

## ENG 209: International Shakespeare Film

Fall 2019

English Department      University of Rochester

Dr. Scott O'Neil

**Office:** Robbins Library

**Office Hours:** Thursday 5-6pm (in campus Starbucks) and Friday 1:30-2:30pm (in Robbins)

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**Class Information:** Monday/Wednesday, 1:40 to 3:00 pm, Robbins Library Classroom

### **Required Texts:**

All texts and some secondary readings will be available through our course Blackboard page or (in the case of several videos) linked to our class page on my professional website. We will be viewing a significant number of films this semester. Several are available on streaming services, such as *Netflix* and Amazon Prime. Most of the films for this class will be on limited course reserve in Rush Rhees Library. Please be careful with these DVDs, as they are from my personal collection. I will also hold regular “Shakespeare movie nights” each week.

### **Course Description:**

Ben Jonson famously described Shakespeare as “a monument without a tomb.” We are all familiar with aspects of Shakespeare—a well-trodden plot, a famous line, or a cultural allusion. But while Shakespeare's texts have been passed down for centuries, they have been kept alive by performances – most recently, by cinematic performances. Perhaps most interesting is the international influence of Shakespeare on screen. Why have directors from Japan, Russia, India, and more gravitated towards the work of an English playwright more than 400 years dead? How do those productions merge Shakespeare's text with the cultural traditions of their modern film-makers? What role, if any, does post-colonialism play in that enterprise? We will begin our work by reading selected scenes from several of Shakespeare's plays. From that foundation, we will turn to Shakespeare in the silent film era and proceed to explore the works of Kurosawa, Kozintsev, Piñeiro, American “Old West” adaptations, and several “Bollywood” productions.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Your final grade in the course will be calculated as follows:

- 10% -- Participation/Preparedness (Including Blackboard Dynamic Notes)
- 15% -- Director presentation
- 15% -- Nation/context presentation
- 15% -- Short Responses
- 20% -- Commentary Track
- 25% -- “Conference” Paper (6-8 pages)

### *Reading and Participation (Incl. Blackboard Dynamic Notes)*

The reading (including films) for each day is listed below, next to the appropriate dates. Please read, annotate, and think about the reading before the start of class. I would encourage you to bring notes or thoughts with you to facilitate discussion. In order for us to have fruitful class discussions, all students are expected to come to class willing and eager to engage with each other and the course material. Continued failure to do so may affect your final grade in the course. Good discussion can come in many forms, but everyone should be prepared to ask anything (without hand-raising) and anyone can answer. Classroom discussions often can have one focus—the professor—but I want us to be a community of multiple voices and conversations, so that we can all learn from each other.

You will also keep a running “dynamic notes” thread in the discussion board throughout the semester. This should take the form of an ongoing thread in the Discussion Board forum on our Blackboard page. Start a discussion with your name in the title, and add responses to that thread throughout the semester, reacting to the texts that we read. See Blackboard for sample “dynamic notes.”

While this is a film class, it is not a *basic* film class. As such, I will expect that you will be able to discuss film and cinematic texts using the “language” of film. Our discussions and scene analyses will use terms including: Mise en Scene, Cinematography, Editing, Sound, etc. You will be expected to know the difference between a shot and a scene, and the ways in which all of these things can contribute to the meaning of a film. I understand that some of you may not have taken Film and Television Analysis, and thus may not be confident yet in your ability to use these terms. For those who fall into that category, I have uploaded a short series of mini-lecture crash courses on the language and history of cinema. The videos can be found on our course page of my professional website. Please view them as soon as possible so that you can fully contribute in class discussions.

### *Presentations*

Twice during the semester, each student will give an informal presentation—one focused on a particular director, and another focused on the nation of origin/historical context of a particular film. These presentations should not be overly formal. Approach them as if you were writing a “Five things you should know about...” article. What five elements of Vishal Bhardwaj’s biography might best help us understand his approach to cinema? What was going on in the late 1960s/early 1970s in the Soviet Union that might help us better understand what we are seeing in Grigori Kozintsev’s *King Lear*? We will be signing up for presentation slots during the second week of the semester. Be sure that you are ready to present on your selected date.

