

THE NEXUS OF LITERATURE AND FILM

Definition of a pseudo-intellectual: someone who always says, "The book was better than the movie."

A problem in most academic film courses is that they are so often taught exactly like literature courses, with films examined as if they were merely another form of literature. But film is not literature. Literature is little black things called words appearing on somewhat larger white things called pages. Film is primarily pictorial. It is probably as close if not closer to painting as to literature. Apples and oranges would not sufficiently describe the difference between film and literature because apples and oranges are both fruit. To eternally say, "The book was better than the movie" is to reveal a certain antiquarian snobbery towards newer art forms and to betray a certain ignorance of both literature and film.

Nevertheless, film and literature do influence and inform one another. And they do overlap and intersect. This course concerns itself with that place where they overlap and intersect.

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BOOKS (available in Douglass Bookstore)

Nathaniel Hawthorne	<u>The Scarlet Letter</u>
John Irving	<u>My Movie Business</u>
Joseph Conrad	<u>Heart of Darkness</u>
David Mamet	<u>Oleana</u>
William Shakespeare	<u>Romeo and Juliet</u>
Henry James	<u>The Turn of the Screw</u>
Anna Quindlen	<u>One True Thing</u>

ADDITIONAL READINGS

I have placed on electronic reserve all the other readings for this course. This was simply to save you the xeroxing and permissions costs, which would have been considerable. These readings include everything from short essays through complete film scripts. As you look at the syllabus, any item to be read other than the seven works listed above is on electronic reserve. These readings are quite as important—in some cases more so—than the seven works to be purchased. I would suggest you go on line and print these works out for yourself, but, in any case, they are to be read prior to the class meeting for which they are listed and, when you write for the seminar, you will need to consult them especially carefully.

To access the readings on electronic reserve, go on the web, access Rutgers, access the Rutgers libraries, access reserves and connect to it, then enter my name, "Rockland" and go to our course.

film: "The Lady in the Lake" (partial screening in class)

February 7 NOVEL TO FILM I

read: My Movie Business, A Memoir by John Irving

film: "The Cider House Rules" (*) (reminder: asterisk means to be seen outside of class.)

February 14 NOVEL TO FILM II: WHEN HOLLYWOOD BLUNDERS

read: The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

film: "The Scarlet Letter" (*)

NOTE: Those who have not read The Scarlet Letter before are to see the movie first, read the novel afterwards; those who have read the novel before are to read it again and then see this particular version of the movie (the contemporary, Demi Moore/Gary Oldman verison).

February 21 SHORT STORIES TO FILM

read: "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," by Ambrose Bierce; "The Swimmer," by John Cheever

films: a short story to a short film: "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," (*) and a short story to a feature film: "The Swimmer" (*)

February 28 NOVEL TO FILM III:

read: excerpt from The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck (chapters 28 and 29.

film: "The Grapes of Wrath" (*) and in class part of a filmed version of the play

March 7 NOVELA TO FILM: AFRICA IN VIET NAM

read: Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

films: "Apocalypse Now" (*) and "Hearts of Darkness" (*)

March 21 PLAY TO FILM

read: "Oleana," by David Mamet

film: "Oleana" (*)

March 28 SHAKESPEARE TO BROADWAY MUSICAL TO FILM

read: "Romeo and Juliet," by William Shakespeare

film: "West Side Story" (*)

April 4 ADAPTATION AND ITS PERILS

read: "Orchid Fever," by Susan Orlean, The New Yorker, January 23, 1995 (from which the book The Orchid Thief-- with which the movie "Adaptation" is concerned-- is derived); "The Best Novelists, The Worst Movie Adaptations," by Joseph O'Neill, N.Y. Times, November 11, 2003; "About Schmidt Has Changed, But Not Its Core," by Louis Begley and "The Hours Brought Elation But Also Doubt," by Michael Cunningham, N.Y. Times, January 19, 2003; "The 'I' Cure for Writer's Block," by Daniel Zalewski, N.Y. Times, December 1, 2002; and "New Yorker Writer Turns Gun Toting Floozy? That's Showbiz" by Sarah Boxer, N.Y. Times December 19, 2002.

Film "Adaptation" (*)

Note: see course requirements for special assignment for this session or, in the alternative, for the April 11 seminar

April 11 FROM FILM SCRIPT TO FILM

read: the film script of "The French Lieutenant's Woman," by Harold Pinter, including the foreword by John Fowles; excerpt from Point of View in Fiction and Film: Focus on John Fowles by Charles Garard; "The French Lieutenant's Woman," from Filming Literature: The Art of Screen Adaptation, by Neil Sinyard; and "Translating Fowles into Film," by Leslie Gants.

film "The French Lieutenant's Woman"(*)

Note: see course requirements for special assignment for this seminar or, in the alternative, for the April 4 seminar.

April 18 FROM NOVEL TO FILM SCRIPT TO FILM

read: One True Thing, by Anna Quindlen, film script of "One True Thing," by Karen Croner, and "Home Movie," by Michael Aaron Rockland, New Jersey Monthly, " September, 1998.

film: "One True Thing" (*) and footage from the making of "One True Thing"

Note: We will hold this session at my home in Morristown, the principal set for "One True Thing." It will be a potluck supper. We'll discuss logistics for this session when we meet, including carpools, time convenient for everyone, etc.

April 25 HOW DOES ONE FILM AMBIGUITY?

read: The Turn of the Screw, by Henry James

Note: See course requirements for special assignment due this day. for everyone.

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GROUND RULES

ATTENDANCE. Unlike many lecture courses, attendance is required for all sessions of the seminar. A seminar is a learning community. We cannot do without the presence of a single member of the community at every session. Unexcused absences will be severely penalized by being reflected in your grade in the course. If you are ill or have a very important reason for missing any session of the seminar, you must reach me by phone no later than one hour prior to a seminar meeting. And please always be on time.

Also, a large part of your grade will be based on class participation. Be sure you have read everything assigned to you before each class and be sure to have seen each film that is on reserve before each class. If you are unprepared for the seminar, trust me: I'll know.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS. There will be no examinations given in this seminar. Thus, your seven written assignments are crucial to your grade. Everyone is responsible for writing five short papers over the course of the seminar. These short papers are due on **Tuesdays**, the day before seminar meetings, by 8 p.m. This is so I can read and grade these papers prior to our seminar meetings on Wednesdays. You may **not** send me your papers by e-mail attachment. Printed out papers are to be placed in the manila envelope provided for this purpose on the bulletin board outside the American Studies office. You will decide which weeks you choose to write, beginning with week III, but do not put off writing papers and later find yourself in

trouble. In addition to the copy of your short paper placed in the manila envelope, you are to bring three other copies to the seminar and pass them around no later than the beginning of the seminar. The first thing we will do at each session beginning with week III is read and discuss each other's papers.

Papers may be one page long but may not be longer than two pages. If your paper on a particular occasion is longer than two pages, edit it down to where it is only two pages long. No cover sheets, please. Just your title and your name on top of your first page. Think of these papers as the length of a newspaper editorial. Also, give your papers a title representative of the argument you advance. And I do want you to have an argument or, at least, a thesis or strong point of view.

Papers for a particular week should deal in the main with the readings and films for that week, but they may also pick up threads from previous weeks' conversations and materials and elaborate on them in connection with the materials for the current week.

I will be grading these papers +, , and -, standing for excellent, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory respectively.

You will have two other special writing assignments. In the first case, you are to choose whether to do the assignment for the April 4 or April 11 seminar, focusing on "Adaptation" or "The French Lieutenant's Woman." Basically, I would like you to present an alternative to Kaufmann's way of dealing with Susan Orlean's *New Yorker* non-fiction story or an alternative to Pinter's way of dealing with the double ending of John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. As for length, 5-6 pages. What you are, in effect, doing is providing a film treatment—how you would make the film as opposed to how Kaufman in one case and Pinter in the other case chose to do so. As with your short papers, these projects will also be placed in the manila envelope on Tuesdays by 8 p.m. in time for me to read and grade prior to the seminar.

Everyone will do the second special assignment, due for the last meeting of the seminar. The reading assignment for that date is Henry James's The Turn of the Screw. There have been several attempts to make a film of The Turn of the Screw but they have been failures. The difficulty is in handling point of view. The story is told by the governess, so one may read it and accept her version of events or dispute her version of events and find her deranged and culpable. Henry James was a master of ambiguity. But how does one film ambiguity?

Your assignment is to create a film treatment of The Turn of the Screw in which you decide how to go about making a film of it which somehow captures its ambiguity. Your treatment will have to wrestle with the issue of point of view. Of course, in a film, the camera has the final word in point of view), so I would like you to suggest camera angles for crucial scenes—plus lighting, set decoration and design, casting, possible voiceovers, music, etc. In short, imagine yourself the auteur or director of the film and imagine your reader as a producer considering the viability of your film proposal artistically and commercially.

As with the special assignments of April 4/11 the suggested length is 5-6 pages.