

English 4405: Shakespeare in Film and Popular Culture

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:15 / 002 Storrs Hall

Professor: Greg Colón Semenza

Office: 232 CLAS

Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday: 11:30-1:00 PM; by appointment.

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Course Description:

The course centers on how five of Shakespeare's most reproduced plays—*Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*—have been adapted, appropriated, and otherwise reinvented in modern popular culture and film. Looking critically and theoretically at engagements of Shakespeare in advertising, children's literature, corporate business practices, pop music, and especially television and film, we will ask the question "Why Shakespeare?" That is, how and why is the "cultural capital" of Shakespeare evoked? More specifically (and to echo the language of Deborah Cartmell), how is modern Shakespeare presented to the masses in terms of sexuality, gender, race, violence, and nationalism? What happens when Shakespeare is transplanted into a non-British or non-western context (such as Kurosawa's stunning Shakespeare films)? What happens when Shakespeare's name is evoked in lowbrow entertainment like *South Park* or "schlock" such as Troma Entertainment's quasi-pornographic *Tromeo and Juliet*? Does Hollywood teach Shakespeare more effectively than high school teachers and university professors, or does it simply "dumb down" one of our most complex and revered artists? Finally, what can the serious study of reinventions teach us about Shakespeare, practices of adaptation, and ourselves?

Texts and other Materials:

1. The five Shakespeare plays (Signet editions ordered), which are to be brought to class
2. Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*
3. "Course packet" of essays on Electronic Reserve and provided by instructor

Assignments:

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| 1. Screening Journal (9 entries): | 30% |
| 2. Attendance and Participation: | 25% |
| 3. Final Exam | 15% |
| 4. Article Analysis (750 words): | 15% |
| 5. Scene Comparison (750 words): | 15% |

OFFICE HOURS:

I will hold office hours in 232 CLAS during the following times: Tuesdays & Wednesdays from 11:30-1. I urge each of you to take advantage of the opportunity to introduce yourself to me, ask any questions you may have, discuss future or current assignments, or seek instruction on specific problems with which you might be wrestling. There is a too often unrecognized but

undeniable correlation between students who tend to use office hours and students who tend to be successful in college.

EMAIL: I encourage *professional* communication through email. During the week, I will make it a point to check my email at least once a day. On weekends, I may not check email until Sunday night.

CLASS POLICIES:

Participation: 25% of your final grade will be based on class preparation and participation. The class participation grade refers to your involvement in class discussions and office conferences, and your attendance record, general level of preparation, and completion of all assignments on time (late assignments will be penalized a full letter grade for each calendar day they are late [for example, an A will become a B, etc.]). Preparation encompasses the timely completion of homework and in-class assignments, and the thorough reading of all assigned texts prior to the class session in which they are to be discussed.

Attendance: Because your understanding and engagement of the material in this class will depend on your presence in it, I will take absences quite seriously. More than three absences (excused or unexcused) is unacceptable and will result in a full-letter-grade reduction for each additional absence (for example, your third absence will turn your A into a B); more than 5 absences will result in an F for the final participation grade. If you must miss class, send due work in with a classmate; then, before the next class period, get someone's notes, and see me during office hours to learn what you missed and how to prepare for the next session. Please do not ask me whether you missed "anything important," as the answer always will be "yes."

Professionalism: [Please turn off all cell phones, lap tops, ipods, etc. before class begins; note that I do not allow laptops in class unless I receive a university explanation of a particular reason to do so]. I will not tolerate behavior that distracts the majority of my students from their work or distracts me from teaching them. Lateness, cell phones going off in class, text-messaging, newspaper-reading, iPod-listening, etc. all are prohibited. My wish is to create a pedagogical environment that is respectful of my students' learning needs and an intellectual atmosphere that is maximally conducive to an effective exchange of ideas.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism can be defined very generally as the practice of offering words, facts, or ideas of another person as your own in any academic exercise. It goes without saying that you are responsible for citing any words or ideas that you borrow. Plagiarism demonstrates contempt for your instructor, peers, and the purposes of liberal education. **If you are caught plagiarizing, you will automatically fail the course for violation of the student code and be referred to the dean of students for judicial affairs.** If you are uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the English Department's policies guide or see me outside of class.

Written Assignments and Exams

1. Screening Journals: In the class immediately following our Tuesday night screenings, you are required to turn in a written response to the film we have just seen. This response should be

argument- or inquiry- centered and consist of at least five hundred words of writing. Responses will be graded lightly on a low pass/pass/high pass system, with a high pass being worth four points, a pass three points, and a low pass two points. Normal writing rules apply.

2. Final Examination: The Final Exam will consist of two parts: 1) your response to a prompt requiring comparative analysis of 4-5 films we will view this semester; 2) a scene analysis. About the latter: you will be shown a filmed version of a key Shakespeare scene, which you will be given 20-30 minutes to analyze. Successful responses will A) describe the manner in which the film interprets the particular scene and B) discuss the ways in which the camera and other cinematic operations and/or decisions such as lighting, blocking, cinematography, etc. contribute to that interpretation.

