

## THTR 500 Dramaturgical Perspectives & Approaches

Units: 4, Section: 63223D

Spring 2022, Session 001—Mondays—Time: 5-7:50 PM

Location: MCC 108

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD; Pronouns: she/her/hers, Race: MR/O, Blood Type: O+

Contact Info: [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu).

Office: USC School of Dramatic Arts

Office Hours: 1-3 pm Mondays by appointment via email to instructor (*please note other times easily can be negotiated*); as a mutual courtesy, 24-hour cancellation via email to the instructor expected.

Teaching Assistant: None.

IT Help: USC Information Technology Services, <http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash Shirke, Contact Info: [shirke@usc.edu](mailto:shirke@usc.edu), (213) 740-1288, MC

### Catalogue Description

Investigates art and craft of dramatic writing initiated/completed in other MFA in Dramatic Writing courses or writing that was submitted as a sample for program entry.

### Course Description and Overview

The course will focus on a page-one, fully reconsidered revision of a play that you wrote in a past USC MFA in Dramatic Writing course or on the play that you submitted to enter the program. This is not a class in which you start a new play, but one in which you focus on the evolution of an existing play that fits the aforementioned parameters.

### Learning Objectives

Your objective is to deepen your grasp of key dimensions of your play – character and story in particular – to strengthen and refine past work that is important to you as a playwright. You should be aware of the world in which you have set your play, the time in which it is set, and other key characteristics of your creative expression.

### Required Readings

#### 1. Available in USC bookstore:

*Peerless* by Jiehae Park, Publisher: Samuel French Inc.

*Fairview* by Jackie Sibblies Drury, Publisher: Theatre Communications Group

*Where We're Born* by Lucy Thurber, Publisher: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

*What They Bring: The Poetry of Migration and Immigration*, Editors: Irene Willis and Jim Haba, Publisher: Ipbooks

2. Blackboard <https://blackboard.usc.edu/> provides additional links to pertinent readings, essays, and resources. (Blackboard, in addition to being the site that contains some course materials is also the 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.) The syllabus is posted on Blackboard as well as on the USC Schedule of Classes. **Blackboard is required reading for the course.**

3. This class requires a writing journal. No computers are allowed in class. You may transfer your in-class workshop writings to your computers outside of class and submit your final projects via [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu). If you submit documents as PDFs, you agree that you do not wish to receive specific notes and that you accept a summary response. You can purchase a journal at the USC bookstore or online; for example:

[https://www.amazon.com/Emraw-Composition-Notebook-Journal-Planning/dp/B07TKCTS1Q/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crd=2U2GCVDA50U3&keywords=writing+journals+black+and+white&qid=1639713415&sprefix=writing+journals+black+and+whi%2Caps%2C215&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Emraw-Composition-Notebook-Journal-Planning/dp/B07TKCTS1Q/ref=sr_1_2?crd=2U2GCVDA50U3&keywords=writing+journals+black+and+white&qid=1639713415&sprefix=writing+journals+black+and+whi%2Caps%2C215&sr=8-2) or [https://www.amazon.com/RICCO-BELLO-Classic-Notebook-inches/dp/B07DMBD1SR/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?crd=2U2GCVDA50U3&keywords=writing+journals+black+and+white&qid=1639713442&sprefix=writing+journals+black+and+whi%2Caps%2C215&sr=8-4](https://www.amazon.com/RICCO-BELLO-Classic-Notebook-inches/dp/B07DMBD1SR/ref=sr_1_4?crd=2U2GCVDA50U3&keywords=writing+journals+black+and+white&qid=1639713442&sprefix=writing+journals+black+and+whi%2Caps%2C215&sr=8-4).

**Supplementary Readings:**

*Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* By Atul Gawande  
*When Can We Go Back to America?* By Susan H. Kamei  
*The Power of Myth* By Joseph Campbell  
*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* By Joseph Campbell  
*Letters to A Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke (Available On-line), [http://www.carrothers.com/rilke\\_main.htm](http://www.carrothers.com/rilke_main.htm)  
*The Art of Dramatic Writing* by Lajos Egri  
*The Book of Tea* by Kakuzo Okakura  
*Poetics* by Aristotle  
*African Philosophy: An Anthology* Edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze

**Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments**

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. Late work is given a ten percent (10%) penalty and is accepted only within one week of its due date. The only exception is illness or personal crisis.

