

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 501: Poetry and Prose into Drama
Spring 2020 Wednesday 5 – 7:50 PM 63219D
Location: MCC 102

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

Office Hours: Available: Mon & Wed 2:30 - 4 pm; Tuesday Noon – 3 pm; please note that office hours are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24 hours in advance. For appointments outside these hours, I am available by videoconference on SKYPE or Facetime.

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<http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts IT – Mr. Prakash Shirke, Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288.
MCC

***Catalogue description:** THTR 501 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.*

Poetry and Prose into Drama...

is a writing workshop that focuses on adapting sources in the public domain into dramatic works. Sources, which will vary from semester to semester, will be drawn from both published and unpublished works and may include poetry, fiction, nonfiction, memoir, or even other dramatic works (**see Theme for This Semester**). This workshop explores both the art and craft of adaptation—the intuitive and the technical—utilizing various strategies including: the investigation of archetypal stories and/or storytelling that thrives across cultures, genres, and time; application of the elements of dramatic writing to an existing story frame or literary concept; analysis of written works across a broad spectrum of forms and styles; readings and/or screenings of literature/cinema/plays; writing exercises; cold readings; and dramaturgical input. With an emphasis on process, the workshop offers methods for adapting work and for developing a means to transform non-dramatic genres to dramatic genres. Questions to be explored include: How much is enough/How little is too little? Faithful adaptation, inspired by, or springboard? Should the work be in conversation with or serve as a refutation of the original material? Assigned reading in this course is intended to be a source of inspiration and discovery. Outside reading and outside interests are vital.

Course Objectives

In this workshop, you will write a full-length play adapted from a public-domain source, beginning with early exploratory work and research and moving all the way through concept/outline, raw draft, analysis, and revision. You may also develop shorter works

that grow out of writing exercises. Emphasis is placed on discovering and cultivating your own unique voice as well as expanding your imagination.

An additional focus: We seek to examine current culture, issues, and trends as part of an attempt to define and redefine American dramatic writing for this new century.

Theme for Spring 2020: Greek Tragedy as a Source for Transformation in the 21st Century

The tragedies of the Ancient Greeks are still viable today. On the one hand, we could look at this pessimistically and say, How sad that humans have learned so little in the last 2500 years. Or, we could marvel at the genius of these writers, how skillful they were in delving into the human condition, how empathetic they were about our frailties, and attempt to acknowledge that for us humans, such complicated and inherently wounded beings, even a tiny bit of change for the better is something to celebrate. In the plays from the Greeks, we've got love, war, betrayal, injustice, bad decisions, revenge, forced marriage, corruption, madness, power, families, and even trafficking all represented. With any luck, there is something for everybody.

For 501, none of you have to do a faithful adaptation—not at all. Your adaptations can (and should) be highly creative, reinventing/reimagining the stories from your own view of the world.

For your adaptation, pick one of the plays from the list below. Please note: To make your selection, you do not need to read all of the plays. You can skim them, or read about them, to get a sense of which one you'd like to adapt. There is plenty of material about these plays available on the internet. Once you have selected the play you are going adapt, read **multiple translations** of the play. This will give you some inspiration and ideas for how even a translation can alter the mood, tone, or approach to a play. (Hint: There are also collections of translations of the plays available on the internet; these tend to be older translations with slightly outmoded language, but this gives you at least one free-of-charge translation to use.) In addition: Read **at least two other** plays from the list so that you will gain a sense of the storytelling style of these works and the beauty of the language—and also so that you will be familiar with multiple story lines. This will be useful when you are supporting the other writers in their adaptations of plays, plus it's good to have some context for the stories, which somewhat link/overlap/interweave. So again: You will read at least three different plays (the one you select to adapt + two others). An added benefit: It would be a shame to leave graduate school without some knowledge of these classics that people from all cultures and eras have used as foundations for their own theatre-making—from people creating their own versions of THE TROJAN WOMEN in refugee camps to others creating hip hop versions of the ODYSSEY.

List of plays to adapt:

AGAMEMNON. Aeschylus

AJAX. Sophocles

HECUBA. Euripides

HERAKLES. Euripides

IPHIGENIA AT AULIS (and/or IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS). Euripides

PHILOCTETES. Sophocles

THE BACCHAE. Euripides

THE SUPPLIANT WOMEN. Aeschylus (Important: We'll use the Aeschylus play, not Euripides' play—which has an entirely different story.)

