

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 and other works by the author; and critical essays on the play or playwright. This research and re-reading eventually lead the director to his 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 research to his 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 that does not result from a traditional script, i.e. a devised work, which might evolved 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 re-reading 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 the contemporary environment.

Course Note: This class requires viewing of plays outside of class time for in-class work.

Required Shows (5)

Mandatory Shows (3)	Additional Shows (Must Select 2)
2/3-2/16 <i>Buenaza/Cabron</i> OR <i>A Bright Room Called Day</i>	2/15 <i>Water by the Spoonful</i>
2/22-2/25 <i>Macbeth</i>	3/1-3/4 <i>Great Expectations</i>
3/29-4/8 <i>West Side Story</i>	3/22 <i>Allegiance</i>
	3/29-4/1 <i>The Labyrinth of Desire</i>
	4/13 <i>The Temblors: Members Only</i>
	4/19-4/22 <i>Don't Go</i>
	4/19-4/22 <i>Love's Labor's Lost</i>

Note: Tickets may be more limited for *Buenaza/Cabron*, *A Bright Room Called Day*, and *Don't Go* as they are in smaller venues. Plan ahead to get tickets.

Buenaza/Cabron, *A Bright Room Called Day*, *Macbeth*, *Great Expectations*, *The Labyrinth of Desire*, *West Side Story*, and *Love's Labor's Lost* are part of the SDA season. *Water by the Spoonful*, *Allegiance*, and *The Temblors: Members Only* are part of the Visions and Voices series:

<http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu>

USC VISIONS AND VOICES SHOWS	Date	Venue	
<i>Water by the Spoonful</i> http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event_id=967461	2/15	Mark Taper Forum	RSVP starting on 1/23
<i>Allegiance</i> http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event_id=967463	3/22	Japan Aratani Theatre	RSVP starting on 2/27
<i>The Temblors: Members Only</i> http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event_id=967471	4/13	L.A. Theatre Center	RSVP starting on 3/20

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

(available at USC Bookstore and/or via instructor):

- * ***Buenaza/Cabron*** by David Bridel and the MFA Class of 2018
- * ***A Bright Room Called Day*** by Tony Kushner
- * ***Macbeth*** by William Shakespeare
- * ***West Side Story*** by Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein & Stephen Sondheim
- * ***Don't Go*** by the Sojourn Theatre Company

Supplementary materials will be posted on ARES or Blackboard and/or handed out in class.

Grading Breakdown:

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

Excellent quality: A = 100-94; A- = 93-90

Good quality: B+ = 89-86; B = 85-84; B- = 83-80

Average quality: C+ = 79-76; C = 75-74; C- = 73-70

Poor quality: D = 60's

Fail: F = 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 mathematic 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 lanugage accomodations 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	25	25
Reflections	15	15
The World of the Play	10	10
First Paper	150	15
Second Paper	150	15
Final Project	200	20
TOTAL	550	100

Assignment Submission Policies:

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

Classroom Policy:

All phones and laptops 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

25%

Objective: Participation includes active listening, respect for the class and various opinions, and engaging with the material, students, guests, and professor. All of this is 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 other 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 the practitioners about the theatre-making process. Students are expected to engage with the guests and to prepare ahead of class with questions.

Reflections on Theatre 15% 2 PAGES

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

Students will write one reflection on each of the following three special topics in theatre most pertinent to this semester's season of plays, citing specific examples from the plays as studied in class and seen onstage, for a total of three reflections for the semester:

- * **Reflection 1** - Classical Theatre vs. Contemporary Theatre
- * **Reflection 2** - "Legit" Theatre vs. Musical Theatre
- * **Reflection 3** - Theatre as Activism vs. Theatre as Entertainment

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.

- * **Word Cloud** - Draw/print a Word Cloud (<https://worditout.com/>) for Buenaza/Cabron.
- * **Drawing Assignment** - Draw a picture/make a collage for a different show from the syllabus.

FIRST PAPER (REPRESENTING 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 paper 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 his or 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 of the additional readings (handouts) from class in their paper to support their argument.

