

## FILM ADAPTATIONS

ENGL 391-01/ FILM 331-01

Monday and Wednesday, 6:00-8:05 PM

W.

Phone: 206-296-5418 (School)

206-860-6087 (Home)

e-mail: [btaylor@seattleu.edu](mailto:btaylor@seattleu.edu)

Taylor

Office hours:

MWF, 11-12

and by appt.

### **Description:**

The course will examine the source texts and film adaptations of works drawn from a variety of print genres, including short stories, a novel, a novella, a modern play, a Shakespearean play, and a graphic novel. Each pair of works, a source and its film adaptation, will provide an illuminating case study, and taken together, the works selected demonstrate both close and loose adaptations, “classic” and recent film productions, and a wide range of approaches to adaptation.

### **Primary Text:**

*Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*, by John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes

### **Introduction:**

Nearly half of the films you have ever seen are adaptations, and historically, three-fourths of the Academy Award winners for Best Picture have been adaptations. If you go to the Amazon website and type “film adaptations” in the search box for books, you will find that the number of hits, all relevant, exceeds 400 titles before the selections begin to wander off topic. In short, choosing one text and eight films for this course presents something of a problem.

Adaptation has been a favorite topic of contemporary theorists, producing this bewildering plethora of approaches to what might seem, at first glance, to be a fairly simple problem: choose a story, devise visual equivalencies for its words, and shoot the movie. The early chapters in our textbook will disabuse you of so simple an understanding. On the other hand, this text steers clear of the more abstruse theoretical issues regarding adaptation, issues which can produce extensive philosophical musings which never mention a single film.

Far more concrete and specific, this text concentrates on direct examination of particular source texts and of the films adapted from them, focusing on what a film retains from its source, what it omits, and what it adds, as preliminary steps to evaluating its success as an adaptation. Most people judge an adaptation by how closely it sticks to its source. The first lesson one learns when entering upon this inquiry is that the test of “fidelity,” or how “faithful” a film is to its source, is an inadequate and inappropriate criterion for judgment. That seems counter-intuitive, but it is the first principle of this study, and you will quickly discover its validity and value. And it is liberating indeed to view a film as a creative work of art rather than as a copy of the story upon which it is based! Film adaptations are either closely or loosely related to their source materials; they are not imitations which are “faithful” or “unfaithful” to texts they are reproducing.

After its three introductory chapters, the text is divided into sections based upon different genres of source material. In each case, it discusses the problems of adapting this type of literature, and illustrates with particular examples, comparing one or two written works to their film adaptations. Following each chapter, we will reach beyond the textbook and apply what we have learned to a selected source work of that genre and a film adaptation of it.

### **Texts and Films to Be Studied:**

#### Short Story:

“Hills Like White Elephants,” by Ernest Hemingway; film directed by Tony Richardson, with Melanie Griffith and James Woods (to be shown in class)

#### Novel:

*A Room with a View*, by E.M. Forster; film directed by James Ivory, with Helena Bonham Carter, Judi Dench, Daniel Day-Lewis, and Maggie Smith

#### Novella:

*Double Indemnity*, by James M. Cain; film directed by Billy Wilder, with Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray, and Edward G. Robinson

#### Short Stories:

“Rashomon” and “In a Grove,” by Ryunoske Akutagawa; film *Rashomon* directed by Akira Kurosawa

“The Dead,” by James Joyce (in *Dubliners*); film directed by John Huston, with Anjelica Huston and Marie Kean

#### Modern Play:

*Fool for Love*, by Sam Shepard; film directed by Robert Altman, with Sam Shepard, Kim Basinger, and Randy Quaid

#### Shakespearean Play:

*Romeo and Juliet*; film directed by Baz Luhrmann, with Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes

#### Graphic Novel:

*The Road to Perdition*, by Max Allen Collins, art work by Richard Piers Rayner; film directed by Sam Mendes, with Tom Hanks and Paul Newman

### **Text Availability:**

I am trying an experiment to save you money on textbooks. Over the years, I have been disturbed by the fact that students could buy their books new from Amazon (or other online bookstores) for less than the price charged by the SU bookstore for used copies. Therefore, I have ordered only the primary text, *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*, from the university bookstore. For three of the short stories, I will give you photocopied handouts. For three other texts, I have

chosen works that are available for free online—if you are comfortable reading texts on a computer screen. Only three works are not available online and must be purchased (or acquired from a library, etc.).

