THTR 506  63224D  Advanced Creating Characters
Spring 2016  Thursday  4 – 6:20 pm
Location:  GFS 114

Instructor:  Paula Cizmar
Office:  JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089
Office Hours:  Available:  Tues 12:30 - 6 pm;  Wed 10 am – Noon; Wed 6 – 8 pm;  Thurs 9 - 10 am; Thurs 1 – 3 pm; please note that office hours are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24 hours in advance.  For appointments outside these hours, I am available by videoconference on SKYPE or Google Hangout.
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http://itservices.usc.edu;  School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash Shirke;  contact Info:  shirke@usc.edu,  213.740.1288.  MCC

Course Description and Overview
Catalogue description: THTR 506)  An advanced writing workshop that focuses on continuing development of the crafting of character, centering on depth, breadth, dimensionality, and authenticity.

In most good stories, it is the character’s personality that creates the action of the story.  If you start with a real personality, a real character, then something is bound to happen.
--Flannery O’Connor, Writing Short Stories

Learning Objectives
Advanced Creating Characters is a writing workshop for writers who already have done the foundational work of character development and are looking to delve deeper into the human psyche, with an emphasis on character complexity and authenticity. Original characters, not stereotypes, with distinct voices, quirks, and traits are the goal. The course is also an opportunity for writers to engage in an exploration of sensitivity, empathy, diversity/inclusivity versus cultural appropriation. MFA writers will be challenged to be proactive in the class and develop and apply a set of diagnostic tools that they can use to fix ailing characters on their own. The course work will include not only character creation and scene writing, but also the critical analysis of the work of other contemporary writers. Included will be not only playwrights and groundbreaking television writers, but also memoirists who write about writing in order to determine if we can adapt some of their process for writing fictional plays. Advanced Creating Characters also looks at how to harness the dark side of human nature—inner demons, desires, lies, secrets, and fatal flaws—to craft dramatic stories. Characters will be viewed as a key component of every dramatic work—serving not only as story generators, but also the creators of the world of the dramatic piece and the source of movement in the work.

Emphasis is placed on empathy and metaphor as each person strives to:
•  establish for each character a unique tone, rhythm, voice;
• experiment with diverse modes of character creation;
• discover how to use multidimensional characters as a point of origin for stories;
• explore the “lore” of the play and how this expands the lead character;
• devise a diagnostic tool and a process for reworking/strengthening characters.

Objectives and Beyond…
We’re also adopting key elements of USC’s 21st-century vision as our own by:
—GOING GREEN
—CONNECTING
—TRANSFORMING

What does this mean?
GOING GREEN means that we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will no longer have to print your work; instead, we will project your scenes, brainstorming materials, revision plans, etc. onto a giant screen in GFS via laptop computer. You won’t have to print your Final Project; instead, you’ll turn in a PDF of the script electronically and I will give you feedback directly on your manuscript via electronic Sticky Notes. All handouts and course materials will be paperless, sent via email and available online via Blackboard.

CONNECTING means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. We’ll connect with each other to form a support network so that everyone feels secure taking artistic risks; plus we’ll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what’s going on in class; you may even want to try connecting via the free teleconferencing tools available (Google Hangout, Skype). We’ll also stay attuned to what’s going on in American theatre, and we’ll look at what’s going on in the world—and explore how we can use art for growth and healing. Let’s take a look at where we are—the American West—and consider how the stories of this region have gone untold and the people have gone unrecognized and determine what we can do to change that.

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives, and in the lives of others; we’ll look at creating theatre from a place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern from humanity; we’ll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): None

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
BFE. Julia Cho.
GUM. Karen Hartman
WATER BY THE SPOONFUL. Hudes. (Pultizer Prize 2012)
BETWEEN RIVERSIDE AND CRAZY. Guirgis. (Pulitzer Prize 2015)
BLOOD AND GIFTS. JT Rogers.
MR. BURNS – A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY. Washburn. (One of the most produced plays in US)
JOE TURNER’S COME AND GONE. August Wilson.
PLAYWRITING BRIEF AND BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen.

THE SOUL’S CODE. James Hillman.

Unpublished plays (to be supplied as PDFs)

Published texts available via the USC Bookstore or online at Amazon. Unpublished plays and various articles, essays supplied as PDFs.

The School of Dramatic Arts’ Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in playwriting courses to read at least seven plays as part of the course and to investigate them critically. You are also encouraged to read plays in addition to those on the Required Reading list; in particular, read contemporary work. Plays will be suggested in class; you may also turn to “Recommended Reading” (see Blackboard). The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: The quality of work for the inspiration/research presentation, the reading and discussion segment, the diagnostic tool, and the ongoing writing component is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed. The rubric for determining the quality of work for the Final Project is described below in the detailed description of the project.

Grading Scale for SDA: A indicates work of excellent quality; B of good quality; C of average quality; D of below average quality; and F indicates inadequate work.

