Fall 8-15-2014

ENG 4764-001: Play Writing

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ENG 4764 (3-0-3) PLAY WRITING: FALL 2014

Professor: Dr. Ruben Quesada
MW 3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. Classroom Location: Coleman Hall 3210
Office Hours: By Appointment -- Mondays 11 AM – 3PM or as available.
NOTE: Please email professor to set an appointment by the Friday afternoon before Monday’s class.
Email: rmquesada@eiu.edu -- Skype: skype.quesada -- Phone: 217 5812428

COURSE CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:
Advanced practice and instruction in dramatic writing.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
A. Students will read and/or watch horror genre films, e.g., screenplays/films for craft analysis.
B. Students will build on the elements of dramatic writing and learn advanced techniques of screenwriting.
C. Students will write creatively, focusing on character, setting, pacing, tone and structure.
D. Students will read, discuss, and identify their creative work in the context of a tradition in dramatic writing.
E. Students will participate in the workshop process and learn both what it means to critique creative work and have their creative work critiqued in ways that are substantive and constructive.
F. Students will do extensive revision of their creative work.

COURSE MATERIALS:


Software: Final Draft is highly recommended for this course – as it is the industry standard. However, the steep price may dissuade you. There are several other screenwriting programs out there including some free ones like Celtx (http://celtx.com/index.html).
COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will focus on the writing of a feature-length screenplay using the theory of horror. Through classroom discussion of student writing and study of assigned films and textbook readings, students will strengthen their familiarity with the structural elements of the feature length motion picture screenplay with well-developed plot, characters, and setting. Students will become familiar with the general guiding elements of dramatic structure and character development in a variety of styles of storytelling.

SUBMISSIONS OF WRITING FOR CLASS DISCUSSION:

Screenplays for workshop must be emailed in Celtx/PDF FORMAT to the professor and peers no later than 72 hours prior to scheduled workshop. All feedback must be emailed to include author and professor before scheduled workshop. Failure to submit your comments prior to workshop will not be considered completed and will affect your grade in participation of workshop discussion.

FILM PRESENTATION:

You are required to give a 15 minutes presentation on a film. Professor must approve your film choice. Your presentation must have a clear focus, organization and structure to demonstrate a thoughtful consideration of the horror genre and your ability to identify its elements in the film of your choice. What makes the film you chose horrific?

GRADING POLICY:

Your course grade will breakdown as follows:

- Screenplay Submissions 50%
  - 30 min. Workshop Draft: 50 – 55 pages (15%)
  - Full-length Draft: 100 – 110 pages (35%)
- Assignments (available on D2L) 20%
  - Complex Discover Plot Structure
  - Ideas/Logline
  - Treatment
  - Beat Sheet
  - Story Questionnaire
  - Character Questionnaire
  - Character Exercises 1 – 4
  - Scene Exercises 1 – 3
- Class Participation 30%
  - 15 min. Film Presentation
  - 20 min. Treatment Workshop
  - Discussion & Attendance

FINAL DUE: 11:00am on Wednesday, December 17, 2014 via email to rmquesada@eiu.edu
RULES OF CRITICISM:

• Don't hold back. If something has problems, it has problems. Say so. However...
• Negative comments are a lot easier to make than positive ones. So, no matter how constructive your criticism is, try to match it with a compliment somewhere else.
• Identifying problems isn't enough -- also identify possible solutions. Don't simply say that a character or a scene doesn't work for you. Say why it doesn't, then tell us what changes to the character or scene would make it work for you.
• With regard to criticism of your own work: start developing a thick skin. Remember that your professor and classmates are commenting on your scripts, not on you. Use their criticism to become a better writer.

GENERAL POLICIES & GUIDELINES

Due dates are non-negotiable. Assignments that are due on a given date must be submitted on that date.

Class attendance is mandatory. If you have more than two unexcused absences, it will result in a reduction of one grade from your final course evaluation. The only way an absence can be excused is with medical documentation.

Adaptations of other written material are not allowed. All written material submitted for this class must be your original work. Proofread your assignments. Spelling and grammatical errors will influence grades. Use a good dictionary, thesaurus and do not rely on a computer spell-checker program.

Reading the required student writing, textbook assignments, and D2L exercises is a course requirement.

Viewing/reading assigned films and screenplays is a course requirement.

Students are expected to participate in class discussions when student writing, films, scripts, treatments are being analyzed/evaluated.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU’s Code of Conduct (http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.
Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to Ninth Street Hall, Room 1302.
WEEK ONE: Premise, Story, Concept

Read for Day One:
Noel Carroll, “Introduction”
D2L, “Screenwriting Elements”

Introduction/Course overview: What are the class goals? What are your goals? What are you hoping to achieve? Overview of the syllabus. Grading.

What is a screenplay? What is your experience with screenplays? When/how to write? Where ideas come from? Inspiration from within, latest news, books, an image, a song, a “crazy” thought, historical events, the “low brow” and the “high-concept” ideas.

What is horror? What is a monster? Monstrous? What’s the difference between a horror, a thriller, and a suspense film?

Read for Wednesday:
Noel Carroll, Chapter 1: “The Nature of Horror”
D2L, “Affect Theory”
D2L, “Three Act Structure”

What structure should I use to develop my story? The Three Act structure and the Complex Discover Plot structure – a very brief overview (more in depth later).

