



**FROM PAGE  
TO SCREEN:  
LITERARY  
ADAPTATIONS IN  
AMERICAN CINEMA**

**ENGLISH 3837 R01FA  
LL 2023  
DEALY 304  
TF 10-11:15 AM**

---

**DR. CAITLIN CAWLEY  
CCAWLEY5@FORDHAM.EDU  
860.227.0416  
OFFICE HOURS: T 11:30-1 & 2:30-5**

## Course Description

In this course, we will study adaptation—an artistic practice as well as an idea with a rich history—in the context of 20th and 21st century American cinema. By analyzing films that adapt literary works from a range of genres, we will answer questions about the technical aspects of adaptation, including who and what is involved in this process? What motivates and defines a filmmaker’s approach to translating a literary text into a cinematic text? What are the characteristics of great adaptations? We will also ask theoretical questions and examine histories that attend this practice. How have critics and the wider public defined and valued the medium of literature in contrast to the medium of film? What values and assumptions underpin these debates, particularly the tendency to treat cinema as a lesser artistic form? How do adaptations enrich concepts such as authorship, interpretation, originality, and translation? And how do each of the six film adaptations conjure a particular problem or development in 20th and 21st century America? Over the course of the semester—through lectures, in-class discussions, writing assignments, and a group presentation—you will grow as a critical writer and thinker, a scholar of 20th and 21st century film and literature, and a movie goer in America.

## Required Texts

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Modern Library)
  - ISBN: 978-0375753770
- Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Mass Market)
  - ISBN: 978-0451140791
- Malcolm X, Ossie Davis (Afterword), Alex Haley (*As Told to*), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Random House Publishing)
  - ISBN: 978-0345350688
- Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (Graywolf Press)
  - ISBN: 9781555974077

## Required Films

- *The Grapes of Wrath* (Amazon Video)
- *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) (Amazon Video)
- *Apocalypse Now* (1979) (Amazon Video)
- *Malcolm X* (Amazon Video)
- *Near Dark* (Screening on 10/30)
- *I Am Not Your Negro* (Amazon Video & Screening TBD)
- *Lemonade* (iTunes)

## Assignments and Grading Policy

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade	Notes
Attendance and Participation	20%	See below
Digital Group Project	20%	See GP

Midterm Close Reading Essay	20%	Due 10/24
Outreach Blog Post	10%	Due 11/13
Final Research Essay or Adaptation Project	30%	Due 12/19

### **Attendance and Participation**

Your attendance and participation are important (and part of your final grade). Great classes are built on a collective commitment to working together to formulate questions, share ideas (and laughs, frustrations, challenges), develop special interests, expand our respective perspectives, debate different interpretations, and learn the subject matter. So come to class ready to participate! To participate, you will need to

1. read/watch the assigned text,
2. organize your thoughts about the work prior to our meeting,
3. **bring the assigned text to class**, and
4. actively listen to the other course members.

Participating in class and on Blackboard will take different shapes for different people, but to receive full credit for attendance and participation, you must attend class, share your ideas with the group, contribute to in-class activities, and engage with the ideas and work of your classmates. To this last point, we should all aim to create a supportive and vibrant community where everyone can grow as writers, scholars, and peers. As Judith Butler argues, “If I am to live a good life, it will be a life lived with others. I will not lose this I that I am; whoever I am will be transformed by my connections with others, since my dependency on another, and my dependability, are necessary in order to live and live well.”

You will not be penalized for your first three absences or latenesses; thereafter, your final course grade will drop one grade for each day missed. Six or more absences may result in failure of the course per [Fordham’s policy](#).

### **Extensions, Emails, Etiquette, and COVID-19**

Everyone is entitled to 1 extension over the course of the semester. If you want to use your extension, simply let me know you are using it before the deadline via email, and we can establish a new due date—typically 2 days/48 hours after the original deadline.

