

### 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 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 visual. 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 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. To reduce it to one word, this course is about issues in adaptation, usually literature to film but sometimes the other way around.

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#### BOOKS (available in Douglass Bookstore)

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

#### ADDITIONAL READINGS

I have placed on electronic reserve all the other readings for this course. This saves 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 books to be purchased. Please go on line and print these works out for yourself as a packet and make sure they are with you when they are to come up in class. This goes for the books too.

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. Be careful: I am teaching another course this semester which also has a long electronic readings list. Be sure to print out the one for our seminar.

## FILMS

A number of short films will be screened in class. Most films, however, will be seen before class in the media room of the Douglass Library. These films will be placed on reserve for two weeks before their discussion date in class and you will watch them on video monitors (unless you prefer to rent them and see them privately). Virtually all of the feature films are also available for rental in video stores. You may wish to watch the films with a friend from the seminar or even make something of a party out of seeing one or more of the films. In any case, I list below the ample hours of the media room. It is easy to see the films; the media room is open nearly 80 hours per week.

Films will be removed from reserve immediately after they are discussed in class. The hours of the media room are presently Monday-Thursday, 9:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.; Friday 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; and Sunday, 12 noon.-8:00 p.m. Their phone number is 732-932-9023, ext. 7, should you have occasion to call them.

Films to be seen before class are indicated in the syllabus with an asterisk (\*).

## SYLLABUS

Tues. Sept. 2 FILM AND REALITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

read: Notes on *David Holzman's Diary*

film: *David Holzman's Diary* (no asterisk, therefore to be seen in class)

Tues. Sept. 9 FILM TO LITERATURE: WHEN THE INFLUENCE GOES THE OTHER WAY

read: script from *Four Days on Big City Waters* by Charles Woolfolk and Michael Rockland; "Up the Creek to Manhattan" in *New Jersey Monthly* and "Up the Creek to Manhattan" from *Snowshoeing Through Sewers* by Michael Rockland

film: *Three Days on Big City Waters* (again, no asterisk, so to be seen in class).

Tues. Sept. 16 THE NEXUS OF FILM AND LITERATURE: POINT OF VIEW

read: "The Literature/Screen Debate: An Overview," from *In Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization* by Robert Giddings; "Turning Books into Films: Expert Advice," from the PEN Newsletter; "The Creative Group," ch. XII in *The Art of the Motion Picture*, by Jean Benoit-Levy;

"How Films Are Made," by Rene Clair; "Literary Technique and Film Technique," ch. 4 in *Literature and Film*, by Robert Richardson; "That Was no Lady: Pilfering Literature," by Jesse Green, *New York Times* May 11, 1997; and "Two Distinct Arts," by Antonio DiFranco.

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

Tues. Sept. 23 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.)

Tues. Sept. 30 NOVEL TO FILM II

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 version only).

Tues. Oct. 7 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* (\*)

Tues. Oct. 14 NOVEL TO FILM III:

read: excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (chapters 28-30)

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

Tues. Oct. 21 NOVELA TO FILM: AFRICA IN VIET NAM

read: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

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

Tues. Oct. 28 PLAY TO FILM

read: *Oleana* by David Mamet

film: *Oleana* (\*)

Tues. Nov. 4 SHAKESPEARE TO BROADWAY MUSICAL TO FILM

Read: *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare

film: *West Side Story* (\*)

Tues. Nov. 11 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, *New York 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, *New York Times*, January 19, 2003; The Cure for Writer's Block, by Daniel Zalewski, *New York Times*, December 1, 2002; and "New Yorker Writer Turns Gun Toting Floozy? That's Showbiz" by Sarah Boxer, *New York Times* December 19, 2002.

Film *Adaptation* (\*)

Note: see course requirements for special assignment for this session or, in the alternative, for the November 18<sup>th</sup> seminar

Tues. Nov. 18 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 November 11<sup>th</sup>. seminar.

**Note: The seminar does not meet on Tuesday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, which has a Thursday schedule**

Tues. Dec. 2 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 the film (the latter in class)

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

Tues. Dec. 9 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 being reflected in your course grade. If you are ill or have a very important reason for missing any session of the seminar, you must reach me by phone or e-mail no later than one hour prior to a seminar meeting. If you do not reach me by one hour before a seminar meeting it will count as an absence. And please *always* be on time.

A large part of your grade will be based on class participation. Be sure you have read everything

assigned 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—unless I feel that some of you are not doing your work. Should that occur I may consider a final exam. Hopefully, as in the past, that will not be necessary. 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 Mondays, the day before seminar meetings, by 8 p.m. This is so I can read and grade them prior to our seminar meetings on Tuesdays. 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 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, double spaced. 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 the 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 November 11<sup>th</sup> or November 18<sup>th</sup> seminar, focusing on *Adaptation* or *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. For November 11<sup>th</sup> I would like you to present an alternative to Kaufmann's way of dealing with Susan Orlean's *New Yorker* non-fiction story; or, for November 18<sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>©1</sup>~~W~~ you would make the film as opposed to how Kaufman in one case and Pinter in the other case suggested doing so. As with your short papers, these projects will be placed in the manila envelope on Mondays by 8 p.m. in time for me to read and grade prior to the seminar, and you will bring three copies to class.

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 find her deranged and culpable or you will simply not be able to determine what is the truth. In this novela Henry James is 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 November 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, the suggested length is 5-6 pages. Hand in an original on Monday evening, December 8, but bring only one copy to class on December 9.