

“Shakespeare and Film”

English 489
English Literary Genres
Spring 2009
California University of Pennsylvania
3 credits
W 6.00-8.45 PM
Duda Hall 211

M. G. Aune
Office Hours TTh 2.00 – 3.30, W 3.00 – 6.00
and by appointment
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Description

The objective in this class is to understand Shakespeare’s plays as they are interpreted, transformed, adapted and otherwise altered by the medium of film. The plays were written to be performed, that is as texts to be seen and heard rather than read. Further, the medium of drama was accessible to a great range of the early modern population, literate and not. In these regards, film is not an alien form for Shakespeare. It is a highly visual and auditory medium that is generally available to a large and diverse audience.

Working toward this objective, our first task is to gain an understanding of Shakespeare’s plays as visual/auditory texts. We will do this by reading the plays with a specific set of criteria in mind. We will read paying attention to visual cues such as explicit and implicit stage directions, settings, costumes, and props.

Our second task is to understand the medium of film and acquire a literacy in that medium that allows us to be critical about it. We will work to develop a vocabulary of critical terms for talking about film. We will do this through reading of critical material, classroom discussion and several homework assignments.

These two goals lead to a final: thinking about how we can be critical about Shakespeare on film as more than just a text to be discussed formally. We will strive to examine, discuss, and write about these films as films rather than simply new versions of the plays. Ideally, we will employ several basic critical approaches including feminist, psychoanalytic, and reception studies.

Requirements

Though this course is a four hundred level English course, the large enrollment prevents it from being a seminar as it should be. We will try to overcome these

limitations through classroom discussion, group presentations, and home viewings. This course will not be a lecture course. Student participation is crucial to its success.

Because the library's holdings of the films we will be watching are slim and because we do not have class time to view all the films I would like to study, you will be required to have some form of access to these films outside of class. You will need access in order to write your term paper and prepare your presentation. I do not expect you to purchase them. Some video rental establishments (Blockbuster, etc.) will have some of these titles. Most convenient, I find, is a subscription to Netflix (www.netflix.com). The cost ranges from about five dollars to as much as twenty dollars a month, depending on how many DVDs you wish to have at a time. The DVDs are mailed to you and you may keep them as long as you wish. Netflix often will give the first month gratis. You might also consider sharing a subscription with your peers.

Texts (available at the campus bookshop)

Samuel Crowl. *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide*

Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet (any edition)

A subscription to Netflix, or other access to the films assigned

A notebook for film notes

A flash drive dedicated to schoolwork

Grading	Scale		University Interpretation	
Reception Project	100 points	100–94%	A	Superior Achievement
8 Preview Papers	80 points	90–93%	A-	
Term Paper	200 points	87–89%	B+	
Group Clip Analysis	100 points	84-86%	B	Above Average
Viewing Notebook	80 points	80-83%	B-	
Total	560 points	77-79%	C+	
		74-76%	C	Average
All scores will be posted on the Blackboard gradebook.		70-73%	C-	
		60-69%	D	Below Average
		Below 60	F	Failure

Grade Guidelines

These descriptions apply to the final grade in the class and the score on particular assignments.

A work is outstanding. It goes beyond the basic requirements of the assignment and the class. The work shows evidence of critical and original thinking. Ideas are clearly supported and explained.

B work is more than satisfactory. It shows understanding of the given task and an understanding of the rules for writing as set out in the syllabus. Thinking is clear,

though not necessarily highly critical or highly original. Ideas are supported and explained, although not always clearly or consistently.

C work is satisfactory. It shows familiarity with though not a complete understanding of the given task and rules for writing as set out in the syllabus. Thought shows inconsistent critical engagement or originality. Ideas are too broad and not clearly supported with evidence. Writing tends to summarize or describe rather than analyze.

D work is below average. It shows an inconsistent understanding of the given task, text, and rules. Thought and writing are often disorganized and do not communicate an understanding of audience or genre. Paper seems to be written quickly with little attention to revision or proofreading.

F work is unsatisfactory. It shows little if any understanding of the given task, text, or rules. Thought and writing are disorganized and do not communicate an understanding of audience or genre.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities reserve the right to self-identify; must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) to receive services; will provide the appropriate notice from OSD for accommodations which specifically involve faculty.

