



THTR 314

Advanced Topics in Modern Drama

Fall 2024

Units: 4

Time T, TH 4:00-5:50 pm

Location: WPH B30

Instructor: Melinda C. Finberg

Office: MCC 212

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2 pm – 3 pm and by appointment. I know students' availability may not line up with any times I schedule, so just contact me to set up a mutually convenient time. I want to meet with you.

Contact Info: finberg@usc.edu Emails will be responded to within 48 hours – and generally much sooner.

IT Help:

Hours of Service: 24/7

Contact Info: 213-740-5555

Course Description

This course will focus on the works of BIPOC playwrights. I am assigning 7 plays for us to analyze; students will be asked to contribute works by additional BIPOC playwrights of any ethnicity to our studies. The course will have two parts: the first is to explore these texts dramaturgically; the second is to venture out virtually into our own communities and connect with local theatres about their productions of works by BIPOC playwrights, what the theatre's mission statements are, what kind of audience outreach they engage in, and how they are responding to the aftermath of the pandemic (are they doing virtual theatre pieces? Are they continuing to engage with their audiences? etc.) These two halves will be combined in a final project in which the student combines what they have learned about the plays they have explored with what they have learned about how theatres make their choices to propose a 3-play season and why they have made these choices.

Learning Objectives

- To advocate for anti-racist theatre in our own practices and in the American theatre
- To analyze a specific play's method of storytelling and engagement with its audience

- To research and create production histories for plays that suggest why theatres choose certain kinds of theatrical works to stage
- To connect with theatre companies to understand how those theatres make production choices and engage in audience outreach – especially in regards to BIPOC playwrights
- To practice professional networking habits

Prerequisite(s): THTR 125 and THTR 225

Course Notes

Links to required videos will be posted on Brightspace in the Contents section. Any Powerpoints I show will also be made available on Brightspace.

I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus to accommodate the needs of the class.

Communication

Our primary form of out-of-class communication will be email. I will post general class information on the Announcements page of Brightspace.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

A WiFi connection is necessary to access material and submit assignments on Brightspace.

The class's primary source of sharing online information is Brightspace, which you can access with your USC account. Here are links for information for the [USC Computing Center Laptop Loaner Program](#), Information for software support and availability: [Zoom information for students](#), [Blackboard help for students](#), [Software available to USC Campus.](#)]

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Boucicault, Dion. *The Octaroon or, Life in Louisiana*
 Fast Horse, Larissa. *The Thanksgiving Play*
 Fornes, Maria Irene. *Fefu and Her Friends*
 Jacobs-Jenkins, Branden. *An Octaroon*
 Parks, Suzan-Lori. *Topdog/Underdog*
 Pritner, Cal and Walters, Scott. *Introduction to Play Analysis*
 Son, Diana. *Stop Kiss*
 Wolfe, George C. *The Colored Museum*

Plays will be available at the University Book Store. Some may be available online through the library.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Major Assignments

Assignment 1: Essay on *The/An Octoroon*. Choose one of the prompts below, or one of your own creation that I have approved.

How do you react to the idea of the double casting in *An Octoroon*? For example, is it too difficult for the actor playing George to also play McClosky? How? Why? Does it add an exciting level to the play? How? Why? Support your choice with evidence from the text. Note **how** the parts are doubled. How does Jacobs-Jenkins decide on how the doubling occurs. Make your best guess and support it with evidence from the text.

Or

Clearly there are difficulties staging slavery today. Explore the scenes with Minnie and Dido. How does Jacobs-Jenkins tackle the minefield of portraying slaves on stage? Note also how Pete transforms himself when white people come around. In Boucicault's play, Minnie, Dido, and Grace are very minor parts, but Jacobs-Jenkins gives them much larger roles and importance. What is he trying to do with these characters? Does he succeed? Be sure to support yourself with evidence from the text and cite it appropriately.

