

THF 402. Text Examination: Dramaturgy and Direction

2024, Fall Term

EPH 112, Wednesdays, 3:00-6:00pm

Instructor Information

- **Instructor Name:** Camille Intson
- **Office Location:** By Zoom
- **Office Hours:** By appointment
- **Course Website:** my.torontomu.ca
- **Email Address:** cintson@torontomu.ca

Email Policy

Note: In accordance with the Policy on TMU Student E-mail Accounts ([Policy 157](#)), Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) requires that any electronic communication by students to TMU faculty or staff be sent from their official university email account.

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to understand both the critical and creative make-up of a film screenplay, television pilot, and theatrical play. Through reading and discussions of the course material, students will gain both a classical and practical sense of dramaturgy, direction, and writing. Students will critically analyze scripts across disparate mediums, screen their associated films and episodes, and then re-analyze the texts. Through this, students will gain a better understanding of structural, practical, and creative differences between plays and screenplays as they reflect contemporary practices in theatre creation, filmmaking, and television production. Students will also learn to compare and contrast scripts as read and as performed, unravelling the role of the writer, director, and actors in the creative process.

Statement of Acknowledgement of Traditional Land

TMU's Original Land Acknowledgement

Toronto is in the “Dish With One Spoon” territory. The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. This was a treaty made between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee after the French and Indian War. Newcomers were then incorporated into it over the years, notably in 1764 with The Royal Proclamation/The Treaty of Niagara. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and Peoples, Europeans and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect.

Camille Intson (Course Instructor) Personal Land Acknowledgement Statement

I am a White Treaty person, a third-generation child of Estonian refugees of the 1940-1991 Baltic occupations and deportations who immigrated to Turtle Island in 1949. I was born and raised in Hamilton, on the traditional lands of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas, covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This land was covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase (1792) between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. I acknowledge the Indigenous territories where I (as a treaty person) am educated and am currently working to emphasize the context in which I work, which is always, already implicated in ongoing settler-colonial violence. I also acknowledge the continued and future existence of Indigenous knowledge, resistance, and creative praxis in spite of centuries of colonial violence, and my commitment to being accountable to these histories as an artist and scholar working within anti-colonial politics, poetics, and frameworks on treaty land.

Course Details

Teaching Methods

This in-person class will use a variety of formats such as lecture, film and television episode screenings, small and large group discussions, in-class readings and annotations of scripts, crafting and presenting pitches of scripts in development, or combinations of any of these options. As a public educator and theory-practitioner, I aim to champion an open, safe, and collaborative environment where students serve as active co-creators of knowledge. My teaching centers care, passion, empathy, and creativity. As such, this course will be heavily discussion based and will, at times, have an informal feel. The main objective of this pedagogy is to transform students from passive receivers of knowledge into active and autonomous cultural critics. In order to do so, students will develop critical thinking skills and the tools to communicate their ideas effectively.

Course Materials

Required Reading

Buchbinder, Amnon. *The Way of the Screenwriter*. House of Anansi Press, 2005.

Garland, Alex. *Ex Machina*. Screenplay.

Jeffreys, Stephen. *Playwriting: Structure, Character, How and What to Write*. Nick Hern Books, 2019.

Jin, Lee Sung. *Beef Episode 101: "The Birds Don't Sing, They Screech in Pain."* Screenplay.

Miller, Kan. *The Hero Succeeds: The Character-Driven Guide to Writing Your TV Plot*. High & Low Media, 2016.

Parks, Suzan-Lori. "Essays" in *The America Play and Other Works*. Theatre Communications Group, 1994.

Parks, Suzan-Lori. *Topdog/Underdog*. Theatre Communications Group, New York, 2001.

Vogler, Christopher, *The Writer's Journey*. Pan Books, 1999.

Required Viewing/Reading

“The Birds Don’t Sing, They Screech In Pain.” *Beef*, created by Lee Sung Jin, Season 1, Episode 1, A24, 6 April 2023.

Ex Machina. Directed by Alex Garland, Performances by Domhall Gleeson, Oscar Isaac, and Alicia Vikander, Film4 and DNA Films, 2014.

