

**GESM 111g: Seminar in the Arts  
The Theatre Scene**

**Units: 4**

**Fall 2017**

**Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00-3:20PM**

**Location: MCC 102**

**Instructor: Elsbeth M. Collins**

**Office: SCD M201**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:30-4:30PM**

**Contact Info: [ecollins@usc.edu](mailto:ecollins@usc.edu), 213-821-4034 office, 213-948-6782  
Cell. Please allow 48 hours for email response.**

**Course Description**

For theatre artists and professionals, the play – as written- is the starting point for a journey of research, exploration and imagination. Before the first day of rehearsal, the director spends several months – if not longer – working with her dramaturge and designers in researching various aspects of the play as well as re-reading it multiple times. The research would include: the historical period in which the play was written – its politics, customs and mores; the performance history or tradition of the play; the life of and other works by the author; and critical essays on the play or playwright. This research and re-reading eventually lead the director to her concept of the play – an aesthetic, philosophical and visual realization of the play that is unique to that director working in concert with her artistic team.

The director brings this concept to the first rehearsal and begins the process of sharing the research to her primary collaborators – the actors. Before and during rehearsal, the designers and actors themselves do their own research, which is not dissimilar to the director's but is more individually based on their priorities of characterization (actors) or visual rendering (designers). Pre-production research is different for a new play or for a play which does not result from a traditional script, i.e. a devised work, which might evolve from movement based language or political framework. In those cases the director works with the playwright or choreographer and cast to explore the writer's intentions in the play, questioning scenes and characters as well as reading and rereading the text and any material that inspired or is pertinent to the play.

**Learning Objectives**

1. **Analysis:** Increase the student's ability to analyze creative endeavors, including describing them with appropriate vocabulary, examining their formal elements, and engaging in research to understand their contexts.
2. **Making:** Expand the student's knowledge about the creative process, as exemplified by specific works studied, and, in many cases, by the student's making creative work.
3. **Connectivity:** Deepen the student's appreciation of the connections between creative endeavors and the concurrent political, religious, and social conditions; show how these endeavors fulfill cultural functions or fill cultural needs.
4. **Engagement:** Increase the student's understanding of becoming a lifelong supporter or participant in the arts by exposure to creative production in the contemporary environment.

**Prerequisite(s):** N/A

**Co-Requisite(s):** N/A

**Concurrent Enrollment:** N/A

**Recommended Preparation:** purchasing reader and texts prior to class

**Course Notes:** This class requires viewing of plays outside of class time for discussion in class.

### Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

*An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins  
*Punk Rock* by Simon Stephens  
*Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare  
*Trojan Barbie* by *Christine Evans*  
*Circle Mirror Transformation* by Annie Baker  
*Wild Honey* by Michael Frayn  
*The Wild Party*, Book, Music and Lyrics by Andrew Lipa  
*Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the Director's Chair* by Frank Hauser and Russell Reich  
**Custom Reader for GESM111G Theatre Scene – Additional Materials**

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard and/or handed out in class.

### Grading Breakdown

The final course grade is determined according to the following scale:

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94; A- (3.7) = 93-90  
Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80  
Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70  
Poor: the D range (.7-1.3) = 60's; F (0) = 59 and below

Excellent means that clear understanding of the class material is coupled with original and creative insight; "good" means that the class material has been understood clearly; "average" means that the class material has been generally understood, but gaps in understanding remain; "poor" means that there are identifiable gaps in the understanding of class material; "failure" means that gaps in the completion of work is coupled with poor understanding of class material.

When the mathematical GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been excellent or good and toward the negative end of the scale for those with average or poor attendance and participation.

Further Grading Notes:

1. Any work that does not fulfill the required assignment is an automatic F.
2. If you are not a native speaker of English and/or you are an international student, please make an appointment with me in the first two weeks of classes to determine whether language accommodations might be necessary.
3. If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W.
4. I will be happy to discuss your work at any time, and I encourage you to visit office hours at least once during the semester.

Additional Policies

Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments should be in MLA or Chicago format, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins on all sides.

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation	15	15
Performance Analyses	25	25
The World of the Play	10	10
First Paper	150	15
Second Paper	150	15
Final Project	200	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	550	100

### Assignment Rubrics

All papers will be turned in to Blackboard or Turn-It-In

### Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due at the start of class on the date listed. No late work will be accepted.

### Grading Timeline

All papers will be returned graded within 2 weeks of due dates.

### A Note on Communication and Media:

All phones laptops and tablets must be turned off and put away before class begins.

