WRITING 243 SYLLABUS
Creative Writing: Script Writing

Instructor: Terrance Millet
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Office Hours: M-R 11-12 pm.
Class time & Place: TR: 9:30 a.m. IA 224
CRN 43689
Web Page http://cf.linnbenton.edu/artcom/english/milletl/web.cfm?pgID=54


Prerequisites: WR 121

→ You will find it helpful to have taken ENG 110, Introduction to Film, ENG 105, Introduction to Drama, or another workshop.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Hello, and welcome to all of you. The goal of this class is to bring script writing to life and to help you in the effort to write your own plays. The format will be based on the workshop model. We’ll study the elements of scripts (dialogue, setting, character, conflict, etc.), write our plays, have them workshopped and discussed in class groups.

We’ll write one three-act script each in addition to a number of creative writing exercises. Each of us will have input and suggestions from the entire class on each of our scripts. You’ll get my input as well, and you can use the suggestions to rewrite your scripts, act by act, and hand in the final three-act version, formatted professionally, at the end of the course.

During the class, let’s explore statements such as this: are the literary arts helpful and relevant, or are they just a form of entertainment? How can we interpret a play or film so that we don’t spoil our enjoyment of it through “over-analyzing” it? How can we see the issues in our own lives reflected in drama, and, through an historical perspective, gain wisdom on how to live? Who are the great writers of scripts, and why are their plays or films great?

Here’s another question I’d like to explore with you: “What matters most—the author’s intent, or the reader’s response?” To begin, let’s start to think about issues that are relevant to you. While good stories have something to say and can entertain us with their message and with the skill with which they are assembled, an important question is this: are they just entertainment? Or do they address the same issues that we as men and women struggle with—the indeed humankind has always struggled with—: love, power, identity, ambition, spirituality, conformity, individual identity, fame, money, death, failure, politics, fear? What issues are important to you? This is the subject of literary art: plays, film, short stories, poems, and the personal essay are as big as life. In this class we’ll learn something about the process of writing scripts for the stage and for film.
My Own Philosophy of Fiction:

What we are forced to look at in most good literature is the discrepancy between inner lives and outer lives, between who we want to be and who we become, between the lives we want to live and the lives we feel we ought to live because the former are too chancy and the latter are endorsed by society, by family and friends. That's what I try to put into every story, play, or poem that I write, and it's a primary component in how I judge literature. The resonance for us as readers comes from a recognition in our own lives, as Joan Didion puts it, of the “apparently bottomless gulf between what we say we want and what we do want, what we officially admire and secretly desire, between, in the largest sense, the people we marry and the people we love.” And that’s something we’ll be looking for in our own work.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: When you’ve successfully completed this WR 243 class, you should be able to:
1. Understand and appreciate the range of human questions and issues that script writing (and most art) explores.
2. Assess the value of a dramatic work: did it accomplish something worthwhile? Did it create a worthwhile experience?
3. Understand and employ the elements of scripts (dialogue, setting, character, conflict, and formatting, etc.).
4. Apply insights from your reading, writing, and watching of dramatic works to the issues we face in ours lives (that is, recognize how this particular art form helps in understanding the human condition).
5. Form an overall impression of a script’s meaning or impact.
6. Analyze the ways different structural elements help create meaning, and awareness.
7. Write and speak confidently about your own and others’ ideas.
8. Demonstrate how literature enhances personal awareness and creativity.
9. Use the different structural elements that help create meaning and awareness in writing your own dramatic writing.

COURSE THEMES AND CONCEPTS: To demonstrate our learning outcomes, you'll need to understand these Themes and Concepts:
1. Author intent in the script: the choice of message and form
2. The Human/Personal significance of drama
3. The non-defensive posture in critical analysis
4. The elements of the script (dialogue, setting, character, conflict, etc.)
5. The meaning and the application of Poe’s Single Effect

SKILLS: To reach our learning outcomes, you'll need to master the following skills:
1. Interpreting drama through critical reading
2. Writing and analyzing scripts using the above themes and concepts in writing responses
3. Connecting drama to our own lives and sharing these connections
4. Understanding structure and meaning of the script
5. Writing the play to appreciate form and process
6. Working collaboratively in groups
COURSE ASSIGNMENTS: You will have the opportunity to demonstrate our learning outcomes by accomplishing the following tasks:

1. **Three Acts** to be workshopped as we progress, culminating in **One** finished three-act play of about 100 pages (200 points). See page 56 in the text for details. Your acts have to be completed and circulated one week before they are scheduled to be workshopped and discussed in class.

