

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 501 Poetry & Prose Into Drama 63219D

REVISED SYLLABUS January 8, 2018

Spring 2018—Wednesdays — 5:00-7:50 pm

Location: McClintock Building 102 (MCC 102)

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD

Office: Massman Drama Center, 1029 Childs Way

Office Hours: W 3:30-4:30 via appointment via email reservations

Contact Info: greentea@usc.edu

Course Description and Overview

Plays for the stage shall be written using public-domain poetry and prose as inspiration and source material, complemented with exploring poetry, prose, and varied dramas as context for the student writer. Students should be well versed in literature, and have written in one or more genres. Recommended preparation: reading source materials and taking notes on key character/story issues.

Learning Objectives

This course is required and designed for students in the USC School of Dramatic Arts' Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program, but also may include graduate students from other writing-related programs at USC at the discretion of the instructor. In spring 2018, the focus is on adapting a play inspired by an essay. Students will read and discuss essays from required readings. The objective is to deconstruct meaning in ways that translate into drama and use these analyses as points of departure for writing a play for the stage. As a final project, each student will complete a dramatic writing project/play that is inspired by an approved essay from the required readings. The course will aid and encourage students to write plays inspired by a diversity of perspectives, cultural, gendered, and otherwise.

Prerequisite(s): Enrollment in the USC School of Dramatic Arts Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program or "D" clearance from instructor. Student must have written a professionally promising play prior to taking this course.

Co-Requisite (s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None

Recommended Preparation: Reading/seeing plays, reading essays, attending presentations by guest speakers.

(1) The course is intended to provide connectivity. The student will better appreciate the connection between poetry and plays with regard to various aspects of the human condition and the ways that poetry and plays attempt to excavate meaning and provide interpretation. (2) The course will provide context. By confronting the artistry of poetry and plays, students will be able to see the powerful roles that poetry can play in connecting with various historical, theoretical, and aesthetic dimensions of humankind both past and present, and how that poetry can be used as a point of departure for artistic inspiration toward the writing of an original play. (3) The course will provide engagement via the reading and deconstruction of poetry and dramas that explore various aspects of the human condition. Engagement will be enhanced via the creation of original art in the writing of new plays. (4) The course will provide analysis. The student will be able to analyze the representations of various aspects of the human condition within the poetry and plays read, using shared vocabulary and focusing on the formal execution of character within the worlds of the poetry and plays.

Course Notes

Each semester that the course is taught explores a different kind of adaptation.

Announcements and course assignments will be posted to Blackboard as well as given in class. Students must check USC email accounts and Blackboard regularly, which means at least once every 24 hours for email and at least once a week for Blackboard or when directed by the instructor (these come as Blackboard notifications via USC email). There will be minimal online research (links provided by instructor). Please keep up-to-date with your class-related emails and Blackboard postings. For any email you send to the instructor related to this course, this text must be in the header: "THTR 501 Spring 2018." If you do not use this subject line, your email will not be considered submitted.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

None. The course will take place in a regular classroom setting. Students must take notes in a journal, not on a computer or handheld device or computer tablet. No electronic equipment may be used during class.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

- *James Baldwin : Collected Essays : Notes of a Native Son / Nobody Knows My Name / The Fire Next Time / No Name in the Street / The Devil Finds Work / Other Essays* by James Baldwin, Editor Toni Morrison
- *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, Fifth Edition, Editor Samuel Cohen
- *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*, Ed. Phillip Lopate
- Individual plays and/or essays suggested to the student by the instructor based on the student's personal artistic vision and writing style/theme
- Blackboard <https://blackboard.usc.edu/> (Means of communication and continuation of curriculum in the event of an emergency) (If you do not know how to use Blackboard, visit the site and follow links to USC Blackboard Help.)

Recommended Readings and Supplementary Materials

In Praise of Shadows by Junichiro Tanizaki

The Best American Essays of the Century, Eds. Robert Atwan, Joyce Carol Oates

Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine

Ficciones: The Selected Essays and Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges by Jorge Luis Borges

New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics, Ed. Minh Nguyen

Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought, Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall

The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Time, Ed. Will Durant

Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, Eds. Audre Lorde, Cheryl Clarke

Here First: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers, Eds. Arnold Krupat, Brian Swann

Cuba on the Verge: 12 Writers on Continuity and Change in Havana and Across the Country, Ed. Leila Guerriero

The Syria Dispatches: Literary Nonfiction about the Search for Syrian Refugees by Ming Lauren Holden

The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future, Eds. Max More, Natasha Vita-More

Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History, Ed. Adelaida R. Del Castillo

Flutes of Fire: Essays on California Indian Languages, Ed. Leanne Hinton

Vietnam Eye: Contemporary Vietnamese Art, Ed. Serenella Ciclitira

Isabel Allende Today: An Anthology of Essays, Eds. Rosemary G. Feal, Yvette E. Miller

