

RECEPTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN THEATRE IN THE USSR

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Various aspects of the origin, evolution and present condition of African-American theatre and drama have long been within the range of attention of literary scholars in the former Soviet Union. In the 1920s and 1930s the Soviet critics' interest in Black culture was fostered by its pronounced social undertones. The revival of this interest in the late 1950s coincided with the new and exceptionally productive stage in the evolution of Black theatre in the USA which was immediately connected with the important role which theatre and drama played in the Black revolution. In the 1960s and 1970s Soviet scholars addressed, first and foremost, the problem of correlation and balance between art and ideology, examining the ways the Black protest movement was reflected in works by African American dramatists. The focus in current studies in Black theatre is eventually shifting from politics to the arts, as researchers tend today to concentrate on such issues as the folk roots of African-American theatre, its diverse uses of popular traditions, its African and European influences and its dramatic techniques, both verbal and non-verbal.

As an integral part of American studies in general, research in the field of African-American theatre and drama has always been of certain interest to Soviet academics. But for Ukrainian scholars it is endowed with additional attraction due to the memory of the legendary friendship which had once united two great men — Ira Aldridge, the first Black tragedian to have won international acclaim, and Taras Shevchenko, Ukraine's national bard.¹

Even though until recently this country could not boast of a single study entirely devoted to Black theatre, still there can be no doubt that various aspects of its origin, evolution and present condition have long been within the range of our scholars' attention. The problems under discussion are wide in scope, encompassing different stages in the historical development of African-American theatre, the delicate balance between ideology and aesthetics which was occasionally upset by Black dramatists (especially in

the 1960s), the uses of popular traditions, both African and African American, and various drama techniques applied by Black authors. Special consideration was given to dramatic works by Lorraine Hansberry, LeRoi Jones and Ed Bullins.

Chronology

Soviet studies in Black theatre fall, in my opinion, into two main periods, the first embracing the 1920s and 1930s, and the second beginning in the late 1950s, with a gap between them bridged by a few occasional references. The current third period is marked by major changes in Soviet political and ideological standards which have affected our literary studies considerably.

The 1920s saw the establishment of Soviet literary criticism characterized from the outset by a pronounced emphasis upon the social relevance of arts and letters.² This accounted for the lively interest displayed by Soviet critics (A. Abramov, S. Dinamov, V. Fritches, I. Kashkin) in African-American culture with its obvious social undertones. Noting the incorporation of Black tradition into the mainstream of US culture and the growth of African-American racial self-consciousness, the researchers based their conclusions chiefly upon the Black novel. Their observations on theatre were but sporadic in the first two decades of Soviet literary studies.³ The main reason for this was, in my opinion, the fact that at that time Soviet scholars, for the most part, were unable to see actual Black theatre productions, and the texts of the novels were more readily available than those of the plays. Sociological criteria overwhelmingly dominated over the aesthetic ones, resulting in rather narrow-minded and somewhat simplified attitudes.⁴

Due to World War II and the subsequent setting in of the "cold war" and inner reaction in the USSR, the 1940s and early 1950s were not very conducive to American studies. The late 1950s, however, brought about the first breaches in the "iron curtain" which promoted the revival of interest in Western culture. The "thaw" in Soviet public and intellectual life coincided with more or less similar developments in the USA awakening from the lethargy of McCarthyism. The tumultuous 1960s came with their mass movements including the fight for civil rights as an important constituent. These events had a direct bearing upon Black theatre, since it was on the crest of that huge billow that Black theatre took its present shape — as a highly controversial entity of diverse ideological and aesthetic phenomena drawing upon years of previous achievement. The new stage in the Black Liberation movement, unprecedented in its intensity and scope, was accompanied by the most momentous rise in Black creativity since the Harlem Renaissance. Direct participation in the protest movement against the background of a rapidly changing social scene released the creative energy of Black people which was often channelled into the arts. Due to a variety of reasons — social as well as artistic — it was Black theatre that became the

“public voice of the Black revolution” (Biggsby 207). No wonder that, beginning with M. Bekker’s study published in 1957, numerous Soviet authors responded to the upsurge in Black drama in their books, reviews and essays printed throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ At the same time, several American publications touching upon the same subject saw the light in Russian translations.⁶ All this brought Black theatre to the foreground of American studies of the period in question.