Suggestion: The editions of these plays from the University of Chicago Press have multiple plays in each volume, plus great introductory notes about the historical/cultural era and the playwright.

Optional Reading

Metamorphoses. Mary Zimmerman.

Troy. Amina Henry.

And books about re-interpreting myths, fairy tales with a contemporary view, i.e., the tales are **metaphors**....

Activities/Participation

Unlike a lecture class, this is an artistic and professional workshop. It is designed to guide your progress through your script by zeroing in on process, critical analysis, and revision—tools you'll need to create works of depth, works of multiple layers.

Please remember, throughout the course of the workshop, to view plays and films—current and classic, comedic and dramatic, realistic and non-. Try, also, to make a habit of looking at visual art and visiting museums: LACMA, MOCA, the Japanese American National Museum, the Getty, the Norton Simon, Museum of Latin American Art, California African American Museum, the Huntington Library, the Autry, etc. Expand your senses. Allow music to inspire and awaken emotions and images. During a focused creative effort such as the adaptation process, it is important to be constantly refueled. The work of other artists from other media provides imaginative stimulation resulting in ideas, inspirations, and solutions to problems you might not have come to otherwise.

Grading

Grading Breakdown

Bearing in mind that a grade is earned, not given, your grade will be based on completion of a Final Project (a full-length play), the ongoing writing and revision of your script, completion of the reading assignments, participation in class exercises and discussion, and the creation of a creative portfolio (which is essentially a compilation of the work/research/exercises/ideas created for this class).

Grading Breakdown Percentages:

Creative Portfolio (research/exercises/ideas/vision boards, etc)	25 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Reading	35 percent
Final Project	40 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

Your Final Project is a revised draft of your full-length adaptation. Note: It is recognized that there is not enough time for the entire script to be revised. However, at least one section of the play should demonstrate some potential revision. The project will be graded on both artistic merit AND progress, i.e., the growth from early exploratory work to completed draft.

Assessment:

The Final Project itself is assessed according to the following formula:

Quality of Character Development	25 percent
Quality of Story & Structure	25 percent
Quality of Dialogue/Language	25 percent
Quality of Overall Creative Achievement, which will include development of theme, metaphor/imagery, professionalism	25 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: The quality of work for all components (see list under “Grading Breakdown”) is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed.

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of acceptable quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

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

Acceptable: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D+ (1.3) = 69 – 66; D = 65-64 (1); D = 63 - 60 (0.7) = 60s; F (0) = 59 and below

Note: A minimum passing grade for graduate students is C.

- “Excellent” indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight, as demonstrated by their work; “Good” means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material and has done the work well; “Acceptable” indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; “Poor” indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student’s understanding of the class material; “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.
- 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 have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

Note: The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:

- *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. Under such exceptional circumstances, no late penalties will accrue.*

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues’ work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, ensemble-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues’ work. One unexcused absence is allowed. All other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare whatever assigned work is due and hand it in immediately upon your return to the workshop.

Please note: If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to obtain information about missed class discussions, missed presentations of pages, etc. from your classmates, not from me. Please keep in contact with your fellow writers and arrange to read their pages on your own if you miss class.

Deadlines: You earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Missed assignments count as a zero. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline.

Important Sustainability Message: This class lives in the world of the Green New Deal. No printing. All work, including the Final Project, will be turned in electronically.

Special Note

All students enrolled in MFADW are required to attend program events. This includes all of the New Works Festival events (NWF I, II, and III), all Western Edge Playwrights' Salon events, and the student orientation held in late August. While some of these dates are not yet solidified, please put the times/dates in your calendar as soon as you can. Because we are monitoring professional development in every course that you take, and in the MFADW overall, your participation in these program events will have a direct impact on your annual review.

Please make any and all travel plans for after the New Works Festival III.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Weeks 1 – 3 Jan 15 to Jan 29	<p>Preparation & Gathering</p> <p>Introduction: Why adaptation? How can you renew, expand, reimagine the original material to create an even more insightful and emotional experience for an audience? How do you make older work relevant?</p> <p>For 2020: Who were the Greeks? What was the purpose of their theatre? How were their plays performed?</p> <p>What rituals of antiquity can serve you in creating theatre in the present day?</p> <p>Consider: What ancient story speaks to you?</p>	<p>Discussion:</p> <p>Laying the Groundwork. How to read deeply into material; how to let the inner life of preexisting work speak to you in an original way. How to explore theatricality.</p>	<p>Week 1: Begin to collect your resources, e.g., research, burning ideas, poetic impulses, images, emotional foundation, monologues, character banks, music/soundtrack. Read the materials on Blackboard; read plays provided as PDFs.</p> <p>Week 2: Select the material you will adapt. Bring in ideas, vision boards, resources. Begin character work. Explore voice (through monologues), intentions, missions, relationships.</p> <p>Note: We will be doing many things at once. We will be discussing the source material, exploring and developing characters, analyzing already existing characters/story lines, etc. Some people will be working on different types of material—and I will be offering different kinds of guidance to different people depending on what phase their work is in. Sometimes you will not be able to present your work—but don't wait! Keep working. Sometimes you will be the only one working in a particular mode. No worries. Be prepared to be flexible.</p>

			Remember that there is no one way of writing a play, no one way of getting there. Please stay on top of things and continue to develop your work in your way—but on time and diligently.
<p>Weeks 4 - 12</p> <p>Feb 5 to Apr 8</p>	<p>The Process: From the Intuitive to the Technical</p> <p>Staying Open: Alternating Various Strategies and Skills When Needed.</p> <p>Using Meditation and Analysis.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Consider: Empathy, metaphor, dynamic Characters, possible alternatives to the source material, possible alternatives to the storytelling.</p> <p>The Hidden Life of Language.</p>	<p>Weeks 4 - 6: Write exploratory/ experimental scenes based on an integration of the source material and your spin on it.</p> <p>Read alternative versions of the source material.</p> <p>Read the source material others are adapting.</p> <p>Week 6: Story meeting. Brainstorm further ideas for your Final Project</p> <p>Weeks 7 – onward: Keep writing. Workshop new scenes for your FPP. Present discussion/new ideas/plans for FPP.</p> <p>Midterm, due week 8: Turn in pages for midterm assessment. <i>What does this mean?</i> Turn in as much as you can to show what you are working on. Communicate what this is and what you intend. Remember, at this point, anything you do is a RAW draft, not a first draft. Let's see how far you can get with your work.</p> <p><i>Hint: Look at your writing exercises and monologues for possible raw material for your Final Project and for other plays you are writing.</i></p>
<p>Reminder: Mar 18</p>	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK	Keep working on your play.

Weeks 13 - 15 Apr 15 to Apr 29	Works in Progress Continue Work.	Workshop In-class presentations of full scripts or large segments of scripts from each writer. Schedule TBA.	Weeks 13, 14, 15: Present your script or script segment according to the schedule as created in class. PROVIDE FEEDBACK to the other writers as their work is presented. Continue to refine, revise, rework your script. TURN IN: Your Final Project. Due May 1, 2020.
FINAL Wednesday May 6	FINAL EXAM 5 - 7 pm	Artistic Review: Group Feedback Plus: Last Look Q&As. Where to go next.	Date: For confirmation of the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at www.usc.edu/soc .

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

Who are you, reader, reading my poems an hundred years hence?
 I cannot send you one single flower from this wealth of the spring, one single streak of gold from yonder clouds.
Open your doors and look abroad.
 From your blossoming garden gather fragrant memories of the vanished flowers of an hundred years before.
In the joy of your heart may you feel the living joy that sang one spring morning, sending its glad voice across a hundred years.
 —Rabindranath Tagore, *The Gardener*. 1915.

Some words are open
 Like a diamond on glass windows
 Singing out within the crash of passing sun
 Then there are words like stapled wagers
 In a perforated book—buy and sign and tear apart—
 And come whatever wills all chances
 The stub remains
 An ill-pulled tooth with a ragged edge.
 Some words live in my throat
 Breeding like adders. Others know sun
 Seeking like gypsies over my tongue
 To explode through my lips
 Like young sparrows bursting from shell.
 Some words
 Bedevil me.
 —Audre Lorde, excerpt from “Coal,” *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, 1997.

It’s a rule of life that we can, and should, learn from everyone. There are solemn and serious things we can learn from quacks and crooks, there are philosophies taught us by fools, there are lessons in faithfulness and justice brought to us by chance and by those we chance to meet. Everything is in everything.
 —Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*.

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. 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. 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. 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. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssu

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. 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. 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. dps.usc.edu