

**PLAYWRITING 2 (THTR 366) Spring 2012 4 units**  
**Weds 3 - 5:50 p.m. GFS 216 Jan 11 – Apr 25 2011 No class Mar 14 (Break)**

*Catalogue description: 366 Playwriting II (4, FaSp) Continuation of the work begun in THTR 365. Prerequisite: THTR 365.*

Instructor: Paula Cizmar Contact info: cizmar@usc.edu FB – Paula Cizmar  
www.paulacizmar.com mobile: 323.376.1216 Twitter @paulacizmar  
Office hours: Thurs 10 am - 1 pm; Wed 6 – 8 pm; Tues 1 - 4 pm  
[Note: Office hours are BY APPOINTMENT; I share office space in MCC. To arrange an appointment, please contact me at least 24 hours in advance.]

Through letters, there is no road too difficult to travel, no idea too confusing to be ordered.  
It comes like rain from clouds; it renews the vital spirit. Inscribed on bronze and marble, it  
honors every virtue. It sings in flute and strings and every day is made newer.  
— Lu Chi, *Wen Fu: The Art of Writing*, 200 A.D.

**Course Objectives**

As a student in this workshop, you will experience the creative process firsthand at both the intuitive and technical level while being guided through the writing of a play. Playwriting 2 picks up where Playwriting 1 left off and expands on the exploration of the art and craft of dramatic writing, once again focusing on process. To be investigated are: sources of inspiration and strategies for creativity, character development, generation of stories, intentional use of language, theatricality/spectacle, empathy and metaphor, plus analysis and revision. All work is geared toward the completion of a full-length stage play (55 – 90 minutes long).

Development of the play is essential—as is development of the imagination. Thus, hand in hand with writing is the course goal of discovering and evolving your own unique, artistic voice. Each week discussion and writing exercises will accompany the workshopping of pages, i.e., presenting material for exploration and critique as a prelude to rewriting, expanding, and polishing. We will go green in this course and utilize technology whenever possible to avoid excessive use of paper.

An additional focus: We are seekers. We'll examine current culture and trends in as part of an attempt to define and redefine the Western voice and American playwriting for the 21st century.

**Required Texts**

ONE FLEA SPARE. Naomi Wallace.  
STOP KISS. Diana Son.  
BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO. Rajiv Joseph.  
JERUSALEM. Jez Butterworth.  
LYDIA. Octavio Solis.  
CROOKED. Catherine Treischmann.  
GOOD PEOPLE. David Lindsay-Abaire.  
PLAYWRITING – BRIEF AND BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen.

### Reading Plays

The School of Theatre's Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each playwriting student to read at least seven plays as part of the course. You are encouraged to read not only the assigned plays but also additional plays from the Recommended Reading list. The more you read, the more you become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and forms open to you as a writer.

### Grading

#### Components of the Grade

Your grade will be based on multiple components: completion of writing journal, ongoing writing/revision of your play, completion of reading assignments and presentations re: the reading (may be oral; may be written; may be quizzes), participation in class exercises and discussion, providing feedback for other students' works-in-progress, and completion of your Final Project.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows:

Writing Journal (See below; used for midterm and final grade)	25 percent
Reading and Presentations	20 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Analysis, Participation	25 percent
Final Project (revised draft of play) & Final Exam	30 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline.

Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero.

The Writing Journal is your archive of sketches, research, ideas, and resources for current and future writing. It includes (but is not limited to) the following entries:

Writing exercises and all raw material generated in class (DATE ALL WRITING X's)

Character development work, including but not limited to: exploration of character voice, monologues, character bank, character research, etc. (DATE and add to WJ)

Inspiration "board," experimentation, and plans for Final Project play (Please DATE and add to WJ)

Research related to Final Project play (Please DATE and add to WJ)

Sketches/reactions to reading assignments + poetic investigations (DATE and add to WJ)

Analysis/assessment and creative plan for revisions (DATE and add to WJ)

**NOTE: All Writing Journal entries must be DATED AND LABELED for portfolio review.**

Your Final Project is a REVISED draft of your play. You may not have time for a completely polished rewrite of your script, but you should at least take steps to begin the revision process.