Authors and Approaches

Regrettably, Soviet literary and cultural studies have long been characterized by a prescribed uniformity of approach. Almost all of them have been strongly biased towards the social at the expense of the artistic — an affliction from which our scholarship is now slowly recovering.⁷ Critical works of the late 1960s and onwards however, are already marked by a comparative diversity of opinions as to certain trends, plays and writers. As far as I can observe, the focus in current research in Black drama is now shifting from politics to the arts, as more Soviet scholars tend to tackle such problems of African-American theatre as its African cultural heritage and folk roots, the presence in it of European cultural tradition, and its imagery, methods of characterization and language, including non-verbal expressive means.

Considering the Soviet perception of Black American theatre, one cannot help but notice a sad peculiarity: our researchers have mostly been dealing with texts, not with live theatre. The reasons are apparent: Black companies did not tour the USSR, and very few Soviet critics had the opportunity to attend performances in the USA. As to Soviet productions of Black American plays, they practically amounted to nil, with Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* being the only happy exception as it enjoyed numerous stage interpretations throughout the country (the first production was mounted by the Leningrad Pushkin Drama Theatre in 1960). Consequently, not only drama critics, but also specialists in various disciplines contributed to the study of African-American theatre and drama — theatre historians, literary scholars, musicologists, culturologists, etc.

There did appear, nevertheless, quite a number of reviews featuring people, companies and productions of Black American theatre. The credit here should largely go to the Soviet monthly periodical *Teatr (Theatre)*, which was very active in the late 1960s and 1970s in covering African-American theatre in articles, reviews and surveys.⁸ A similar approach — that of a theatrical review — was also characteristic of the books by V. Vulf (1982) and M. Gordeyeva (1979). *A History of the World Theatre* (1977) — a manual for drama students — made reference to Black playwrights and companies in the general context of US theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. These publications which were, due to their nature, more informative than

analytical, were extremely instrumental in bringing new developments in African-American theatre within the reach of Soviet theatre connoisseurs.

Black actors found themselves in the spotlight in a few publications. S. Durylin's book *Ira Aldridge* (1940) gave an outline of the great tragedian's brilliant career, while two books by Kulirova and Zimianin written in 1952 and 1985 respectively were devoted to Paul Robeson. The earlier forms of Black theatre, or rather, its precursors — African musical traditions, minstrel shows, Ethiopian operas, burlesques, plantation concerts — are treated in several books and essays on American music, by critics like V. Konen (1965) and E. Kampus (1983), as they are justly regarded principal factors in the shaping of national musical sub-genres like blues, jazz, ragtime, etc.

It was the study of *written texts*, however, that accounts for the bulk of Soviet research in Black theatre, though the texts were far from easily available. Only a few plays by Black authors have been so far translated into Russian (*Scottsboro Limited* by Langston Hughes, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* by Lorraine Hansberry and *Blues for Mr Charlie* by James Baldwin; LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman* is scheduled for publication).⁹ As for the English originals, they can be found only in major libraries.

Every period in the history of Black theatre was reflected in Soviet literature, though not always adequately. Many plays and dramatists of the early 20th century are mentioned by A. Romm in her study of American drama in the first half of the century (1968) in connection with the opposition "nature/civilization" which she considers to be the key conflict at that period. T. Tsintsadze's survey of Black American literary history (1983) deals with the Black Renaissance, with special focus upon theoretical writings and poetry; it stresses, however, the great role played by Harlem theatres of the first decades of the century in wedding popular Black tradition to serious drama. In two essays devoted to this period (1984 and 1991 respectively) I sought to present Black theatre in its dynamics and to investigate the problem of typological similarity between Irish and Black American cultural phenomena.

B. Gilenson's book *American Literature in the 1930s* (1974) contains a chapter on radical companies of the "red decade" — Theatre Union, Group Theatre, Federal Theatre — highlighting Black dramatists' participation in these projects. Dramatic works by Langston Hughes who is, in all probability, the most popular Black poet in the USSR, were mentioned, as a rule, in forewords to the collections of his prose and verse.¹⁰

The 1940s and the early 1950s remain, for the most part, a blank spot in this country as far as Black theatre is concerned. After the 1930s we have to make a wide leap directly to the 1960s.

