

ENG 441A, Literature and Film, 3 sem. hours
Spring 2013
Prerequisite: English Core Curriculum
Tuesdays, 1:30-4:00, Jennings 307

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Course Description

A comparative study of great works of literature and the films based on them.

Course Rationale

Welcome to this study of literature and film. Did you realize that well over half of all commercial films have come from literary originals? Dudley Andrew, a scholar in film theory, makes this assertion as he seeks to explain the concept of adaptation. As a class, we will wrestle with that same concept this semester: what is the relationship of a literary original to its filmed adaptation? The question is a pressing one in the wide and complex field of film studies, which intersects the study of literature quite naturally. After all, a great portion of society--and not just Western society--knows great literature by its movie versions. Baz Luhrman's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is certainly the first major version to show actors proficient in the handling of large-caliber handguns. But whatever subtlety conveyed by a knife or poison at the end of Shakespeare's adaptation of the story gets lost completely when guns are introduced. Watch the ending again and consider how this adaptation shapes Shakespeare's version. Or does it improve on the story? Is this a shrewd turn of adaptation that will draw a larger audience these days or is it a straightforward approach that best conveys the story for our time? In any case, one may be glad that Luhrman's film probably mirrors the text more closely than *Gnomeo and Juliet*, about warring factions of lawn gnomes. Does Cormac McCarthy's tone in *No Country for Old Men* finally subvert, for the first time in their films, any sense of irony or tongue-in-cheek humor in the Coen brothers' usual style? More recently, do they depart too widely from that wilder style in their straight-up adaptation of *True Grit*? One might say that McCarthy's text beats the Coen brothers into submission, or as Clint Eastwood would phrase it, "kills the hell" out of them and their stylistic hallmarks. But on the other hand, is their sense of economy and directness what allows the brutality of the text to succeed on film? Change is the constant we will study. Many moviegoers were no doubt relieved to find out that *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* had happy endings. But an interesting irony is that some films that take great liberties with the original end up more faithful to the story in the book.

This course is guided by two parameters: great books, great films. Some great films, such as *The Bridge On the River Kwai* and *Blade Runner*, come from mediocre originals. And some great books have been turned into very bad movies: hence, *The Witches of Eastwick*, and the fairly recent version of *The Scarlet Letter*, about which Demi Moore said, "Hardly anyone's read the book." Unfortunately, she is probably right. I would like for you to actively work against Demi Moore this semester and read the novels and stories our films are based upon. This is a literature course; careful readings of the primary texts will be essential for your success in the class. Our selections are based on common themes: how does an outsider relate to the world, and more

epically, how does anyone, outsider or not, relate to death, the ultimate outsider to all of us?

Course Objectives

The course provides an in-depth study of great literature turned into great film, examining the books of only six or seven authors. Your reading load may well be lighter than your writing load since this is a writing-based course. The course offers a framework for 1) studying the concept of adaptation, 2) examining basic aspects of film theory and film language, and 3) evaluating criteria of judging film and literature. At the end of the course, you should be familiar with the primary texts and their films, and you should demonstrate proficiency in writing about the three areas above. You should also be proficient in basic written critical analysis of a film adaptation.

Course Requirements

Two major exams, occasional exercises and short writing assignments, one discussion leading, and a final critical paper. Written assignments will call for clearly argued, effective prose as taught in the English core curriculum, the prerequisite for the course. Four of these assignments will be short (one to two single-spaced pages) responses to a novel or story and its film version; everyone must write short papers on *A Simple Plan* and *Macbeth*, but you will select the other two texts that you want to write about. These short papers will be due at the second (or concluding) class of the two or three class dates assigned for each text. As an option, you may choose to write five papers, dropping the lowest grade. The course exams will measure your grasp of the texts, the films, and the class material. Since this is a writing-based course, the exams will consist of essay exams supplemented by objective questions such as identification and short answer. Your writing will also be evaluated in your critical paper, which will be your assessment of how the strategy of the film shapes the text (or the other way around). More details to follow in a handout. You will write 8-10 pages for this paper.

Your active participation in class will also have a significant impact on your final grade. We will be doing in-class exercises and quizzes from time to time. Your attendance in class is required, and you are responsible for all assignment changes mentioned in class. I follow the attendance policy of Mississippi College; see "Attendance Regulations" in the catalog (note carefully that 4 absences for a class that meets once a week will result in an automatic "F" for the course). Your grade will be affected by tardiness for class and absences. If you miss more than the allowed number of class periods and there are reasonable explanations for your absences, you may appeal to the Dean of this school by filling out a Student Absence Appeal Form (available from the office of the Dean). Exercises and quizzes are designed to measure your progress and ordinarily cannot be made up if you miss a class. Remember, missing one day of this course is equivalent to missing a week's worth of work. Because the class meets just once a week, I treat all absences especially seriously. You are responsible for material presented on the day of your absence and for any changes announced in assignments. I value your participation highly; please be on time and be prepared. I will also be interested in how you respond to each other in class. Each of you will have an opportunity to help lead a discussion in class: you will work together in small groups.

Critical papers must conform to MLA guidelines. Late work will normally not be accepted (to be fair to all, late work that is accepted will be marked down in grade). See handout.

THE LAST DAY TO DROP A COURSE IS FRIDAY, MARCH 22. STUDENTS CANNOT WITHDRAW AFTER THIS DATE WITH “W” (PASSING) UNLESS THEY MEET THE CONDITIONS OUTLINED UNDER “WITHDRAWAL FROM COLLEGE” IN THE MC UNDERGRADUATE CATALOG. NOTE ALSO THAT REFUNDS ARE BASED ON THE DATE OF DROPPING OR WITHDRAWING. PLEASE TALK TO ME EARLY IN THE SEMESTER IF YOU ARE HAVING DIFFICULTIES.

Academic Integrity

“Mississippi College students are expected to be scrupulously honest. Dishonesty, such as cheating or plagiarism, or furnishing false information, including forgery, alteration or misuse of College documents, records or identification, will be regarded as a serious offense subject to severe penalty, including, but not limited to, loss of credit and possible dismissal” (**MC Undergraduate Catalog**).

Grading

Mid-Term	25%
Final	25%
Critical Paper	25%
Short papers And participation	25%
(includes quizzes, exercises, discussion leading, and in-class activity)	

My grading scale is as follows: A=93-100, B=85-92, C=75-84, D=65-74, F=0-65

Texts

Elmore Leonard, *Three-Ten to Yuma and Other Stories* (Harper)
 Charles Portis, *True Grit* (Overlook)
 Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (U of Chicago P)
 Scott Smith, *A Simple Plan* (Vintage)
 Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Dover)

Schedule (tentative--changes may be announced in class)

Jan	15	Introduction and <i>3:10 to Yuma</i>
	22	<i>3:10 to Yuma</i> and begin <i>True Grit</i>
	29	<i>True Grit</i>
Feb	5	<i>True Grit</i> and begin <i>A River Runs Through It</i>
	12	<i>A River Runs Through It</i>
	19	<i>A River Runs Through It</i> and begin <i>In the Bedroom</i> (Dubus's "Killings")
	26	<i>In the Bedroom</i>
Mar	5	Mid-term (and begin watching <i>A Simple Plan</i>)
	19	<i>A Simple Plan</i>
	26	<i>A Simple Plan</i>
Apr	2	<i>A Simple Plan</i> and begin <i>Macbeth</i>
	9	<i>Macbeth</i>
	16	<i>Macbeth</i>
	23	<i>Macbeth</i>
	30	<i>Macbeth</i>
May	7	Final Exam, Tues, May 7, 12:00-3:00