

English 190-03: Shakespeare on Screen

Professor Newstok

Fall 2008
WRF 2:00-3:00pm
Rhodes Tower 410

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Office: Palmer 310

Office hours: M 9am-noon; MWF 3-4pm; or by appointment

Course description

What happens when Shakespearean dramas written for a 16th and 17th century theatre audiences get ‘translated’ to 20th and 21st century televisual media? What interpretative strategies shape adaptations? This course surveys Shakespeare on screen from a range of periods, directors, nations, and media in order to confront the full span of adaptation, and complicate conventional notions of “fidelity” to the “original text.” Following a close reading of each play, we will ‘triangulate’ our textual analysis by viewing two different film adaptations of that same play: three ‘major’ tragedies (*Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*) as well as *As You Like It*, a comedy that will be performed in the Memphis area this fall. Final projects require that students explore a contemporary adaptation of one play, in dialogue with earlier versions we viewed together. All ENG-190 courses are designed to introduce you to some of the methods of the English major.

Administrative details

- Enrollment is limited to First Years and Sophomores.
- Thursday night screening 'lab's sessions are mandatory; these take place in Barret 0-34.
- This course will count toward English Major as well as pre-1800 credit within the major.
- This course satisfies the F-4 “Literary Texts” Foundations requirement.
- ENG-151 is NOT required as a prerequisite; conversely, this course will NOT fulfill the ENG-151 requirement, nor is this an F-2 (writing) course (although we will write extensively).

Schedule—subject to revision, per class interest and instructor’s discretion

Have the assignments read before our discussions each week. Ideally, you will read them once over the weekend, and then re-read them during the week—good reading always entails re-reading. Be sure to bring your Norton Shakespeare to each class so you can follow along.

You are always expected to read the 5–7 page Norton introduction to each play.

INTRODUCTION

Norton Introduction (30–42; 79–99); Cowl Intro (xi–xxv)

Wednesday	Aug. 27	Survey; preview of course; <i>King John</i> scene
Thursday	Aug. 28	FILM SCREENING— <i>Silent Shakespeare</i>
Friday	Aug. 29	QUIZ—Norton Introduction & Cowl Introduction

HAMLET

Over weekend: read play as well as Norton introduction, concentrating in particular on Act 1; Cowl 179–84; Cowl Glossary (197–201); view multiple versions of scene 1.5; Hamlet website

Monday	Sep. 1	No class—Labor Day
Wednesday	Sep. 3	<i>Hamlet</i> discussion—metatheatre and the ghostly
Thursday	Sep. 4	FILM SCREENING—BBC <i>Macbeth</i>
Friday	Sep. 5	QUIZ—Cowl Glossary; comparing ghosts

MACBETH

Over weekend: read play as well as Norton introduction

Monday	Sep. 8	Acts 1–3
Wednesday	Sep. 10	Acts 4–5
Thursday	Sep. 11	FILM SCREENING— Kurosawa <i>Macbeth</i>
Friday	Sep. 12	Initial responses to Kurosawa

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Kurosawa adaptation; Crawl 42–45; Dawson (handout)

Monday	Sep. 15	Noh conventions
Wednesday	Sep. 17	Shakespeare translated
Thursday	Sep. 18	FILM SCREENING— <i>Scotland, P.A.</i>
Friday	Sep. 19	Initial responses to a “spin-off”

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Scotland, PA adaptation; Shohet (handout)

Monday	Sep. 22	Parody conventions
Tuesday	Sep. 23	FIRST PAPER DUE BY 5PM IN PALMER 310
Wednesday	Sep. 24	Filmic violence
Thursday	Sep. 25	FILM SCREENING— BBC <i>As You Like It</i>
Friday	Sep. 26	Initial responses to screening Shakespearean comedy

AS YOU LIKE IT

Over weekend: read play as well as Norton introduction

Monday	Sep. 29	Acts 1–3
Wednesday	Oct. 1	Acts 4–5
Thursday	Oct. 2	FILM SCREENING— Czinner <i>As You Like It</i>
Friday	Oct. 3	Initial responses to Czinner

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Czinner adaptation; Russell Jackson (handout)

Monday	Oct. 6	1930s conventions
Wednesday	Oct. 8	Olivier as actor and future director
Thursday	Oct. 9	FILM SCREENING— Branagh <i>As You Like It</i>
Friday	Oct. 10	Initial responses to Branagh

