

**THTR 395m – Drama as Human Relations**

63095R/Units: 4

Spring 2024 — TUES, THURS — 1:00-2:50pm

**Location: DMC 260**

**Instructor: Boni B. Alvarez**

**Office Hours:** by appt: TUES, THURS 11am-12:30pm

**Office:** MCC 212

**Contact Info:** bbalvare@usc.edu

(I will reply to your e-mail as soon as I can, but please allow 24 hours for a response.)

**Course Assistant: Marisa Caddick**

**Contact Info:** mcaddick@usc.edu

**Office Hours:** by appt

**Course Description**

This course explores intercultural diversity and the dynamics of human relations through contemporary dramatic works. We will read plays that address various aspects of perceived human differences, including those based on race, ethnicity, class, level of education, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, political affiliation, and national origin. We will consider how these differences create tensions, cause despairs, stir up conflicts, as well as generate hopes and deliver redemptions among dramatic characters striving to survive and thrive in a multiethnic environment. Inspired by the etymological roots of “drama” as “to do, to act, and to perform,” our curriculum will also include analysis of films and television shows that attempt a move towards social change. The course encourages its participants to appreciate the challenge and pleasure of experiencing diversity in interpersonal encounters across various boundaries.

This course fulfills the diversity requirement for undergraduate general education.

**Learning Objectives**

- This course broadens students’ dramatic literacy of contemporary American plays and playwrights through reading dramatic texts and group presentations on working playwrights.
- This course cultivates the students' abilities for dramatic analysis and critical thinking via class discussion and through short essays on close readings of the texts.
- Through analysis and embodied encounters of dramatic artworks, students may appreciate how theater and performance artists intervene in contemporary cultures to promote social change toward more diverse, equitable, and inclusive societies.
- Through group assignments, students will sharpen ensemble-building and presentational skills, expanding awareness of interpersonal dynamics in collaborative situations.

## Required Readings

Texts marked with an asterisk (\*) have been ordered through the USC Bookstore. All other texts will be distributed via Blackboard.

- Alfaro, Luis. *Mojada*
- Cale, David. *Harry Clarke*
- Fornes, Maria Irene. *Mud*
- Fuchs, Elinor. "Visit to a Small Planet"
- Jenkins, Barry. MOONLIGHT
- \*Lew, Michael. *Teenage Dick*
- Majok, Martyna. *Sanctuary City*
- \*Nottage, Lynn. *Sweat*
- Scheer, Alexis. *Our Dear Dead Drug Lord*
- Song, Celine. PAST LIVES

The required readings deal with intense and disturbing subject matter. This course ascribes to the adage that a playwright's artistic purpose is to hold up a mirror to the world they live in, illuminating the potential of extreme dramatic situations – those that force us to ponder the fundamentals of human existence. Please consider this syllabus itself an overall content warning and your participation in the course an explicit consent to experiencing difficult and/or troubling art.

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

**The quality of work in this class is largely determined by the thoroughness of your effort, the ongoing process, and the imagination/critical thought displayed.**

Assignment Submission: **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

### **Participation – 15%**

Students must actively participate in the discussion topics and in-class readings. Students will be evaluated on eagerness to be involved in class activities, and the quality of contributions to discussion. Many ideas, positions, and opinions will arise; students should be respectful in the ensuing dialogue, practicing active listening & engagement, and employing empathy.

### **Weekly Intro – 15%**

Students will be divided into groups to present a 15-minute introductory profile on one of the playwrights whose work is being studied. Elements that should be explored include biographical information, career and artistic goals & accomplishments, themes & topics in the playwright's body of work. Groups should also include brief dramaturgical context that might be crucial to our understanding of the play being studied.

### **Dramaturgical Project – 15%**

Dramaturgs serve as invaluable resources during the rehearsal process and production. For each play studied, we will have a dramaturgical team. Teams will field questions that arise during the play readings and provide reports for subsequent class sessions. Teams can also choose to provide other information or materials for the class to consider. Students will work as a creative team and will earn the same grade for the assignment.

### **Character Analyses (2) – 20% each**

Students will submit a 3-page response to a work, taking a deeper dive into the characters, analyzing their specific arcs, resonance and (non-)relatability with their audiences. A more detailed prompt will be distributed.