The project will be graded on both artistic merit AND progress, i.e., growth from early exploratory work to final draft. Elements to be assessed are: character development - 25 percent; language (distinct character voice; rhythm, pace, metaphor) - 25 percent; story/structure/theatricality - 25 percent; overall achievement (includes how well script works as a whole, plus professional appearance of script) - 25 percent.

#### Guide to Grades

USC defines grades as follows: A = work of excellent quality; B = work of good quality; C = work of fair quality for undergraduate credit and minimum passing for graduate credit; C- = failing grade for graduate credit; D- = work of minimum passing quality for undergraduate credit; F = failure; IN is given for incomplete work and *must be student-initiated after 12th week and is only awarded under exceptional circumstances*. The following scale is used:

96-100%=A    95-91%=A-    88-90%=B+    85-87%=B    81-84%=B-    78-80%=C+  
 75-77%= C    71-74%= C-    67-70%=D+    66-64%=D    61-63%=D-    60 and below=F

### **Note on Participation**

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. One unexcused absence is allowed. All other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and hand it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

PLEASE NOTE: If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from *your classmates*, NOT from me. Please keep in contact with your fellow writers and arrange to get their notes if you are absent. It may also be necessary to do independent research to make up for what you have missed. Again: When you miss a workshop, you must find a way to make up what you have missed ON YOUR OWN.

### **Extra Credit**

If you desire extra credit, you may participate in a service learning project. Please let me know as early as possible in the semester, so that I can put you in touch with Brent Blair; he will acquaint you with the opportunities for service learning via his project N-TURN at USC.

### **Official Statement from School of Theatre on Trojan Integrity and Plagiarism**

Dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the School of Theatre. Therefore, USC policies on academic integrity will be enforced in this course. Work suspected of containing plagiarized material (the unacknowledged or inappropriate use of another's ideas, wording, or images) will be verified for authenticity by the School of Theatre through internet services. I expect you to familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current "Scampus."

([www.usc.edu/dept/publications/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/scampus); [http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/appendix\\_a.p](http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/appendix_a.p))

### **Disability Services**

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 – 5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776. (Please note: If a medical problem or disability arises during the course of the semester and academic accommodations are needed, the same procedure as detailed here must be followed.)

### **Communications**

Each student is required to maintain a working e-mail account (USC accounts are available free of charge). Each student is required to check his/her e-mail on a regular basis, particularly the evening before class for any notices pertaining to class. My e-mail is noted at the top of this contract. Also, please note: This class is Blackboard-enabled; thus the syllabus and other course information can be found online.

### **Student Responsibilities**

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.

3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade. Only one (1) unexcused absence is allowed.
4. Other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance).
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed; I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; you will need to make arrangements to do independent research on whatever topics you have missed to keep up with the workshop. You will also need to make arrangements with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Do not request notes or information from me. Many materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. If you lose your syllabus or handouts, go to Blackboard.
7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting place, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new location for class meeting. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail.
8. Written work must be typed, and legible copies must be provided for either all workshop participants (or at least a sufficient number so that there are copies for each character, the stage directions reader, and me). No light or damaged copies, please. You may read pages from your computer during early stages of the writing; after a significant amount of material has been created, however, the work must be in print.
9. Please remember: A grade is not given, it is earned.
10. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee that I will receive your message. (Contact information is printed on the first page of the syllabus.)

## SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

### **Week One January 11**

Introduction: *Where Are We—And Where Are We Going?* Assessment & Challenge.

Consider: Surprising yourself; writing the best play you *can't* write; writing beyond your comfort zone. Writing X: Soundtrack/What's Happening?/Guided Tour

Assignments (due week two):

Collect your resources, e.g., research, character bank, burning ideas, poetic impulses, images, emotional foundation, monologues, music/soundtrack, etc.

Read selected scenes from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Bengal Tiger*, and *Stop Kiss* (as designated in class). Prepare to discuss. (Discuss also in Writing Journal.) Read *Playwriting – Brief & Brilliant*.

### **Week Two January 18**

Rituals of Antiquity and Present Day. Conference on: elements of drama, elements of ritual; empathy, archetypes, current/historical events as jumping off point, trends, myths.

Writing X: Ritual Character Encounter. Workshop: Present your resources.

Panels: Ritual/Why&how a play's a play—and not a screenplay/

Read aloud: Selected scenes from *One Flea Spare*, *Stop Kiss*, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. (BRING YOUR BOOKS TO CLASS!)

Discuss: *Playwriting – Brief & Brilliant*.

Assignments (due week three):

Develop your resources into an inspiration “board.” (Could be any or all media.)

Develop characters for your play using a variety of techniques; derive and develop at least one from **myth**, one based on **research**, and one totally from your **imagination**.

Consider: **theme** and how a character can humanize a theme. Create exploratory monologues/scenes/sketches for each of these designated characters for your Writing Journal (WJ). Hint: Your characters will probably be starting to generate story (and/or scene ideas). Let them. Take notes!

Read the rest of *One Flea Spare*, *Stop Kiss*, and *Bengal Tiger*.

Read selected scenes from *Jerusalem*, *Lydia*, *Crooked*, *Good People*. (Bring books to class next week.)

### **Week Three January 25**

The Sky's the Limit: Writing Outside Traditional Rules. Consider: Theatricality, tone, style, and dealing with the impossible on stage. Workshop 1: Present inspiration boards.

Workshop 2: Present character work—scenes, monologues, sketches.

Writing X: Dreams & Dreams.

Read aloud: Scenes from *Jerusalem*, *Lydia*, *Crooked*, *Good People*. (BRING BOOKS TO CLASS!)

Assignment (due week four):

Using ideas/images/intuitions generated thus far, explore and experiment with your Final Project play.

### **Week Four February 1**

Sensory Work/Metaphor: Staying Attuned to the Natural World, the Senses/ Translating “Reality” through Imagery. Writing X: 6 Items/10 Minutes. Workshop: Present explorations/experiments on Final Project Play.

Read aloud: Scenes from assigned plays.

Assignment (due week five): Write new exploratory scene. (Note: Your exploratory scene may be the first scene of your Final Project play—or a later scene. It's not necessary that you write in order, at this point. It may also be a scene that is merely pure exploration and ultimately doesn't make it into the play. That's fine. It's part of the process.)

Read the remainder of the assigned plays. Write personal response to plays in your journal.

### **Week Five February 8**

Language: Sound, Rhythm, Meaning, Hidden Life. Turn in and present: Exploratory scenes. Writing X: Visualization.

Brainstorm further ideas for your Final Project play. (In class)

Assignments (due week six):

Write new scene(s). Continue research.

**Week Six February 15**

Putting It All Together—Structure (including Plot Variations). Writing X: Six plots.

Workshop: Present scenes/ideas for your Final Project play.

Assignments (due week seven):

Write another section of your play. (Hint: Look at Writing X and WJ entries for possible raw material.)

**Week Seven February 22**

Refinements: Subtext, Contradictions, Misdirects, Miscommunication, and the Unreliable. Writing X: Subtext/Contradictions. Workshop: Present scenes.

Assignments (due week eight):

Prepare to present ideas and a plan for your Final Project play. (Also, create an entry on this topic for your WJ.) Due: Week eight.

Write another section of Final Project play. Prepare to turn in pages.

Reminder - Next week: QUIZ + turn in WRITING JOURNAL and script pages for midterm assessment.

**Week Eight February 29**

The Worst-Case Scenario. Pushing Your Character to the Edge/Anticipating an Ending.

Writing X: Worst Enemy/Nightmare. Workshop: Readings/discussions of Final Project plans/scenes.

QUIZ: Brief essay test involving *Playwriting-Brief and Brilliant*, and plays from reading list. Compare and contrast. You may use your books to quote from the plays.

TURN – IN: WRITING JOURNALS for midterm evaluation and script pages written so far for your Final Project play.