2. **One** letter or set of Workshop notes (written critique) on the **every scene we workshop in class**. You will make **TWO COPIES**: one for the writer, and you will email one copy to me for appraisal and grading. These thorough, positive comments shall be worth 10 points each on a credit/no credit basis. They cannot be handed in late for credit.

3. **Discussions** in class of the assigned chapters from the text.

**Scripts**: Each student will have **two acts** discussed in the class workshop, followed by a briefer discussion of the finished play in the final weeks of the course. We will organize this together. Remember to bring enough copies of your "workshop" story for the class and me **On The Date it is Due**, which will be one week prior to its actual discussion date. All scripts must be formatted professionally, and carefully proofread. Failure to get copies of your story in on time means you'll miss your workshop experience and the grade. No exceptions. Failure to be present in these workshops will lower your grade substantially.

**WRITTEN CRITIQUES**: Each student must write a response (notes in the margins or a letter, or both) to the author of each script discussed in class. On the day a piece is to be discussed, bring to class your copy of the script, complete with your comments in the margins and a response letter stapled or paper-clipped to it. These letters should be typed and signed, **WITH AN EXTRA COPY FOR ME**. You may email a copy to me for grading **BEFORE THE CLASS**. I will grade them at random. (That is, some days I'll grade them and return them to you, and some days I'll simply collect them. Always be prepared. Please see the **Appendix** for more details on what sorts of things to consider in these letters.

**ORAL PARTICIPATION**: Your workshop participation (points taken off for generality, dominating, meandering, or arrogance) will count in my final summing up of your grade, in combination with the written analysis grade.

**LATE PAPERS & ABSENCES**: Beyond one pardoned absence during the term, failure to attend class will be marked, and will affect your grade. This is a workshop, not a lecture, and your attendance is vital.

If any piece of creative or critical writing is late, the grade will drop by 1/3 per day. Again: in the case of a late script, you may forfeit your workshop. Don't beg for mercy, because the entire class depends upon your story and yourself being present. Late peer critiques and analyses will not be accepted because they indicate your nonparticipation in the class discussion of the day. If you are unable to attend class, turn in work to my office mailbox on that day. It's important that you attend all classes. **Again, every class will entail points towards your grade**. Most of the work will be in-class discussion (class participation)—and you'll be graded on this. The revision process occurring in class is crucial in developing skills in writing, and your team members will depend on you. Also, material is covered in class that is not in your texts.
CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE: Writing is an intense process, a skill acquired through diligence and work. It is a personal act as well that demands honesty, focus, and openness. To help each other in this process, it’s important that an attitude of civility, a habit of positive suggestions, and a posture of support be the rule.

Resources:
- My Web Page (http://cf.linnbenton.edu/artcom/english/milletl/web.cfm?pgID=54) has a list resources and templates, including an important one to OSU’s M.F.A. program in creative writing.

NOTE: You may submit your work to me electronically. E-mail it to me at terrancemillet1@comcast.net as attached documents in Microsoft WORD format only and in Arial (or another screen) 12 font. These assignments are due by class time on the due dates. You will get them back sooner than written work (which is due in class), and have the opportunity to get more feedback on them. Electronic submissions must be attached files with a subject line that begins with your last name, the class, the days, and the assignment, in that order Otherwise, they will be returned to you unopened. For example: Hemingwaywr241TRstory#1.

Disability Statement:
Students who have emergency medical information that the instructor should know of, or who might need special arrangements in the event of evacuation, or students with documented disabilities who have special needs, should make an appointment with the instructor no later than the first week of the term. If additional assistance is required, the student should contact LBCC’s Office of Disabilities at 917-4789.