Keeping an Eye Open: Essays on Art, Ed. Julian Barnes

Of Adobo, Apple Pie, and Schnitzel with Noodles: an anthology of Essays on the Filipino-American experience by Myles A. Garcia

Confessions by Saint Augustine

Crossing the Water: A Photographic Path to the Afro-Cuban Spirit World by Claire Garoutte and Anneke Wambaugh

Self-Reliance and Other Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson

A World Between: Poems, Short Stories, and Essays by Iranian-Americans, Ed. Persis M. Karim

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments + Grading Breakdown

Academic integrity is important to the University. The student is urged to remember that professors do not "give" grades; students *earn* grades. Thus, a final grade is entirely up to the student with regards to the effort he or she chooses to expend to meet course requirements. Here are USC's definitions of grades: "A" for work of excellent quality, "B" for work of good quality, "C" for work of fair quality for undergraduate credit and minimum passing for graduate credit, "C-" as a failing grade for graduate credit, "D-" for work of minimum passing quality for undergraduate credit, "F" for failure, "IN" for incomplete work, *student-initiated after 12th week and only awarded under exceptional circumstances*. Regarding late assignments, please see SDA grading guidelines below.

There will be three categories of grading:

10% - Weekly Grade. This evaluates your engagement in reading and assessing assignments, the quality of your engagement in writing exercises, and the quality of viable peer dramaturgy of plays-in-process vis-à-vis the adaptation process. If the student is not present, the weekly grade is 0, unless the absence is excused in advance, because one cannot engage in absentia.

40% - Assessments via Ten-minute Plays. The mission statement of the Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing states that the program “is designed to mine the literary potential of the artist, and prepare the artist to engage meaningfully in global society and the profession.” Engaging with meaningful literature is part of the processes that the objective requires. There is a need to expand the mind and spirit in order to enrich one’s writing; it is organic and critical. As the playwright Arthur Miller said, “A writer must live a useful life.” Finding a balance between guiding one towards engaging meaningfully in society and helping one to cultivate his or her artistic creation always is challenging. However, we are going to attempt that balance in a coalescence of need/response. For the first section of the course, students will read essays from required reading. In each class, students will write a ten-minute play inspired by an essay discussed in class. The plays must be an outgrowth of the essay that reflects the integrity of the essay while also embracing dramatic writing principles. Each play will be evaluated for relatability to source, character development, story development, crafting of dialogue, overall quality of play, spelling, grammar, and adherence to length (no more than ten minutes, which is about five pages in professional stage format). The grade also will be evaluated based on the professional demeanor of the student in the dramaturgical process as well as the quality of the student’s constructive criticism. The plays will be shared and provided with dramaturgical input in class and will be submitted to the instructor electronically by the end of the course day on which it is presented or by 11:59 pm that same evening.

50% - Final Project/Final Examination. Your final project will be a full-length play that is developed and refined viably via the work in this course. The projects should be typed in standard manuscript format (for plays please consult the current *Dramatists’ Guild Resource Directory* for formatting example: <http://www.samuel french.com/content/files/upload/General%20SF%20Formatting%20Guidelines%20Complete.pdf>, using a clean 12-point font (Courier, Times, Times New Roman), bound in standard manuscript format (card stock cover, *all-brass* professional brads. Your final project must not exceed 86 pages (this page count does not include your title, cast-and-character page, or copyright page). Note that lack of adherence to these guidelines will lower your grade, as they are professional standards to learn; for each lack of adherence, 5 points each will be subtracted from your final project grade. Please do not plagiarize. [Many of you have trouble locating professional brass brads. Here is a link: <http://www.amazon.com/Solid-Brass-Fasteners-Capacity-A7071505/dp/B000061BK1>; you will need 1¼ inch or 1½ inch depending on the thickness of your manuscript.] Please note that any brads that are not all-brass will not hold a script together, resulting in possible loss pages and jeopardizing your work.

The plays may be submitted via email, BUT only as Word doc/docx so that commentary also can be provided electronically. No PDFs.

The final project grade is evaluated on a percentage scale (the same as the Weekly Grade) with the grade breaking down as follows: 25% Quality of structure/through-line/plotting, 25% Quality of character development, 25% Quality of dialogue development, and 25% Quality of overall creative achievement and professionalism of project. Minus 5 points each for lack of adherence to submission guidelines noted in this paragraph. Due date for final project/final examination: **May 2, 2018, Wednesday, 4:30-6:30 pm PST. BE SURE TO SUBMIT YOUR PROJECT DURING THAT WINDOW in order to have it graded for credit. No projects will be accepted before that time of after that time, no exceptions.**

Grading is determined on the following scale:

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

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

When the average 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 has been good, but will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

In keeping with SDA guidelines on grading:

- 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.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
Weekly Assessment	10%
Assessments/Ten-minute Plays (3)	40%
Final Project	50%

Assignment Submission Policy

For your full-length class project, in hard copy only including pages of plays presented in class. In addition, to reiterate, any course-related emails must be sent with this header: "THTR 501 Spring 2018." For Assessments/Ten-minute Plays, electronic submission is permitted, but, again, with the header: "THTR 501 Spring 2018."

