Writing 100: From Page To Screen: Film Adaptations of Literature

Fall 2005
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Course Theme

This writing course provides students with the opportunity to reflect critically on how they respond to film adaptations of select novels and short stories.

Over the course of the semester, we will address three interrelated questions. First, how do different film directors use the "language" of film to present a visual interpretation of literature? Second, to what extent does such a visual interpretation of literature make a statement about the culture and society we live in? And third, what sort of criteria should we use in the attempt to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a particular film director’s “statement” about society?

Required Texts

Burgess, Anthony. Clockwork Orange
Greene, Graham. The Quiet American

Custom Reading Packet (Short Stories, Poems, Interviews, Movie Reviews and Essays written on the art of film adaptation)

(Books available at Moravian College Bookstore; reading packet will be distributed in installments throughout the semester).

Class Format

This course will be primarily discussion-based. Each student is therefore required to complete the reading assignment prior to the beginning of class. This will allow each student to participate in the classroom discussions and workshops that will help him or her develop the ideas and arguments which are necessary for writing insightful and well-organized essays.
Writing Assignments

Each student will draft and complete weekly graded papers (between a paragraph to four pages in length, depending on the particular assignment), and an expanded version of a previously written essay (that contains a research component) over the course of the semester.

One of the three 3-4 page essays assigned will be a collaborative work (co-authored with another student).

The short essays and writing exercises turned in each week will serve two primary purposes; they will focus on a particular form of writing (such as commenting on a cited passage from a particular text, “applying” a film concept to a clip from a movie viewed in class, or writing an introduction), and they will form the building blocks for three 3-page essays.

Schedule of writing assignments and corresponding course material to be covered:

I. August 30 to September 22 (Note: schedule subject to slight change)

First 3-4 page essay: Summary and Application

Each student will write a concise and well-organized summary of an assigned text. This assignment is designed to introduce students to the importance of reading comprehension. Students will be asked to “restate” the central idea of a text and the author’s supporting arguments in their own words. They will then “apply” the author’s argument to a particular film or text.

Themes: Introduction to relation between film and literature; “point of view” in literature and film; Film Noir and genre; “tone” in literature and film.

Texts/Films:

Ingmar Bergman, “Film Has Nothing To Do With Literature.”
Joseph Boggs, “The Problems of Adaptation.”
Mark Crispin Miller, “The Big Picture.”
Christopher Nolan, “Memento” (Film)
Johnathon Nolan, “Memento Mori”
Andrei Tarkovsky, “Ernest Hemmingway’s ‘The Killers’” (Film Short)

September 27 to October 20

II. Second 3-4 Page Essay: Close Reading and Argument/Commentary
In this assignment, students will critique a select scene of a film, focusing on how the director has chosen to represent a certain passage of a literary work. Each student will be expected to write a sustained commentary in which they incorporate material they have studied on the art of cinematic adaptation.

Themes: “Irony” in film and literature; The Vietnam War Film as Genre; the relationship between the “private” and the “public” in film/literature.

Texts/Films:

W.H. Auden, “The Unknown Citizen.”
Pat Aufderheide, “Vietnam: Good Soldiers.”
Loren Baritz, “The Myths We Take To War”
Daphne Du Maurier, “The Birds”
Graham Greene, The Quiet American....
**Alfred Hitchcock, “The Birds” (film)**
**Joseph L. Mankiewicz, “The Quiet American.” (1958 Film)**
**Phillip Noyce, “The Quiet American” (2003 Film)**

**October 25 to November 22**

**III. Third 3-4 page essay: Comparative Analysis**

Each student will compare and contrast two film review essays that are written from different perspectives on a similar issue. In this assignment, students will be expected to develop an argument stating why they think one perspective has more validity than the other. This essay will enable the student to learn how to analyze similarities and differences, expose argument subtleties, and discover significant criteria for an analysis.

Themes: “Dystopia” as Genre; Music and Film; use of metaphor in film and literature; feminism, violence and film.

Texts/Film:

Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange
William Ferrell, “Reading the Novel into the Film.”
**Stanley Kubrick, “A Clockwork Orange” (Film)**
Hugo Mauerhofer, “Psychology of Film Experience.”

**November 29 to December 8**

**IV. Expanded Paper With Research Component (6-8 pages)**
This assignment will allow students to conduct independent research, evaluate sources and develop an original argument.

In order to assist the student with this project, there will be several research related assignments due throughout the semester. There will also be a class session conducted by the librarian that is designed to introduce students to various library resources that will assist them with their research projects.

Each student will also meet with the instructor for a research paper conference.

**It is the student’s choice which 3-4 page paper is expanded into the research paper.**

**The final draft is due no later than December 8.**

**Oral Presentation**

On a date chosen by the student, an oral presentation that focuses on comparing a written passage from a text with a scene from a film will given to the class.

This presentation can either be done alone or in collaboration with another student. In either case, the student or students will meet ahead of time with the instructor to discuss the project.

**Mid-term (October 20) and Quizzes**

The mid-term exam will be divided into three parts: an analysis of a clip from a film shown in class using the film terms we will study; short, critical comments on select passages from texts (which will serve as basis for a subsequent essay); a peer review of another student’s essay.

Unannounced quizzes on the reading assignments will be given throughout the semester; announced grammar quizzes will be given if a particular grammatical rule seems to be unclear. These grammar quizzes will be “customized”—that is, they will be tailored to individual student concerns.

**Grades**

Final grades will be determined on the basis of the following percentages:

- 2 750-word essays: 20%
- Weekly Writing Assignments: 10%
- Peer Review and Collaborative Essay: 15%
- Mid-term: 15%
Expanded Paper: 20%
Oral Presentation: 10%
Quizzes: 10%

In accordance with the Moravian College grading policy, each letter grade corresponds with numerical “Quality Points”:

A: 4.00.
A-: 3.67
B+: 3.33.
B: 3.00.
B-: 2.77.
C+: 2.33.
C: 2.00.
C-: 1.67.
D+: 1.33.
D: 1.00.
D-: 0.67.
F: no points.

While this grading system is obviously quantitative, the final grade will be determined, in part, by a qualitative consideration; that is, on the basis of the first essay, each student will meet with the instructor to establish a set of goals for the rest of the semester in order to improve his or her writing in specific ways. If these goals are met, then the final grade will be adjusted upwards.

**Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is of course expected. There is no penalty for unexcused absences. However, please note the following: there will no make-up quizzes given if you are not present on one of the days that a quiz is given.

Further, there will be no make-up assignment for missing one of the graded peer-review sessions. And finally, for each day a writing assignment is late, the final grade for that assignment will be lowered by 1/3 grade (exceptions made for documented medical absences).

(Due to past difficulties arising from electronic mail submissions, all essays are to be handed in during class, no essay is to be turned in via e-mail).

**Academic honesty policy**

Please consult the Moravian College policy as stipulated in the Student Handbook.