Please note that I invite you to visit with me outside of class if you need support or counsel about the course content.

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.*

Each assignment is graded on a percentage, i.e. 9/100, according to this scale:

A	95-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F = 59 & below
A-	90-94	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66	
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62	

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

The final grade summarizes the semester’s grades and the final project assessment. This culminates in a letter grade calculated on the same grading scale above.

Your grade for this course is assessed as follows:

1. 25% - Engagement in weekly dramaturgy/writing workshops and artistic creation and engagement notes
2. 25% - Life of the Mind Presentations
3. 25% - Final Project (culmination of item #1)
4. 25% - Final Examination

The following fundamental concepts of dramatic writing are used to evaluate student work:

- Ability to cultivate a distinctive and authentic voice and vision.
- Expertise in character development, including desire, the multidimensional elements of character, and the “geography” of mapping character; and the ability to tackle the “unanswerable” – the problems and questions that cannot be merely quantified or completely described or finished – on stage through the actions and consequences of the characters. Ability to research dimensions of character and story in order to authenticate dramatic representations.

- Expertise in story development including an understanding of progressive action and the nature of conflict. Ability to reflect the world through the prism of the play, so that the writing is suitably and deliberately questioning and open-ended, allowing for colloquy between artist and audience that can change and adapt over time.
- Ability to write dramatic dialogue and discern the distinctions between dialogue and conversation including the ability to use all the dimensions of language to enhance the expression of the sensory and emotional life of the play.
- Ability to comprehend and utilize metaphor and imagery to expand the subtext and the deeper implications of the dramatic work. Awareness of dramatic writing's capacity for connecting to all disciplines in the investigation of the critical questions of humanity.
- Ability to understand and utilize stage time as something other than real time, as something to be foreshortened or elongated as well as elevated, depending on event and point of view.
- Ability to think in terms of total theatre – utilizing music, dance, media, sports, and other elements – to create a world on stage all its own; and own the courage to explore form with intelligence and creativity.
- Ability to understand the process of presentation and production, and the responsibilities of the writer as a collaborator in that process, including the ability to absorb and apply constructive criticism and revise and refine the work towards greater professional excellence as well as the ability to adapt, learn, initiate, and be proactive creatively and intellectually.

Engagement Notes (25%). Interactive, participatory writing workshops will be held in class in which your artistic creation will occur accompanied by readings and feedback. Outside of class, you can transfer your journal writings to your computers. See information above about submitting electronically for your final projects. Please note that you are expected to provide constructive criticism to your peers and accept their constructive criticism in return. You will take notes on what is said to you, type them up, and submit them to the instructor within twenty-four hours of the end of each course (midnight the Tuesday after class) (these are your engagement notes).

Life of the Mind Presentations (25%). Reading expands your universe of thought, which organically feeds your creative expression. Three teams will be designated on the first day of class. Each team will be responsible for a presentation about an assigned required reading that assesses these elements of the reading: Characters beginning with Protagonist, World of the Play (place, time period, sociopolitical realities of the time period), History of the Author, Premise of the Play, Point of Attack of the Play, Q&A. Each presentation should be no more than 30 minutes in length. Here are the team assignments: Writer 1 (Marilyn Schotland) – *Peerless*, Writer 2 (Cynthia Sotelo Galaz) – *Fairview*, Writer 3 (Joseph Valdez) – *Where We're Born*.

Final Project (25%). This project is your play, a culmination of the work you do in the engagement/writing workshop process. *You must submit a play that is a fully reconsidered revision of the play that you designate on the first day of class.* A superficial revision is not acceptable. Please make certain you entirely reconsider your work over the course of the semester and that this development is obvious in the Final Project that you submit.

Your final project play must be typed in standard manuscript format with standard top/bottom/side one-inch margins in Courier or Times 12-point type. Please see the professional formatting standards of the Dramatists' Guild: <https://www.dramatistsguild.com/script-formats>. As noted herein, please be mindful that your Final Project grade will be diminished if you do not submit it in professional format. *Remember, if you do not submit your Final Project electronically as a doc/docx document so that commentary also may be provided electronically and instead submit it as a PDF, it is understood that you do not desire written feedback, but merely summary comments.*

Because you are presenting your work to the profession, you are expected to refine your thesis into a play manuscript that is between *50-89 pages*, not including the title page, copyright page, and cast of characters page. Do not exceed the maximum.