A few major academic publications on the current American cultural situation appeared in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.¹¹ Though not immediately

concerned with Black studies, their authors — A. Muliarchik, A. Nikoliukin, A. Zverev, T. Morozova, S. Tchakovsky — made references to the plays by LeRoi Jones, James Baldwin and others in order to establish their links with the prevailing ideologies of the time. As even their titles suggest, some other pamphlets and essays — *John Brown's Soldiers* (1965) by M. Tugusheva, *Uncle Tom's Grandchildren Keep on Fighting* (1962) and *The Voices of the Black Revolution* (1966) by R. Orlova — were written in the same vein concentrating primarily upon the political connotations of Black writing (drama included). On the other hand, authors like B. Smirnov (1976) and G. Zlobin (1968), specializing in American theatre, presented their views of Black drama as a part of theatrical process under way in the USA. Maya Koreneva put out her reviews of the contemporary situation in American theatre offering her subtle analysis of African American plays in terms of artistic achievement (1975). B. Gilenson, in his turn, viewed the Black drama of the turbulent decade from the perspective of the African American literary tradition (1981). My works on the Black theatre of that period (1985, 1987, 1990) dealt with the realization of the Black comic tradition in drama, with interrelated elements of various aesthetic systems in African American plays and with different kinds of dramatic conflicts.

Playwrights

The critical variety of today is best reflected, in my opinion, in the diverse treatment of authors whose work has evoked the widest comment here — Lorraine Hansberry, LeRoi Jones and Ed Bullins.

Lorraine Hansberry, has always been favoured by Soviet critics thanks to her unquestionably democratic and humanistic stand, to her adherence to traditional forms of drama, as well as to her fearless acceptance of the "flame of commitment" (*New York Sunday Times* 1964), her appealing personality and her early death. In addition to the two plays, a few of her essays have been translated into Russian.¹² Virtually every writer describing the developments in Black American theatre in the late 1950s and early 1960s referred to Hansberry's drama as a fine specimen of genuinely progressive and talented African-American art, though they did not see eye to eye in their assessment of the playwright's work. R. Orlova, for instance, believed that the message of *A Raisin in the Sun* had to do with the assertion of ordinary people's potential grandeur; she underlined the universality of the play's conflicts which accounted, according to her, for its successful run on the world's stages, including the Soviet ones. M. Druzina, on the other hand, objected to the approach to Hansberry's play as a psychological family drama on the grounds that such interpretation deprived the play of its political overtones. For her the play's supreme message was to show Black Americans' impassioned urge to restore their national and human dignity (60-76).

Analysing *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, G. Zlobin laid special

emphasis on the fact that Sidney Brustein's restoration to life was effected through his own bitter political experience. In the critic's opinion, the logic of the play led to an unambiguous conclusion: in the newspaper which he started Brustein was going to fight against the insanity of the modern world enlisting the assistance of his compatriots, both Black and white.

In her review of the collection of Hansberry's later plays M. Koreneva highly appreciated the dramatist's humanity, tolerance and broad-mindedness in tackling the burning issues of inter-racial relations. She also reflected upon the writer's quest for a contemporary intellectual hero. Summing up, Koreneva points out that though Hansberry died in the heyday of the Black revolution, her passionate and profoundly humane voice was still contributing to the spiritual liberation of the Black people of America (137-38).

In his extensive and thorough articles V. M. Paverman investigated specific problems and techniques used by L. Hansberry in her drama (1979, 1990).

My essay "Sean O'Casey and Lorraine Hansberry: A Live Tradition" proceeded from noting traits of similarity between *Juno and the Paycock* and *A Raisin in the Sun* on the levels of subject-matter, plot and characterization to wider generalizations about O'Casey's tradition which is markedly present in Hansberry's social and aesthetic views (1986: 52-58).

It is natural that LeRoi Jones with his controversies and protean transformations in ideology and art proved a much more difficult subject for Soviet studies in which he figured very prominently in the late 1960s and 1970s. The majority of authors — B. Gilenson, A. Zverev, G. Zlobin, I. Kovalev, M. Koreneva, A. Nikoliukin, T. Morozova, M. Tugusheva, B. Smirnov, V. Vulf and others — regarded him as the Black dramatist of the decade. Soviet scholars, with few exceptions, did not question Jones' highly imaginative gift, the sincerity of his ardent protest against racism, and the powerful impact his writings exercise on readers and viewers. At the same time, they invariably presented Jones as a talented artist misled by erroneous ideological guidelines (namely, nationalistic). Critical attention was accorded, mainly, to his drama of the 1960s and early 1970s — *The Toilet*, *Dutchman*, *The Slave*, *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*, *The Slave Ship* — whereas his later work, *Motion of History*, for example, remains mostly in the shadow.