The Topdog Diaries. Directed by Oren Jacoby, Storyville Films, 2013.

Recommended Reading

Schmidt, Victoria Lynn. *45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters*. Writer’s Digest Books, 2001.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the basic principles of analyzing scripts and screenplays, and critically read a script as both a text and performance.
- Identify and analyze the connections between structure, character, action, and event, along with how they evoke specific emotions or concepts.
- Effectively communicate and articulate the underlying key concepts of script analysis to peers, instructors, and future collaborators.
- Collaborate effectively with peers, fostering a spirit of rigorous critical inquiry and open dialogue.
- Recognize and navigate ethical considerations related to storytelling, socio-historical representation, and audience engagement in analyzing and writing scripts.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is integral to your learning, the credibility of your degree or certification, and the integrity of the university as a whole. [Senate Policy 60: Academic Integrity](#) defines academic misconduct, provides a non-exhaustive list of examples of behaviours that may be considered as academic misconduct, and explains how academic misconduct concerns are evaluated and decided. The entirety of the policy applies in this course. As well, please note that submitting work created in whole or in

part by artificial intelligence tools unless expressly permitted by the Faculty/Contract Lecturer, is considered a violation of Policy 60.

Generative AI Course Policy, Plagiarism Detection, and Virtual Proctoring

Generative AI Course Policy

Use of Generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Grammarly, Perplexity, DeepL Translator) is expressly prohibited in this course. Use of Generative AI will be considered a breach of Policy 60.

Turnitin or another originality detection software

Turnitin is a plagiarism prevention and detection service to which TMU subscribes. It is a tool to assist instructors in determining the similarity between students' work and the work of other students who have submitted papers to the site (at any university), internet sources, and a wide range of books, journals and other publications. While it does not contain all possible sources, it gives instructors some assurance that students' work is their own. No decisions are made by the service; it generates an "originality report," which instructors must evaluate to judge if something is plagiarized.

Students agree by taking this course that their written work will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin. Instructors can opt to have student's papers included in the Turnitin database or not. Use of the Turnitin service is subject to the terms-of-use agreement posted on the Turnitin website. Students who do not want their work submitted to this plagiarism detection service must, by the end of the second week of class, consult with their instructor to make alternate arrangements.

Even when an instructor has not indicated that a plagiarism detection service will be used, or when a student has opted out of the plagiarism detection service, if the instructor has reason to suspect that an individual piece of work has been plagiarized, the instructor is permitted to submit that work in a non-identifying way to any plagiarism detection service.

Topics and Course Schedule

Note: This course will cover topics that are sometimes uncomfortable to talk about. We will discuss issues of identity that include race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and religion. We will also watch material that includes sometimes uncomfortable and/or potentially triggering topics. While some discomfort can be productive for learning and

growth, triggers can make people feel unsafe and impede learning. You understand your own safety best: If there is a concern about a particular film or topic, please consider reaching out for a conversation. Content warnings will, to the best of my ability, be shared in advance.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
Week 1	September 4th	Welcome, Introductions, and Course Overview	For next week: Amnon Buchbinder, <i>The Way of the Screenwriter</i> (pg. 32 to 46); Excerpts from Christopher Vogler's <i>The Writer's Journey</i> (1-9)
Week 2	September 11th	Lessons in Structure I: The Hero's Journey vs. Six Stage Plot Structure IN CLASS: Lecture on film structure; Introduction to Assignment #1 (Further Reading: Victoria Lynn Schmidt's Heroine's Journey , as explored in <i>45 Master Characters</i>)	For next week: Amnon Buchbinder, <i>The Way of the Screenwriter</i> (pg. 47 to 69, 70 to 78)
Week 3	September 18th	Lessons in Structure II: Film Plot in Practice IN CLASS: Lecture on mechanics of plot; Collaborative reading of <i>Ex Machina</i> screenplay! Come prepared to read, annotate, and discuss the assigned text.	For next week: Amnon Buchbinder, <i>The Way of the Screenwriter</i> (pg. 107 to 118)