Waitlist Policy:
Students who are registered but not present for the first class, unless they have given the instructor prior notice, will be dropped from the class and their place assigned to students on the waitlist.
Tentative Schedule
(Subject to revision, with notice)

Week 1
We set up the class and go over some aspects of the text. We discuss what script writing is all about. You read the text this week, in its entirety. We’ll talk about it. We discuss the aspects of story—the Single Effect, the Heart of the narrative, the formation of character as a vehicle of message. There is a lot of material in the text that will be new. It is not complicated, however, so breeze through it and raise questions you may have.

Start scribbling ideas about your script. Remember, a script is a short story without the descriptive details. It’s essentially dialogue.

Your over-arching assignment out of class for this course is to read the novel *The English Patient*. After that, you are to watch the film by the same name. Finally, you are to read the screenplay—the instrument that transformed the novel into a film.

A couple of us have to volunteer to get a script handed out by the end of the week. The schedule below indicates the day on which your script (one act) will be workshopped in class. Your responsibility is to have these done and handed out one week in advance.

**R**–Handouts on Thursday by:
1. 
2. 
3. 

**Week 2**
**T** Handouts: 4:……………..5:………………………6:………………
We’ll look at some sample scripts today.

**R** Handouts: 7:……………..8:………………………9:………………
We workshop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. . ..........................................................</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. . ..........................................................</td>
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<td>3. . ..........................................................</td>
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</tbody>
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**Week 3**
**T** Handouts: 10:……………..11:..............................12:………………
We Workshop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. . ..........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. . ..........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. . ..........................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We Workshop:

**Week 4**

**T** Handouts: 16:..................17:..................18:..............

**Act 1**

7. .........................................................
8. .........................................................
9. .........................................................

**Week 5**

**T** Handouts: ACT 2 1:..................2:..................3:..............

**Act 1**

16. .........................................................
17. .........................................................
18. .........................................................

**Week 6**—we start workshopping Act 2

**T** Handouts: 7:..................8:..................9:..............

**Act 2**

1. .........................................................
2. .........................................................
3. .........................................................
Week 7
R Handouts: 10:................11:......................12:.................
We Workshop:
   Act 2
   4. ..........................................................
   5. ..........................................................
   6. ..........................................................

Week 7
T Handouts: 13:..............14:.....................15:.................
We Workshop:
   Act 2
   7. ..........................................................
   8. ..........................................................
   9. ..........................................................

Week 8
R Handouts: 16:..............17:.....................18:.................
We Workshop:
   Act 2
   10. ..........................................................
   11. ..........................................................
   12. ..........................................................

Week 8
T Handouts: 19:..............20:.....................21:.................
We Workshop:
   Act 2
   13. ..........................................................
   14. ..........................................................
   15. ..........................................................

Week 9
R
We Workshop:
   Act 2
   16. ..........................................................
   17. ..........................................................
   18. ..........................................................

Week 9
T
We Workshop:
   Act 2
   19. ..........................................................
   20. ..........................................................
   21. ..........................................................
Let the plays begin... We’ll take the rest of the time to look at the finished products.

**Week 10**
The plays.
APPENDIX I

Here are Professor Marjorie Sandor's guidelines for her creative writing course at OSU. We'll use the same cues here. Our class (Wr 241) is accepted at OSU as Wr 224, and it's important that we speak the same language.

Sandor/Guidelines for Story Critique

"READERS:
Please type an end-letter to the author of each story we discuss in workshop, and make smaller notes in the margins of the story itself. Before attaching this letter to the story, make a copy of it for me. I will collect these at the end of class. No late critiques will be accepted, nor those written during class. I will read them, mark them "done" in my grade book, and let you know if I see a problem. Please feel free to ask me for further advice or clarification during office hours. In your letters and your oral remarks, begin by identifying the story's strengths. Name two or three (more than a sentence!) in the piece and give specific examples to support your impression. "I liked this" is dull and vague and will help no one. The idea here is to point out to the writer his or her best shot for a powerful, convincing, and authentic piece of writing. If you are at a loss, simply point out a specific moment that caught your interest and explain what worked for you there. If the moment is not adequately developed, or has some other problem, please say so--but focus first and in detail on what the writer "did right," or try to explain what you think the writer was trying to accomplish.

