

Cinematic Shakespeare

שייקספיר בקולנוע

BA Seminar

Dr. Noam Reisner

Course no.: 0626380601 Fall term 2022, 4hr credit for BA
Monday and Thursday, 10-12, Gilman 317א, 262

Reception hours: By appointment, Webb 513

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Seminar prerequisites: Students must have successfully completed Introduction to British Culture part 1, a Shakespeare core course, Intro to Theory and a Proseminar.

Seminar Description

From the first invention of the cinematograph camera and the emergence of the new medium of silent film in the 19th century, filmmakers were drawn to Shakespearean drama as lofty material for cinematic adaptation. With well over 400 feature-length cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays since the invention of cinema, Shakespeare is the most 'adapted' author in the world, in any language. The relationship of cinema to Shakespeare is indeed a complicated love-affair that spans the 20th century and continues to inspire new films and film adaptations to this very day, now in television, digital and online media as well, including comics, cartoons and animation (see for example the BBC's *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*, 1992-1994, or the Anglo-Japanese *Manga Shakespeare*). In this seminar, we will explore this complex and fascinating relationship between Shakespeare and some of his most interesting cinematic adapters, discussing several key Shakespearean plays and in each case two exemplary films the play in question inspired – from major English-speaking classics to world-cinema, fringe, and the avant-garde. Our approach will always be a double one, moving from a discussion about the original play in theatrical performance to its cinematic adaptations, combining close textual analysis with cinematic analysis. Throughout, we will try and address a number of aesthetic, theoretical and cultural questions: what are the challenges when adapting Shakespeare to the screen? How do different film directors respond to what they recognise as the central themes and motifs of a given play? What gets lost in the adaptation of a play from theatre to screen? What is gained? Can cinematic adaptations shed new or different light on a play which a theatrical performance could not? What are the wider aesthetic, ethical and cultural implications of translating poetry into imagery, and of making Shakespeare come alive so that the world is no longer a 'stage', but a screen of moving images subject to frames, editing, and cinematic points of view? How, finally, do filmmakers position their own art in relation to the mercurial poetic and dramatic genius of Shakespeare?

Seminar Reading and Viewing

Romeo and Juliet and the film adaptations of Franco Zeffirelli (1968) and Baz Luhrmann (1996); *Hamlet* and the film adaptations of Laurence Olivier (1948) and Kenneth Branagh (1996); *Othello* and the film adaptations of George Cukor (*A Double Life*, 1947) and Orson Welles (1951); *The Tempest* and the film adaptations of Derek Jarman (1979) and Peter Greenaway (*Prospero's Books*, 1991).

Seminar Requirements

Attendance: Attendance is compulsory and will be tracked on Moodle. Students who accumulate more than 3 unjustified absences will lose 5% of the final grade per absence. Students who miss more than 30% of the classes, regardless of circumstances, will not be able to complete the seminar.

Active class participation and preparation: Class discussion will move between readings in the texts of the plays and the viewing of short clips from the assigned films. It is incumbent on registered students to read the plays and watch the films **in advance of class discussion**. Where and when possible, I will organize group screenings of key films outside class hours. The recommended edition of the plays is either the Oxford/Norton Shakespeare or the Shakespeare Arden series. It is compulsory to read the plays before they are discussed in class and always to have a text in class for reference.

Take-home midterm assignment (20% of grade): there will be a single midterm take-home assignment, posted through the Moodle website. Students will have two weeks to write and submit the assignment through Moodle. Late submissions will not be accepted.

In-class presentation (10% of grade): the midterm assignment will be followed by in-class presentations related to the submitted midterm papers. Details about both assignments and instructions will be given in class and on Moodle ahead of time. Presentations will take place in the last three classes of term.

IMPORTANT: it is not possible to complete the seminar with a failed or incomplete midterm grade which consists, in this case, of both components (30%).

Submission of final paper topics (ungraded): all students must submit by the end of term a one-paragraph outline for a final paper proposal. These proposals will form the basis of private consultation meetings to discuss final papers in the week immediately following the end of term. While this assignment is not graded, it is compulsory for the completion of the seminar. I must approve all topics for final papers. I will not accept papers whose topics I did not previously approve.

Final seminar paper (70% of grade): The deadline for submitting final papers follows the dates and guidelines as published in the Yedion. As per faculty regulations, all papers must be submitted on or before the stated deadline through the designated Moodle page.

Late submissions will not be accepted. Requests for extensions must be processed through the proper channels before the expiration of the deadline.