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
Week 4	September 25th	<p>Lessons in Structure III: Film Plot in Practice, Cont'd</p> <p>IN CLASS: Lecture on mechanics of plot cont'd, followed by screening of <i>Ex Machina</i> (2014)</p>	<p>For next week:</p> <p>Amnon Buchbinder, <i>The Way of the Screenwriter</i> (pg. 119 to 147)</p>
Week 5	October 2nd	<p>Character and Theme</p> <p>DUE: Structural Analysis</p> <p>IN CLASS: Lecture and group discussion on <i>Ex Machina</i> screening into lecture and workshop on character; introduction to Character Analysis assignment</p>	<p>For next week:</p> <p>Kan Miller, <i>The Hero Succeeds</i> (pg. 14 to 26, 63 to 70)</p>
Week 6	October 9th	<p>Lessons in Structure IV: Breaking Down the TV Pilot</p> <p>IN CLASS: Lecture on TV pilot structure and character into collaborative reading of <i>Beef</i> Episode 1x1: "The Birds Don't Sing, They Screech in Pain"</p>	<p>For next class:</p> <p>Amnon Buchbinder, <i>The Way of the Screenwriter</i> (pg. 151 (starting with "The Scene") to 164)</p> <p>Kan Miller, <i>The Hero Succeeds</i> (pg. 278 to 294)</p>
Week 7	October 23rd	<p>Scene, Sequence, Dialogue</p> <p>IN CLASS: Lecture with group exercises on <i>Ex Machina</i> and <i>Beef</i>, Introduction to Group Assignment and Final Essay</p>	<p>For next class:</p> <p>Meet with your group and start discussing your approach to the group assignment prior to presentations on November 27th.</p>

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
Week 8	October 30th	From Script to Screen IN CLASS: Screening of <i>Beef</i> Episode 1x1: “The Birds Don’t Sing, They Screech in Pain” (Netflix) and group discussion	For next week: Stephen Jeffreys, <i>Playwriting: Structure, Character, How and What to Write</i> (pg. 21 to 26, 43 to 74)
Week 9	November 6th	Introduction to Playwriting DUE: Character Analysis IN CLASS: Lecture, followed by collaborative reading of Act 1 of <i>Topdog/Underdog</i>	For next week: Stephen Jeffreys, <i>Playwriting: Structure, Character, How and What to Write</i> (pg. 75 to 100)
Week 10	November 13th	Introduction to Playwriting II IN CLASS: Collaborative reading of Act II of <i>Topdog/Underdog</i> , followed by group discussion.	For next week: Suzan Lori Parks, “Essays” in <i>The America Play and Other Works</i> .
Week 11	November 20th	Style and Substance IN CLASS: Lecture on style and substance; watch and discuss <i>Topdog Diaries</i> (Storyville Films, 2013)	For next week: Get your Group Assignment project ready for presentations next week!
Week 12	November 27th	DUE: Group Assignment IN CLASS: Presentations of Assignments	For next week:

Evaluation

Students will receive their first assessments by October 26th, 2024.

Assignment Descriptions

Participation

Accounts for attendance and participation in in-class discussions and assignments.

Structural Analysis (750 words), Due October 2nd 2024

Apply one of the screenwriting structures from our first two classes (ie. Hero/Heroine's Journey, Six Stage Plot Structure, Three/Four Act Structure) to a film of your choice. How does the film adhere to and/or resist your chosen structure? How might it be dramaturgically improved?

Character Analysis (500 words), Due November 6th 2024

Choose one of the characters from the pilot episode of *Beef* and write a biography of the character based only on information found in the pilot. Include any information you find including their history, career position, relation to other characters, likes and dislikes, how they speak, etcetera.

Group Presentation, to be presented November 27th 2024

In a small group (size to be determined), your job is to “pitch” an original movie, TV pilot, or play to the rest of the class. Pitch decks must include compelling visuals; overviews of structure, character, and plot; discussions of style and theme; and a rationale of why this story and why now? More detailed instructions will be given in class on October 23rd. All presentations must happen in class on November 27th.

Final Reflection (500 words), due December 6th 2024

Students will complete a 500 word final paper, reflecting on critical insights learned throughout the course. How has this course informed your craft as a storyteller? What were your biggest epiphanies? How will you take these lessons on structure, character, plot, and page to stage-or-screen adaptation forward?