Photocopied handouts:

“Hills Like White Elephants”

“Rashomon”

“In a Grove”

Available online:

*A Room with a View* [http://www.online-literature.com/forster/room\\_with\\_view/](http://www.online-literature.com/forster/room_with_view/) and others (or purchase for \$6.95 at Amazon)

“The Dead” <http://www.enotes.com/dead-text/> and others (or purchase, in *Dubliners*, for \$5.94 at Amazon)

*Romeo and Juliet* [http://shakespeare.mit.edu/romeo\\_juliet/full.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/romeo_juliet/full.html) and many others (or purchase, many editions, \$5.39 and up, at Amazon)

Must be purchased or otherwise acquired:

*Double Indemnity* (\$10.40 at Amazon, or less, at other dealers listed by Amazon)

*Fool for Love (Fool for Love and Other Plays)*, \$10.88 at Amazon)

*The Road to Perdition* (\$17.91 from Amazon)

If these options seem too complicated, just order the last six works from Amazon. They will cost you \$57.47, plus tax and shipping. If it turns out that you would have preferred to buy them all at the bookstore and pay the higher price for the convenience, I’m sure you will tell me so, and I will not use this procedure with future classes.

**Video Availability:**

You will rent each film and view it, on your own or in small groups of your devising, before the day we are scheduled to discuss it. This is a slightly inconvenient way to handle the film viewing, but it is necessary. I cannot put copies in the library because it is illegal, even copies I have myself purchased. Six of the seven films are in the library (*The Dead* is not), but only one copy of each, on either VHS or DVD.

So you must rent the videos. Plan on looking for each one early enough to find it and view it before the day it is to be discussed in class. I suggest that you get to know the other members of the class as quickly as possible and watch the films in groups. It’s more fun that way, anyhow, and more instructive, because you can talk about the film with other people immediately after seeing it.

It would be a good idea to plan for the whole quarter now. Probably the best resource is Netflix, which many of my film students have been using with good success. If you are a member of Netflix, three of the films are available for free download: *A Room with a View*, *Rashomon*, and

*Romeo + Juliet*. Two are available for On Demand download rental (\$2.99) from Amazon.

Besides being free for downloading from Netflix, the first film, *A Room with a View*, should be very easy to find in video stores, even though it was released in 1985; it was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won three (including Best Adapted Screenplay!).

In the local area, I would suggest Broadway Video (near the corner of Broadway and Republican) and Island Video (31<sup>st</sup> and E. Madison; they also have a store in Greenwood). The best store in town is Scarecrow Video, on Roosevelt Way NE, between 50<sup>th</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup>. The Maltese Falcon is excellent, on Aurora, out by Oak Tree Cinema. No doubt there are many other good ones, but these are the ones I used before I joined Netflix. Now I use only Scarecrow, in an emergency. The films for the course should be relatively easy to find. The only possible problem is Netflix not having enough copies. However, in my last three film courses, no one has told me they couldn't find a film.

### **Procedures:**

The classes will be conducted primarily through discussion: discussion of the textbook, the source texts, and the films. There will be a short objective quiz on every source text at the start of the class in which we are scheduled to discuss it. And for every film, on the day we are scheduled to discuss it, you will submit a two-page essay on (1) elements that were *retained* from the source work, (2) elements that were *dropped*, and (3) material that was *added*, together with a brief commentary. There will be a mid-term exam (in-class, essay), no final exam, and a term paper on a source text and a film adaptation of it, chosen from a list of possible topics I will provide.

We will take a brief cell phone break at about 7:00 pm. Please turn off your phone and your laptop during class.

### **Summary of Requirements:**

1. Check your e-mail every day. I will frequently send you information and study materials.
2. For each class, read the assignment in the textbook and/or the source story.
3. Take a short objective quiz on each source text on the day the reading is due.
4. For each film, prepare a two-page essay (double spaced) on significant elements that were retained from the source, elements that were dropped, and material that was added, together with a brief commentary. This essay must be handed in on the day the film is discussed. Late papers will not be accepted.
5. Participate in the class discussions of the textbook, the source texts and the films. Involvement in the discussion is an *essential* requirement, accounting for 20% of the course grade. I enforce that requirement. Good class participation can raise the grade for the course a full letter grade, and poor participation can lower it a full letter grade.
6. Take a mid-term exam (in-class, essay).
7. Prepare a term paper/final exam on a source text and a film adaptation of it, in which you apply what you have learned during the quarter. You will choose the text and film from a list of options I will provide. Since I am required to give a final exam, we will call this a

final, and it will be due on the regularly scheduled Final Exam day, Wednesday, June 9, at 6:00 PM, in the classroom, or earlier, in my mailbox in the English Department.

8. Come to class on time. Everyone should be out of bed and wide awake by 6:00 PM.

### **Plagiarism:**

I include the following note as a formal policy statement, required of all syllabi in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Plagiarism is the representation of the words or thoughts of another author as one's own.

I anticipate no such difficulty in here, but it does sometimes occur, especially in recent years, because so much material is available on the internet. Research in support of papers is laudable and to be encouraged. Be very careful, however, to document, not only actual quotes or paraphrases, but also all *ideas* taken from other sources, with or without the original language. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, any instance of which will result in a failing grade and will be reported to the Dean.

### **Grades:**

You will be evaluated on your objective quizzes, your two-page essays on the adaptations, your classroom contributions, your mid-term exam, and your term paper/final exam. Because the class discussions and film clips are essential and indispensable elements of the course, I do take roll, and attendance is required. Absences in excess of 15% (three classes) will adversely affect your final grade. Recurring tardiness is an irritation, and you don't want to irritate me.

Class participation:	20%
Quizzes:	15
Film analyses:	15
Mid-term exam:	20
Term Paper:	30

### **Detailed Schedule for the Quarter:**

Because the course is being taught for the first time and is therefore experimental, this schedule may need adjusting from time to time.

M	3/29	Intro; syllabus; procedures
W	3/31	Discuss chapters 1-3 in text
M	4/5	Discuss chapter 4; discuss text of "Hills Like White Elephants" (no quiz)
W	4/7	View and discuss film of <i>Hills Like White Elephants</i>

M 4/12 Discuss chapter 5 and text of *Room with a View*; quiz

W 4/14 Discuss film of *Room with a View*; essay due

M 4/19 Discuss text of *Double Indemnity*; quiz

W 4/21 Discuss film of *Double Indemnity*; essay due

M 4/26 Discuss chapter 6 and short stories “Rashomon” and “In a Grove”; quiz

W 4/28 Discuss film *Rashomon*; essay due

M 5/3 In-class Midterm

W 5/5 Discuss short story “The Dead”; quiz

M 5/10 Discuss film *The Dead*; essay due

W 5/12 Discuss chapter 7 and the play *Fool for Love*; quiz

M 5/17 Discuss film *Fool for Love*; essay due

W 5/19 Discuss text of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*; quiz

M 5/24 Discuss film *Romeo + Juliet*; essay due

W 5/26 Discuss chapter 9 (perhaps) and graphic novel *Road to Perdition*; quiz

M 5/31 HOLIDAY

W 6/2 Discuss film *Road to Perdition*; essay due

M 6/7 Last Class Day; pick-up day; evaluations

W 6/9 Term Paper/Final due, 6:00 PM