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Branagh adaptation; Crawl (handout)

Monday	Oct. 13	“The Branagh Era”; “translating” setting
Wednesday	Oct. 15	HBO and cinematic television;
Thursday	Oct. 16	<i>AS YOU LIKE IT</i> PERFORMANCE—GERMANTOWN (6pm)
Friday	Oct. 17	MID-TERM EXAM

OTHELLO

Over Fall Break: read play as well as Norton introduction

Monday	Oct. 20	<i>NO CLASS—FALL BREAK</i>
Wednesday	Oct. 22	Acts 1–3
Thursday	Oct. 23	FILM SCREENING—Buchowetski <i>Othello</i>
Friday	Oct. 24	Acts 4–5; initial responses to Buchowetski

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Buchowetski adaptation; Crowl 4–7; Rothwell handout

Monday	Oct. 27	Silent conventions
Wednesday	Oct. 29	The Melodrama of Race
Thursday	Oct. 30	FILM SCREENING—Welles <i>Othello</i>
Friday	Oct. 31	Initial responses to Welles

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Welles adaptation; Bazin handout

Monday	Nov. 3	<i>Film noir</i> conventions
Wednesday	Nov. 5	Welles as auteur; “blackface” and performance
Thursday	Nov. 6	FILM SCREENING—Papp <i>King Lear</i>
Friday	Nov. 7	Initial responses to Papp; “colorblind” casting

LEAR

Over weekend: read play as well as Norton introduction; Crowl 61–79

Monday	Nov. 10	Acts 1–3
Wednesday	Nov. 12	Acts 4–5
Thursday	Nov. 13	FILM SCREENING—Kozintsev <i>Lear</i>
Friday	Nov. 14	Initial responses to Kozintsev

Over weekend: re-read play in light of Kozintsev; Sokolyanksy handout

Monday	Nov. 17	Soviet conventions
Tuesday	Nov. 18	SECOND PAPER DUE BY 5PM IN PALMER 310
Wednesday	Nov. 19	<i>Lear</i> as a mid-20 th century play
Thursday	Nov. 20	FILM SCREENING— <i>The King is Alive</i>
Friday	Nov. 21	Initial responses to <i>The King is Alive</i>

Over weekend: re-read play in light of of The King is Alive; Scott-Douglass handout

Monday	Nov. 24	Brainstorming with full class during Barrett research session
Wednesday	Nov. 26	NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK
& Friday	Nov. 28	NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

FINAL PROJECTS

Monday	Dec. 1	Presentations of work-in-progress
Wednesday	Dec. 3	Presentations of work-in-progress
Thursday	Dec. 4	FILM SCREENING—Class choice
Friday	Dec. 5	Presentations of work-in-progress

Monday	Dec. 8	Presentations of work-in-progress
Wednesday	Dec. 10	Retrospect on course
Thursday	Dec. 11	<i>No screening this week</i>
Friday	Dec. 12	FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5PM IN PALMER 310

FINAL EXAM

Dec. 12–15(?) **FINAL EXAM**

Requirements

Engagement (20%) is mandatory, broadly conceived to include active **participation** (*listening and responding* to your peers as well as the professor), consistent **preparation** of course readings, **enthusiasm** for assignments, **collaboration** with your peers, and **respect** for the course. Occasional unannounced **quizzes** will gauge your engagement with the readings.

Successful students are typically those who re-read thoroughly in advance of discussion, arrive on time to class, and participate thoughtfully every day of the semester. If you miss a class *for any reason*, your ‘re-admission ticket’ to the following class will be a short (300-word) typed essay on the single most interesting thing from your reading for the prior class. If *for whatever reason* (including medical and personal emergencies, extracurricular events) you miss **more than eight classes** (that is, three full weeks of the semester!), **you will fail the course**.

There will be **two short essays** throughout the term (**15% \times 2**), and one **final research paper (25%)**. The first short essay (**1000 words**) entails a detailed “scene analysis” of a sixty-second clip of Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood*. The second short essay (**1000 words**) requires that you compare the same speech from two versions of *Lear*. **Final research papers** involve engaging in a **critical dialogue** with one other substantial critic of a Shakespearean film, leading to a **2000-word** research paper on an adaptation of your own choice. The plays addressed, however, must be selected from those read in this course, excluding *Hamlet*—your audience consists of your peers. NOTE: **Hard copies** (not email attachments) are due **on the assigned days by 5pm in my office (Palmer 310)**. **No late work**—you are warned well in advance of these due dates.

Exams (10% for the mid-term, 15% for the final) will test your knowledge of literary and cinematic terminology, and facility with identifying the practical and conceptual challenges of adapting Shakespeare to the screen.

Grading: ‘C’ (70–79%) represents *satisfactory* work; a ‘B’ (80–86%) represents *good* work; a ‘B+’ (87–89%) represents *very good* work; an ‘A-’ (90–93%) represents *excellent* work; and the infrequent ‘A’ (94% and above) represents *extraordinary* achievement. This holds true for your overall engagement, your short essays, your critical surveys, and your final projects.

Policies: As always, please observe Rhodes guidelines regarding the **Honor Code**; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and an Honor Code violation (including plagiarism) will be grounds for **failure in the course**. Respect the integrity of the course: please turn off **cell phones** and **remove hats** before entering the classroom; please **do not eat during class**. Treat email exchanges with one another and with the professor as **formally composed correspondence**.

Notes toward reading Shakespeare's plays

Keep in mind is that a *play is not a novel*. Why does this distinction matter?

- English Renaissance dramatists were not as preoccupied with the modern idea of **character** as we might expect. Characters can fall away from the plot with relatively little notice, or appear with just as little preparation. Their 'motivation' is based much less on psychological or biographical consistency than on cultural expectations for the roles in which they are placed. It helps, in this respect, to think of characters not as fully developed people but rather as 'types'—'the wise old counsellor,' or 'the scorned lover.' This is not to say that playwrights only make caricatures, but it does mean that your sense of how a 'character' acts needs to be somewhat flexible.

- Shakespeare wrote much of his drama in **verse**; these plays are much more like poetry than like prose. Moreover, this is a highly stylized, rhetorically-inflected verse. The culture in which Elizabethan drama emerged was extremely well trained in producing different kinds of speeches and arguments, and even a boy with only a 'grammar school education' would have memorized, translated, and imitated far more elaborate Latin and Greek models than all but the most advanced students do today. On account of this, much of the language appears quite ornate and presents some difficulty for us. Keep reading, keep consulting the footnotes; after a while, you will recognize more than you might expect. But don't just read 'for plot'; let the words trouble you, and try to approach them with the same attention and intensity as you would a poem.

- We tend to take for granted a degree of **realism or naturalism** in many of our prose readings today; even experimental narrative forms presume a familiarity with novelistic conventions. This is not necessarily the case with English Renaissance drama: fantastical events can happen; great lengths of time can be compressed into the short span of a few hours; and distances across the globe can be traversed between scenes. Sometimes even the characters themselves express incredulity at these almost magical developments. Remain open to the plot as it exists; reserve judgment about its 'believability.'

Read the play closely. The unfamiliar style, vocabulary, syntax, and stories require a great deal of attention. If you read the play in the same amount of time required to see it performed, you're going too fast. (Consider that the performance was not achieved in those two or three hours, but rather after a sequence of hundreds of preparatory hours of interpretation, memorization, and rehearsal.) Here are some suggestions to get you into the text:

- *Good reading is re-reading*; to this end, read the play at least **twice**. You might want to read through the entire play quickly at first, then look at the Norton introduction, and then read more slowly, with an eye for detail (note, for instance, what you have already forgotten since the first reading).

- Read the play **aloud**; or listen to a **recorded audio version**. You'll find that you won't be able to gloss over passages you don't understand, and will have to stop to figure out what they mean. You'll also get a better sense of the rhythms of the lines by getting them into your mouth—again, like poetry. For these reasons, we'll also be reading aloud a good deal in class.

- Keep an eye out for **patterns**—where have you heard this kind of speech before? why does this particular image keep re-appearing? Keep track of what happens in each scene—you might even want to add a kind of descriptive subtitle to each one ('Hamlet contemplates killing Claudius'). Make an outline of the plot; what would happen if certain scenes were rearranged? Read with a pencil in hand, and make note of anything that seems important, or confusing, or surprising. Review these notes before class.

Most importantly, **be curious**. If you don't understand a word, look it up in the footnotes, or better yet, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If something doesn't make sense to you, make note of it, and bring it up during discussion. Check out the books in the Shakespeare section of the library; view additional productions of the plays in the AV center.