*** Please note that NO recordings of this seminar will be made. This is a discussion-based seminar requiring the students' full in-class participation.**

Detailed Schedule

*Please also follow the schedule on Moodle to note the various related reading assignments, links to online resources and other materials posted on the website.

24.10 – Introduction: the many incarnations of “Cinematic Shakespeare”

27.10 – Introduction: moving between mediums – some theoretical considerations

31.10 – Introduction: poetic imagery/imagery as poetics

Romeo and Juliet

3.11 – Reading the play in its theatrical context

7.11 – Operatic Shakespeare: Franco Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

10.11 – Franco Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* (continued)

14.11 – MTV Shakespeare: Buz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*:

17.11 – Buz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (continued)

Hamlet

21.11 – Reading the play in its theatrical context

24.11 – The gothic gaze: Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet*

28.11 – Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet* (continued)

1.12 – Hollywood’s revenge: Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet*

5.12 – Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet* (continued) * **Midterm Assignment handed out**

Othello

8.12 – Reading the play in its theatrical context

12.12 – Noir Shakespeare: George Cukor’s *A Double Life*

15.12 – George Cukor’s *A Double Life* (continued)

19.12 – Cinematic chiaroscuro: Orson Welles’s *Othello* * **Midterm Assignment due**

22.12 – Orson Welles’s *Othello* (continued)

The Tempest

26.12 – Reading the play in its theatrical context

29.12 – Queer fantasies: Derek Jarman’s *The Tempest*

2.1 – Derek Jarman’s *The Tempest* (continued)

5.1 – Avant-garde magic: Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*

9.1 – Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (continued)

In-class Presentations

12.1, 16.1, 19.1

* **one-page outlines for final paper topics due**

After term, I will set up individual meetings with students to discuss final papers

Select Bibliography

Burnett, Mark Thornton, *Shakespeare and World Cinema* (Cambridge, 2013)

Jackson, Russell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film* (Cambridge, 2007)

---. *Shakespeare & the English-speaking Cinema* (Oxford, 2014)

Jess-Cooke, Carolyn, *Shakespeare on Film* (London, 2007)

Selected Filmography

*The following is a selected filmography of major film adaptations of Shakespearean plays, arranged alphabetically (if the title of the film is different from the title of the play, I note the play's original title in brackets). This list includes many films **NOT** covered in the seminar syllabus, but which could well serve as the subject of a final paper. I list here only film adaptations which are noteworthy for doing something original or interesting with the play at their source.

10 Things I Hate About You [*The Taming of the Shrew*] (USA, 1999), Dir: Gil Junger – a brilliantly conceived and hilariously charming adaptation of Shakespeare's play set in a US high school. Very clever in its deeper understanding of Shakespeare's play, with memorable performances from Julia Stiles and the late Heath Ledger.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (USA and Germany, 1999), Dir: Michael Hoffman – an interesting adaptation combining elements from Puccini's opera, elaborate effects and Hollywood a-list actors (and one Kevin Kline in a memorable turn as Bottom).

As You Like It (UK, 2006), Dir: Kenneth Branagh – an intriguing adaptation set in an English colony in 19th century Japan. Captivating performance by Bryce Dallas Howard as Rosalind.

The Boys from Syracuse [*Comedy of Errors*] (USA, 1940), Dir: A. Edward Sullivan – a charming musical adaptation, based on a Broadway show, loosely based on this early Shakespearean comedy.

Chimes at Midnight [The Henriad plays] (Switzerland and Spain, 1966), Dir: Orson Welles – another one of Welles's cinematic masterpieces, in this case adapting into one film different scenes from *Richard II*, *Henry IV* part 1 and 2 and *Henry V*, focusing on the character of Falstaff (with Welles in the memorable leading role).

Coriolanus (UK, 2012), Dir: Ralph Fiennes – a remarkably powerful modern-day adaptation

set in a vaguely eastern European setting (evoking the Balkan wars) directed by Ralph Fiennes who also stars in the leading role.

Forbidden Planet [The Tempest] (USA, 1956), Dir: Fred M. Wilcox – although only very loosely related to Shakespeare’s play, this interesting 1950s sci-fi cult classic teases out the conceptual links between Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the sci-fi genre.

Get Over It [A Midsummer Night’s Dream] (USA, 2001), Dir: Tommy O’Haver – a very intriguing adaptation set in a modern-day American high school where the seniors are putting on Shakespeare’s play.

Hamlet (Germany, 1921, silent), Dir: Svend Gade and Heinz Schall – a truly remarkable silent era adaptation casting Danish actress Asta Nielsen as the Danish prince, in which Hamlet is in fact a woman raised in disguise as a boy.

Hamlet (USA, 2000), Dir: Michael Almereyda – a modern-day adaptation starring Ethan Hawke set in the world of corporate greed, reflecting many of the play’s themes onto tv and video imagery.

Henry V (UK, 1944), Dir: Laurence Olivier – a much-debated production directed by and starring the legendary Olivier, filmed during WWII and problematically transposing the militaristic nationalism of the play into a comment on British patriotism and resolve during the Blitz and the Battle of Britain.

Henry V (UK, 1989), Dir: Kenneth Branagh – Branagh’s debut as film director offers a “historically realistic” adaptation of this famous history play, capturing the horror of the battle of Agincourt and war more generally, while offering a direct critique of Olivier’s earlier “gang-ho” nationalistic production from the 40s.

Macbeth (UK and USA, 1971), Dir: Roman Polanski – a compelling and fittingly unnerving adaptation with a remarkable performance by Jon Finch in the leading role. A landmark film from the vision of this controversial director.

Julius Caesar (USA, 1953), Dir: Joseph L. Mankiewicz – a stunning black-and-white sound-stage adaptation, showcasing and contrasting the controlled theater acting of James Mason as Brutus with the mercurial method acting of a young Marlon Brando as Antony.

Looking for Richard [Richard III] (USA, 1996), Dir: Al Pacino – A brilliant documentary following Al Pacino’s efforts to put on a production of *Richard III* in New York, while trying to come to terms with the genius of Shakespeare and its relevance to modern-day people and audiences.

Love’s Labour’s Lost (UK, 2000), Dir: Kenneth Branagh – a radically original adaptation turning the play into a 1930s Hollywood musical.

The Merchant of Venice (USA, 2004), Dir: Michael Radford – not a great film, but nevertheless an interesting “historically realistic” take on this complex play. Pacino delivers a mesmerizing performance as Shylock.

Much Ado About Nothing (USA, 2012), Dir: Joss Whedon – a very interesting black and white modern-day adaptation visually transposing the play's themes onto a comment on the ennui of affluent North American suburban life.

My Own Private Idaho [*Henry IV part I*] (USA, 1991), Dir: Gus Van Sant – a lyric, beautifully filmed loose adaptation of some scenes from *1 Henry IV*, and several other plays, capturing the rare talent of River Phoenix before his untimely death.

O [*Othello*] (USA, 2001), Dir: Tim Blake Nelson – a modern-day loose adaptation of *Othello*'s plot set in an American high school, interesting for its mapping of the play onto contemporary US culture and its obsession with black athletes.

Ran [*King Lear*] (Japan and France, 1985), Dir: Akira Kurosawa – an award-winning masterpiece of cinema which transposes the *Lear* plot and many of its scenes adapted into Japanese in the Noh style into feudal Japan, while adding many other elements which expand and comment on the play's main themes of madness, old age, and father-son relationships.

Richard III (UK, 1995), Dir: Richard Loncraine – an edgy, visually compelling and effective adaptation starring the great Ian McKellen in the leading role, set in a Nazi-like fascist dystopia.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead [*Hamlet*] (UK and USA, 1990), Dir: Tom Stoppard – Stoppard directs this film adaptation of his own award-winning play, making remarkable use of inset camera shots to enhance his original play's existential meditation on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the idea of "perspective".

The Taming of the Shrew (Italy and USA, 1967), Dir: Franco Zeffirelli – a memorably lush, bawdy production focusing only on Kate and Petruchio's romance through the unforgettable performances and on-screen chemistry of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

Tempest [*The Tempest*] (USA, 1982), Dir: Paul Mazursky – a charming, visually interesting loose adaptation of the play into a rom-com set on a Greek island, with a memorable performance by Raul Julia as 'Kalibanos', the lecherous local fisherman.

Throne of Blood [*Macbeth*] (Japan, 1957), Dir: Akira Kurosawa – another masterpiece from this celebrated filmmaker, adapting the plot and themes from Shakespeare's play into an arresting Japanese aesthetic in the Noh style. Yamada steals the show here from Mifune as a terrifying Lady Macbeth figure.

Titus [*Titus Andronicus*] (Italy, UK and USA, 1999), Dir: Julie Taymor – a stunningly provocative and highly original adaptation, visually capturing the play's visceral meditation on the aesthetics of violence. Powerful performances by Anthony Hopkins and Jessica Lange.