Due September 19, 2024

Assignment 2: Production Histories

You will look at 3 plays over the course of the semester. They should be a mix of plays we have read in class and plays you are looking at in the context of your final project. Some of the questions you should ask of them might be:

- When was the first production of the play? Where did it take place? Who directed it? Who acted in it?
- What was the reception it received? Was the run extended?
- Were there other productions of the play following the original? If so, where? Was it the same director or cast? Or an entirely new production? What was the reception it received in these other venues?
- What kind of audiences attended? Were they primarily audiences of color? White? Diverse? Any idea why? Was there outreach?
- Have there been virtual productions and/or are any planned?
- Are there any or other questions you should ask about your play's production history?

Assignment 3: Questions to Ask a Play

- You will look at 3 plays over the course of the semester. They should be a mix of plays we have read in class and plays you are looking at in the context of your final project and be different from those you are writing about in Production Histories. Some of the questions you should ask of them might be:
- Who is the protagonist? Who or What is the antagonist? Why?
- What is the primary conflict?
- What is the Introductory Incident?

- What is the Moment of Engagement?
- What is the Climax?
- What is the Denouement?
- What is the Major Dramatic Question?

Make sure you understand what Pritner and Walters mean by these questions. How do these questions help you to understand the structure of the play? What do they reveal to you?

Final Project: Planning a 3-Play Season

Having read the plays both assigned in class and those you have found on your own (perhaps through your outreach to professional theaters,) create a 3-play season and explain how this produces a cohesive season. (At least 2 plays should be from those we read in class.) What ties the plays together? Themes? Audiences they will appeal to? How they relate to the mission of the theater? Whether there is a core company who can be cast in the plays? Is there enough variety? Create and present a sales pitch for your season.

Participation

Class participation includes taking part in class discussions, engaging with group learning in break-out sessions, responding to prompts submitted on the Discussion Board or Journal pages of Brightspace that contribute to class discussions or group work. It also includes observing Netiquette and helping to make the class a comfortable place for all to express different opinions.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	Percentage of Grade
Essay on <i>The/An Octoroon</i>	15	15%
Production Histories	3@5	15%
Questions to ask a Play	3@5	15%
Connecting with Theatres		25%
Researching Theaters	5	5%
Planning your Approach	5	5%
Planning Follow-up	5	5%
Do it and Report Back	10	10%
Final Project	15	15%
Class Participation	15	15%
TOTAL	100	100%

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Rubrics

Rubrics will be posted on the Brightspace Assignments page underneath the Assignment description

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments should be submitted to Assignments, and for backup to Turnitin, on Brightspace, unless otherwise indicated, before 11:59 pm of the due date

Grading Timeline

Grades will be released and comments will be available on the Turnitin page two weeks after the due date.

Additional Policies

- Please refrain from using technology during class for anything other than classwork.
- We will be taking a short break in the middle of class. That time is not only a “bio” break but a time to relax and check in with each other informally.
- Remember, our primary goal is to learn from each other and creating a learning community relies on consistent commitment from each of us.

Common Ground Rules for Class

In our meetings:

- Listen actively and attentively.
- Respect each other’s views
- Respect others’ rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own.
- Ask questions when you do not understand; do not assume you know what others are thinking.
- It’s OK to ask a question that you think may be unsophisticated or uninformed
- If you are offended by anything said during discussion, acknowledge it immediately.
- If you think something is missing from the conversation, don’t wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself
- Refer to the text to support your ideas.
- Support good ideas that other people have, even if they are different from your own.

- Recognize and/or remember that we have different backgrounds.
- We all make mistakes at times. You may correct someone (including me) as long as you do so respectfully.
- Trust that people are always doing the best they can.

Zoom Etiquette

Should we need to have class via Zoom, common ground rules for class still apply. In addition:

- Mute when you are not speaking and raise your hand when you wish me to call on you
- Keep your camera on, unless you have contacted me before class to explain why you cannot do so

Attendance

- No portion of your grade will be awarded for class attendance, but unexcused absences can be the basis for lowering grades in Class Participation. Excused absences include illness, student athletes with approved Travel Request Letters, other students with departmental letters indicating a need to provide service to the School, and students who give advance notice of religious observation.
- Students are responsible for material covered on days they are absent. Please contact me if you have any difficulties with this.

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.
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- *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.