B. Gilenson speaks of Jones' artistic method as a fusion of naturalistic and absurdist elements: M. Tugusheva maintains that Jones' work represents Black culture's drive for self-sufficiency, while S. Kotlob attempts to trace literary and theatrical trends, especially European ones, which have left an imprint upon Jones' drama. My paper on the influence of the Theatre of the Absurd upon Leroi Jones (1991) is concerned with similar problems. V. Vulf studies the way Jones' seemingly offensive diatribes against white America have, paradoxically, found their way into the mainstream. T. Morozova

argues that Jones failed to express his nationalistic ideas through realistic images and had to resort to expressionist masks. For A. Nikoliukin Jones is the creator of the existentialist Black character alienated from his native country. M. Koreneva draws the reader's attention to Jones' inventive imagery and the parable quality of his plays. A. Zverev focuses on Jones' ideological evolution corresponding, according to the critic, to various stages in the Black protest movement.

Most of these and other observations were based, first and foremost, upon *Dutchman* — the play which has received the widest coverage and the greatest acclaim. It is true that R. Orlova admits her failure to come to grips with the play's dream-like nature, but still she refers to it as "talented," though "confused." G. Zlobin associates its theme to the problem of Black identity and strives to examine it in terms of the Black idiom. My essay probed into differences in the presentation and treatment of inter-racial conflict in L. Jones' *The Slave* and L. Hansberry's *Les Blancs* (1984).

Ed Bullins, though not so much in the limelight, also received his share of critical appraisal. M. Koreneva called him "the leading dramatist of Black America." I. Kholmogorova holds that Bullins' principal task as a writer was to reveal the actual reasons for Black Americans' misfortunes which are deeply rooted in modern society. I. Kovalev suggests that the basic structural element in Bullins' drama is its ghetto atmosphere wrought with despair and tragic anticipation. My article was aimed at tracing the playwright's evolution from psychological drama with Chekhovian undercurrents to propaganda plays of the 1970s.¹³

Summing up, it may be argued that Soviet scholars have made a certain contribution, however modest, to the study of Black theatre in the USA. To my mind, African-American drama of the 1960s has received more or less adequate, though by no means exhaustive, coverage in this country. The first-priority task facing us at present is to learn more about the current facts which are so far very little known here. Earlier pages in the history of Black theatre also await interpretation by the scholars of new independent states which used to make up the Soviet Union. One of the most promising trends in our work to follow could be, in my opinion, the typological study in Black American culture and the cultures of former Soviet nations. I hope that the present openness of attitudes and better opportunities for seeing productions and for reading plays will encourage further studies in this field which are essential, I am sure, for a mutually enriching dialogue between two different cultural traditions.

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Notes

1. Taras Shevchenko met Ira Aldridge in November 1858. Aldridge was on tour in Russia and Shevchenko had recently returned from his ten-year exile caused by his participation in an anti-autocratic and anti-serfdom society. On November 10 he attended the first performance of Othello in St. Petersburg where Aldridge played the lead. The poet was enraptured with the Black tragedian's acting. Two days later they met each other at the house of Count F. P. Tolstoy, Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Arts. His daughter Ekaterina knew many languages and often acted as interpreter during the conversations between Shevchenko and Aldridge. The two artists took to each other immediately. Both their dispositions and fates were much alike. In November – December 1858 they met almost daily spending long hours in animated discourse. Shevchenko, who was also a prominent painter, made a portrait of Ira Aldridge which he completed on December 25, shortly before the actor's leaving. Both of them left their signatures on the portrait. When they were parting, Aldridge promised Shevchenko to visit his native Ukraine. Unfortunately, he did not manage to keep his promise until the poet's death in 1861. Though these two great men had known each other for two months only, their friendship left an indelible impression upon both of them and became a landmark in the cultural history of the two peoples. For a more detailed treatment of the subject see I. Kulnych, *Poet i tragik [The Poet and the Tragedian]* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1964); S. Durylin. *Ira Aldridge* (Moscow-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1940). I think that it is chiefly because of this friendship that the well-known book on Aldridge was translated into Ukrainian and published in Kiev, while there is no Russian translation of it (H. Marshall, M. Stock, *Ira Aldridge-negritianskiy tragik [Ira Aldridge, The Negro Tragedian]* [Kiev:Mystetstvo, 1966]).
2. The official viewpoint was that this period, formative for Marxist-Leninist literary theory and criticism in the USSR, was marked by a fierce ideological struggle against numerous "deviations" from the "main line." The most important of these "deviations" were the "vulgar sociological school" represented by V. M. Fritche, P. I. Sakulin, V. F. Pereverzev, and the "formal school" with such brilliant exponents as B. M. Eihenbaum, B. V. Tomashevsky, Yu. I. Tynianov, V. Shklovsky. What it meant in reality was the fact that the 1920s saw a remarkable variety of approaches to literature. The 1930s witnessed the triumph of uniform Marxist-Leninist attitudes which was not the result of scholarly arguments, but was determined by political factors — gross intervention of the totalitarian state in every sphere of cultural life. It manifested itself in disguised and overt repressions against dissenters and often assumed the extreme forms of exile and physical extermination.
3. For example, N. Efros, "Teatr negrov" [Theatre of Negroes], *Sovr. Zapad* 3 (1923): 223-24; a few reviews of Langston Hughes' plays in current periodicals: A. Abramov, "Novoye v amerikanskoy dramadurgii" [New Developments in American Drama], *Teatr* 2/3 (1939): 48-49; "Langston hyuz—poet i dramaturg" [Langston Hughes — Poet and Playwright], *Oktiabr* 11 (1938): 217.
4. Even official sources had to admit later that the "straightforward, rigid and simplified sociological analysis" practised in the 1920s "led to the serious underestimation of the cultural and literary legacy," (*Sovetskoye literaturovedeniye za 50 let [Soviet Literary Science During 50 Years]* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968: 19).
5. The first Soviet dissertation on Black American theatre was defended in 1986 at

