

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 501: Poetry and Prose into Drama
Spring 2021 Wednesday 5 – 7:50 PM 63219D
Location: Online

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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IT Help: USC Information Technology Services
<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 Sources, which will vary from semester to semester, will be drawn from both published and unpublished works and may include poetry, fiction, nonfiction, memoir, or even other dramatic works (**see Theme for This Semester**).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 as specified in the Spring 2021 theme;

- experiment with a flexible writing process, beginning with exploratory work and research, using vision boards, character voice exploration, and archival materials;
- develop work through concept/outline and raw draft;
- devise a personal strategy for 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.

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 2021: Religious and Spiritual Texts as a Source for Transformation in the 21st Century

This semester, we are going to be using religious and spiritual texts as our source material. This literature offers you a wide range of options for adapting poetry and prose into plays; it contains both stories and philosophies, characters and ideas. You can turn to the Torah, the Bible, the Qur'an, the Sutras, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Avesta, the Kojiki, the Confucian Book of Odes, the Popul Vuh, or the 52 texts found in Nag Hammadi that make up the Gnostic Bible. You can look into the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Tao Te Ching, the Lives of the Saints, the meditations of Howard Thurman, the writings of Sufi mystics, or Druid lore.

There are stories and themes in abundance in these texts. There are origin stories, cautionary tales, inspiring stories, songs, rituals, words of wisdom, history.

And there are big questions: Why are we here? What is spirit? What is faith? Is there a heaven, is there a hell, is there life after death, is there reincarnation? Why do bad things happen to good people? Who or what is god? Where did evil come from? Is there karma? Is organized religion necessary for communication with god/spirit?

Plus think of the characters: Esther, Job, Siddhartha Gautama, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Akka Mahadevi....

With any luck, there is something that will inspire you to create a new play for the 21st century. For 501, none of you have to do a faithful adaptation of the story you select—not at all. Your adaptations can (and should) be highly creative, reinventing/reimagining the stories/philosophies from your own view of the world.

For your adaptation, pick a story or theme from a religious text. Please note: To make your selection, you do not need to read all of the recommended books on the reading list, but it would be helpful to familiarize yourself with these books. You can skim them, *or read about them*, to get a sense of what is available besides the text you choose to adapt. There is plenty of material about these texts and/or religions available on the internet. Once you have selected what you are going to adapt, read about it, i.e., read not only the text itself but commentaries on the text. Or different versions/translations of the text. This will give you some inspiration and ideas for how even a different translation can alter the mood, tone, or approach to a play. (Hint: There are various versions of some of the texts on the internet, available free-of-charge.) With any luck, you will gain a sense of the storytelling style of these works and the beauty of the language or the questions—and perhaps become familiar with multiple story lines/options. Also, gaining at least a cursory knowledge of the range of religious/spiritual texts out there will be useful when you are supporting the other writers in their adaptations—plus it's good to have some context for the stories, which may somewhat link/overlap/interweave. So again: Do some reading. An added benefit: Knowledge of these texts that people from many cultures and eras have used as foundations for their own lives will offer you some insights into how/why we are here.

Recommended Reading (NOT REQUIRED—but do read at least something from this list):

FRAGRANT PALM LEAVES. Thich Nhat Hanh.
 REVELATIONS. Elaine Pagels.
 TAO TE CHING. Lao Tze, as translated by Stephen Mitchell.
 JESUS AND THE DISINHERITED. Howard Thurman.
 A PASSOVER HAGGADAH. As commented on by Elie Wiesel.
 AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMANIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION. Nyasha Junior.
 PEOPLE OF THE BOOK. Gwendolyn Brooks.

Note: PEOPLE OF THE BOOK is fiction, but it's a wonderful example of how the author took sacred texts and the lore surrounding them and wove an imaginative story.

Other Suggestions for Reading

THE HEART OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING. Thich Nhat Hanh.
 THE CLOISTER WALK. Kathleen Norris.
 THE Gnostic GOSPELS. Elaine Pagels.
 UNDERSTANDING GENESIS. Nahum Sarna.
 IN SEARCH OF OUR MOTHERS' GARDENS. Alice Walker.
 Also, I will be posting handouts about approaching spirituality/religion from a contemporary perspective...

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. [[NOTE FOR SPRING 2021: You'd be surprised what is available for online viewing!]] 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. [[Note for Spring 2021: We are aware that internet connectivity issues may make it difficult for you to participate at certain times. Please make sure to view the recorded version of the class if you have internet issues. And please COMMUNICATE and let me know when these issues arise.]]

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. [[SPRING 2021: Recorded versions of the class sessions will be available on Zoom.]]

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. [[SPRING 2021: OK, we'll be virtual. Just make sure you're not on a plane or in the wilderness without wifi until after NWF3.]]

Zoom Etiquette

"Netiquette" or "internet etiquette," is important for collaborative work. Please respect the following guidelines:

- Whenever possible, please use your computer to log-in to the class rather than your phone. This will help us with the quality of visuals and audio, plus it will present fewer problems when sharing screens.
- If you have technical issues during class, please contact: USC Information Technology Services <http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash Shirke. Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288.
- Your camera must be on at all times, unless you are requested to hide video.
- Please attempt to log-in from an environment that does not have distracting background noise, such as pets, family members, machinery, music. If you find yourself in a situation with distracting noise, please use ear buds or headphones.
- When not speaking (for example, during a reading of a scene, when you are not playing a role), please mute your microphone. During discussions feel free to leave your mic on.
- Remember that you are in class, therefore behavior appropriate to class should be followed. Please do not walk around, leave the room, read, play games, etc. during class.
- You may use your devices for research that enhances the discussion during class, but please stay attuned to what is going on while engaged in research.
- Try to take turns speaking. Remember that Zoom creates problems when voices overlap.
- The chat box will be available to you to use during class, however please don't abuse it. For example, remember that everyone can see what you type in the chat. Therefore your comments should not contain private messages to another class member—which can be read in the saved chat. Also, try to use chat to enhance the discussion, rather than interrupt it.
- Remember: The class session is being recorded. (This includes the chat.)
- Be respectful of others at all times.
- Remember: We're all in this together. Now more than ever.

Synchronous Session Recording notice

Recordings of each class session will be available to class members on Blackboard.

Sharing of Course Materials Outside of the Learning Environment

USC has a policy that prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
<p>Weeks 1 – 3</p> <p>Jan 20 to Feb 3</p>	<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 2021: What is the foundation of the religion/spiritual practice you are exploring? What was their purpose? Their basic beliefs?</p> <p>What rituals of these practices can serve you in creating theatre in the present day?</p> <p>Consider: What text speaks to you—and why?</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. 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>
<p>Weeks 4 - 12</p> <p>Feb 10 to Apr 7</p>	<p>The Process: From the Intuitive to the Technical</p> <p>Staying Open: Alternating Various Strategies and Skills When Needed.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Consider: Empathy, metaphor, dynamic characters, possible</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</p>

<p>PLEASE NOTE: We do not actually meet on Apr 7 due to a USC Wellness Day.</p> <p>Continue work and check in with me as needed.</p>	<p>Using Meditation and Analysis.</p>	<p>alternatives to the source material, possible alternatives to the storytelling.</p> <p>The Hidden Life of Language.</p>	<p>source material and/or commentary on the source material.</p> <p>Check out 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>Weeks 13 - 15</p> <p>Apr 14 to Apr 28</p>	<p>Works in Progress</p> <p>Continue Work.</p>	<p>Workshop</p> <p>In-class presentations of full scripts or large segments of scripts from each writer. Schedule TBA.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>TURN IN: Your Final Project. Due May 5, 2020.</p>
<p>FINAL</p> <p>Wednesday May 5</p>	<p>FINAL EXAM</p> <p>5 - 7 pm</p>	<p>Artistic Review: Group Feedback</p> <p>Plus: Last Look Q&As. Where to go next.</p>	<p>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.</p>

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,
policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group
 counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symphlicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.