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from

the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations could result in outcomes such as a grade penalty or as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action such as suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Policy on AI Generators

Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is limited to generating ideas. Using AI generated text in writing your assignments is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus they are not prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work **and provide the prompts used to generate the content**. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.

Please ask me if you are unsure about what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Group work. Unless specifically designated as a 'group project,' all assignments are expected to be completed individually.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, and/or in the course.

Policy for the use of AI Generators In this course, You may use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs only to help you with generating ideas for assignments You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus they are not prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To

adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate any content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity as such. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. 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. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Course Evaluations

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. The process and intent of the end-of-semester evaluation should be provided. A [mid-semester evaluation](#) will be provided for early course correction.

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.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverables/ Due Dates
Week 1 Tues 8/27	Intro to course What is melodrama?		
Thurs 8/29	Play Analysis	Read Pritner and Walters, <i>Introduction to Play Analysis</i> , Chapters 1 and 2	
Week 2 Tues 9/3	Who was Boucicault? <i>The Octoroon</i>	Read Boucicault, <i>The Octoroon</i> What is the Climax? What is the Major Dramatic Question?	
Thurs 9/5	<i>The Octoroon</i>	<i>The Octoroon</i> Discuss Theatre Outreach	
Week 3 Tues 9/10	Who is Branden Jacobs-Jenkins? Why is he adapting Boucicault?	Read Jacobs-Jenkins <i>An Octoroon</i>	Choose theatres to write to
Thurs 9/12	<i>An Octoroon</i>		
Week 4 Tues 9/17	<i>An Octoroon</i>	Read Pritner and Walters, Chs. 3 and 4	
Thurs 9/19	<i>An Octoroon</i> <i>The Colored Museum</i>		<i>Octoroon</i> Assignment due
Week 5 Tues 9/24	<i>The Colored Museum</i>	Read Wolfe, <i>The Colored Museum</i>	Theater Outreach: plan your approach.
Thurs 9/26	<i>The Colored Museum</i>		
Week 6 Tues 10/1	<i>The Colored Museum</i>	Read Pritner and Walters, Chs. 5 and 6	Send query letters out
Thurs 10/3	<i>Topdog/Underdog</i>	Read Parks, <i>Topdog/Underdog</i>	
Week 7 10/8- 10	<i>Topdog/Underdog</i> Discuss theatre follow ups		Plan your follow up on Theatre Outreach.
Fall Break 10/10-10/11			
Week 8 Tues 10/15	<i>Topdog/Underdog</i>	Read Pritner and Walters, Chs. 7 and 8	Make sure you are up to date on Production Histories and

Thurs 10/ 17	<i>Topdog/Underdog</i>		Questions to Ask a Play. At least one of each should now be in.
Week 9 Tues 10/22	<i>Fefu and her Friends</i>	Read Fornes, <i>Fefu and her Friends</i>	
Thurs 10/24	<i>Fefu and her Friends</i>		
Week 10 Tues 10/29	<i>Fefu and her Friends</i>	Read Pritner and Walters, Ch. 5 Characters	
Thurs 10/31	<i>Fefu and her Friends</i>		
Week 11 Tues 11/5	<i>Stop Kiss</i>	Read Son, <i>Stop Kiss</i>	Make sure you are up to date on Production Histories and Questions to Ask a Play. At least two of each should now be in.
Thurs 11/7	<i>Stop Kiss</i>		
Week 12 Tues 11/12	<i>Stop Kiss</i>		Check in in on theatre results
Thurs, 11/14	<i>Stop Kiss</i>		
Week 13 Tues 11/19	<i>The Thanksgiving Play</i>	Read Fast Horse, <i>The Thanksgiving Play</i>	
Thurs, 11/21	<i>The Thanksgiving Play</i>		
Week 14 11/26 Thanksgiving break 11/27-28	<i>The Thanksgiving Play</i>		
Week 15 12/3- 5	Review, Summing up		Report back results of theatre outreach Make sure you are finished your Production Histories and Questions to Ask a Play. All three of each must now be in.
FINAL	Presentations	No extensions possible	Date: check date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at classes.usc.edu .

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre 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.

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.

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate](#)- and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

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

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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) 740-2500

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

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

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.