You are encouraged to copyright your play (Electronic Copyright Office: [https://eco.copyright.gov/eService\\_enu/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eco.copyright.gov](https://eco.copyright.gov/eService_enu/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eco.copyright.gov))

The Final Project play shall be graded according to the following rubric:

- 25% Quality of character development.
- 25% Quality of story development.
- 25% Quality of dialogue crafting.
- 25% Originality, overall creative achievement, and professionalism of project, which includes formatting, spelling, and grammar.

Final Examination (25%).

Read *What They Bring: The Poetry of Migration and Immigration*, Editors: Irene Willis and Jim Haba, to prepare.

**Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

***Dramaturgical notes are provided throughout the semester. Please retain and refer to them in the continued refinement of your play.***

Jan. 10 - First day of class. Online due to USC policy. Overview of dramatic writing fundamentals and review of syllabus. Project designation and revision ideas. Designation of Life of the Mind presentation teams.

Jan. 17 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday. USC holiday. No class.

Jan. 24 – Writing workshop: writing the standard existence, stakes, disruption, and emergent desire. Readings, dramaturgical feedback; engagement notes to instructor by Jan. 25, 11:59 pm PST.

Jan. 31 – Writing workshop: writing the initial action of the protagonist, conflicts, challenges, discoveries, education. Readings, dramaturgical feedback; engagement notes to instructor by Feb. 1, 11:59 pm PST.

Feb. 7 – Writing workshop: writing a subsequent action of the protagonist, conflicts, challenges, discoveries, education. Readings, dramaturgical feedback; engagement notes to instructor by Feb. 8, 11:59 pm PST.

Feb. 14 – Writing workshop: writing a subsequent action of the protagonist, conflicts, challenges, discoveries, education. Readings, dramaturgical feedback; engagement notes to instructor by Feb. 15, 11:59 pm PST.

Feb. 21 – President’s Day. USC holiday. No class.

Feb. 28 – Mid-term project presentation and dramaturgical discussion of Plays A & B. Full play or what has been created of the play-in-progress. If you miss a presentation, please obtain the play(s) from the student(s), read it, and provide dramaturgical commentary to the student. Entire play will be read by creators (two presentations).

Mar. 7 – Mid-term project presentation and dramaturgical discussion of Play C. Full play or what has been created of the play-in-progress. If you miss a presentation, please obtain the play(s) from the student(s), read it, and provide dramaturgical commentary to the student. Entire play will be read by creator (one presentation). Writing workshop: discussion of mid-term readings, dramaturgical feedback, creative strategies.

Mar. 13-20 – USC Spring Recess. No class.

Mar. 21 – Online for presentations. Life of the Mind presentations: All writers.

Mar. 28 – Final project presentation and dramaturgical discussion of Play A. This is a curricular presentation for your fully revised play. Please use SDA actors. If you miss a presentation, please obtain the play(s) from the student(s), read it, and provide dramaturgical commentary to the student. Post-play dramaturgical feedback session.

Apr. 4 – Final project presentation and dramaturgical discussion of Play B. This is a curricular presentation for your fully revised play. Please use SDA actors. If you miss a presentation, please obtain the play(s) from the student(s), read it, and provide dramaturgical commentary to the student. Post-play dramaturgical feedback session.

Apr. 11 – Final project presentation and dramaturgical discussion of Play C. This is a curricular presentation for your fully revised play. Please use SDA actors. If you miss a presentation, please obtain the play(s) from the student(s), read it, and provide dramaturgical commentary to the student. Post-play dramaturgical feedback session.

Apr. 18 – Online for guest artists. Dramatic Writing (Theatre, Television) guest artist panel. Interactive discussion and Q&A.

Apr. 25 – Final day of class. Student evaluation time. Guest artist: diverse views from the theatre arts front, DEI panel. TBA. Interactive question-and-answer session.

May 9 – Final examination date as designated by USC. Please submit your final between 7 and 9 pm PST, no earlier or later, to [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu). The examination will be posted to the course Blackboard site after 6:30 pm May 9, 2022.

<b>**ADDITIONAL POLICIES</b>
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#### **EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPS**

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, home work that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

#### **SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities\* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

\*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

#### **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](http://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 Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto: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.

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### **Health and Participation in Class**

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

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### **SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:**

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

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### **Support Systems:**

***Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call***  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://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.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.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 Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776***  
<https://osas.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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.