

## FILM ADAPTATION

**Dr. Kevin L. Ferguson**  
**Office: Klapper 711**  
**Office Hours: Thursdays, 3:00-4:00**  
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**ENGL 781-03 (1338): Fall 2012**  
**Thursdays, 4:30-6:20, Kiely Hall 325**  
**filmadaptation.qwriting.org**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course examines the relationship between writing and cinema by focusing on film adaptations of literary genres such as the novel, short story, nonfiction essay, and poem. We will consider classic and contemporary theories of film adaptation as well as historical and industry-specific issues to address our central question: “How can studying film adaptation allow us to better understand what it is that literature does, and vice versa?” You’ll see that this is a very contentious issue, so expect to read lots of different points of view about the value of adaptations, to watch film adaptations outside of class, to engage in weekly blog discussions, and to examine one selected adaptation for a final project. The course is designed as a seminar with substantial weekly reading, a shared blog, and formal writing assignments.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES for students include:**

- ★ to demonstrate familiarity with competing theories of film adaptation.
- ★ to apply those theories to specific texts.
- ★ to be able to describe historical or industrial changes in cinematic adaptation.
- ★ to demonstrate a mastery of methods of research and documentation.
- ★ to be able to answer the following questions:
  - ~ How did early film theorists define cinema as an art distinct from other arts?
  - ~ How do theories of “how fiction works” relate to the cinema, and where do they fall short?
  - ~ Why did the early film industry see literature as the “obvious” source for films?
  - ~ What features are pointed to when calling adaptations “successful” or “unsuccessful”?
  - ~ Why and how has the contemporary American film industry encouraged transgenre adaptation, tie-ins, remakes, reboots, sequels, appropriations, etc?

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### **REQUIRED COURSE READINGS:**

All readings are on our blog: <http://filmadaptation.qwriting.org/> [password: filmadaptation]  
You should bring a printed copy of the readings to class.

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### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

★ **Reading Responses** posted on our class blog. These should be substantial (~300 words) responses to the week’s assigned readings. You will not discuss every reading, and you should not summarize the readings. Instead, pick one quotation or concept to focus on. Begin your post by posing an open-ended question, such as “Would Bazin modify his emphasis on realism given today’s prevalence of CGI in movies?” Then discuss a few possible answers to the question. You should not come to a “final answer.” These are due Tuesday at midnight. You will do one of these every other week. When it is your “off week,” you will instead read your peers’ posts and leave a substantial **comment** (~100 words) on at least two of them by Thursday at noon.

★ **Presentation:** You will prepare a brief, 10-minute presentation that applies the assigned reading to a film or TV show. Your presentation should highlight relevant concerns from the reading such as terminology, history, or key quotations and specifically apply any of these to the chosen example. You should prepare an accompanying handout with enough copies for the class.

★ **Investigative Proposal:** You will submit a formal proposal for a final essay. In four paragraphs, present a specific text and investigative question to pursue, examine the purpose of the investigation and how it contributes to the study of adaptation, consider a method for approaching the subject, and identify possible resources that you would need to explore the topic.

★ **Annotated Bibliography:** You will find five scholarly secondary sources (i.e. journal articles, book chapters, scholarly reviews, interviews) to inform your proposed investigation, at least one of which is in print form. Use electronic databases like JSTOR, EBSCOHost, and the CUNY+ catalog. Following MLA style, create an annotated Works Cited page with citations and one-paragraph evaluative summaries for each article. *Hint: PN 1997.85 and PN 1995.3*

★ **Final project:** Your choice of either 1) a formal **sentence outline** of a hypothetical paper based on your proposal, or 2) a brief, 400-word **answer** to each Learning Outcome question.

**PARTICIPATION:** Since participation is crucial to your success, you should not miss more than one class. I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. If you come unprepared to class, you are not present; “coming unprepared” means not doing the reading, not bringing the text, not making an effort to participate, arriving late or leaving early. If you know you cannot attend, contact me *before* to ask about homework; I do not accept late assignments.

**SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION:** If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation, please inform me and the Office of Special Services at 718-997-5895.

#### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

[www.qc.cuny.edu/StudentLife/services/studev/Documents/AcademicIntegrityViolationForm.pdf](http://www.qc.cuny.edu/StudentLife/services/studev/Documents/AcademicIntegrityViolationForm.pdf)

Violations of academic integrity include: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and denying others access to information or material. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of what constitutes academic dishonesty. Students who want to know more should visit this website: <http://writingatqueens.org/for-students/what-is-plagiarism/>

I have a *zero-tolerance* policy towards plagiarism and academic dishonesty. The *minimum* punishment for plagiarism is an F as a final grade and being reported to the campus officer.

#### **GRADING:**

- ★ Blog Responses: 25 points
- ★ Responses to blog posts: 20 points
- ★ Presentation: 10 points
- ★ Investigative Proposal: 15 points
- ★ Annotated Bibliography: 15 points
- ★ Final Project: 15 points

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**COURSE CALENDAR**


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**8/30 Course Introduction**

- ★ Stam, Robert. "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation." *Literature and Film*. Eds. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. 1-52.
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***Part I: Early Theories of Film and Literature (1930s to 1950s)*****9/6 What Can Images Mean?**

- ★ Eisenstein, Sergei. "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today." [1944]. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, Ed. and trans. Jay Leyda. San Diego: Harcourt, 1949. 195-255.
  - ★ Barthes, Roland. "The Third Meaning." [1970]. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 44-68.
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**9/13 Who is the Author?**

- ★ Arnheim, Rudolf. "Who Is the Author of a Film?" [1934]. *Film Essays and Criticism*. Trans. Brenda Benthien. Madison, WI: The U of Wisconsin P, 1997. 62-69.
  - ★ Balázs, Béla. "The Script." [1945]. *Film And/As Literature*. Ed. John Harrington. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977. 215-223.
  - ★ Woolf, Virginia. "The Movies and Reality." [1945]. *Authors on Film*. Ed. Harry M. Geduld. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972. 86-91.
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**9/20 New Metaphors for Adaptation**

- ★ Bazin, André. "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest." [1948]. *Film Adaptation*. Ed. James Naremore. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000. 19-27.
  - ★ Bazin, André. "In Defense of Mixed Cinema." [1951]. *What is Cinema?, Vol. 1*. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley: U of California P, 1967. 53-75.
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- 9/27 ★ *Adaptation*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. Nicolas Cage, Meryl Streep. Columbia, 2002. Film.
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***Part II: Adaptation Studies (1980s to 1990s)*****10/4 Reconsidering Adaptation**

- ★ Andrew, Dudley. "The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory." [1980]. *Narrative Strategies: Original Essays in Film and Prose Fiction*. Eds. Sydney M. Conger and Janice R. Welsch. Macomb, Ill.: Western Illinois University, 1980. 9-17.
  - ★ Chatman, Seymour. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)." [1980]. *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 121-140.
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**10/11 Narrative**

- ★ McFarlane, Brian. "Backgrounds, Issues, and a New Agenda." [1994]. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. 3-30.
  - ★ *Due: Proposal (email it to me)*
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**10/18 Narration**

★ Branigan, Edward. "Narration." *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. London: Routledge, 1992. 63-85.

★ *Due: Revised Proposal*

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**10/25** ★ *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Perf. Steeve Coogan and Roby Brydon. BBC Films, 2005. Film.

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**Part III: Contemporary Debates (2000s to present)**

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**11/1 Film Theory's Two Traditions**

★ Ray, Robert B. "How a Film Theory Got Lost." *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001. 1-14.

★ Ray, Robert B. "Film and Literature." *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001. 120-131.

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**11/8 Six Models of Adaptation**

★ Elliott, Kamilla. "Literary Cinema and the Form/Content Debate." *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 133-183.

★ *Due: Investigative Proposal*

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**11/15 At a Crossroads**

★ Leitch, Thomas. "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory." *Criticism* 45.2 (2003): 149-171.

★ Leitch, Thomas. "Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads." *Adaptation* 1.1 (2008): 63-77.

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**11/22 NO CLASS**

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**11/29 Recent Work**

★ Hutcheon, Linda. "In Defence of Literary Adaptation as Cultural Production." *M/C Journal* 10.2 (2007). 23 Dec. 2011 <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0705/01-hutcheon.php>>.

★ Connor, J.D. "The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today." *M/C Journal* 10.2 (2007). 23 Dec. 2011 <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0705/15-connor.php>>.

★ *Due: Annotated Bibliography*

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**12/6 ★ Film To Be Determined**

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**12/13** ★ *Due: Final Projects by noon*

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