Assignment (due week nine):

Write a RAW DRAFT of your Final Project play. Note: Write as much as you can. If there are scenes that you know you can write, even if out of order, write them. If there are scenes that you intend to write but haven't gotten around to writing, add a placeholder in the script or describe it in theatrical terms.

**Week Nine March 7**

Empathy & Metaphor: The Foundation of the Playwright. (And how there cannot be too much of either.) Workshop: Present scenes and Final Project plans.

TURN IN raw draft of your entire play.

Assignment (due week 10): Keep working on your play.

No Class March 14 - SPRING BREAK.

**Week Ten March 21**

Going Beyond: Ways to Risk, Ways to Play, and Looking for a Challenge. Writing X: Scene W/out Dialogue.

Workshop: Present scenes from Final Project play.

Discuss: The feedback on raw draft of your Final Project play. Questions and answers; brainstorming.

Assignments (due week eleven):

Assess the raw material in your WJ. Assess risk-taking and construct a challenge. Look to your sources of inspiration for your Final Project; discuss. Keep working on your play; write new scenes; do revisions as needed.

### **Week Eleven March 28**

Exploration of Rewrite Tools: Traditional and Non-, Mechanical and Non-, Left-brain and Right-brain. Workshop: Present revised scenes and discuss revision plans.

NOTE: Complete drafts of FINAL PROJECTS that are ready may be turned in and presented today—allowing you to get additional feedback (and have extra time) for further revision and final polish.

Assignment: Keep working on your play; revise as needed.

### **Week Twelve April 4**

Focusing. Workshop: Present workshop members' scenes.

(Note: In-class presentations of full scripts—or large segments of scripts—will be scheduled for weeks thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen; be ready to sign up for a particular week.)

Assignment: Continue to workshop FP plays.

### **Weeks Thirteen April 11**

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts (or large segments). (Schedule TBA)

### **Week Fourteen April 18**

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts (or large segments). (Schedule TBA)

### **Week Fifteen April 26**

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts (or large segments).

End Game: Last Look Q&As. Where to go next—how to submit a script.

TURN IN: Your Final Project play.

FINAL EXAM: Feedback & Critique of Scripts **FRI May 4, 2–4 pm**

[W]e write because it gives us courage, and if courage, why not life? Because somehow finding ourselves repeatedly visa-less on the borders of love, we seek to write our way back in.—Ehud Havazalet, "To Live in Tiflis in the Springtime"

By failing to read or listen to poets, a society dooms itself to inferior modes of articulation--of the politician, or the salesman, or the charlatan--in short, to its own. It forfeits...its own evolutionary potential.—Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, 1996

## FORMAT

Final Project plays must be properly formatted and must have a cover page plus a character page, which includes: a list of characters, the time and place, a playwright's note (optional—although this is your chance to speak about the style and world of your play).

When formatting your script, the most important point to consider is readability. The Dramatists Guild has a recommended standard professional format (example follows on next page), however you may do slight variations on the professional standard. I don't require any one in particular; however the following format is **prohibited**. Again:

**DO NOT use the following:**

Max: Did you hear from him yet?

Pat: He'll call. Give him time.

The above format is too cramped, is difficult for actors, directors, literary managers, and producers to read. This format is accepted generally only in PUBLISHED scripts (which are cramped to save space and money; plus they include other anomalies because they are transcriptions of the stage manager's prompt book from the original production).

Though some playwrights play with the formatting when they are writing plays that are more poetic or nontraditional, the following format is considered the industry standard:

**Stage directions**—are indented, single-spaced, and placed in parentheses.

Double space before character name. Use 12-point Courier.

**Character name**—is capitalized and centered. Single space between character name and dialogue. 12-point Courier.

**Dialogue**—single-spaced and typed on a full line, with reasonable margins.

Double space before next character name. 12-point Courier.

**Line readings**—are discouraged; but if you use them, they should be centered like character name and placed in parentheses.

The typed script, then, using this format style, looks something like this:

(Stage directions here.)

CHARACTER NAME

Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue. In 12-point Courier.

CHARACTER NAME

Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue.

*Note how this looks different from a screenplay in that the dialogue extends out to the left margin rather than being clustered under the character name.*

*A sample from a script follows:*

(Len takes another drink, hands Celia the bottle. She drinks and hands it back.)

