

Theorizing Shakespearean Adaptations
ENGL*6412 and/or DRMA*6100

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Course Description:

“This [changes to the curriculum] is not about compelling all students to remain in a traditional classroom setting. Many of us remember friends in our high school days for whom studying *Macbeth* was cruel and unusual punishment, but who could take apart a car engine and put it back together again like nobody else could.”

**—Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, Saturday, September 3, 2005
(*Toronto Star* “Province launches bold assault on soaring high school dropout rate” A1, A17)**

The above quote demonstrates anxiety about Shakespeare as a key locus of achievement and empowerment—and disdain. And it suggests a re-ordering of traditional values associated with Shakespeare as a cultural icon—in this case now opposed by that other marker of high cultural attainment, the car. And yet, reductive notions of how a play like *Macbeth* actually circulates in contemporary culture also point us in the direction of adaptations of Shakespeare—re-writings that challenge, extend, and re-think conventional notions of originality and authenticity.

This interdisciplinary course will examine the receptions, adaptations, and distributions of Shakespeare in the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, through a variety of media including film, theatre, and the Internet. Shakespeare, often identified as the most unique and innovative user of the English language, the most produced playwright on the planet, was also the most inventive adapter of others’ works. Moreover, he was also extraordinarily proficient in the popular culture of his day and made constant use of popular culture referents in his plays.

This course examines how Shakespeare’s writing practice, especially in relation to adaptation and the use of popular culture, carries on today through the

extraordinarily varied adaptations that remake Shakespeare to suit a variety of aesthetic, ideological, and cultural interests. The course will focus on the adaptations of four plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. Students are expected to be familiar with these plays already: **if you have not read the originals of these plays you should do so as soon as possible.**

Using a variety of critical methodologies such as materialism and historicism, postcolonial and race, postmodernism, globalization, and gender/queer theory the course explores how these are relevant to emergent theorizing of adaptation as both a localized literary process but also as a much larger form of cultural sampling.

The course also includes a trip to the Stratford Festival to view a production. Since some of the course materials are audiovisual it will be crucial that you attend all viewings—and that you make sure you receive all study questions related to course materials. These will form the basis for the written and oral course work. A significant portion of the course will be devoted to Canadian materials and work for the course will explore the interface between humanities research and computing via materials derived from the Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project website.

Required Texts:

Fischlin, Daniel and Mark Fortier, eds. *Adaptations of Shakespeare*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project website: www.canadianshakespeares.ca. Please visit this website and bookmark it on your computer—it will provide you with a comprehensive set of resources and texts and is available for free.

Assignments and Assessment:

The course will be evaluated as follows:

1. Ongoing Seminar Presentations (40%); please note that these will be doled out equally. In grad courses I emphasize seminar work as a way of getting students to articulate and work through theory, close reading practices, and the sharing of information in a way that activates critical thinking.

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2. 1 Web-based Research Assignment/Publication: You will be given a choice from a range of dossiers that require research to be completed—these dossiers are all related to adaptations done in Canada. Working with a partner you will track down as much information as possible, summarize it in a file form, transpose it to the CASP website, and write a short critical piece for publication to the site. All such work will be vetted as per normal scholarly practice. All this work will entail presentations to the class on a staggered basis. (20%)
3. You will be asked to produce a list of 5 sites where Shakespeare gets adapted in popular/mass culture along with a short commentary on each of the uses. Alternatively, those interested in producing a short creative adaptation of their own (radio or TV script, short story, series of poems, etc.) will be free to do so. (20%).
4. Final Paper based exclusively on in-class lectures, materials, and so forth—this essay may overlap with Section 2 above (20%).

Please note that ALL submissions of materials for this course must be made in hard copy/CD/DVD and not via email attachments. I anticipate that many of you will ultimately publish work produced for this course in some sort of web-based environment so please be prepared to work across a variety of media (visual, audio, as well as textual). Where necessary please be ready to address relevant copyright issues in attributing these media properly.

Film materials can be procured/rented through either Thomas Video (downtown) or various outlets of Blockbuster or Rogers. The course text will be on reserve at the Library and all other materials will be either hand-outs or freely available on the Internet.

Course Outline

Week 1: Class introductions and assignment of first seminars

Romeo and Juliet

Week 2: Theories of Adaptation: Seminar work on Hutcheon and Fischlin and Fortier (with attention to *The Shakespeare Effect: Adaptations, Multimedia, Film and Shakespeare*)

Week 3: Nicholas Flood Davin's *The Fair Grit* (1876): Historicizing Canada Through Shakespeare (or, Modernism, Nationalism, and Shakespeare)

Note: This play and related materials are to be found in the online anthology section of the CASP site, www.canadianshakespeares.ca Please download the play as a PDF and print off for use in class.

Lorca's *The Public* (1930)*: Global Shakespeare and the Translation Effect: Theatrical Resistance

Week 4: Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996): Gangsta Shakespeare, Popular Culture, and Youth

Scenes from the film will be shown but students are expected to watch the film in its entirety on their own.

The Tempest

Week 5: Philip Osment's *This Island's Mine* (1988)*: Radical Shakespeare and Queer Theory

Week 6: Fred M. Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956): Magic, Technology, Utopia, and Shakespeare(ans) in Space

N.B. The Fred Wilcox film will be screened and attendance is required.

Macbeth

Week 8: Orson Welles's *Macbeth* (1948); Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957): Auteur Theory

N.B. The Welles film will be screened and attendance is required

Week 9: Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha** (1972): South Africa, Race, and Shakespeare

Week 10: Billy Morrissette's *Scotland, PA* (2001; Sundance Festival): Fringe Shakespeare / Made in America

N.B. The Billy Morrissette film will be screened and attendance is required.

Othello

Week 11: Djanet Sears, *Harlem Duet** (1996): 'Hear My Train a Comin': *Othello*, Jimi Hendrix, and Racism (may include Welles's film adaptation of *Othello* (1952) and scenes from D. W. Griffiths film *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Expect this segment to take up some of the subsequent week's classes.)

Week 12: Making Shakespearean Connections: Course Summary and Review

Note: All plays marked with an asterisk (*) are to be found in the anthology text *Adaptations of Shakespeare*.