- the Kiev Institute of Literature, Academy of Sciences of Ukraine: N. A. Vyssotskaya, *The Dramatic Conflict in African American Drama of the 1960s and the early 1970s*.
6. Ph. Bonosky, *Dve Kultury* [Two Cultures] (Moscow: Progress, 1978); H. Winston, *Strategiya bor'by chernogo naseleniya* [The Strategy of Struggle for Blacks] (Moscow: Progress, 1975); Dick Gregory, *Tchenomazi* [Nigger] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1969); P. Robeson, *Na tom ya stoyu* [On This I Stand] (Moscow: Pravda, 1958); *Govorit Pol'Robeson* [Paul Robeson Speaks] (Moscow: Progress, 1981).
 7. According to a contemporary stand, in the late 1940s and early 1950s many problems of foreign literature were treated by Soviet literary scholars in a distorted light. A number of major works were condemned as "reactionary literature," and this unfavourably affected the publishing practice. "For more than a decade Soviet readers were deprived of the translations of many outstanding books. Creative work by a number of prominent writers was hushed up" (*Sovetskoye literaturovedeniye za 50 let* [Soviet Literary Science During 50 Years] (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968, 312)). The same prohibitions were imposed upon literary criticism. The "decision ushered in by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party and upheld by N. S. Khrushchev's more liberal rule brought about the lifting of many restrictions and taboos, made it possible to at least partly depart from purely "class" criteria in the assessment of literary phenomena. At the same time, liberalization did not touch the underlying premises of Soviet literary studies. Even comparatively recent publications were firmly grounded in Marxist Leninist theory (see, for instance, *Novye tendentsii v metodologii sovetskogo literaturovedeniya i literaturnoy kritiki* [New Trends in the Methodology of Soviet Literary Studies and Literary Criticism] (Moscow: Inion, 1985)). The last few years, however, saw publications in which the authors have tried to dispense with dogmatic approaches and to offer their individual and independent views.
 8. Z. Voinova, "Negritianskiy teatr v Nyu-Yorke" [Negro Theatre in New York], *Teatr* 4 (1969): 126-27; I. Kovalev, "Teatr stradaniya, nadezhdy i bor'by" [Theatre of Suffering, Hope and Struggle], *Teatr* 3 (1974): 114-21; I. Kovalev, "Dva goda negritianskogo ansamblya" [Two years of Negro Ensemble Company], *Teatr* 1 (1970): 149-51; S. Kotlobay, "Leroy djons protiv rasizma" [LeRoi Jones against Racism], *Teatr* 8 (1968): 140-42; I. Kholmogorova, "V sporakh o negritianskoy drame" [Discussing the Black drama], *Teatr* 2 (1972): 159-60.
 9. L. Hughes' *Scottsboro Limited* was even twice published in the same year in different Russian translations: *Skottsboro* (Moscow: MORP, 1932); *Uzniki Skottsboro* [Scottsboro Prisoners], in the book *Raskaty* [Thunderstorm], (Leningrad: Lengikhl, 1932: 416-22); L. Hansberry, *Iziuminka na solntse* [A Raisin in the Sun], *Innostrannaya Literatura* 11 (1959): 38-89; *Plakat v okne Sidneya Brustaina* [The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window] *Innostrannaya Literatura* 3 (1968): 123-83; James Baldwin, *Bluz dla mistera Tcharli* [Blues for Mr Charlie] *Innostrannaya Literatura* 11 (1964): 149-210. The choice of texts for translation depended largely upon their ideological validity, though literary workers of *Innostrannaya literatura* [Foreign Literature], a journal which was the most influential edition in this field, did their best to decide upon the works combining acceptable ideology with sufficiently high aesthetic standards. At present ideological barriers have been practically removed but they have been replaced by financial problems.
 10. The first translations of Langston Hughes' poetry appeared in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* [Literary Gazette] on January 9, 1931 (4 poems). That was followed by a