LEN

Good ole Bobby. Here's to you, B.C. Wherever you are.

(Len finishes off the liquor.)

This place is a pit.

CELIA

It's old. Everyone's old.

LEN

Look at that. Lawns shaved within an inch of their life. Stunted little bushes, one here, one there, no flow to the branches, just regimented rows of ugly little shrubs.

CELIA

Yep. Cracked driveways. Greasy bricks.

LEN

Everything's the color of rust.

CELIA

Rust and motor oil.

LEN

I'm taking you out of here, Celia.

CELIA

Forget it. I'm not leaving.

LEN

Today. Now. Tonight.

(He grabs her; she throws his hand off her arm. He staggers.)

Damn, I'm so drunk.

*\*\*(If you insist on line readings, they should look like this:)*

CELIA

(coolly determined)

Forget it. I'm not leaving.

## Recommended Reading: A Playwright's Bibliography

(In addition to the required reading, here are some books every writer should read at some point during his/her writing career. For your oral presentation, pick a play from the list below.)

### On writing

THE WRITING LIFE, Annie Dillard  
 AN ANATOMY OF DRAMA, Martin Esslin.  
 ON BECOMING A NOVELIST and THE ART OF FICTION, John Gardner  
 WRITING IN RESTAURANTS and THREE USES OF THE KNIFE, David Mamet  
 ONE WRITER'S BEGINNINGS, Eudora Welty  
 ON WRITING WELL, William Zinsser.  
 LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET, Rainer Maria Rilke  
 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL, E.M. Forster  
 MAKING A LITERARY LIFE. Carolyn See  
 SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM. Italo Calvino.

### On playwriting craft

THE ART OF DRAMATIC WRITING, Lajos Egri (classic text; dated, but a helpful resource)

### The submission/competition/grants info bible:

DRAMATISTS SOURCEBOOK, published yearly by TCG

### Plays (an eclectic collection)

OEDIPUS EL REY; and BITTER HOMES AND GARDENS, Luis Alfaro  
 THIN AIR: TALES FROM A REVOLUTION, Lynne Alvarez  
 CLOUD NINE; and FEN, Caryl Churchill  
 SEVEN, a theatrical documentary by Paula Cizmar, Carol K. Mack, Ruth Margraff, Anna Deavere Smith et al.  
 TALES OF THE LOST FORMICANS, Connie Congdon  
 THE SAINT PLAYS, Erik Ehn  
 BACK OF THE THROAT. Youssef El Guindi  
 FEFU AND HER FRIENDS, Maria Irene Fornes  
 DANCING AT LUGHNASA, Brian Friel  
 PYRENEES, David Grieg  
 SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION, John Guare  
 TEA and KOKORO (TRUE HEART), Velina Hasu Houston  
 36 VIEWS, Naomi Iizuka  
 LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER and TWO HEADED, Julie Jensen  
 ANGELS IN AMERICA, Tony Kushner  
 FLOYD COLLINS (musical), book by Tina Landau; music & lyrics by Adam Guettel  
 YELLOWMAN, Dael Orlandersmith  
 MARISOL and CLOUD TECTONICS. Jose Rivera  
 CLEVELAND RAINING, Sung J. Rno  
 THE CLEAN HOUSE, Sarah Ruhl  
 SPRING AWAKENING: A NEW MUSICAL by Steven Sater (based on play by Wedekind)  
 DOUBT, John Patrick Shanley  
 CURSE OF THE STARVING CLASS, Sam Shepard  
 STOP KISS, Diana Son  
 BALTIMORE WALTZ; HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE, Paula Vogel  
 THE FEVER CHART, Naomi Wallace.  
 OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD, Timberlake Wertenbakker  
 JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE; and FENCES, August Wilson  
 ST. LUCY'S EYES, Bridgette Wimberly  
 THE MOUNDBUILDERS; BALM IN GILEAD; and BOOK OF DAYS, Lanford Wilson  
 PORCELAIN; and A LANGUAGE OF THEIR OWN, Chay Yew.