How to start a story. What is the inciting incident? What are the characters’ major arcs?

In Class: Write a log line (one to two lines) of your favorite movies. What are the themes of these movies? What’s the conflict in these movies?

D2L Assignment: Complete & bring in 3 story/script IDEAS of your own on Monday. Something you want to write. Each one should be in a log-line form.


WEEK TWO: What makes a good three-dimensional character? Sign up for Workshops.

Read for Monday:
Discuss in groups: The Exorcist

Dr. Quesada presentation on The Exorcist.

Follow up from previous week: Sharing log-line ideas and discussion.

Focus: Creating 3-Dimensional Characters.
- What makes a character 3-dimensional?
- Whose story is it? From whose POV (Point of View) is the story being told?
- What is the goal of the main character(s)? What is her/her obstacle to achieving this goal?
- Creating characters. Creating backstory.
- Making sure the character has conflict and obstacles.

**D2L Assignments:** Finishing rewriting the log line of the movie. Develop new one’s if necessary. Complete SCREENWRITING STORY QUESTIONNAIRE for your principle character(s) on D2L. Also write shorter backstories of the other major characters.

**Homework Part 2:** Watch *Nosferatu* and *The House on Haunted Hill*. Take notes on character development and story.

**Read for Wednesday:**
Noel Carroll, “Character Identification” pp. 88 – 96

Small groups. Discuss character and story from *Nosferatu* & *The House on Haunted Hill*. Q&A full class.

**In Class:** Using previous homework, do the log lines have conflict (previously discussed)? Do your log-line/ideas have a good central character? Adjust and tweak to ensure conflict and good characters in log line/ideas.

**D2L Assignment:** Complete CHARACTER EXERCISE #1 – 4.

**Homework Part 2:** Read Script & Watch the *The Omen* and *The Matrix*. Link so we can discuss it in class in terms of characters and structure.

- **WEEK THREE: Structure**

**Read for Monday:**
Noel Carroll, Chapter 3: “Plotting Horror”

*Focus:* What is the Complex Discover Plot Structure? Where do we see it? How does this fit into the Three Act Structure?

- Ms. Tana Young presentation on *The Matrix*.

*In Class:* Choose someone’s premise and the class will create a three-act feature film outline. Possibly break the class into 2 groups.

**D2L Assignment:** Write a one-paragraph synopsis of the COMPLEX DISCOVERY PLOT STRUCTURE of your future screenplay.
Read for Wednesday:
Sign up for Treatment Workshop.

Small group discussion on Riley. Full class Q&A.

*D2L Assignment:* Complete SCREENWRITING CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRE.

*Homework Part 2:* Read Scripts & Watch *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Night of the Living Dead* so we can discuss its structure the next week as well.

➢ WEEK FOUR: Treatments and Beat Sheets

Read for Monday:
D2L, “Beat Sheet”
D2L, “Film Treatment”
Sign up for Film Presentation.

What is a film treatment? What is a Beat Sheet?

*In Class:* In groups, write a beat sheet of a film you’ve recently watched.

*D2L Assignment:* Prepare a TREATMENT for your screenplay. Be prepared to present and discuss in class.

Read for Wednesday:
Riley, *The Hollywood Standard*, pp. 29 – 113

What is Celtx? Create account. Practice writing 10 – 15 pages with Celtx. Q&A.

*D2L Assignment:* Prepare a BEAT SHEET for your screenplay. Be prepared to present and discuss in class.

➢ WEEK FIVE: Treatment workshop (20 min x 3/meeting)

*D2L Assignment:* COMPLETE SCENE EXERCISE #1 – 3

➢ WEEK SIX: Treatment workshop (20 min x 3/meeting)

➢ WEEK SEVEN: Treatment workshop (20 min x 1/meeting)
  + Riley, *The Hollywood Standard*, pp. 115 – 139

➢ WEEK EIGHT: Revision + Non-traditional horror discussion.

Read for Monday:
Noel Carroll, Chapter 4: “Why Horror?”
Sign up for Screenplay Workshops.
Focus: What makes horror a tradition and non-traditional? How can we use horror to write about what matters to us?

In class: Make a list of 2 – 3 films that are not traditional horror films, but can be discussed in the same terms. Small groups.

Homework: Revised and prepare 50 - 55 pages for workshop.

Homework part 2: Read Script and Watch Edward Scissorhands & Transamerica. What is horrific?

- WEEK NINE: Film Presentations (15 min x 4/ meeting)
- WEEK TEN: Film Presentations (15 min x 4/ meeting + 15 min x 1/meeting) + Screenplay Workshop (30 min x 1/ meeting)
- WEEK ELEVEN: Screenplay workshop (30 min x 2/ meeting)
- WEEK TWELVE: Screenplay workshop (30 min x 2/ meeting)
- WEEK THIRTEEN: Screenplay workshop (30 min x 2/ meeting)
- WEEK FOURTEEN: THANKSGIVING BREAK
- WEEK FIFTEEN: Individual Conferences (face-to-face/skype)
- WEEK SIXTEEN: Individual Conferences (face-to-face/skype)

FINALS WEEK: FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAY DUE:

11:00am on Wednesday, December 17, 2014 via email to rmquesada@eiu.edu