Email communication. Please feel free to email me for any reason regarding the class, but allow 48 hours for a response. While email is a seemingly casual messaging medium, please maintain decorum in your communication.

### **PARTICIPATION 15%**

*Objective: Participation includes active listening, respect for the class and various opinions, and engaging with the material, students, guests, and professor. All of this essential to learning.*

Attendance during seminar is mandatory. Missing more than two classes and/or being late will impact your ability to be an active participant. There are many forms of meaningful participation, including insightful questions and active listening. If you tend to feel uncomfortable speaking in class, see me so we can work out a participation strategy. This course is largely discussion-based. It is up to you to come to class prepared to engage in lively conversation and respectful debate.

Please let me know in advance if there are circumstances that impair or impede your attendance or participation. You are responsible for obtaining notes, handouts, and important information that you may have missed due to absence or lateness.

The class will be visited by members of the production teams, casts, and professors from USC's SDA. This is an opportunity for students to ask questions and engage with

practitioners about the theatre-making process. Students are expected to engage with the guests and to prepare ahead of class with questions.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSES 25%** **2 PAGES**

Objective: The response papers are designed for you to practice analytical writing and performance analysis.

Students view five (5) productions this semester. For the five (5) productions, students will write an analytical paper. This is a close reading of the production and no additional sources are to be used.

For the five Performance Analyses, each student must write one paper on each of the five following elements:

- Stage/Lighting Design
- Director/Dramaturg choices
- Casting
- Costuming/makeup
- Sound/music/accents

**Required Shows (5)**

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**Mandatory Shows (3)**

- 10/5-10/81 *Twelfth Night*
- 10/26-10/29 *Trojan Barbie*
- 11/2-11/5 *Wild Honey*

**Additional Shows (Must Select 2)**

- 9/6 *O Solo Homo* by Margo Gomez and Tim Miller
- 9/24 Echo Theatre Co: *Fixed* by Boni Alvarez
- 9/10-10/1 *An Octoroon*
- 10/12-10/21 *Passion Play*
- 10/13-10/22 *Punk Rock*
- 11/7 or 11/14 *Hamilton* (Pantages Theatre – Visions and Voices Lottery)
- 11/16-11/19 *The Wild Party*
- 11/16-11/19 *Circle Mirror Transformation/Eurydice in Rep*

Note: Tickets may be more limited for *An Octoroon*, *Punk Rock*, *Passion Play*, *The Wild Party* and *TBD* as they are in smaller venues. Plan ahead to get tickets.

*An Octoroon, Punk Rock, TBD, Wild Honey, Twelfth Night, Passion Play, and The Wild Party* are part of the SDA Season. *O Solo Homo: Performances* by Margo Gomez and Tim Miller and *Fixed* by Boni Alvarez and *Hamilton* are part of the Visions and Voices series. <http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/>

<b>USC VISIONS AND VOICES SHOWS</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue</b>
O Solo Homo by Margo Gomez, Tim Miller	9/6	Joyce Cammilleri Hall
Fixed by Boni Alvarez	9/24	Atwater Village Theatre
Hamilton by Lin Manuel Miranda	11/7 or 11/14	Pantages Theatre (By LOTTERY – be sure to RSVP to receive dates for this lottery)

Each response paper is due at the beginning of class on Monday after the production run.

**THE WORLD OF THE PLAY 10% 1 PAGE**

*Objective: These are to help you explore creative ways for developing your analytical skills and conceptualizing the world of the play.*

Due Wednesday, September 6, 2017- Draw/print a Word Cloud (<https://worditout.com/> after reading *An Octoroon*).

Due Monday, November 15, 2017 – Draw a picture/make a collage for *The Wild Party*.

**FIRST PAPER (STAGING DRAMATIC LITERATURE): 15% 3 PAGES**

*Objective: This is a paper in which you will use critical analysis of the text to support performance and production choices.*

The first assignment will be for each student to select one of the first three texts and cast it using actors whose work they have seen on stage, television or film. The student will then explain her choices based on the characteristics of each actor and why he or she is the student’s ideal choice for the particular role.

**SECOND PAPER (READING THE TEXT AND PERFORMANCE): 15% 3 PAGES**

*Objective: This paper is designed for students to engage their skills in both reading dramatic literature and reading performance.*

The second paper will require each student to select one of the plays they have seen and analyze the difference between how the student imagined the play when he read it and the difference he observed in performance. Students must have a thesis statement and

use two (2) of the additional readings (handouts) from class in their paper to support their argument.

