Special Topics: Dramaturgy
THEA-4390.004 MWF 10-10:50 BH 206
Instructor: Heather Honnold
Spring 2016
Office hours: Mondays 11a-12:30p and by appointment BH 3.33

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course is designed to be a practical, hands-on workshop on production dramaturgy. The dramaturg, taken from the Greek word *dramatourgos*, is a maker or doer of theater. The making of theatre is a shared, collaborative experience between the production team, the performers, the audience, and beyond. Dramaturgs play a critical role in that collaboration.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:
A. Students will explore the development of dramaturgical materials for a variety of theatre and production situations, as well as develop research, criticism, script analysis, and resources important to the making of informed production choices.
B. Students will use *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov to develop various types of dramaturgical materials: an in-depth script analysis, a Dramaturg’s Protocol (which includes understanding the playwright’s intentions and motivations, the world *outside* of the play, important/relevant criticism, production history, understanding the world *inside* of the play, etc.), cutting the script, comparing translations, creating materials to connect the audience to the play, re-working the play into a different genre, and even writing a critical review of a production.

COURSE MATERIALS:

*Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekov, translated by Kristin Johnsen-Neshati (will be provided to you).

Various dramaturgy articles provided to you by instructor.

ATTENDANCE:
As this is a hands-on workshop, attendance is necessary. You will be allowed two absences without your grade being impacted. For the next two absences your final grade will lower by a letter. On your fifth absence, you will receive a failing grade for the course. Special circumstances affecting this policy may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

TARDIES:
Three late arrivals constitute one absence. If you arrive more than ten minutes late you will be considered absent. Time management skills are one of the most significant tools of the profession. The practice and development of these skills is expected.

LATE WORK:
No late work will be accepted. The work we do in this class builds upon itself, and work must be done in a timely manner in order to keep up. Dramaturgs, and all members of the theatrical production, generally work with a limited amount of time and must produce a quality product regardless of personal conflicts. Exceptions can be made for extenuating circumstances on a case by case basis.

**GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:**
There is not a lot of out-of-class required reading throughout the course, but there will be numerous projects and assignments spaced throughout the semester, so plan on spending as much time on research and writing outside of the classroom as you would reading for other classes.

You will receive more specifics about the assignments as they come up in class, but the grading breaks-down as follows:

*Note, there is no final exam for this course. Your grade is a culmination of all your assignments throughout the semester.

**Grading Scale:**
- A=100-90%
- B=89-80%
- C=79-70%
- D=69-60%
- F=59-0%

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating will receive an “F” for the assignment, and, if the situation warrants it, for the entire course.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING**
The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call (361) 825-3466.

**DISABILITY SERVICES**
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability
requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

GRADE APPEALS PROCESS
Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

15% Dramaturg’s Protocol Assignments
Students will participate the development of a collective, comprehensive Dramaturg’s Protocol for Uncle Vanya. Each section of the protocol will have a small research or writing assignment attached to it. (Each assignment will be worth 1/6 of this score).

The playwright
The world Uncle Vanya was created in/for
The world inside the play (social protocols, specific references, music, images, etc.)
Major criticism/scholarship of the play and/or playwright
History of productions, important productions, projects “inspired by” the play
Glossary

15% Script Cutting
Half of your grade for this assignment will be based on the cutting of the script (is the story still fluent, has the meanings and motivations changed, were the cuts thoughtful, etc.)
The other half of your grade will be based on your justifications for script cuttings, and explanation of how the story has changed or hasn’t changed.

15% Translation Analysis
You will read a second translation of Uncle Vanya and write a critical analysis of it comparing it to Johnsen-Neshati’s translation.

15% Program notes/study guide
You will select a theater audience and prepare program notes or a study guide to facilitate the audience’s connection and understanding of the play.

15% Genre Group Project
Rewrite *Uncle Vanya* into another style or genre. Present a plan (fully fleshed-out outline) and a short written scene for a “Backer’s Audition”

**20% Critical Review**
Write a critical performance review of a production of *Uncle Vanya* shown in class.

**5% Wild Card/Freebie**
If you show up to class and miss two or fewer classes, you can have these points!

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

**Weeks 1 and 2:** What is Dramaturgy?
Reading Assignment: Articles provided by instructor.
We will discuss the classical origins of the craft from the Greeks to Lessing to Brecht - the tradition of the dramaturg as maker of theater to that of an outside critic, back to that of a theater maker. Focus will then shift from the history of dramaturgy to the contemporary roles of a dramaturg in productions, and the importance of dramaturgy in making theatre.

**Weeks 3 and 4:** Understanding the play.
Reading Assignment (due the first session of week three): *Uncle Vanya*, translated by Kristin Johnson-Neshati.

We will work together in class to develop an in-depth script analysis of Chekhov’s entire play to discover the play’s story, its actions and arcs, main ideas, and the characters and their motivations. We will investigate the play for its structure, scrutinizing the Chekhov’s methods of creating theatre through plot, character, and imagery.