Grading Breakdown

Your grade will be based on multiple components: the creation of a character inspiration presentation, the development of character banks/character recipes, completion of the reading assignments, participation in class exercises and discussion, critical analysis, ongoing writing, and completion of your Final Project.

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.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows (see below for details):

- Character Inspiration/Research Presentation 10 percent
- Character Bank/character recipes/monologues/etc 10 percent
- Reading assignments (discussion and critical analysis posts) 10 percent
- Individual Character Diagnostic Tool & Process 10 percent
- Participation 15 percent
- Ongoing writing and revision 20 percent
- Final Project + Final Exam 25 percent

TOTAL 100 percent

The Character Inspiration/Research Presentation is a creative project in which each writer presents the various sources that provide the background for the characters of a play and for the world of the play. In addition to being a research component of writing—this project is also a way to get in touch with your unconscious motivators. These presentations will be supported by video
projection and may include visual art, musical inspirations, charts, graphics, articles/news stories/essays, photographs, podcasts, archival documents—any kind of source material. If desired, the presentations may be done in a specific format, such as Powerpoint, Keynote, Glogster, Pinterest, Prezi, etc. Be prepared to discuss your resources and inspirations for your characters/story both in a creative/metaphoric language, as well as pragmatically. Note that this presentation is a “vision board” and is useful whenever beginning a creative work; it may include items that inspire you in general, or items that relate particularly to the characters you have in mind right now (even if you don’t know what to do with them), or items that are even more specific and directly relate to a play you want to write. This a tool with which you can tap into your imagination; you can use it as an active, multimedia form of brainstorming, as a way to start to explore ideas, as a way to begin to frame your thoughts, as a way to visualize characters, and as a way to promote discussion with other artists to enhance your vision. The “board” part of this vision board presentation is virtual—we’ll project your inspirations onto the screen from a laptop.

Critical Analysis is vital to every writer because it provides a process for assessing artistic work; in the analysis of already published plays, you gain experience in taking a deeper look at character, language, and structure—which can then be applied to evaluating your own work, to assist you in revision. Two short critical analysis posts in which you address components of the assigned reading are required for this course. (These will be posted on BlackBoard.)

What is the diagnostic tool?
Each of you will devise some sort of strategy or process-oriented method for checking your characters for authenticity, voice, and integrity. These will be individualized to your needs/desires as a writer (and perhaps, also, individualized to the requirements of the play you’re working on).

What does participation entail?
Participation includes: Presentations; in-class exercises; discussion of assignments; and feedback provided to other writers’ work.

Your Final Project is a creative work illustrating your understanding of multidimensional characters plus your ability to develop and use such characters. The project will be graded on artistic merit, comprehension of character principles, and progress, i.e., your growth from early exploratory work to final draft. Please bear in mind: Revision of the Final Project is a component of the grade.

HINT: Keep a Creative Journal! This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, and exercises and raw material from class. NOTE: It’s no longer necessary to keep an actual journal, on paper. Due to the proliferation of smart phone and tablet apps for storing notes, etc., the Creative Journal may now be electronic. But do keep one. It will make your writing so much easier!

Note: The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:
• There shall be no unexcused absences.
• No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.
Additional Policies
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. Indeed, in this class, one of our projects depends upon collaboration. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues’ work. 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 turn it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

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. **IF YOU MISS CLASS:** It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed and to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates or Blackboard, not from me. 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 keep in contact with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Again: Do not request notes or information from me. Course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. For your syllabus, handouts, etc., 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 and/or text message.

8. We’re going green in this classroom, so you will be providing all workshop members with copies of your work by **projecting your documents onto the screen in the classroom from your computer**, thus eliminating the need for paper. Instructions on how to do this will be provided and we will create a schedule of volunteer scribes to assist in this area so that it will not be necessary for everyone to carry a laptop to all class meetings. For collaborations, you may work on Google documents that may be team-edited via Google Drive.

9. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with
sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Weeks One - Three  Jan 14 – Jan 28, 2016  Gathering & Preparing
Topics:
Introduction: Complex Characters and Deep Characterization. The Roles of Characters as Story Generators; as Creators of the World of the Play.
Heroes/Myths from the Millennia—Ancient to Contemporary.
Consider: Secrets, Quirks, Contradictions, Habits, Attitudes, Desires, Demons, Inconsistencies, Flaws. What is a character-driven script/story?

Guest speaker: Dr. Brent Blair on James Hillman and depth psychology.

ASSIGNMENTS:
Due week 2:
Read selected scenes from: BFE, Water by the Spoonful, Gum. (Bring books to class.)
Create a Character Inspiration/Research Presentation.
Due week 3:
Continue Character Inspiration Presentations as needed.
Create a character bank with multiple characters including the following:
--at least one character from current events and/or history (with monologue);
--at least one character based on myth/archetype (with monologue);
--at least one character who is totally fictional (with monologue).
Read remainder of BFE, Water by the Spoonful, Gum.
Read selected scenes from: Between Riverside and Crazy and Blood and Gifts. (Bring books to class.)
Begin: Exploration (including research) of Final Project play, beginning with characters.
(Feel free to write and present a scene.)
Read: Selections from The Soul’s Code. Prepare to discuss.