#1 will explore Lew's *Teenage Dick* and Scheer's *Our Dear Dead Drug Lord*

#2 will explore Jenkins' *MOONLIGHT* and/or Cale's *Harry Clarke* and/or Song's *PAST LIVES*

### **Final Assignment – 15%**

A final self-assessment in relation to the works studied over the course of the semester, evaluating one's growth as an artist and collaborator. A more detailed prompt will be distributed.

### **Grading Breakdown**

<b>ASSIGNMENT</b>	<b>% of grade</b>
Participation	15
Weekly Intro	15
Character Analysis #1	20
Character Analysis #2	20
Dramaturgical Project	15
Final Assignment	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

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

A+: 100-98	A: 97-94	A-: 93-90
B+: 89-87	B: 86-84	B-: 83-80
C+: 79-77	C: 76-74	C-: 73-70
D+: 69-67	D: 66-64	D-: 63-60
F: 59-0		

When a student's mathematical GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted towards the higher end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been excellent or good and toward the lower end for those with average or poor attendance and participation.

## **Additional Policies**

MISSED CLASSES – It is your responsibility to obtain information about missed class discussions and assignments from your colleagues.

### **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.

<u>WK</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>WEEKLY SCHEDULE</u>
<b>1 Introduction</b>		
	TUES 1/9	Introductions; <i>Amazing Race</i>
	THURS 1/11	<u>Fuchs' <i>Visit to a Small Planet</i>; <i>Amazing Race</i></u>
<b>2 Coming of Age</b>		
	TUES 1/16	Michael Lew's <i>Teenage Dick</i>
	THURS 1/18	<u><i>Teenage Dick</i> (cont)</u>
3	TUES 1/23	<i>Teenage Dick</i> (cont)
	THURS 1/25	<u><i>Amazing Race</i></u>
4	TUES 1/30	TBA
	THURS 2/1	<u>Alexis Scheer's <i>Our Dear Dead Drug Lord</i></u>
5	TUES 2/6	<i>Our Dear Dead Drug Lord</i> (cont)
	THURS 2/8	<u><i>Our Dear Dead Drug Lord</i> (cont)</u>
<b>*Character Analysis 1 – DUE: MON, 2/12 – 11:59pm</b>		
6	TUES 2/13	Barry Jenkins' MOONLIGHT
	THURS 2/15	<u>MOONLIGHT (cont)</u>
7	TUES 2/20	MOONLIGHT (cont)
	THURS 2/22	<u>David Cale's <i>Harry Clarke</i></u>
8	TUES 2/27	<i>Harry Clarke</i> (cont)
	THURS 2/29	<u><i>Harry Clarke</i> (cont)</u>
9	TUES 3/5	Celine Song's PAST LIVES
	THURS 3/7	<u>PAST LIVES (cont)</u>
	TUES 3/12	SPRING BREAK
	THURS 3/14	SPRING BREAK
<b>10 American Dreams &amp; Enlightenment</b>		
	TUES 3/19	Luis Alfaro's <i>Mojada</i>
	THURS 3/21	<u><i>Mojada</i> (cont)</u>
<b>*Character Analysis 2 – DUE: MON, 3/25 – 11:59pm</b>		
11	TUES 3/26	<i>Mojada</i> (cont)
	THURS 3/28	<u>Martyna Majok's <i>Sanctuary City</i></u>
12	TUES 4/2	<i>Sanctuary City</i> (cont)
	THURS 4/4	<u><i>Sanctuary City</i> (cont)</u>
13	TUES 4/9	TBA
	THURS 4/11	<u>Lynn Nottage's <i>Sweat</i></u>
14	TUES 4/16	<i>Sweat</i> (cont)
	THURS 4/18	<u><i>Sweat</i> (cont)</u>
15	TUES 4/23	Maria Irene Fornes' <i>Mud</i>
	THURS 4/25	<i>Mud</i> (cont)
<b>FINAL</b>	<b>WED 5/8</b>	<b>2:00-4:00pm FINAL</b>

## 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 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](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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### Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

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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.