great number of publications, both in periodicals and in book form, the fullest collections being those of 1964 and 1977.

11. *Amerikanskaya literatura i odshchestvenno-politicheskaya bor'ba. 60-ye-nachalo 70-kh godov XX veka* [American Literature and Socio-Political Struggle. 1960s-early 1970s], Moscow: Nauka, 1977; *Amerikanskaya khudozhestvennaya kul'tura v sotsial'no-politicheskom kontekste 70-kh godov XX veka* [American Artistic Culture in the Socio-Political Context of the 1970s], Moscow: Nauka, 1982; *Literatura SSHA XX veka. Opyt tipologicheskogo issledovaniya* [US Literature in the 20th Century. A Typological Study], Moscow: Nauka, 1978; *Osnovnyye tendentsii razvitiya Literaturny SSHA* [Main Trends in the Development of the US Literature], Moscow: Nauka, 1975.
12. L. Hansberry, "Vremia brosayet vam mastera kul'tury" [Time Challenges You, Masters of Culture], *Innostrannaya Literatura* 7 (1963): 252-55; L. Hansberry. "Negr v amerikanskoy teatre" [Negro in the American Theatre], in *Pisateli SSHA o literaturny SSHA* [US Writers on Literature], Moscow: Progress, 1982, 232-37.
13. N. Vyssotskaya, "Sevat' zerna peremen/obreteniya i poteri Eda Bulinza" [... "To Sow the Seeds of Changes.../Ed Bullins' Ups and Downs], *Literaturnaya Ucheba* 1 (1985): 172-80.

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Πολλές πλευρές της αφετηρίας, της εξέλιξης και της σημερινής κατάστασης του αφροαμερικανικού θεάτρου έχουν απασχολήσει εδώ και πολύ καιρό τους κριτικούς της λογοτεχνίας στην πρώην Σοβιετική Ένωση. Κατά τις δεκαετίες του 1920 και 1930 το ενδιαφέρον των Σοβιετικών κριτικών για τη Μαύρη κουλτούρα διαμορφωνόταν από τις έντονες κοινωνικές του προεκτάσεις. Η αναβίωση αυτού του ενδιαφέροντος κατά τα τέλη της δεκαετίας του 1950 συνέπεσε με τη νέα και ιδιαίτερα παραγωγική φάση στην εξέλιξη του Μαύρου Θεάτρου στις ΗΠΑ, που συνδέθηκε κατ' ευθείαν με το σημαντικό ρόλο που έπαιξε το θέατρο στη Μαύρη επανάσταση. Κατά τις δεκαετίες του 1960 και 1970 οι Σοβιετικοί άνθρωποι των Γραμμάτων αντιμετώπισαν κατά κύριο λόγο το πρόβλημα της συσχέτισης και ισορροπίας μεταξύ τέχνης και ιδεολογίας, εξετάζοντας τους τρόπους που το κίνημα της Μαύρης διαμαρτυρίας αντικατοπτρίστηκε στα έργα των Αφροαμερικανών δραματουργών. Η έμφαση μέσα στις τρέχουσες μελέτες πάνω στο Μαύρο θέατρο σιγά-σιγά μετατίθεται από την πολιτική στην τέχνη, καθώς οι ερευνητές τείνουν σήμερα να επικεντρώνουν τις αναζητήσεις τους σε θέματα όπως οι λαϊκές ρίζες του αφροαμερικανικού θεάτρου, οι ποικίλες χρήσεις των λαϊκών παραδόσεων, οι αφρικανικές και ευρωπαϊκές επιδράσεις και οι δραματικές του τεχνικές, φατικές και μη.