Requests for approval for reasonable accommodations should be directed to OSD. Approved accommodations will be recorded on the ODS Accommodation Approval notice and provided to the student. Students are expected to adhere to the ODS procedures for self-identifying, providing documentation and requesting accommodations in a timely manner. The OSD is located in Azorsky 105 and the telephone number is 724.938.5781.

Academic Honesty

According to the University Bulletin, “[t]ruth and honesty are necessary prerequisites for all education, and students who attempt to improve their grades or class standing through any form of academic dishonesty may be penalized by disciplinary action ranging from a verbal reprimand to a failing grade in the course or dismissal from the University. If the situation appears to merit a severe penalty, the professor will refer the matter to the appropriate dean or to the Provost. The student may appeal the penalty as outlined above with the Academic Integrity Committee hearing appeals above the level of Dean.”

I assume that all work you turn in for this course is yours, and any material that you have acquired from an outside source is documented properly. Failure to do so is considered plagiarism and, per University policy, may result in failure of the course or dismissal from the University.

Late Papers

Late papers will lose ten points per day until they are turned in. You are responsible for turning in all work assigned in this class. Failure to do so will result in failing this class.

Attendance and Participation

According to the University Catalogue, “[r]egular class attendance is a prerequisite to successful class performance.” Important material will only be presented in class, thus attendance is important for preparation for examinations. If you are unable to attend class, you are still responsible for any work done or due in class that day. If you are more than fifteen minutes late to a class meeting or if you leave early, you will be considered absent.

Participation includes not only contributing to class discussion, it also covers prompt attendance, listening and responding constructively to your classmates, attending class prepared to discuss the readings, and bringing your books and writing material to every class meeting. If you attend class but are unprepared to discuss the homework, or do not have your books or writing material, you will be considered absent. If you accumulate more than two absences, you will lose one letter grade from your final grade. If you miss three or more classes, you will not pass the class. If you must miss a class because of a university-related activity, your coach or supervisor must contact me in writing at least one week before the absence.

Cell Phones

If you use your cell phone in class, you will be asked to leave and be marked absent for that day.

Paper Format

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are to be typewritten, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in twelve-point Times font. Your name, the date, the class, my name and the assignment are to be at the top of the first page. Do not forget to title your work. Any papers longer than one page must have page numbers and be stapled.

Preview Papers

These are to be two to three page analysis/predictions of films after you read the play but before you watch the film. First, briefly identify (three or four sentences) a major theme or question associated with the play (e. g. the importance of names in *Romeo & Juliet*). This will be helpful in discussing the film as a whole. Then, choose one or two aspects of the play and analyze the challenges you think that filming those aspects may present. In other words, use this paper to describe what you will be watching for in particular, and why. These papers are to show your familiarity with the play, your ability to think about the play in visual and cinematic terms, and your ability to use the language of film studies. Be sure to use

properly cited quotations from the text. You may well know something about the film, such as its modernized setting. Feel free to take this information into account. Likewise, if you have seen the film you are writing about, do not pretend that you have not. Your knowledge will make your paper more focused.

For example, the first conversation (2.1) between Katharina and Petruccio in *Taming of the Shrew* is rife with sexual double-entendres and violent implications. You might write about how these elements might be emphasized or de-emphasized or eliminated entirely and what the consequences of such changes might be on the film as a whole. You might focus on similar elements in different films, such as the use of close-up or montage. These papers may also be useful for your term paper.

Reception Project

Barbara Hodgdon uses the term “expectational text” to describe her “private notions about the play and about performed Shakespeare, notions that [she] may not even recognize until [she] find[s] them denied” (“Two *King Lear*s: Uncovering the Filmtext.” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 11.3: 143). For this paper, you will use reviews of a single film of a Shakespeare play to attempt to recover a sense of the “expectational text” associated with a given Shakespeare play. In other words, what do critics expect a Shakespeare film to do or to be? For your analysis of the reviews, look for patterns across the reviews. For example you might focus on how the film gets compared to the play (or not compared); the reviewers’ attitude toward Shakespeare as a cultural formation, or the reviewers’ attitudes toward film. The goal is to use the reviews to generate a description of what the reviewers assume a film of a Shakespeare text to do and to be.