Then, you may elaborate on areas that you feel need more attention. Here are some sample areas to address. You might choose one or two to focus on--don't try to do them all!

1. The story's beginning: Tell the writer what the opening did for you--what it promised, and to what degree he or she followed through on that promise.
2. Character: do you have a strong sense of the characters? Which ones are best drawn; which are vague, unbelievable, etc. Is the protagonist in a realistic and original predicament? Is it predictable? Melodramatic? What makes it seem so? OR is there not enough at stake as the story proceeds.
3. Point of view: Can you define it? Is it consistently employed throughout the story, or does it wobble and shift? What is the effect of that wobbling? What gets lost? (This question is a big one--give it some thought.) Is this the best point of view for the story? Why or why not?
4. Detail, imagery and setting: are the details sharp, sensory, and strictly necessary to the character and story? What is extraneous? Or not adequately developed? Why would a stronger sense of detail and place benefit this particular story? Be very specific.
5. Language and style: Often it is the writer's language that makes a story seem rushed or predictable or trumped up (melodramatic). Where is the writer's voice at its most believable? Give a specific example or two. Now ask yourself where the writer has fallen into overwriting, generality, abstraction, cliché--in a word: falseness. We all do it every day, but in this class, it is our work to recognize and zap it. We are looking for clear, vivid prose and the voice of a living, breathing person. Good writing--fiction or non-fiction--has a spoken quality. Be on the look out for stiffness and false formality, or the equally false super-cool slang. A test: does the writer seem more interested in him or herself than in the characters and their situation? If you feel this is the case, tactfully suggest what elements of the writing are clouding up the picture.
Also be on the lookout for grammatical errors, typos, and misspellings: you need not try to correct them all, but do point out any patterns or problems you noticed, and mark one or two in the manuscript. Our goal is to bring these down to a bare minimum, and to train ourselves to be careful in all matters of craft from large to small. You will be irritated by typos and carelessness in others' manuscripts. Therefore proofread your own before you Xerox!
6. The story line, or dramatic action: is there too much plot jammed in, so that the story's action and characters seem summarized rather than alive on the page? Where could the writer slow down? What (and who) could the writer throw out of the story altogether--and why?
Or, conversely: does not enough "happen?" Is there a rising action? A climax? Does the ending both surprise and seem the "only way" it could have ended? Look at one scene: does it rise to its full potential before the writer goes on? Does the progression of scenes make sense to you? Why or why not? Again, give an example to support your criticism. You might give an example of a specific scene (or even a small moment) that was convincing and well done, then contrast it to one that was not convincing or pertinent to the story.

WRITERS: Please sit quietly and stoically through discussion of your story. Do not interrupt, explain, apologize, etc. Just listen and take notes, because sometimes the workshop discussion bears very little resemblance to the written comments. At the end of the discussion period, I'll give you a couple of minutes to ask any questions that weren't covered in the discussion. But again, please confine yourself to questions. After class, you can discuss your own hopes and fears with your classmates. And please try to recycle all that paper after you've gleaned what you want from the commentaries!

EVERYONE:
I've thrown a lot of questions and material at you here. I don't expect you to try to cover all of this when you write your critiques and talk in class. But I do expect you to use this sheet as a guideline. First read the student's story once through without marking it, then take a look at the critique sheet and focus on say, two out of the five areas of inquiry that seem most crucial. Your critiques, over time, should show a range of analyses--in one you might find yourself concentrating on language and point of view; in another, you will be concerned with the story line. Always, always, always, support your comments with specifics from the text, and explain what you mean. The only "mean critique" is the unsupported one, and that, finally, suggests that the analyst is not serious about the craft of writing. Remember: I am reading these very closely, for tone, specificity, support, and constructive analysis."1

1 Marjorie Sandor. Dr. Sandor was good enough to send us some materials to help us synchronize our courses with those of OSU. LBCC's Wr 241 and 244 are the equivalent of Wr 224 and 324 respectively.