Additional Policies

- You are expected to attend all classes except in the case of doctor-documented illness or family crisis.
- Please do not be late; if you are tardy, your weekly assessment grade is compromised.
- Please do not have computers open in class unless I ask you to do so for a specific exercise. Use of computers will constitute lack of participation and the student will receive a "0" for participation on that given week.
- Please do not use cell phones in class for any reason. Use of cell phones will constitute lack of participation and the student will receive a "0" for participation on that given week.
- Please do not have personal conversations during instruction time because it interferes with the presentation of other students' work and with classroom instruction.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

January 10. Discussion of the essay as a genre and essayists included in our investigation for the semester. Discussion of Baldwin essay in class, writing exercise; in-class writing workshop, readings, peer and mentor dramaturgy.. Ten-minute Play #1 due at end of class or by 11:59 pm PST January 10. For January 17, please read the following essays in Baldwin: *Notes of a Native Son*, *Nobody Knows My Name*, *The Fire Next Time*, *No Name in the Street*, and *The Devil Finds Work*, pp. 5-576. Be prepared to discuss one or more of the sets of essays on January 17; the January 17 notes below designate the responders. This practice will follow with each set of essays that we read.

January 17. Discussion of assigned essays including *Notes of a Native Son* (Wabvuta), *Nobody Knows My Name* (Reichle), and *The Fire Next Time/No Name in the Street/The Devil Finds Work* (Langley). Writing exercise. Ten-minute Play #2 due at end of class or by 11:59 pm PST. For January 24, in the Cohen book read *To My One Love, How to Tame a Wild Tongue, On Compassion, On War, The Myth of the Latin Woman..., Serving in Florida, The Fourth of July, Me Talk Pretty One Day, The Allegory of the Cave, Civil Disobedience, The Ways We Lie, Reading to Write*.

January 24. Discussion of assigned essays including *To My One Love, How to Tame a Wild Tongue, On Compassion, On War* ((Kamitaki), *The Myth of the Latin Woman..., Serving in Florida, The Fourth of July, Me Talk Pretty One Day* (Houston), and *The Allegory of the Cave, Civil Disobedience, The Ways We Lie, Reading to Write* (Gardner). Writing exercise. In-class writing workshop, readings, peer and mentor dramaturgy. Ten-minute Play #2 due at end of class or by 11:59 pm PST. For January 31, read in the Lopate book: *Hateful Things, Essays in Idleness, Goodbye to All That, Death, The Knife, My Confession, Split at the Root, Late Victorians, Leaving the Movie Theatre, Unpacking My Library, Blindness, On the Pleasure of Hating*.

January 31. Discussion of assigned essays including responses: *Hateful Things, Essays in Idleness, Goodbye to All That, Death* (Carreño), *The Knife, My Confession, Split at the Root, Late Victorians* (Andrei), *Leaving the Movie Theatre, Unpacking My Library, Blindness, On the Pleasure of Hating* (Allis). Writing exercise. In-class writing workshop, readings, peer and mentor dramaturgy. Ten-minute Play #3 due at end of class or by 11:59 pm PST. Pitches of final project ideas.

February 7. Writing workshop. Presentation of first scenes from class projects, ten pages. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

February 14. Writing workshop. Presentation of second scenes from class projects, ten pages. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

February 21. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy. First acts of projects due by February 23, 2018, 12 noon. Please submit electronically in Word doc/docx; no PDFs.

February 28. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

March 7. Guest speaker on the essence of dramaturgy and criticism: dramaturge, director, or literary manager.

March 14. No class. USC holiday. Spring break.

March 21. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

March 28. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

April 4. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

April 11. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

April 18. Writing workshop. Presentation of new scenes from class projects. Peer and mentor dramaturgy.

April 25. Last day of class. Guest artist on the art of the staged reading and its value for cultivation of the play: producer, director, performer.

Extra Credit Opportunity

For extra credit, you may attend the event below and write a ten-minute play inspired by it and by the post-presentation discussion. The fact that the talk inspired the play should be evident; other assessment elements: quality of crafting of dialogue, story development, character development, overall quality of the play, spelling, grammar, and length (no more than ten minutes, which is about five pages in professional stage format): **Working the Public, with Theaster Gates**, USC Visions and Voices, http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event_id=965837.

USC Policy Statements

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/academicssupport/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.