Assessment Weighting Breakdown

Evaluation Component	Percentage of Final Grade	Due Date
Participation	10%	Ongoing
Structural Analysis (750 words)	20%	October 2nd 2024
Character Analysis (500 words)	20%	November 6th 2024
Group Presentations	25%	November 27th 2024
Final Reflection (500 words)	25%	December 6th 2024
Total:	100%	

University Policies

Students must be reminded that they are required to adhere to all relevant university policies found in their online course shell in D2L and/or on [the Senate website](#).

Important Resources Available at Toronto Metropolitan University

- [The University Libraries](#) provide research [workshops](#) and individual consultation appointments. There is a drop-in Research Help desk on the second floor of the library, and students can use the [Library's virtual research help service](#) to speak with a librarian, or [book an appointment](#) to meet in person or online.
- [Student Life and Learning Support](#) offers group-based and individual help with writing, math, study skills, and transition support, as well as [resources and checklists to support students as online learners](#).
- You can submit an [Academic Consideration Request](#) when an extenuating circumstance has occurred that has significantly impacted your ability to fulfill an academic requirement. You may always visit the [Senate website](#) and select the blue radio button on the top right hand side entitled: Academic Consideration Request (ACR) to submit this request.

For Extenuating Circumstances, Policy 167: Academic Consideration allows for a

once per semester ACR request without supporting documentation if the absence is less than 3 days in duration and is not for a final exam/final assessment. Absences more than 3 days in duration and those that involve a final exam/final assessment, always require documentation. Students must notify their instructor once a request for academic consideration is submitted. See Senate [Policy 167: Academic Consideration](#).

- If taking a remote course, familiarize yourself with the tools you will need to use for remote learning. The [Remote Learning Guide](#) for students includes guides to completing quizzes or exams in D2L Brightspace, with or without [Respondus LockDown Browser and Monitor](#), [using D2L Brightspace](#), joining online meetings or lectures, and collaborating with the Google Suite.
- Information on Copyright for [Faculty](#) and [students](#).
- Information on Academic Integrity for [Faculty](#) and [students](#).

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and/or accessibility needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me as soon as possible. There will be material screened in this class; subtitles will be provided.

Academic Accommodation Support

Academic Accommodation Support (AAS) is the university's disability services office. AAS works directly with incoming and returning students looking for help with their academic accommodations. AAS works with any student who requires academic accommodation regardless of program or course load.

- Learn more about [Academic Accommodation Support](#).
- Learn [how to register with AAS](#).
- Learn about [Policy 159: Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#)

Academic Accommodations (for students with disabilities) and Academic Consideration (for students faced with extenuating circumstances that can include short-term health issues) are governed by two different university policies. Learn more about [Academic Accommodations versus Academic Consideration](#) and how to access each.

Wellbeing Support

At Toronto Metropolitan University, we recognize that things can come up throughout the term that may interfere with a student's ability to succeed in their coursework. These circumstances are outside of one's control and can have a serious impact on physical and mental well-being. Seeking help can be a challenge, especially in those times of crisis.

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 and go to the nearest hospital emergency room. You can also access these outside resources at anytime:

- **Distress Line:** 24/7 line for if you are in crisis, feeling suicidal or in need of emotional support (phone: 416-408-4357)
- **[Good2Talk](#):** 24/7-hour line for postsecondary students (phone: 1-866-925-5454)
- **[Keep.meSAFE](#):** 24/7 access to confidential support through counsellors via [My SSP app](#) or 1-844-451-9700

If non-crisis support is needed, you can access these campus resources:

- **[Centre for Student Development and Counselling](#):** 416-979-5195 or email csdc@torontomu.ca
- **[Consent Comes First – Office of Sexual Violence Support and Education](#):** 416-919-5000 ext 3596 or email osvse@torontomu.ca
- **[Medical Centre](#):** call (416) 979-5070 to book an appointment

We encourage all Toronto Metropolitan University community members to access available resources to ensure support is reachable. You can find more resources available through the [Toronto Metropolitan University Mental Health and Wellbeing website](#).