You do not have to restrict yourself to one of the films we will be watching. Using the research databases available through the library, Academic Search Premiere (EBSCO), JSTOR, ProjectMUSE, Lexis/Nexis, etc., you must locate and read at least ten reviews of your film. These reviews may come from newspapers, magazines, academic journals, and/or reputable on-line journals such as *EMLS*. Do not use personal websites. The reviews of the film must be from its American or international theatrical release. You may not use reviews of the film on VHS or DVD. Basic information on the film can be found using the on-line resources on the course website. Your paper should be four to six pages long and include a bibliography of all the reviews you found in MLA style.

Clip Analysis/Group Presentation

I will divide the class randomly into seven groups, of about five people each. Each group will be responsible for choosing a clip (scene, part of a scene, series of shots) from the film to be discussed that day and leading a discussion of its filmic elements. The discussion should include a showing of the clip, use of filmic analysis, and a lively discussion involving the rest of the class. It should last no more than thirty minutes. In addition to the presentation, each group must give me 1.) a bibliography of at least five scholarly articles or chapters on the film in MLA

format; 2.) a list of questions/topics for discussion; 3.) a two to three page written version of the analysis.

Your discussion will be graded on the materials you give me, equal participation by all group members, level of preparation and knowledge of the film, level of engagement with your classmates, and a *Group Member Evaluation Form* for each member and a *Peer Rating of Group Members*. These forms are available on the Blackboard Site and the course website. You must print them out and complete them before your discussion. Late forms will result in a loss of ten points.

Viewing Notebook

Keeping notes on a film can be quite difficult as they are typically shown in the dark and ideally will attempt to keep your attention on the screen rather than the notes. As scholars of film, you each will have to develop your own strategy for keeping notes on the films we will watch. Your notes will be important in participating in discussions of the film, writing your term paper, and preparing your presentation. Some bring small lights, some have pen/light combination devices. Others learn to write in the dark. I ask that you not use computers or phones; in my experience these devices are overly distracting to other viewers. You cannot keep notes on an entire film, especially if you are watching it for the first time. But you should be able to make notes about elements that interest you, catch your attention, or confuse you. Your preview paper will be helpful here as you will be prepared to keep notes about at least one part of the film.

As part of this course, you will turn in your viewing notes from time to time. Unlike any other work you do for this class, these notes may be handwritten. They must have the date of viewing, title of the film, and your name on them. They will be graded based on their usefulness, their clarity, and their comprehensiveness. I regard these notes as the raw material of your scholarship and evidence of your engagement with the class.

Term Paper

Your term paper should be eight to ten pages in length, following the format rules on the syllabus. The paper should draw on at least five outside sources, no more than two may be on-line. The paper should demonstrate your ability both to interact with the primary text(s) and with secondary sources. You may well have to resort to interlibrary loan to acquire the secondary sources needed for this paper. With that in mind, start early.

You have several options for this paper. You might take up an idea that Crowl introduces, either expanding and supporting it or critiquing and correcting it. You may conduct a close, formalist reading of one or two films we have seen this term. This would involve careful attention to one or more filmic elements. Potential topics for close, formalist readings include focusing on gender, race, class, postcolonialism, or queer theory. A genre study would consider a particular film as representative or not representative of a particular film genre such as the western or film noir. Please see me if you choose to do so. You may contrast/compare two

films of the same play, again following a careful filmic close reading. You may develop an idea that you have introduced in your journals. You may conduct a reception project that considers how a particular film was received in terms of its reviews, its persistence, and its profitability. Do not write a paper that focuses solely on how the film diverges from the play text.

An abstract and annotated bibliography of the paper are due on April 15th. The abstract should be no more than one page, identify the film(s), the thesis, and provide a brief description of how the thesis will be supported. The annotated bibliography should list the sources you plan to use (in MLA format) and using two or three sentences, describe how the source will be useful.