### *Short Responses*

Short responses should be about two full typed pages in length. Responses might expand on a class discussion; they might branch off and consider questions we did not have time to consider in class; they might consider a key image or passage that shapes your view of the work as a whole. Each response should focus on specific passages/scenes (or in some cases, one work) read for the course.

Because these responses are fairly short, you are not expected to fully develop and defend a complex thesis. This is your chance to further explore something that confused you or intrigued you about the reading in question – in a focused way. A good short response will lead to an interesting discussion in class. You will write three of these short responses over the course of the semester. See Blackboard for examples of good short responses. These responses are due in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> week of the semester (see course calendar).

### *Commentary Track Assignment*

You will prepare for and execute an expert commentary track for a 5 to 10-minute segment of a film of your choosing. You will identify an area of expertise (expertise can be connected to film production, Shakespearean expertise, knowledge of the filmmaker, knowledge of one of the actors, music, historical/cultural context, or any number of areas of specialization) and then prepare to speak as an expert in that area. In addition to your commentary track video, you will also hand in a detailed outline, including specific details that you intend to discuss at certain points in the film. You may work individually or in a group of up to three people. If you choose to do a group assignment, each member of the group must have a distinct specialty area, each member must submit an individual outline, and the length of the commentary should be extended by 5 minutes for each additional group member (ie: 1 member is 5 minutes, 2 members is 10 minutes, and 3 members would be 15 minutes). During the semester, I will provide you with examples of expert commentary, as well as technological tips on recording your commentary track. Have fun with this.

### *Paper*

Successful papers will develop an argument driven by your interests and connected to the themes of the course. Where the earlier assignments are designed to get you “thinking out loud” about your ideas and reactions to these novels, the paper should be a polished argument where you construct a claim, situate that claim within the scholarship on the topic, and support that claim with an analysis of one or more texts. Let your thoughts develop organically throughout the semester. A Blackboard Dynamic Note might spark an idea. You might then develop that idea a bit in a short response, and then build a formal conference paper from that foundation. For example, I had a student once who, in reading *Richard III*, noticed that only one character “survived” Old Queen Margaret’s curses. She wrote a BBDN that was effectively “Wait, why does Dorset get to live (4.1.41-42)?” Later, she wrote a short response puzzling over whether lamentations or blessings could counteract curses. Finally, in an excellent conference paper, she did the research to better answer the questions she was posing in her short response. The best papers tend to have that kind of organic development. Of note—a conference paper should address one particular aspect of a text—make sure you narrow your scope enough so that you can fully explore an idea in just 6-8 pages.

## **Policies**

### *Contacting Your Instructor*

I will be delighted to discuss your suggestions, ideas, and concerns about this course with you. You should feel free to drop by during my office hours, particularly if you enjoy coffee or tea. If those

times are inconvenient, please e-mail me. I'm happy to make other arrangements. Please e-mail me in advance if you need to cancel an appointment.

The best way to contact me is via e-mail. However, I am not permanently attached to my computer. **I do not generally check my e-mail between 10 PM and 10 AM.**<sup>1</sup> Please plan your electronic communications accordingly.

### *Written Work*

All writing assignments should be typed and double spaced with one-inch margins. Please use 12-point Times New Roman font. All writing will be handed in electronically via Blackboard unless otherwise indicated.

**Please note! This syllabus constitutes a contract for this class.** I will follow all of the policies I have set out in the syllabus. If you are still enrolled in this class by the end of the add/drop period, I will assume you have agreed to these terms and conditions.

### Course Schedule

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- 9/8 **W:** Welcome, Syllabus, Course Design. In-class readings of Asimov's "The Immortal Bard," and Nikki Giovanni's "Giovanni on Shakespeare." IMDB Challenge.
- 9/13 **M: Silent Films:** Please read Alexa Alice Joubin's "Others Within: Ethics in the age of Global Shakespeare" (on Blackboard). Silent films. Standard *Hamlet*. Asta Nielsen *Hamlet*.
- 9/15 **W: Silent Films:** Nielsen *Hamlet* scene analysis. I will model the Director and Context presentation format. Please read "The Globalist Dimensions of Silent Shakespeare Cinema" by Greg Colon Semenza (on Blackboard).
- 9/20 **M: Westerns:** *Yellow Sky*, standard *Tempest*, and American Shakespeare. Please read excerpts from *Shakespeare in America: An Anthology from the Revolution to Now* (on Blackboard).
- 9/22 **W: Westerns:** *Yellow Sky*, Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ ; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_. Scene analysis.
- 9/27 **M: Westerns:** *Jubal*, standard *Othello*, issues of race.
- 9/29 **W: Westerns:** *Jubal*, Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ ; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_. Scene analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a lie, but you shouldn't really expect a response that late at night. ☺

