

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 63188D Textual Studies for Performance
Fall 2017 – Wednesdays and Fridays from 12noon-1:50pm
Location: KAP 141

Instructor: Oliver Mayer
Office: PIRC #1007 or MCC #101-C
Office Hours : by appointment or walk-in (call first).
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Course Description and Overview:

Close textual reading of dramatic texts as a fundamental tool for rehearsal and performance.

Learning Objectives:

This class offers various methods to study dramatic texts – not for purely academic reasons – but rather for the working artist creating work to perform. Through joint effort, discussion, and research -- not to mention trial and error -- we will create a living rubric on how best to approach reading, understanding, analyzing and evaluating of dramatic texts. Whether written long ago or in our own current moment in time, and whether the playwright is living or dead, we will do our utmost to find ways to bring life to these texts – even when at first blush they seem foreign and opaque.

Goals:

Better understanding and compassion for both the actor's process and the writer's journey.
The ability to use various methods of research to help plumb the depths of character and intention in a play.
Acquiring and utilizing tools to unlock meaning beyond the obvious received or surface interpretation of text.
Connecting effective individual choice to text performance, and allowing the present to connect to the past.

Required Readings:

<i>Brecht, Berthold</i>	<i>THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN</i>
<i>Fornes, Maria Irene</i>	<i>SARITA (from her collection entitled "Plays")</i>
<i>Shawn, Wallace</i>	<i>AUNT DAN AND LEMON</i>

These collections were ordered, and are available the USC Bookstore: Purchase them there or elsewhere.

Supplementary Readings:

<i>Alfaro, Luis</i>	<i>OUR FATHER'S HOUSE</i>
<i>Mayer, Oliver</i>	<i>YERMA IN THE DESERT</i>
<i>Powers, Kemp</i>	<i>ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI</i>
<i>Craig-Galvan, Inda</i>	<i>BLACK SUPER HERO MAGIC MAMA</i>

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments:

Professors do not "give" grades: students earn them. Your final grade is up to you. Meeting course requirements does not equal excellence; I am looking for uncommon effort and commitment in each assignment. I grade on bravery, making bold and nuanced choices, demonstrating an active sense of play, and cultivating an open heart and mind. Your final grade consists of:

Overall Weekly Grade: 30%
Midterm Exam: 15%

Final Play: 30%
Final Exam 25%

School of Theatre classes use the University's grading scale:

96-100%=A	85-87%=B	75-77%= C	66-64%=D
95-91%=A-	81-84%=B-	71-74%= C- [Fail Grade for Graduate Credit]	61-63%=D-
88-90%=B+	78-80%=C+	67-70%=D+	

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.

Weekly Assignments:

We will work both individually and in teams. There will be occasional written work, but discussion will be constant. Team work allows both a shared workload and the possibility of differing viewpoints on a text. Your grade depends on your active participation, having read the material, and being open to new ways of reading and seeing. The emphasis is firmly on learning how to analyze, evaluate, and perform a wide variety of dramatic texts on the fly.

Attendance at Plays and other Events:

Whenever possible, we will attend major SDA productions and other plays/events in and around town. Learning how to analyze and evaluate plays on stage is an essential and ongoing part of a life in the dramatic arts, and we will devote significant class time to this discussion.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown:

(NOTE: As this is the first time that I have taught this class, the schedule is subject to change, depending on our experience together. I reserve the right to revise the schedule below, although I promise to give you fair warning via Blackboard, group email, and in person.)

Wednesday August 23	Introductions. Growing Compassion, holding back the urge to judge too quickly. See what is and isn't there. How individual reactions to texts reveal how we really feel, and show us how to stretch outside ourselves.
Friday August 25	The Actor's Process, The Writer's Journey: in our own words. Discuss Wally Shawn's essay "Reading Plays" on Blackboard and in hard copy.
Wednesday August 30	History and Mystery. Read ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI.
Friday September 1	Guest speaker, Kemp Powers http://thetemplors.org/bio-powers.html The writer's path: intention, research, experience – and bringing the dead back to life.
Wednesday September 6	Personal and Political, changing ideologies versus upholding standards. Historical Representation versus Dramatic Presentation in ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI.
Friday September 8	Guest instructor Jody Armour , USC Professor of Law http://gould.usc.edu/faculty/?id=129 Moral Luck, Race and the Law, and their relation to textual analysis and performance.
Wednesday September 13	History and Mystery. Read SARITA. Discuss Oliver Mayer's article "The Redeeming Demon" on Blackboard and in hard copy.
Friday September 15	Guest speaker: actress Marlene Forte http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0287168/ The power of intuition, immediacy, heat, and the voice not normally allowed to speak.
Wednesday September 20	Intuition and Research. Approaching SARITA from the hips, while staying in an historical context.

Friday September 22	Shifting loyalties, moving targets, third rails. Read AUNT DAN AND LEMON. Discussion of taboos.
Wednesday September 27	Read Wally Shawn essay "On the Context of the Play" at the end of the published play. What are the third rails of our present moment, and how might we stage them?
Friday September 29	Guest speaker: Inda Craig-Galvan http://www.indacraig-galvan.com/
Wednesday October 4	Expectations around race, color, and gender for a recent USC MFA writing graduate and nationally recognized playwright. Present short scenes from BLACK SUPER HERO MAGIC MAMA, SARITA and AUNT DAN AND LEMON. Where is moral luck in the equation? Are expectations reversed?
Friday October 6	MIDTERM IN CLASS. Text and Context. SPRING AWAKENING by Frank Wedekind, What exactly is being awakened?
Wednesday October 11	MIDTERMS RETURNED. Translations: Rewrites of short scenes from SPRING AWAKENING, bringing the story and characters up to date without losing Wedekind's original thrust.
Friday October 13	Guest speaker: Armin Shimerman. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001734/ . Using training and technique to break down a script, and to approach both prose and poetry.
Wednesday October 18	Making SPRING AWAKENING work. What do you do? What translates? What needs jettisoning? What is really going on?
Friday October 20	Class teams present rationale for their take on scenes from SPRING AWAKENING.
Wednesday October 25	Discussion on THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN.
Friday October 27	Guest speaker: David Bridel or David Warshofsky. How to tailor work for a particular company or audience. How to bring Brecht up to date in Los Angeles, 2017.
Wednesday November 1	Bringing moral luck into the equation: Does the meaning change depending on who's playing the role?
Friday November 3	Guest instructor Jody Armour Presentations regarding Moral Luck in relation to THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN.
Wednesday November 8	Discussion of OUR FATHER'S HOUSE.
Friday November 10	Class teams present found stories that translate/connect to elements of Alfaro's play.
Wednesday November 15	Discussion of YERMA IN THE DESERT.
Friday November 17	Class teams present cultural icons/songs/slang that translate/connect to elements in Mayer's play.
Wednesday and Friday November 22-24	Thanksgiving Holiday, no class
Wednesday November 29	Final presentations: Each student breaks down a particular moment from one of the plays using tools learned during the semester.
Friday December 1	More Final presentations.
Friday December 8	Final Exam 11am-1pm.

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.