THTR501 Poetry and Prose into Drama
Spring 2019
Units: 4
Wednesdays 5:00-7:50PM
Location: MCC 102

Instructor: Luis Alfaro
Office: JEF207A
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00AM-2:00PM
Contact Info: luisalfa@usc.edu
213-740-3302 office, 323-369-8306 Cell

COURSE DESCRIPTION

‘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.’

We will use the same playwriting elements to create new work that is inspired by and adapted from other forms to locate character, story and drama. Our starting point will be research, exploration and imagination. Our research will include historical period, politics, customs, etc. of the original piece.

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 2019, the focus is on adapting a play inspired by essays from Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology: A Library of America Special Publication. You will choose one of the essays in this collection to explore, place, culture, race, history, etc. We will build starting with character and move forward into looking at place for inspiration.

Students will read and discuss the essays from this book as 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 essays and plays. We will look at various aspects of the human condition, and the ways that essays and plays attempt to excavate meaning and provide interpretation.

(2) The course will provide CONTEXT. By confronting the artistry of essays and plays, students will be able to see the powerful roles that essays can play in connecting with various historical, theoretical, and aesthetic dimensions of humankind both past and present, and how that essays 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 essays 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 pays.

(4) The course will provide ANALYSIS. The student will be able to analyze the representations of various aspects of the human condition within the essays and plays read, using shared vocabulary and focusing on the formal execution of character within the worlds of the essays 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.
REQUIRED READINGS AND SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology: A Library of America Special Publication
Edited by David Ulin,
Publisher: Library of America;
ISBN-10: 1931082278

SELECTIONS TO READ
Los Angeles: a rhapsody / Aldous Huxley
Sister Aimée / H.L. Mencken
Paradise / James M. Cain
Golden land / William Faulkner
Pacific village; A thing shared / M.F.K. Fisher
from Ask the dust / John Fante
The day of the locust / Nathanael West
from America is in the heart / Carlos Bulosan
from Southern California country: an island on the land; from North from Mexico:
blood on the pavements / Carey McWilliams
from The labyrinth of solitude / Octavio Paz
The pedestrian / Ray Bradbury
from On the road / Jack Kerouac
Los Angeles notebook; The getty; Quiet days in Malibou; Fire season / Joan Didion
Waiting; Betting in now; The death of the father / Charles Bukowski
from Beneath the underdog / Charles Mingus
from The sexual outlaw / John Rechy
Eureka! / John Gregory Dunne
Angel baby blues / Wanda Coleman
from Anywhere but here / Mona Simpson
from Golden days / Carolyn See
Going up in L.A. / Rubén Martínez
from City of quartz / Mike Davis

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.)
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 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.samuelfrench.com/content/files/upload/GeneralGuidelinesComplete.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.

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 1, 2019, 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 exercised shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless
exceptional circumstances occur.

**Assignment _____ _____% of Grade**
Weekly Assessment Assessments/Ten-minute Plays (3) Final Project

**Assignment Submission Policy**
10% 40% 50%

For your full-length class project, in hard copy only including pages of plays presented in class. For Assessments/Ten-minute Plays, electronic submission is permitted, but, with the header: “THTR 501 Spring 2019.”

**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.
### USC VISIONS AND VOICES SHOWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Super Hero Magic Mama by Inda Craig-Galvan</td>
<td>3/27</td>
<td>Geffen Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othello by William Shakespeare</td>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>Noise Within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lackawanna Blues by Ruben Santiago-Hudson</td>
<td>4/17</td>
<td>Mark Taper Forum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/](http://visionsandvoices.usc.edu/)

### COURSE SCHEDULE: A WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics/Daily Activities</th>
<th>Readings and Homework</th>
<th>Deliverable/ Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Slide Show/Origin Story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Parent as Character</td>
<td>Read in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Introduction to book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Responding to the book</td>
<td>David Ulin, Editor Visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Handout Assignment</td>
<td>‘Scene as Short Play’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Proposal for Play</td>
<td>Short Play Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Research Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>In Class Writing</td>
<td>Writing on Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>In Class Writing</td>
<td>Writing through time/space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>SPRING RECESS (3/10-17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Writing the one-act</td>
<td>Reading in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Writing the one-act</td>
<td>Reading in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Writing the one-act</td>
<td>Reading in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Writing the one-act</td>
<td>Reading in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Writing the one-act</td>
<td>Reading in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Date: For the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC Schedule of Classes at classes.usc.edu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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” policy.usc.edu/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.

Statement for Students with Disabilities
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 STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

***

Support Systems:
Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [link to equity.usc.edu]

**Bias Assessment Response and Support**

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [link to studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support]

**The Office of Disability Services and Programs**

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [link to dsp.usc.edu]

**Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710**

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [link to studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa]

**Diversity at USC**

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [link to diversity.usc.edu]

**USC Emergency Information**

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [link to emergency.usc.edu]

**USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.** Provides overall safety to USC community. [link to dps.usc.edu]