

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
COLLEGE OF ARTS
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH AND THEATRE STUDIES
ENGL*6811 (01): Special Studies in English
Winter 2017 – Preliminary Course Outline (subject to change)

Course Title: Studies in Literary Adaptation for the Screen
Instructor: Prof. Elaine Chang

Course Description (subject to change):

The proliferation of adaptations across multiple cultural forms and media has served to reconfigure the works involved beyond relations of ontological or chronological priority, or oppositions between source materials and derivations. Rather than attempt to taxonomize the rich and heterogeneous process of adaptation, this course examines selected pairings of literary texts and films on a “case study” basis. As contemporary critic Colin MacCabe has adapted the work of earlier film theorist André Bazin, this course regards these pairings less in terms of “one medium translating another” than “as two media making a whole that [is] not reducible to the sum of its parts” (*True to the Spirit*, 2011: 5-6). Working closely with literary and critical texts and films, we will explore challenging methodological questions for the study of adaptations. At the same time, we will consider how the contradictions and possibilities of adaptation also articulate, reinforce, and transmute borders and relations between dominant, subordinate, and emergent cultural formations and communities of artists, critics, readers and viewers.

Required Course Texts **may** include the following:

Criticism:

Colin MacCabe, et. al (eds.), *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*

Michael Ondaatje, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*

James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation*

Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*

Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation*

Robert Stam, *Literature through Film*

Literature and Film:

Dorothy Hughes, *In a Lonely Place* & Nicholas Ray (dir.), *In a Lonely Place*

Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road* & Sam Mendes (dir.), *Revolutionary Road*

Alice Munro, “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” & Sarah Polley (dir.), *Away from Her*

Russell Banks, *The Sweet Hereafter* & Atom Egoyan (dir.), *The Sweet Hereafter*

Sapphire, *Push* & Lee Daniels (dir.), *Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire*
John le Carré, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* & Tomas Alfredson (dir.) *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* & Francis F. Coppola (dir.), *Apocalypse Now*

* NOTE: Most films will need to be viewed on your own time. Seminar screenings TBD.

Additional films and novels for presentations may include the following:

High and Low (dir. Akira Kurosawa) & Ed McBain, *King's Ransom*
Clueless (dir. Amy Heckerling) & Jane Austin, *Emma*
David Copperfield (dir. George Cukor, novel by Charles Dickens)
The Shining (dir. Stanley Kubrick, novel by Stephen King)
The English Patient (dir. Anthony Minghella, novel by Michael Ondaatje)
The Nun's Story (dir. Fred Zinneman, novel by Kathryn C. Hulme)

* NOTE: You will be responsible for one additional text-film pairing. Reading and viewing of the remaining pairings will be welcome, but optional.

Recommended Theoretical Texts:

M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination* and *Art and Answerability*
Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse"
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *The Uncanny*
Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*
Slavoj Žižek, several, including *Enjoy your Symptom!* and *The Plague of Fantasies*

Course Assignments **may** include the following:

Presentation on **Text-Film Pairing** (presented in groups of 3): 25%

- 45-60 minute presentation on an assigned text-film pairing that you and 2 other students have researched extensively. The presentation should address a range of issues or aspects such as: historical or other context; criticism and reviews of the text and the film (scholarly and popular); production and technical information; biographical and/or other information as may be germane. Also post annotated bibliographies for your major research materials (4-5 entries individually, or 12-15 per group) on CourseLink the day of your presentation: after class will be fine.

Presentation on **Additional Case Study** (presented in pairs): 20%

- 20-40 minute presentation by you and 1 other student on an assigned essay and its central text-film pairing. You will read and view the cited text and film in relation to the essay, its approaches and interpretations. Passages, clips, etc. are welcome. Further research is recommended but optional.

1-page **Response Paper** on Theoretical Essay: 10%

- You will write a short paper in response to one or more of our assigned theoretical essays, and post it on CourseLink before class meets, to be read by all prior to that session. This paper can be informal and impressionistic, can include more searching questions than firm answers, yet it should at least engage some substantive aspect of the assigned reading, its methodological workings, and what it might illuminate and/or obscure. Your paper is a resource for everyone's reference; discussion may or may not take place on the designated day.

Discussion Questions on Texts (posed by groups of 3) and **Participation**: 10%

- As part of your participation mark for the entire seminar, itself ungraded yet required, you and 2 other students will offer introductory discussion questions about the text portion of an assigned text-film pairing to be presented on by another group. This assignment is informal, and will consist mainly of your preparedness to help direct an engaged, focused discussion of the literary text in question, apart from and prior to our consideration of the film. One goal is to highlight some potential challenges for a screen adaptation—perhaps to be taken up by those who will present on the text-film pairing the following week.

Outline or Adaptation Plan for Final Project: 5%

- This should be a document of 2 or more pages, pitched toward either a "critical" or a "creative" final project (see below). Scholarly and other preliminary research is to be reflected in a clear, brief introduction. An outline might identify the topic, central questions, methodological framework, and principal text(s) and film(s). An adaptation plan might include similar components while articulating the rationale, goals, and challenges of a hypothetical adaptation (e.g., how you understand and plan to handle character, dialogue, setting, major plot points, theme, etc.).

Final Critical Essay or Detailed Treatment, approx. 25 D/S pages: 30%

- If you choose to write a critical essay, this could address specific text-film relationships and/or a particular theoretical or other problem or issue to be analyzed via adaptations and adaptation studies. Alternatively, you

can write a detailed treatment for an actual though hypothetical screen adaptation of an existing work in another medium. If you wish to select this option—or to propose another project, perhaps one that combines “critical” and “creative” content and approaches—please discuss your ideas with me before Week 10.

Sign-up sheets will be circulated in Week 1 for the first four assignments listed above. The two presentations will require work in groups or pairs.