FINAL PAPER 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 their own research) in their paper to support their argument.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (subject to change with pace and needs of class)

Date	Readings Due	Work Due	In Class
Wk 1: Introduction			
Wk 1			
1/9			*Introductions + expectations *Elements of theatre
1/11			*Begin <i>Buenaza/Cabron</i>
Wks 2-4: Approaching Dramatic Literature			
Week 2			
1/16	“The Theatrical Image” <i>Buenaza/Cabron</i>		* <i>Buenaza/Cabron</i> - world of the play
1/18			*Devising theatre re <i>Buenaza/Cabron</i> *Assign Word Cloud assignment
Week 3			
1/23		Word Cloud	*Begin <i>Bright Room</i>
1/25			* <i>Bright Room</i> - world of the play
Week 4			
1/30	<i>Bright Room</i>		*Guest speaking - the play vs. its production

2/1		*What to look for at a performance *Reminder: <i>Buenaza</i> opens!
Wks 5-6: On Casting		
Wk 5		
2/6		*Discuss conscious casting in <i>Bright Room</i> *Guest speaking - on casting *Assign First Paper
2/8	Casting articles - TBA	*Casting exercise in class *Reminder - <i>Bright Room</i> opens!
Wk 6		
2/13	First Paper: Representing Dramatic Literature	*Collect First Paper *Guest speaking - on approaching <i>Bright Room</i>
2/15		* Begin <i>Macbeth</i> * Classical theatre's relevance
Wks 7-8: Dramaturgy and Theatre-Making		
Wk 7		
2/20	<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Macbeth</i> - world of the play
2/22	Shakespeare production articles TBA	*Guest speaking - on Shakespearean verse *Assign Reflection 1 *Reminder - <i>Macbeth</i> opens!
Wk 8		
2/27	Reflection 1: Classical Theatre vs. Contemporary Theatre	*Collect Reflection 1 *Macbeth guests - approaching classical theatre/Shakespeare *What did you understand onstage? *Begin <i>Great Expectations</i>
3/1	<i>Great Expectations</i>	* <i>Great Expectations</i> - world of the play *Adapting literature to drama *Reminder - <i>GE</i> opens!
Wk 9: Directors and Actors		
Wk 9		

3/6	Directing and Acting articles TBA		*GE guest speaking - acting and directing *Begin <i>West Side Story</i> *Discuss musical theatre
3/8			*Guest speaking - on acting and directing musical theatre *Assign Reflection 2
SPRING BREAK (March 11-18)			
Wks 10-12: Designers			
Wk 10			
3/20	<i>West Side Story</i>		* <i>West Side Story</i> - world of the musical
3/22		Reflection 2: “Legit” Theatre vs. Musical Theatre	*Collect Reflection 2 *Guest speaking - on Directing *Begin <i>Labyrinth of Desire</i>
Wk 11			
3/27	<i>Labyrinth of Desire</i>		* <i>Labyrinth of Desire</i> - world of the play *Guest speaking - on Design *Assign Second Paper
3/29			*Guest speaking - on Costuming *Reminder - <i>WSS</i> and <i>Labyrinth of Desire</i> open!
Wk 12			
4/3			*Reflect on <i>WSS</i> and <i>Labyrinth</i> *Guest/s from <i>WSS</i> and <i>Labyrinth</i>
4/5		Second Paper: Reading the Text and Performance	*Collect Second Paper *Begin <i>Don't Go</i> *Assign Drawing Assignment
Wks 13-14: Activism in Theatre			
Wk 13			
4/10	<i>Don't Go</i>		* <i>Don't Go</i> - world of the play
4/12		Drawing Assignment	*Collect Drawing Assignment *Continue <i>Don't Go</i> *Discuss social activism in theater
Wk 14			

4/17	Social Activism in theatre articles TBA		*Guest speaking - on social activism
4/19			*Assign Reflection 3 *Reminder - <i>Don't Go</i> opens!
Wk 15: Final Thoughts			
Wk 15			
4/24		Reflection 3: Theatre as Activism vs. Theatre as Entertainment	*Collect Reflection 3 * <i>Don't Go</i> guests
4/26			*Discuss Final Paper *Wrap-up

Final Paper due by Tuesday, May 8th, 10am.

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.