3. Article Analysis: You are responsible for choosing one of the following secondary readings to analyze (Hutcheon, Benjamin, Hedrick, Giroux, Burt, Donaldson, Hawkins, or Mulvey) in an approximately 750-word paper. The paper is due on the day that the essay you choose to analyze is to be discussed. Please note that if you fail to write on one of the essays assigned prior to the November 18th class, you will fail the assignment. Reviews should analyze the argument of the essay, its general persuasiveness, and its contribution to our ongoing discussions of Shakespeare's place in film and popular culture or to film art, per se. Please do not fall into the trap of assuming that a harsh critique of an author demonstrates intellectual rigor. Focus less on what you perceive to be flaws and more on what you perceive to be the strengths of the article and the ways in which we might *use* its findings. I tend to associate the process of reviewing with the process of grading student papers; it's much more useful (and difficult) to be constructive than it is simply to point out weaknesses. That said, it's also problematic simply to praise every aspect of a scholar's work. Strive for balance. (We'll discuss this in more detail in class).

4. Scene Comparison: On October 19th, you will turn in an approximately 750-word analysis of a single Shakespeare scene as interpreted by two different films. For example, you might choose to write on the *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene as handled by Baz Luhrmann and Franco Zeffirelli. The key here is 1) to describe the manner in which each film interprets the scene; 2) to discuss the ways in which the camera and other cinematic operations and/or decisions such as lighting, blocking, cinematography, etc. contribute to each interpretation; 3) to discuss what we learn about the Shakespeare scene when the two scenes are brought into dialogue with one another.

Class Schedule and Film Screenings (All Screenings at 7 PM in Library Video Theater 1):

Aug 31	T	Introduction to Shakespeare in Film and Popular Culture
Sept 2	Th	Read Lanier (On Reserve), "Introduction: Where no Bard has Gone Before," 1-20; Read Act 1 of <i>Macbeth</i>
Sept 7	T	<i>Macbeth</i> (Acts 2-5) Screening #1: Billy Morrissette's <i>Scotland PA</i> (2001)
Sept 9	Th	Discuss <i>Scotland PA</i> ; Read Sanders, 1-25; Read Hutcheon (On Reserve), "Beginning to Theorize Adaptation," 1-32.
Sept 14	T	Silent Film Shakespeare; Read Monaco (On Reserve), "Film as an Art," 22-65.
Sept 16	Th	Silent Film Shakespeare; Read Benjamin (On Reserve), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 665-85.
Sept 21	T	CEO Shakespeare: Read Hedrick (Email Attachment), "The Bard of Enron," 19-43; Read Sanders, "What is Appropriation," 26-41. Screening #2: John Madden's <i>Shakespeare in Love</i> (1999)
Sept 23	Th	Discuss <i>Shakespeare in Love</i>
Sept 28	T	<i>Othello</i> (Read Acts 1-5) Screening #3: Tim Blake Nelson's " <i>O</i> " (2001)
Sept 30	Th	Discuss " <i>O</i> "; Read Giroux (On Reserve), "Hollywood and the Demonization of Youth," 35-63.
October 5	T	TeenPic Shakespeare: Read Burt (On Reserve) "Afterword: Te[e]n Things I Hate About You," 205-231; Read Semenza (Email Attachment), "Shakespeare After Columbine," 99-124.
October 7	Th	<i>Henry V</i> (Read Acts 1-3)
October 12	T	<i>Henry V</i> (Read Acts 4-5) Screening #4: Kenneth Branagh's <i>Henry V</i> (1989)
October 14	Th	Discuss <i>Henry V</i> film; Read Rabkin (On Reserve), "Either/Or: Responding to <i>Henry V</i> ," 33-62.

- October 19 T International Shakespeare (Lessons in the Image); **Scene Comparison Paper Due**
- Screening #5: Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957)
- October 21 Th Discuss *Throne of Blood*; Read Jorgens (Email Attachment), "Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*: Washizu and Miki Meet the Forest Spirit," 167-73.
- October 26 T Shakespeare and Globalism: Read Crofts (Email Attachment), "Reconceptualizing National Cinema's," 853-64; Read Dissanayake (Email Attachment), "Issues in World Cinema," 877-85.
- Screening #6: Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003)
- October 28 Th Discuss *Maqbool*
- November 2 T *Romeo and Juliet* (Read Acts 1-5)
- Screening #7: Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)
- November 4 Th Discuss *Romeo + Juliet*; Read Donaldson (On Reserve), "In Fair Verona': Media, Spectacle, and Performance in R+J," 59-82.
- November 9 T Scene analysis: Two Endings of *Romeo and Juliet*
- Screening #8: Lloyd Kaufman's *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996)
- November 11 Th Schlock-speare; Read Hawkins (Email Attachment), "Sleaze Mania, Euro-Trash, and High Art," 264-77.
- November 16 T Beyond Shakespeare: Appropriating the Renaissance; Read Semenza (Email Attachment), "Introduction: An Age for All Time," 1-21.
- Screening #9: Episodes 1 and 2 of Season 1 of Showtime's *The Tudors* (2007)
- November 18 Th Discuss *The Tudors*; Read Mulvey (Email Attachment), "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."
- November 23, 25 NO CLASSES. Happy Thanksgiving.
- November 30 T *Hamlet* (Read Acts 1-5)
- Screening # 10: Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000)

December 2 Th Discuss Almereyda's *Hamlet*; Read Cartelli and Rowe, "*Hamlet* Rewound," 45-68 (On Reserve).

December 7 T Several Short *Hamlets*

December 9 Th Course Wrap-Up

FINAL EXAM DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED