

NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

Authorship, Accuracy, and Modification in Film Adaptations

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Guest Professor

Room and time: Room 3 (Institut f. Anglistik und Amerikanistik), Fri 12-14 Uhr

First session: March 9, 2012

Course description: What happens when a literary text is turned into a motion picture? Can a film reflect the gist of a novel, short story, drama, or comic book accurately? And, more importantly: Does it necessarily aspire to do so? The rift between literary and cinematic productions seems huge (given the fact that, due to the nature of the medium, a film is required to conduct a number of changes, elisions, and interpolations). Nevertheless, film adaptations often stress the proximity to the original and capitalize upon the 'magic' power of literary works. "Well over half of all commercial films have come from literary originals – though by no means all of these originals are revered or respected" (D. Andrew). This course deals with the challenges that cinematic adaptations of literary texts usually face – in terms of their usage of compositional features, the cultural background of film and original, and the uncontrollable dynamics of reception. We will discuss numerous works of British, Irish, and American origin, the filmic result often being a truly 'transnational' product. Emphasis will also be placed on a subgenre called "meta-adaptation," in which "the adaptive processes between media, texts and genres" are foregrounded (Voigts-Virchow). Films to be analyzed in class include Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002), and Michael Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005).

Methods: Presentations by students in the form of expert sessions (based on PowerPoint and handouts, focusing on five discussion questions and two or three relevant passages/sequences from movies or literary texts to be selected by the experts and discussed in class); forum discussions on Moodle.

Aims: The course aims at a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between literary works and their cinematic adaptations. We will focus on the structural mechanisms as well as the aesthetic patterns that lie at the heart of film versions of literature.

Form of control: Regular attendance; active in-class participation; presentation as part of an expert session with 4-page handout to be distributed in class; reading assignments; occasional quizzes; at least 9 elaborate entries in the discussion forum.

Syllabus

- Mar. 9** **Introduction – Film Adaptations**
Basic texts (recommended):
Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation" [1984], in: *Film Theory and Criticism* (eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen), Oxford et al.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004, 461-69.
Thomas Leitch, "Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads," in: *Adaptation* 1.1 (2008): 63-77.¹
- Mar. 16** **Noir Aesthetics - The 'Literary' Dimension of Films**
Main text (obligatory):
Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (1950).
Film version (required for experts):
The Third Man (dir. Carol Reed, 1949).
- Mar. 23** **Gothic Fiction – Cinematic Adaptation and the Power of the Uncanny**
Main text (obligatory):
Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820).
Film adaptation (required for experts):
Sleepy Hollow (dir. Tim Burton, 1999).
- Mar. 30** **Long Live Romance – Kitsch and the Blockbuster**
Main text (obligatory):
Margaret Mitchell, excerpts from *Gone with the Wind* (1938).
Film adaptation (required for experts):
Gone with the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939).
- Apr. 6 & 13** **No class! (Easter Holiday)**
Relax and enjoy!

¹ All main and additional texts for this course are available on Moodle: <https://moodle.univie.ac.at/>.

- Apr. 20** **Theater to Screen – Comedy and the Politics of Romance**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* (1895).
 Film adaptation (required for experts):
 An Ideal Husband (dir. Oliver Parker, 1999).
- Apr. 27** **Extra-Screening**
 Tristram Shandy (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2005).
- May 4** **Experimental Fiction and the Genre of ‘Meta-Adaptation’**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Laurence Sterne, excerpts from *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767). Please
 browse through the book and read the most relevant parts.
 Film adaptation (required for experts):
 Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2005).
- May 11** **Children’s Literature – The Many Faces of ‘Alice in Wonderland’**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865).
 Film adaptation (required for experts):
 Alice in Wonderland (Walt Disney Productions, 1951).
- May 18** **Realism and Its Discontents – Adapting Hemingway to the Screen**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Ernest Hemingway, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936).
 Film version (required for experts):
 The Snows of Kilimanjaro (dir. Henry King, 1952).
- May 25** **Mastering Suspense – Crime Fiction and the ‘Hitchcock Touch’**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Cornell Woolrich, “It Had to Be Murder” (1942).
 Film version (required for experts):
 Rear Window (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954).
- June 1** **Extra-Screening**
 Adaptation (dir. Spike Jonze, 2002).
- June 8** **Adaptation Goes to Hollywood**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Devin Harner, “*Adaptation, The Orchid Thief, and the Subversion of Hollywood Conventions*” (2010).
 Film version (required for experts):
 Adaptation (dir. Spike Jonze, 2002).
- June 15** **Queer Fiction – Hollywood and Sexual Taboos**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Annie Proulx, *Brokeback Mountain* (1997).
 Film version (required for experts):
 Brokeback Mountain (dir. Ang Lee, 2005).
- June 22** **Feminist Approaches – Madness and Hysteria in Television Adaptations**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Margaret Atwood, “Polarities” (1971/77).
 Film version (required for experts):
 Polarities (dir. & screenplay Lori Spring, 2003).
- June 29** **Science Fiction – The Apocalypse in Literature and Film**
 Main text (obligatory):
 Richard Matheson, excerpts from *I Am Legend* (1959).
 Film versions (required for experts):
 The Omega Man (dir. Boris Sagal, 1971).
 I Am Legend (dir. Francis Lawrence, 2007).