The paper is due Wednesday 28 April, in my office before five pm. **If you are a graduating senior, it is due on 24 April, before five pm.**

Library Holdings

The Taming of the Shrew (1966) VHS

Hamlet (1948) VHS

Romeo & Juliet (1968) DVD

Books on Reserve

Russell Jackson, ed. *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare on film.*

Michael Andregg. *Orson Welles, Shakespeare, and popular culture*

Kenneth S. Rothwell. *A history of Shakespeare on screen: a century of film and television*

Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe, eds. *New wave Shakespeare on screen*

Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt, eds. *Shakespeare, the movie: popularizing the plays on film, TV, and video*

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Calendar

Subject to change. I expect you will have the specified play read and prepared on the date it is listed.

14 January Introductions, film language

21 January Read: *Taming of the Shrew*; View: *Taming of the Shrew* (1967, 122 min.); Due: Preview Paper 1

28 January Discuss: *Taming of the Shrew*; Read: Crowl 3-20, 53-60

Outside of Class: View: *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999, 97 min.)

4 February Due: Preview Paper 2; Discuss: *10 Things I Hate About You*; Clip Analysis #1; Read: Crowl 101-27

11 February Read: *Romeo & Juliet*; View: *Romeo & Juliet* (1968, 138 min.); Due: Preview Paper 3

18 February Discuss: *Romeo & Juliet* (1968); Clip Analysis #2; Read Crowl 128-44

Outside of Class: View: *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996, 120 min.)

25 February Discuss: *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996); Due: Preview Paper 4; Clip Analysis #3; Read Crowl 80-97

2-6 March Spring Break

11 March Read: *Macbeth*; View: *Macbeth* (1971, 140 min.); Due: Preview Paper 5

18 March Discuss: *Macbeth* (1971); Clip Analysis #4; Read Crowl 145-60

25 March View: *Kumonosu jô (Throne of Blood)* (1957, 109 min.); Due: Preview Paper 6; Due: Reception Project

1 April Discuss: *Kumonosu jô (Throne of Blood)* (1957); Clip Analysis #5; Read Crowl 41-48; 161-78

8 April Read: *Hamlet*; View: *Hamlet* (1948, 153 min.); Due: Preview Paper 7

15 April Discuss *Hamlet* (1948); Clip Analysis #6; Due: Term paper abstract; Read Crowl 21-28, 179-96

Outside of Class: View: *Hamlet* (2000, 113 min.)

22 April Discuss: *Hamlet* (2000); Due: Preview Paper 8; Clip Analysis #7

24 April Term papers for graduating seniors due in by 5.00 pm

28 April Final Exam Period, term paper due in my office by 5.00 pm

Standard Academic Usage

1. Titles of books, films, magazines and newspapers are in italics: *Beloved*, *New York Times*, *The Godfather*
2. Write out all numbers that are two words or fewer: one hundred, 352.
3. Put all foreign words in italics, *fromage*
4. The first time you refer to a person, use his or her full name; after that use only the last name.
5. Avoid slang and clichés.
6. Always assume that you should use third person (he, she, it, one) rather than the first person (I, we) or second person (you), unless you check with the instructor first.
7. Place punctuation inside quotation marks. E.g. Shakespeare wrote, "To be or not to be." Not, Shakespeare wrote, "To be or not to be".

Tips for Writing about Shakespeare

There are standard practices that nearly everyone follows when writing about Shakespeare and literature in general. I have briefly outlined them below and I expect you to learn and follow them.

When briefly summarizing or describing the action in a particular scene, always write in the present tense. "In the closet scene, Hamlet is speaking to his mother, unaware that Polonius is hiding behind an arras."

When you use a quote from a play, cite the quote's location in parentheses after the quote. Give the act, the scene and the line numbers in Arabic numerals, all separated by periods.

"To be or not to be" (3.1.55). Do not use page numbers.

If the quote is longer than four lines, set it off an extra five spaces on the left and do not use quotation marks.

To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them. (3.1.55-59)

Do not write about Shakespeare as if he were a person we can know and judge. We know he wrote the plays, but not much else. *Merchant of Venice* may have strong anti-Semitic elements in it, but we can't say Shakespeare the person was anti-Semitic. We do not know what his motives were in writing the plays so choose your words carefully. Analyze the plays, not the author.