“He was not of an age, but for all time!” Ben Jonson wrote about his friend and fellow dramatist, William Shakespeare, a figure so iconic that sleuthers have sought for centuries to prove he didn’t exist, was an alien, or was the alter ego for the Earl of Oxford, Francis Bacon, or—my personal favorite—Queen Elizabeth. Although Shakespeare lived five hundred years ago from 1564 to 1616 (writing 37 surviving plays), the perpetuation of his texts on stage, in novels, in literary criticism, and now in film continues to support Jonson’s admittedly ahistorical claim. Actors, readers, and scholars still argue about the most productive way to represent the most canonical author in history—stage? page? screen? —but the contemporary medium of film has by all accounts brought a new dimension to bardolatry. This course explores the validity of Jonson’s famous assertion by studying the adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays for the screen.

Our fare is Titus; Midsummer Night’s Dream; Richard III; Henry 4, Part 1; Henry 5; and Macbeth. Not surprisingly Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies have the most elaborate filmography, but we will cover the histories and comedies as well. Some of the earliest silent films in history put the camera at work to preserve Shakespearean productions, including Richard III. Subsequently some of the most accomplished auteurs of all time—Kurosawa, Welles, Olivier, and Polanski—have brought Shakespeare’s plays to the silver screen, using the methodology of a full-scale Hollywood production or through the more nuanced autonomies of independent filmmaking. MND, for example, has a filmography that begins in 1909, re-emerges with Max Reinhardt’s famous 1935 film with James Cagney and Hoffman’s strict adaptation. In addition to auteurship and its concomitant fame and fortune, other directors have used Shakespeare’s plays to expand the more commercial and more irreverent field of the chick flick (the dubious Get Over It of 2001 with Kirsten Dunst) as well as the loose queer adaptation of MND called Were the World Mine (2008), a twink flick which uses the herbal “love in idleness” to create a homo-normative high school. (See also the rave genre, spawning MND and Mac films in the early 2000s). These are loose adaptations that play with the bard’s stories in order to market but also comment on bardolatry. Hence, most notably Peter Weir’s Dead Poet’s Society (1989) and Van Sant’s cult classic My Own Private Idaho (1991), which is based on the Henriad. America loves to depict and debunk the Shakespeare canon, as we shall see in Morissette’s brilliant reduction of the Scottish play into a fast-foot drama in small town Pennsylvania, Scotland, PA. Our
study of adaptation must necessarily involve an exploration of the bard as cultural capital, his fetishization, the reduction of his narratives into box office draws, even as we look at the way this dissemination of the plays reinvigorates our interest in the words, words, words that have led to this a phenomenon grown well beyond our full comprehension. Go Shakes.

Any inquiry into Shakespeare and/in/as film also requires a working familiarity with the current critical conversation in another industry: the academic engine of Renaissance studies, a machine that often drives literary studies as a whole. Sure, Freudian readings of Hamlet have grown nauseating, but there are exciting new areas of scholarship and critical debate, including:

- **Historicism v. presentism.** Scholars are interested in whether we must attempt to read the plays from a turn of the 17th century mindset (if that is possible) or relinquish the quixotic quest to claim access to that historical perspective objectively and instead read the plays through a lens that understands them as current cultural artifacts which allow for all forms of interpretation as long as that interpretation grounds its intelligence within the parameters of the play text.
- **Gender Studies.** Recent research into queer theory has found fertile ground in the Elizabethan convention of the all-male stage, leading scholars to study the degree to which Shakespeare foregrounds within the plays the gender and sexual orientation questions that the existence of young males playing Hermia and Helena brings to our reception of the most iconic love story in history.
- **Women and Gender Studies.** The contradictory roles of women in Renaissance England are central to Shakespeare’s plays. On the one hand, the iconic Puritan spouse was enjoined to be “chaste, silent, and obedient;” on the other, a powerful and imperious female monarch (Elizabeth I) ruled Britain and beyond in an Age of Discovery that pitched the Spanish Conquistadors against nimble footed Sir Francis Drake. As these social contradictions are dramatized, current debates about the autonomy and harassment culture that women face today are brought alive in depictions of Lavinia, the Weird Sisters, and Titania.
- **Environmental Studies.** Students of the Renaissance have begun to move beyond the genre conventions of the pastoral to think about the role that landscape comes to play in Shakespeare’s works—landscapes both urban and nonurban (running the spectrum of the wandering wood of unleashed wilderness to the shepherdic ideal of the lovelorn suitor or the well-tended garden of the *locus amoenus*). The old topos of microcosm/macrocosm—which employs the pathetic fallacy to show how the weather mirrors the subject—has come under further scrutiny by those who have looked at mental landscapes (psychology) and gendered landscapes. But environmental studies has also led to inquiry into the symbolic roles of animals in Shakespeare—how they have worked metaphorically in the
plays and how those metaphors tap into animals have become areas of displacement for human beastliness.