- 10/4 **M: Kurosawa:** *Throne of Blood*, standard *Macbeth*.
- 10/6 **W: Kurosawa:** *Throne of Blood*, Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ . Scene analysis. **First short response is due.**
- 10/11 **M: Kurosawa:** *Ran*. Standard *Lear*. Overview. Please read “Wicked Humans and Weeping Buddhas: (Post)humanism and Hell in Kurosawa’s *Ran*” by Melissa Croteau (on Blackboard).
- 10/13 **W: Kurosawa:** *Ran*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ ; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ . Scene analysis.
- 10/15 **F: Recess Day**
- 10/18 **M: Kozintsev:** *Hamlet*. Overview.
- 10/20 **W: Kozintsev:** *Hamlet*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ . Scene analysis.
- 10/25 **M: Kozintsev:** *King Lear*. Overview. Please read excerpts from *King Lear: The Space of Tragedy (The Diary of a Film Director)* by Grigori Kozintsev (on Blackboard).
- 10/27 **W: Kozintsev:** *King Lear*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ . Scene analysis.
- 11/1 **M: Kozintsev/Kurosawa—Cultures in conversation.** Please read “Lear’s Fool on Film: Peter Brook, Grigori Kozintsev, Akira Kurosawa” by Samuel Cowl from *Shakespeare on Screen: King Lear* (on Blackboard). We will discuss the way different filmmakers have approached one of Shakespeare’s most enduring mysteries (ie: the vanishing of the Fool).
- 11/3 **W: Bhardwaj:** *Omkaara*. Overview. If your last name begins with A-M, please read “No Country for Young Women: Empowering Emilia in Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Omkaara*” by Mike Heidenberg. If your last name begins with N-Z, please read “The Global as Local/Othello as Omkaara” by Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani (both on Blackboard, and both from *Bollywood Shakespeares*). **Second short response is due.**
- 11/8 **M: Bhardwaj:** *Omkaara*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ . Scene analysis.
- 11/10 **W: Bhardwaj:** *Haider*. Overview. In class discussion: paper topic brainstorming/workshopping.
- 11/15 **M: Bhardwaj:** *Haider*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_ . Scene analysis.
- 11/17 **W: Piñeiro:** *Viola*. Standard *Twelfth Night*. Overview. Please read the short interview with Piñeiro on the Criterion website (linked on Blackboard).

11/22 **M: Piñeiro:** *Viola*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_.  
Scene analysis.

11/23-11/28: Thanksgiving Break

11/29 **M: Piñeiro:** *Hermia & Helena*. Standard *Midsummer*. Overview.

12/1 **W: Piñeiro:** *Hermia & Helena*. Director presentation: \_\_\_\_\_; Context presentation: \_\_\_\_\_.  
Scene analysis.

12/6 & 12/8 **MW:** During the last week of the semester, I will be using our class time to screen the 2006 film, *The Banquet* (also called *Legend of the Black Scorpion*) by noted Chinese director Feng Xiaogang. The film is a take on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* set in 10<sup>th</sup> century China. You may choose to watch the film or to come to class, put in some ear buds, and work on your papers/final assignments. I will be available to help/answer questions during this time, and I will also bring some end-of-semester, movie watching, celebratory food. **Third short response is due.**

## Sample Assignment and Rationale for International Shakespeare Film

## Commentary Track Assignment

In order to demonstrate your mastery of film and specifically Shakespearean adaptation, you will prepare for and execute an expert commentary track for a 5 to 10-minute segment of a film of your choosing (in consultation with me). You will identify an area of expertise (expertise can be connected to film production, something connected to Shakespeare or the source play, knowledge of the filmmaker and/or their nation of origin, knowledge of one of the actors, music, historical/cultural context, or any number of areas of specialization) and then prepare to speak as an expert in that area. This involves research—your commentary track should be both specific and incisive, with sources at the ready when necessary.