**FINAL PROJECT 20%**

**5-6 PAGES**

*Objective: The final project will demonstrate the student’s critical and analytical understanding of the production cycle.*

For their final project, the students will be asked to select a play that was not produced, do their own research and then write a paper describing how they would approach the play – what they believe the play is about and what they would hope to be saying with it. Students must have a thesis statement and use three additional scholarly sources (from class or from their own research) in their paper to support their argument.

**Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

Date	Readings Due	Work Due	In Class
Wk 1: Introduction			
8/21/2017	<a href="http://www.howround.com">www.howround.com</a>		Introduction: Fuchs, Elinor <i>E.F.'s Visit to a Small Planet</i> ; Discuss Key People In Theatre
8/23/2017	Twyla Tharp: Excerpts from <i>The Creative Habit</i>		Defining the Discipline to make Theatre.
Wks 2-4: Reading Dramatic Literature			
8/28/2017			Reading the mise-en-scène
8/30/2017	Ball, David W. Excerpts from <i>Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays</i>		How to read a play
9/4/2017	<b>NO CLASS - LABOR DAY</b>		
9/6/2017	<b>An Octoroon</b>	<b>Word Cloud</b>	<i>An Octoroon</i> - themes, structure, style, narrator, character development, setting. GUEST: Anita Dashiell-Sparks
9/11/2017	Clay, James H. And Daniel Krempel. A Chapter from <i>The Theatrical Image</i>		<i>An Octoroon</i> . Discuss <i>The Theatrical Image</i> and performance spaces.
9/13/2017	<b>Punk Rock</b>		<i>Punk Rock</i> - themes, structure, style, narrator, character development, setting
Wks 5-6: On Casting			

9/18/2017	Svich, Caridad (editor). Excerpts from <i>Innovation in Five Acts</i> .	<b>FIRST PAPER</b>	An Octoroon. Discuss <i>Innovation</i> . What to look for at a performance.
9/20/2017	SDA Inclusive Casting Statement in Blackboard		GUESTS - Punk Rock. Stephanie Shroyer on Casting; Casting exercise in class
9/25/2017			On Casting and Positionality
9/27/2017	Review LA Stage Alliance Ovation Voter "Points to Consider" in Blackboard		Reading Performance
Wks 7-9: Dramaturgy and Theatre-Making			
10/2/2017	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	<b>Performance Review 1</b>	<i>Twelfth Night</i> - Melinda Finberg on Shakespearean Verse.
10/4/2017			Performance Reviews
10/9/2017			GUESTS - Twelfth Night. Director, Kate Burton Discuss performance/scene analysis
10/11/2017	<i>Trojan Barbie</i>		Directing exercise in class
10/16/2017			On Funding for the Arts
10/18/2017			On Censorship and Selection
Wk 10: Design and Production			
10/23/2017	Hauser, Frank and Reich, Russell – Notes on Directing	<b>Performance Review 2</b>	On Pre-production Planning
10/25/2017			On Collaboration and Flexibility
Wks 11-13: Actors and Acting			
10/30/2017	<i>Circle Mirror Transformation</i>		<i>Circle Mirror Transformation: writing elements, editorial choices</i>
11/1/2017	Selected articles on Costuming – see BB	<b>Performance Review 3</b>	Discuss The Actor. On Backstage and Bodies
11/6/2017	<i>Wild Honey</i>	<b>SECOND PAPER</b>	<i>Wild Honey: review writing on performance</i>

11/8/2017			
Wks 14-15: The Theatre Scene			
11/13/2017	Brook, Peter. Excerpts from <i>There Are No Secrets</i> . AND Mamet, David. Selections from <i>True and False</i> .		GUEST: Carla Della Gatta. Discuss Mamet and Brook. Acting methods and styles.
11/15/2017	<b><i>The Wild Party</i></b>	<b>drawing/collage</b>	<i>The Wild Party</i> : The world of the play.
11/20/2017	Bogart, Anne. Stereotype. <i>A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre</i>		Guest: Vicki Lewis. Discuss <i>A Director Prepares</i> in the context of "The Wild Party"
11/22/2017	<b>NO CLASS -Thanksgiving Recess</b>		
11/27/2017	Jones, Robert Edmond. Selections from <i>The Dramatic Imagination</i>		Discuss <i>The Dramatic Imagination</i> .
11/29/2017	Final Class		Wrap-up.
12/8/2017	Final Exam	<b>FINAL PAPER DUE AT 2:00PM</b>	

## 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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>. 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, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office* <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu>. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

### 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://ali.usc.edu>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office*



*of Disability Services and Programs* <http://dsp.usc.edu> 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.