- Cultural Studies has become crucial for thinking about Shakespeare, in part because of the way power (economic and political) operates in both the Renaissance worlds of Machiavelli and the contemporary world of corporocracy and fundamentalism. But cultural studies also focuses on the way media like film, television, and other technology have found analogues in the Shakespearean script. Our study of race in Titus will confront the cycles of militarism.

Our course requires an amalgamation of three steps:

1) familiarity with the texts of the plays and the historical context of Shakespeare’s England. Students will learn to closely read the text—understand its images, metaphors, paradoxes, and rhetorical strategies. We will also read the introductions to the plays and other criticism.

2) conversance with the language of film criticism. We will read handouts and Understanding Movies in order to learn how to closely read a shot or a scene. Find your own list of film terms on line and bookmark it. Find out the difference between formalism and realism; learn how to discuss mise en scene and montage; know how to describe angle, focus, and composition of a shot. In addition we will read articles on film theory in order to supplement the knowledge you have gained in LIT 300. For example, our look at feminist film criticism will amplify your foundation in gender studies.

3) understanding of the challenges of adaptation (the translation of word to image). This course has as its most specific focus a study of the way play text is adapted into film. Besides a new vocabulary (myth of fidelity, loose/strict adaptation, citation), adaptation of film often involves not just a duplication of one of the plays into film, but most films provide an analysis or commentary on the play—an interpretation as much as a version of the play.

**Required Texts:**

*The Norton Shakespeare*

Moodle Posts

Netflix subscription (recommended)

*Understanding Movies* (recommended)

**Films** (an asterisk designates the movies for each play you must watch)

Kapur, *Elizabeth* 1998

Madden, *Shakespeare in Love* 1998

Emmerich, *Anonymous* 2011
Taymor, *Titus* 1999*

Kent, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* 1909*
Reinhardt, *MND* 1935*
Hoffman, *MND* 1999*
Peter Weir, *Dead Poet’s Society* 1989*
Get Over It 2001
Were the World Mine 2008
Herbert Ross, *The Goodbye Girl* 1977*

Loncraine, *Richard III* *
Olivier, *Richard III* *
Pacino, *Looking for Richard*

*The Hollow Crown* BBC 2012
Van Sant, *My Own Private Idaho* 1991*
Welles, *Chimes at Midnight* 1966
Olivier, *Henry V* 1944*
Branagh, *Henry V* 1989*

Polanski, *Macbeth* 1971*
Kurosawa, *Macbeth* 1957*
Morrisette, *Scotland, PA* 2001*
Wright, *Macbeth* 2006 from the director of *Romper Stomper*
Welles, *Macbeth* 1945

**Other Film Offshoots:**

*Shakespeare Retold*
*Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*
*Rave Macbeth*
*A Midsummer Night’s Rave*
*Slings and Arrows*
*Maqbool*
*The Banquet (Legend of the Black Scorpion)*
*Theatre of Blood* (Vincent Price)
*Shakespeare Retold*

Many of the films are on YouTube or other instant viewing venues, including instant Netflix.

The filming of a stage production represents an entirely different cinematic form. The *BBC Shakespeare* series is invaluable for students who need to see the play as they read it. These are available in the library and on YouTube. I recommend their use. I also am
not opposed to No Fear Shakespeare, especially the side by side sections that translate lines. None of these, of course, can ever substitute for wrestling with the text yourself.

