUCTURE and CREATING CHARACTERS:

How Playwrights and Actors Transform Words into Action

WEEK 1 **Course Introduction / What is the "Playwright's Concept" or the structural DNA**
AUG. 28 of a play? / Read and Analyze "Symbiosis," a skit from THE COLORED MUSEUM

Assignment # 1 – Due Wed SEPT 4

Read and analyze "Symbiosis," a skit from THE COLORED MUSEUM

Read: "Symbiosis"

Chapter 3: How to Read a Play

Write an analytic essay that:

- Identifies the Playwright's Concept of "Symbiosis"
 - Character Motivations for MAN and KID characters
 - Cite examples of how this skit applied elements of "Aristotle Poetics" from Chapter 3
- All assignment criteria will be posted to Blackboard.*

Please note for Week 2 **Thur. SEPT 5 ** CCNY FOLLOWS A MONDAY SCHEDULE

WEEK 2 **Discuss analysis of "Symbiosis" / Creative Exercise: Character Monologues**
SEPT 4 & 5* **Thur. 9/5** CCNY FOLLOWS A MONDAY SCHEDULE**

In-Class Exercise: Creating a Character Monologue

Interviewing a classmate for a Monologue Portrait or Dramatic Sketch

Assignment # 2 – Due SEPT 11

Write a Classmate Portrait/Character Monologue

Part I. Monologue Portrait or Dramatic Sketch of a classmate based on in-class interview

Part II. Process Reflection—cite how you incorporated elements from Chapter 3 "How to Read a Play," in how you wrote and visualized your Classmate Portrait

WEEK 3 **Turning Words into actions through Acting Improvisation**

SEPT 9-11 How actors physically interpret words?

UNIT I Presentations: Hear, Discuss and Improvise on Classmate Portraits

Assignment # 3 – Due SEPT 16

Creating a physical character from your Classmate's Portrait of you.

Read

- The "Classmate Portrait/Character Monologue" that your classmate wrote about you

- Introduction from THE EMPTY SPACE by Peter Brook

Write some notes and ideas about how you would physically and vocally imagine yourself playing the “character”—based on your classmate’s portrait of you.
(i.e.) What are two gestures this “character” would use?
Cite examples and get additional inspiration and ideas from the Peter Brook reading.

WEEK 4 Improvisation, Session II,

SEPT 16-18 Preview reading, then listening to THE FANTASTICKS

Assignment # 4 / Due SEPT 25

Compare and contrast reading and then listening to THE FANTASTICKS,
a musical by Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones
Make arrangements to **attend** THE FANTASTICKS performed @ CCNY, 9/26-29

Read and Listen to THE FANTASTICKS

WRITE Analytic essay that:

- Identifies the Playwright’s Concept of THE FANTASTICKS
- How music impacts the narrative and drama/comedy

UNIT II:

THE DIRECTOR, DRAMATURG and STAGING A PLAY

How do we take a script from the page to the stage ... from the past to today and beyond? (Weeks 5-7)

WEEK 5 Elements of Staging a Play / How do Directors and Dramaturgs shape a play?

SEPT 23-25 What is Dramaturgy? / Preview seeing vs. reading THE FANTASTICKS

Assignment # 5 / Due OCT 2

Attend THE FANTASTICKS here at CCNY, 9/26-29

Read

Chapter 4: How to See a Play

Chapter 9: Directors

Write a reflection essay that compares and contrasts:

- Seeing vs. reading and listening to THE FANTASTICKS
- What were some acting, directing and musical choices made?
- What type of stage was used for the production?

Include citations from Chapter 4: How to See a Play & Chapter 9: Directors

WEEK 6 Discussion: Seeing vs. reading THE FANTASTICKS

OCTOBER 2 (NO CLASS ON SEPT 30)

Assignment # 6 / Due OCT 7

Create a Director’s Concept and Dramaturg’s Packet for an alternative staging of THE FANTASTICKS.

WEEK 7 UNIT II Presentations: Director’s Concept and Dramaturg’s Packet for an alternate

OCT 7 staging of THE FANTASTICKS—presenters TBA.

Assignment # 7 / Due OCT 16

Analyze YELLOW FACE a “mock-documentary” play by David Henry Hwang

Read

- YELLOW FACE
- “The Battle of ‘Miss Saigon’: Yellowface, Art and Opportunity”
By Michael Paulson from *THE NEW YORK TIMES* (Blackboard)

WRITE Analytic essay that:

- Identifies the Playwright’s Concept of YELLOW FACE
- Explores the impact of critics and the media on YELLOW FACE—on stage and off.

Cite examples from both assigned readings

UNIT III:

CRITICS, REPRESENTATION AND CULTURAL POWER IN THEATRE

—*On and Off-Stage, In 21st Century USA and 17th Century France* (Weeks 7-9)

WEEK 8 **Discussion: YELLOW FACE: Critics, Representation and Cultural Power** in 21st
OCT 16 Century / Preview TARTUFFE, a verse play by Molière (17th century France)
NO CLASS 10/14

Assignment # 8 / Due OCT 23

Analyze TARTUFFE, a verse play by Molière, and the powers that be on-stage and off in 17th century France

Read TARTUFFE

Excerpts from Chapter 16: The Triumph and Decline of Neoclassicism

WRITE an essay that compares and contrasts TARTUFFE and YELLOW FACE, as well as Critics, Representation and Cultural Power in 17th Century France and 21st Century USA.

What is a current situation in theatre or film that critics and media have impacted?