**Week 5, 6, 7, 8:** The Dramaturg’s Protocol
What is the protocol and who is it for?

The class will research and collaborate to build a collective Dramaturg’s Protocol for *Uncle Vanya* from which the class can all benefit. In addition to developing a deeper understand of *Uncle Vanya* and its world, you will develop more in-depth research skills, from using primary and secondary resources to using special collections and inter-library loan to using resources that on the surface aren’t even related to theatre. Information gathered and written about includes:

- Understand the playwright – what were Chekhov’s ideas and reasonings behind this play?
- Understanding the world outside of the play – No play is written in a vacuum. What did this play mean in late 19th century, early 20th century Russia? Who performed it? Who was the audience? In a nutshell, what was going on in the “real” world?
• Understanding the world *inside* the play – What must we know to understand the created world of this play? (i.e., societal protocols, dated references, gender roles, military behavior, big ideas such as “the superfluous man”).

• Understanding major criticism/scholarship of the play and playwright – Many people have written about this play. What do they have to say that could impact the production of *Uncle Vanya*?

• Understanding the play’s history of productions – A comprehensive time line of production history will be collected. Has *Uncle Vanya* been adapted to address “modern” times or other regions of the world? What are the important, or seminal productions of the play? How has *Uncle Vanya* been adapted into other genres or projects “inspired by” the original play.

• Developing a glossary and bibliography.

**Week 9**: Spring Break

**Week 10**: Cutting the Script

Cut *Uncle Vanya* into a 60 minute one-act production. You will be provided with an online version to print and draw lines through or mark in WORD/Adobe with electronic comments. Write a one-page explanation of your rationale and describe what it does to the play.

**Week 11-12**: Translating Chekhov: Kvass vs. Beer

We will discuss the challenges in translating plays, consider linguistic translation vs. transmutation of the cultural/physical essence into another culture, compare subtle nuances of translations, and talk about how to choose the right translation for your production.

Assignment: You will be given a second translation of *Uncle Vanya* to read and write a critical analysis of it comparing it to Johnsen-Neshati’s translation (1000-1500 words).

Things to consider: What are the differences between the translations? Does one speak to a more modern audience? Does one seem to remove the Russian-ness (and does it matter)? Is one awkward or stilted? Does one lose the unique Chekhovian nature that we’ve talked about throughout this class?

**Week 13**: Connecting the Audience to the Play

Knowing your audience and developing program notes, study guides, entrance displays, music, etc., to connect your audience with the world of the production. We will brainstorm ideas and reference examples of both traditional notes/displays/guides, and those that “push the envelope”.

Assignment: Choose a theater audience. Develop program notes or a study guide for *Uncle Vanya* that would facilitate that specific audience’s connection to the play.

**Week 14-15**: Changing Genres
You will break up into teams and rewrite/recreate *Uncle Vanya* as one of the following:

An Aristotelian Tragedy (consider the following articles found in: *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, Robert W. Corrigan – the Poetics, and “Tragedy and Melodrama,” by Robert B. Heilman)

A Medieval Morality Play

A comedy (consider the following articles on comedy found in *Comedy: Meaning and Form* edited by Corrigan: Bergson’s “Laughter”, Northrop Frye “Mythos of Spring”)

Farce (Chapter on farce in *Comedy/Corrigan*)

Epic Play by Brecht (consider Eric Bentley’s “Melodrama”, James L. Rosenberg’s “Melodrama”, both found in *Tragedy/Corrigan*).

A Play by Beckett (Tragicomedy in *Comedy/Corrigan*).

A Lifetime Movie (Three act-movie structure. You could use Sid Field’s *Screenplay* or Robert McKee’s *Story Structure*, or any How-to-write-Hollywood-movie book as your guide.

Theatre of Cruelty - Artaud

Dada

A play by Alfred Jarry

An Expressionist play - *Stationendramen*

A Futurist play – avant-garde

A Symbolist play

Surrealist

A Split Britches or other radical feminist play (Five Lesbian Brothers)

A Happening

Tennessee Williams

OR

A genre idea of your own. It needs to have something you can reference for structure, or important nuances of the genre, but talk with me and we’ll see what we can come up with.

Assignment: Students will work in pairs or trios to rework *Uncle Vanya* into another style or genre. The group will research the rules of the genre and create and turn-in a brief description (1-2 pages) of how you would restructure the play to fit the constraints of the genre. It may help to supply a scene breakdown. Provide a short written scene of the genre re-write. The group will then give a 10 minute presentation to the class as if they were pitching at a “Backer’s Audition”, incorporating the ideas, themes, and any
other important information someone would need or want to know in order to fund the production.

**Week 16: Performance Review**

We will watch a recorded performance of Uncle Vanya in class.

Assignment: Write a 2500 word critical performance review of the production. Now that you are an expert on *Uncle Vanya*, what do you think of the production? This is not a summary of a play. This should be a critical analysis of the production. If you were the only person to record what happened in this production for all of posterity, what would you say about it? Things to think about, but not necessarily required to be addressed: What were the production’s objectives? Did it meet those objectives? Did the actors understand their characters? Did the setting/lighting/costumes support the world of the play? Did the production honor Chekhov’s original ideas (and does it matter?)? etc. etc.

**Final Exam Session:** May 9, 8:00 am. There will not be a final exam, but the class will meet.