Work:

- Weekly quizzes on assigned reading and viewing are open-book but time-sensitive. The quizzes are designed to find out if students are closely reading the text, underlying key passages, proper nouns, place names, unfamiliar words. Students are expected to read the footnotes and mark any passages not understandable to them. Quizzes may also include questions about the films (25%).
- Response papers, paragraphs, the adaptation paper, and an optional short paper on a scene you wish to direct. The response papers (2 to 4 pages) involve what I call “a theoretically informed close reading,” an exercise that involves a) a narrow focus, b) a argument or claim about your passage or film shot that includes a theoretical positioning, and c) a discussion of the language of the text or shot you have isolated. (25%).
- One short essay (6-10 pages) that must be rewritten (the grades will be averaged). This essay cannot cover any of the response paper material. In this assignment students expand the response paper concept by engaging in a more extended close reading that works as evidence to support a claim or thesis and develops that evidence in a way that discusses its own strengths and weaknesses, its own methods of support, and the relationship between parts of its evidentiary base. (25%)
- A final essay (10-12 pages) (25%)
- The films are on two-hour reserve at the library. You are responsible to find the time to view them in their entirety. We will watch and study substantial section of the films in class as we move through the plays. Students are required to bring assigned reserve readings to class.
- Attendance and participation: students are expected to come to class ready to ask and answer questions. Those who attend and participate through questioning, emailing, conferencing, arguing, engaging their colleagues will have their grade bumped up an increment. On the other hand, more than three unexcused absences during the semester may result in a failing grade. Students who come late, do not bring the assigned text to class, and regularly do not pay attention will have their grade bumped down at least one increment. Attending class unprepared or bookless is tantamount to an absence, and the professor reserves the right to mark a student absent who is there but not there.

Ground Rules

- I do not accept late papers unless the student contacts me with a reasonable excuse before the beginning of the class on the day the paper is due.
- Students must follow the directions on any and all prompts for assignments. Often papers will call for different section headings, the employment of
particular theoretical approaches, use of specific supplementary materials. If the student does not follow the guidelines, the paper cannot receive a grade.

- There are no make-up quizzes.
- Students must attend at least one conference with the teacher during the semester.
- Students with disabilities will be accommodated.
- Plagiarism (the stealing of another’s words or ideas) will result in a recommendation of expulsion from the university.
- [http://connect.umt.edu/diversity/umallies/](http://connect.umt.edu/diversity/umallies/). This classroom is a safe space for diverse populations and adheres to the principles of nondiscrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation as set forth by UM Allies (see UM Allies website).
- Students are required to obtain the required texts and bring them to class. Those who do not show up with their Norton edition will be counted absent.

**Grading:**

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All assignments will receive a grade. On written assignments, I either put a check mark in the margin of the line where the sentence-level error occurs or I circle the word or punctuation that is not correct. Comments occur throughout the paper and at the end. Grading is based on:

- Organization and development (thesis statement, topic sentence, paragraph development, specific evidence including quotations to substantiate claims)
- Content (the employment of a theoretical position, development of a narrow focus, following of guidelines, using the film and other terminology learned in class, avoiding repetition, close reading skills)
- Sentence structure (coordination and subordination of clauses, using conjunctions to indicate thought process, employment of conjunctions, parallelism, question, quotations)
- Punctuation, citation, mechanics. This section sometimes conquers the might English student, ironically enough. All students are required to buy the Bedford
Handbook; you are also required to use it in writing your papers. More than 3 mechanical errors per page will result in a failing grade. I will stop reading the paper if there are too many. Common mechanical errors include 1) proofreading mistakes (homonyms, spelling errors) and 2) grammatical errors (fragments, comma splices, run together sentences, capitalization, use of apostrophes, use of quotation marks, correct citation of the text by act, scene, and line number)

On all papers except the final one, a lengthy introduction and conclusion are unnecessary. Chicago or MLA style is generally recommended, but a Works Cited on the short papers is not necessary and outside sources if used may be supplied in footnotes or endnotes. A bibliographic entry for the primary text is not necessary.

