

## **Wendall Thomas – Talks Scripts**

Q1. This is the 7th consecutive year you've presented your *Talks Scripts* series with 37°South & Accelerator Lab at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

What excites you about coming to Melbourne and giving these presentations?

**The draw of Melbourne itself is obvious – the food, the art, the theatre, the architecture, the amazing artistic and film community, the films(!). But I particularly love coming back because of the friendships I've made with so many people at the Festival, not only the amazing MIFF and 37°South staff, but the wonderful lecture attendees. I've been lucky enough to have a number of "repeat customers" and seeing those familiar faces in the audience makes that LAX to Melbourne flight worth it every time. I can never thank MIFF Chair Claire Dobbin enough for suggesting me for these lectures or 37°South Director Mark Woods for bringing me back each year.**

Q2. Your seminar 'Spotlight: Moonlight – from Indie to Oscar' dissects the indie film's unconventional screenplay and explores its successful business model. In a nutshell, what factors do you think it was that made the film cut-through?

**Obviously there are so many things that go into a film's success. We'll be talking about all of them and how they resulted in the particular alchemy of *Moonlight* in the workshop. But if I had to choose just a few, I feel that the film broke through primarily because of its complete emotional honesty, great performances and direction, and an evocative, unforgettable poster and trailer.**

Q3. One of your sessions this year is focused on constructing transformative character arcs. For those who are unfamiliar with the theory behind character arcs, how does a character arc help audiences connect to a film's themes?

**The protagonist, and his or her journey, is in most cases the easiest and most effective way to connect your reader or audience to the story you want to tell. And consequently, it's the easiest way to convey a theme which will resonate emotionally with your audience. Creating a journey for the protagonist that feels real and believable in context—not forced or unlikely or melodramatic—delivered as "one step forward, two steps back" and completely connected to the plot events of the story, is the thing most likely to keep the audience engaged. The theme of a film is usually carried, or realized, in the ending for your main character, so the ending of the arc—where the character winds up—is particularly important in expressing the theme. We'll be discussing this in some depth in the workshop.**

Q4. Do you think the rise of "water-cooler" / "box-set" TV is changing approaches to screenwriting - especially on new and emerging writers? And, if so, how?

**The rise of the public's TV/streaming obsession and the major studios' almost complete focus on superhero franchises, have combined to have a huge effect on people just coming into the business. At UCLA, feature writing enrollment is down and TV writing enrollment is up, for example. I think young writers are focusing on television, as are many feature drama writers.**

**However, because so many show runners or creators are coming from the**

**feature world, they often prefer original feature film writing samples--as opposed to TV specs--in staffing their shows. This means, even if your goal is television, there is still a value in being able to conceive and execute a feature-length story. Also, for those of us who have been around since the 1980s, we all know the town works in cycles and that there will be a point at which there is too much content (we may already be there), the bubble will burst, and there will be a brief feature renaissance or another format will emerge. Remember that with the advent of reality TV 15 or 20 years ago, everyone declared that scripted television was dead.**

Q5. Writers often regard that putting pen to paper (or fingers to a keyboard) at the very beginning of a project is one of their biggest challenges. What general tips can you provide to writers who find themselves staring at a blank page for far too long?

**Actually, in my experience, most people can get started - and even have a burst of inspiration and energy for the first page or two. It's trying to keep going that trips them up. Being stuck, in either case, usually comes from fear, either that you can't write, or that someone else will judge your writing harshly. So, whether you're trying to get started, or trying to keep going, go back to the reason you wanted to write the piece in the first place, go back to what inspired you.**

**Then remember is that no one ever has to see the writing but you. In our world at the moment, everyone seems to do everything for an audience and posts every tiny thing about themselves. But you don't have to. Writing is completely private when you're doing it and can stay that way if you're not happy with the result. So my first, best, advice is to do the first draft like no one's looking and give yourself a daily page or word count. Some of the pages will be terrible. It doesn't matter. Just get to the end and start again, knowing that pretty much anything can be fixed.**