PLEASE NOTE: In this workshop, we will be doing many things at once. We will be exploring and developing characters, analyzing already existing characters, and writing/preparing the Final Project. Be prepared to be flexible, even with assignments. Even if you are working on a play/story that you had planned to write in advance of this class, be prepared to expand your vision and try new approaches to the writing of the piece.

Weeks Four - Six  Feb 4 – Feb 18, 2018  Exploration & Experimentation
Topics:
Character Voice – Including: Rhythm, Diction, Slang, and Sensory World of the Character.
Active Characterization: Characters as Story Generators. Character Revelations.
Self and Shadow Self. The Inner Character: Inner Child, Inner Demon, Inner Life. An
Exploration of the Characters Often-Invisible Motivators.

ASSIGNMENTS
Due week 4:
Read remainder of *Between Riverside and Crazy, Blood and Gifts.*
Write exploratory scene that is character-driven.
Due week 5:
Write another exploratory scene.
Present: Ideas/proposals/refined or expanded thoughts for Final Project.
Read and discuss: *Playwriting – Brief & Brilliant, The Soul’s Code.*
Write a short analysis of *Gum, Blood and Gifts, BFE,* describing the distinct approach each playwright took to creating character voice writing these plays. (250 – 600 words; turn in as a post on BlackBoard.)
Due week 6:
Let me know of your plans for your Final Project - for approval.

*Note: Experimental scenes may be the early scenes of your Final Project—or later scenes. It’s not necessary that you write in order at this point. These may also be simply scenes that don’t make it into your Final Project, but rather serve as a springboard or inspiration point.*

**Weeks Seven - Nine   Feb 25 – March 10, 2016   Mission & Transformation**
Topics:
Putting It All Together—Structure.
The Dark Side: Villains, Antagonists, and Anti-Heroes. Working Beyond the One-Dimensional.
Supporting Players: Sidekicks, Mentors, Catalysts, and Clowns.

ASSIGNMENTS
Due week 7:
Read article on Jill Soloway and “Transparent.” (PDF)
Write scenes/pages for your Final Project.
Prepare an oral presentation about your Final Project. (Progress report, problem/issues to be addressed, brainstorming needed, Q&A.)
Read an alternate play and prepare to lead a discussion about it.
Begin work on your individual diagnostic tool.
Read *Mr. Burns.*
Due week 8:
Write a short analysis of *Mr. Burns, Between Riverside and Crazy, and Joe Turner’s Come and Gone,* using Hillman’s *The Soul’s Code* to inform your discussion of the characters. (250 – 600 words; turn in via post on BlackBoard.)
Due week 9:
TURN IN raw draft of your Final Project. (Note: Yes, this may be unfinished, there may be holes, placeholders scenes, undeveloped material, etc. It’s a raw draft.)
No Class Mar 17, 2016  Spring Break

Weeks Ten - Twelve    Mar 24 – Apr 7, 2016  Insight & Evaluation
Topics:
Character Epiphanies and Revelations.
Charting/Tracking with Concrete Creative Tools.
Final Project Preparation. Self-assessment and Plans for Revision.

ASSIGNMENTS
Due Week 10:
Present your individualized character diagnostic strategy/process/tool.
Discuss the feedback on raw draft of your Final Project.
Ongoing:
Questions and answers; brainstorming.
Assess your character inspiration projects, character banks, and raw draft.
Present new and revised scenes.
Prepare pages/revision/revision plan/whatever is needed for your Final Project; discuss.
Create a schedule for presentations/playreadings. (Note: The people who go first will not
be expected to have a play that is quite as finished as those who go last.)
Keep working on your Final Project.

Week Thirteen    Apr 14, 2016  Presentation
Begin presentations/Playreadings/ Final Project. (Schedule TBD.)

ASSIGNMENT:
Keep working on your Final Project components. Revise as needed.

Week Fourteen    Apr 21, 2016
Begin presentations/Playreadings/ Final Project. (Schedule TBD.)

ASSIGNMENT:
Keep working on your Final Project components. Revise as needed.

Week Fifteen    Apr 28, 2016  Presentation, Post-Mortem, and Beyond
Finish Presentation/Playreadings. (Schedule TBD.)

Discuss: Usefulness of character diagnostic tool.
Discuss: Where to go next.

TURN IN: Your Final Project. Due Apr 28, 2016.

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

We all have two heads and two memories. A head of clay, which will turn
to dust; and another, forever invulnerable to the gnawings of time and of
Final Examination Date:
FINAL EXAM: May 5 4:30 – 6:30 PM
Feedback & Critique of Scripts.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in Scampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in Scampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems
A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity

passion. One memory that death kills, a compass that expires with the journey, and another memory, the collective memory, which will live as long as the human adventure in the world lives. –Eduardo Galeano, Memory of Fire: Faces and Masks
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

*Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis*

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.