In writing a paper for this class, set up a claim that employs a critical approach and treats a sufficiently narrow enough aspect of the text, develop the evidence for the claim in an organized fashion that anticipates its counter-arguments, and finalize the claim as it has been reconfigured in the process of development. Teachers are not looking for long funneled introductions, grand thesis statements about the immaturity of Demetrius, or long restatement conclusions; they are looking for readings of parts of the text that shed a different light on the Rude Mechanicals, Falstaff’s critique of honor, or the contents of the Witches’ brew.

**Outcomes:**

- Acquisition of skills in analyzing Shakespearean drama through close reading
- Familiarity with the historical and cultural context in which Shakespeare’s plays arose
- Understanding of and conversance with the basic grammar of film studies
- Production of writing that demonstrates the ability to employ the grammar of film studies and critical theory to create a coherent argument about the adaptation of Shakespearean texts for the screen

**Prerequisite:** LIT 300 or consent of the instructor

**Key Dates:** (see the UM website)

[http://events.umt.edu/?calendar_id=27&upcoming=upcoming&](http://events.umt.edu/?calendar_id=27&upcoming=upcoming&)

**Schedule:** (Subject to change)

Aug 26 Introduction
Aug 28 Greenblatt, General Introduction 1-67
Film Clips: *Elizabeth
Shakespeare in Love
Anonymous*

Sep 2  Greenblatt, General Introduction Quiz

Paragraph on film clips due. Isolate a shot or a series of shots in one of the film and discuss the mise en scene and/or montage in reference to a critical issue the film raises.

*Quiz on Introduction:* The quiz is open-book but timed. The key is underlining the text for proper nouns, key concepts, important dates, historical events. The questions are short answer or multiple choice. You need to know the material in this introduction in order to do well in the course, especially on the writing assignments, which require that you employ the historical context and ideas to your readings.

Sep 4  Titus Acts 1 and 2

Film: Julie Taymor’s *Titus*

Getting Started:
1) Read the Introduction to the play. Underline information that is useful: critical approaches, historical facts, central scenes that receive commentary, assumptions the author of the introduction makes about the play.

2) Read the Personae Dramatis page and create a genealogy in your notebook. Who’s related to whom? Draw the family trees in your notebook.

3) Read the act twice. Pay attention to the location of the scenes (who’s on stage; who is talking, who is listening). Read through the first time to grasp the plot, then go back the second time to figure out the meaning, sentence by sentence, word by word, reading the notes, and putting a question mark by language you cannot figure out. Underline proper names, places, repeated words.

Remember Shakespearean is difficult to understand but not impossible. The going will be tough at the outset but will become easier as the semester progresses. People have spent their lives reading these lines. You may be coming to them for the first or second time, but you are also coming to them with your own inimitable point of view—one which can discover (believe me) ways of understanding the plays in completely original ways. How can anyone say anything new about Shakespeare? How can anyone say anything new about rocks, stars, parents, drugs, dreams, proteins, disease—life itself? How can anyone who loves literature not say something new about Shakespeare?
Sep 9  Titus  Acts 2 and 3

_Understanding Movies_, Chapter 1 “Photography” Sections: 1) Realism and Formalism, 2) Shots, 3) Angles

Sep 11  Titus 3

Sep 16  Titus 4-5

Sep 18  RIII 1

Films: Loncraine (1995 Ian McKellen); Olivier (Technicolor 1955)
Adaptation: _Goodbye Girl_

Sep 23  RIII 2

Sep 26  RIII 3

Sep 30  RIII 4-5

Response Paper

Oct 2  Midsummer Night’s Dream 1

Adaptation: _Dead Poet’s Society_

Oct 7  MND 2

Oct 9  MND 3

Oct 14  MND 4-5

Oct 16  Henry the Fourth, Part One, Act One

Films: _The Hollow Crown_ (BBC); Olivier, Branagh
Adaptation: _My Own Private Idaho_
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Scene Paper (optional)

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