In addition to your commentary track video, you will also hand in a detailed outline, including specific topics that you intend to discuss at certain points in the film. You may work individually or in a group of up to three people. If you choose to do a group assignment, each member of the group must have a distinct specialty area, each member must submit an individual outline, and the length of the commentary should be extended by 5 minutes for each additional group member (ie: 1 member is 5-10 minutes, 2 members is 10-15 minutes, and 3 members would be 15-20 minutes of consecutive footage). During the semester, I will provide you with examples of expert commentary, as well as technological tips on recording your commentary track. Remember, you don't need to speak during the *entire* film clip, but you want to be sure to avoid long stretches where you aren't discussing the scene. Choose a clip from a film where you will have a lot to say, and above all, have some fun with this.

Grading for the Commentary Track Assignment		
Instructions:	Feedback/Comments:	Grade:
<b>Planning:</b> Student submitted a script/outline with clearly marked time stamps for planned comments. Student's commentary incorporated references to the original Shakespearean text in at least two different places.		/10
<b>Performance:</b> Student stated & demonstrated an area of expertise. Student opened the commentary with an introduction/establishment of credibility and provided closure at the end of the commentary. Student's commentary remained within the assigned time frame and reflected clear rehearsal and timing.		/10
<b>Total:</b>		/20

## Rationale for the Commentary Track Assignment

There are several intersecting goals for this course. By the end of the semester, students will be expected to analyze Shakespearean text, apply that analysis to a cinematic adaptation, and also to filter all of that through one or more critical lenses, including but not limited to historicism, post-colonialism, and post-modernism. The course was designed to ease students into this process, as we begin with the silent film era and two examples of American Westerns—genres that are a bit easier for students to relate to than the sub-titled films that arrive beginning in week five. Those early weeks also provide time for students to get up to speed on the “language of cinema” in the event that they have not yet taken a film class. I have several recorded mini-lectures online that can help students quickly master concepts including Mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and more. Beginning with week 5, the course moves on to four noted international Shakespearean auteurs: Akira Kurosawa, Grigori Kozintsev, Vishal Bhardwaj, and Matías Piñeiro, viewing two films from each director.

The structure of the course is designed to both develop the skills listed above and to maximize the number of films we can work with during the semester. I view this primarily as a Shakespeare film class rather than a Shakespeare text class, and so each time one of our films adapts a new play, I provide students with a “traditional” version of the play to watch as their foundation. We spend two class periods on each film. The first is to discuss the film holistically. Where were the Shakespearean origins most obvious? Where did the adaptation diverge? Are they similar thematically? This allows for discussion of both the “traditional” version and the international adaptation. The second class is designed more for scene work, and it is on these days that we will be working with selected scenes from the plays themselves.

On “day twos,” I generally lead the class in modeling a performance-based analysis of a scene from the source play, and then apply what we learn from that to the corresponding clip from that days international film. Students then repeat the activity in small groups with a different scene. For example, for the class on 11/15, I modeled a performance activity about character motivations by using the Folger Shakespeare Library’s “handkerchief” game. One student moves a handkerchief around rapidly while another student tries to snatch it out of the air. The goal of this short acting game is to think about what really motivates a character and how their body language might reflect those motivations. As a class, we then look at *Hamlet* 1.5.1-119 (the Ghost’s call for vengeance) and identify the Ghost’s “handkerchief” lines/moments. We then view the corresponding scene in *Haider* (1:08.40 through 1:21.42) and analyze how the character maintains or diverges from those motivations. Students then repeat the activity in small groups with another scene, the play within a play, which features one of the most notable points of divergence between the source material and Bhardwaj’s film.

By the end of the semester, students will ideally be able to view the original plays as performance texts and sites of adaptation, while also being able to verbalize how the cultures and biographies of these international directors are intersecting with those plays. Both of the course’s final assessments require the students to work through that process. The final paper is a more traditional assessment model, and I created the commentary track assignment as a way to offer an additional method for students to demonstrate mastery, particularly for students in the English major whose strengths may not be in analytical *writing*. By offering a more creative, performance-based option, my goal is to create additional avenues for student success.