Include citations from the “Tartuffe spotlight” and essay on French Theatre in Chapter 16

Make arrangements to **attend** SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER @CCNY, 10/17-19)

- Be prepared to discuss in class

WEEK 9 **Discussions: Critics and Cultural Power from TARTUFFE to YELLOW FACE.**
OCT 21-23 Seeing SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

Assignment # 9 / Due OCT 28

Analyze THE COLORED MUSEUM an episodic collage play by George C. Wolfe

Read THE COLORED MUSEUM

WRITE an essay that analyzes how the “episodic collage” structure of this play serves the overall Playwright’s Concept of George C. Wolfe.

How did this worked in three individual skits?

UNIT IV:

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

COMEDY & THE SYMBOLISM of SOUND and SET DESIGN (Weeks 10-13)

WEEK 10 **How does form follow dramatic function in THE COLORED MUSEUM?**
OCT 28-30 **Part I: How do Set and Sound Design create physical and audio metaphors on stage?** / FINAL PROJECTS preview I

Assignment # 10 / Due NOV 6

How does form follow function in THE MOTHERFUCKER WITH THE HAT by Stephen Adly Guirgis?

Read THE MOTHERFUCKER WITH THE HAT

Make arrangements to **attend** THE MOTHERFUCKER... @ CCNY, 11/7 – 11/9)

WRITE Analytic essay that:

- Identifies the Playwright's Concept of THE MOTHERFUCKER...
 - Compares and contrasts comedy and era in this play with THE COLORED MUSEUM
- Cite examples from both assigned readings

Assignment # 11 / Due NOV 6

Final Project Proposals

WEEK 11 How does form follows function in THE MOTHERFUCKER...

NOV 4-6 Part II: How do Set and Sound Design create physical and audio metaphors on stage?
Announce Final Project Teams & Schedules

Assignment # 12 / Due NOV 11

Create a Symbolic Concept for Sound and Set Design of one of the skits of THE COLORED MUSEUM **or** THE MOTHERFUCKER...

Read Chapter 10 Designers and Technicians

Write brief process reflection citing examples from Chapter 10.

Extra Credit for physical mock-ups of set or paintings/drawings of set...samples are required

Assignment # 13 / Due NOV 13

Attend THE MOTHERFUCKER WITH THE HAT @ CCNY, 11/7 – 11/9)

Write a brief reflection that compares and contrasts reading vs. seeing this play

WEEK 13 Unit IV Presentations: Concept for Sound and Set Design of one of the skits of

NOV 18-20 THE COLORED MUSEUM **or** THE MOTHERFUCKER...Presenters TBA
Discussion: Seeing vs. reading THE MOTHERFUCKER...

Unit V: FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOPS: Groups and Schedule TBA

Assignment # 15 / Due DEC 9

Compare and contrast reading vs. seeing URINETOWN @ CCNY, 12/5-7
(Criteria to be posted to Blackboard)

Assignment # 16 Due DEC. 11

FINAL REFLECTION PAPER ON FINAL PROJECT
(Criteria to be posted to Blackboard)

Assignment # 17 Due DEC. 11

Karma Assignment also due on DEC. 11 (details to be announced...)

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CCNY THEATRE DEPARTMENT SCHEDULE & TICKET POLICY

DEPARTMENT TICKET POLICY:

Tickets are available for purchase in the Theatre Office (Compton Goethals 311) beginning three weeks prior to the first performance, from Monday - Friday (10am - 4pm). Tickets may also be reserved at ccny.cuny.edu/theatre/thisseasonsshows. Follow the directions **carefully**, and make sure that you pay for those reserved tickets **one week prior to the first performance in person at Compton Goethals 311**, or else those tickets will be sold to people on the Wait List.

The price for all tickets is \$5.00.

REMINDER: ALL THEATRE CLASSES MUST SEE ALL FOUR PRODUCTIONS EACH SEMESTER.

Box Office opens 30 minutes prior to show time.

If you do not arrive by the time the show has started, you will not be allowed into the theatre.

This ticket is only valid for the time and date listed on the front.

THERE ARE NO TICKET REFUNDS OR EXCHANGES.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Aug. 27	(6:15 - 7pm)	REQUIRED MEETING FOR THEATRE MAJORS & MINORS (CG 318)	
Aug. 27	(7 - 9 pm)	FALL OPEN AUDITIONS	(Compton-Goethals, 310)
Aug. 28	(6 - 9pm)	FALL OPEN ADITIONS	(Compton-Goethals, 310)
Aug. 29	(12-2 pm and 6 - 9pm)	FALL OPEN ADITIONS	(Compton-Goethals, 310)
Aug. 30	(TBA)	FALL CALLBACKS	(Compton-Goethals, 310)

(All City College Students are welcome to audition! You may prepare a short monologue, but you may also audition with a scene that you'll be given at the audition. Scripts for the shows are available in CG 311.)

The Fantasticks, A Musical by Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones

Directed by Keyla Mata Castro

September 26th-29th, 2019

Compton Goethals 318

She Stoops to Conquer, by Oliver Goldsmith

Directed by Chan Harris

October 17th-19th, 2019

Aaron Davis Hall, Theatre B

The Motherfucker with the Hat, by Stephen Adly Guirgis

Directed by Christopher Bello

November 7th-9th, 2019

Aaron Davis Hall, Theatre B

Urinetown, A Musical by Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis

Directed by Jennifer Tuttle

December 5th-7th, 2019

Aaron Davis Hall, Marian Anderson Theatre

New Play Collaborations: A Festival of New Plays

Mentored by Jennifer Wineman and Liz Wisan

December 12th-13th, 2019 (Time TBD)

Compton Goethals 318

PERFORMANCES (UNLESS SPECIFIED) ARE:

THURSDAY – SATURDAY AT 7PM; THURSDAY AT 12:15; and SATURDAY at 2PM.

**EXCEPTION: FIRST STUDENT SHOW IN 318 WILL ALSO HAVE
A SUNDAY PERFORMANCE AT 2PM.**