If you have a question or an issue arises, please stop by **office hours** or let me know after class (I hang back at the end of the period for just this reason). You may also email me, but note that the best way to reach me is via office hours and our in-person meetings. When emailing me (or any professor), keep in mind that there is no time like the present to begin honing your email etiquette. Consider all messages professional correspondences and include subject headings, appropriate salutations, and minimal grammatical errors. This skill will be valuable throughout your career at Fordham and beyond.

Last but not least, I know we are coming out of a devastating global pandemic and that our lives have changed dramatically over the last three years. While learning about great ideas, movements, and creative works is important, your health and well-being are my top priority. I am happy to make adjustments, so please ask for what you need. Communication is key (always but especially now), so please do not wait or be afraid to reach out to me after class or via office hours if an issue arises. Fordham's [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) is also an excellent resource. They offer one-on-one appointments and group workshops to support your mental, psychological, and emotional health.

### **Academic Integrity**

Participating in an academic conversation means learning from others and giving them credit for what you have learned. This skill is one of the great responsibilities and joys of writing. Plagiarism undermines the integrity of your work, our class, and Fordham. Therefore, plagiarism will not be tolerated. **Please note that submitting work produced by ChatGPT or any AI system will be considered plagiarism as well.** Evidence of plagiarism will result in an automatic zero for the assignment as well as a notification to the Dean's office and possibly failure of the course. For more information on Fordham University's policy on academic integrity, please consult your student handbook. Also, while we'll practice citing, synthesizing, and incorporating the work of others in class, please don't hesitate to reach out to me with questions about using outside sources!

### **Paper Submission and Formatting**

Please submit an *electronic copy* of each assignment on Blackboard (under Content tab) before class and bring a *hard copy* to class on the assigned due date. Essays should be formatted according to MLA standards: double spaced; Times New Roman, 12-point font; header and title; citations and works cited page, etc. See *The Bedford Handbook for Writers* or [Purdue Owl Online Writing Lab](#) if you need a refresher. Fordham's [Writing Center](#) is also an excellent resource.

### **Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

One of my goals is to make this course inclusive, equitable, and explicitly antiracist by supporting the vital truth of Black Lives Matter and its charge to all of us to recognize biases, confront privilege, and labor toward justice for all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). During this semester, we will do our best to discuss complex issues related to racial and other intersectional forms of social justice with care, empathy, and courage. As part of this effort, we will answer [Toni Morrison's](#) challenge to ensure that oppressive language is "rejected, altered and exposed." This means disavowing speech that attempts to silence, threaten, and degrade others and communicating in ways that are inclusive of individuals and groups. For example, we will use gender-inclusive and non-sexist language, which avoids misgendering people, recognizes the distinction between biological sex and gender expression, and rejects outdated assumptions. Similarly, we will not repeat racial slurs even when we watch a film or read a book that includes them. This shows respect to all the people, past and present, who have been subjected to this language as a means of violence. Last, like many, I am still in the process of learning. If something is said in class (by me or anyone) that makes you

uncomfortable or that does not support these goals, please talk to me about it or provide anonymous feedback via Blackboard.

### **Disability Services**

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities at our university. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the [Office of Disability Services](#).

### **Please Note**

This course includes disturbing, discriminatory, and violent content. My goal is to cultivate sensitive discussions and an empathetic classroom environment, and we will work together to identify and critique racism, homophobia, misogyny, ableism, and other forms of discrimination and cruelty. That said, please email me if you want further information on how these topics will be covered or for assistance in switching into a class that suits you better at this time.

### **Course Schedule**

The syllabus is subject to change. See Blackboard for updates.

Weeks 1-3

#### **Novel: The Golden Age of Hollywood, the Naturalist Novel, and the Politics of Form**

\*No Mandatory Screening (please watch *The Grapes of Wrath* independently)

Sept 1: Course Introduction

Sept 5: John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939. (Introduction and chs. 1-5)

Sept 8: John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939. (chs. 24-30)

Sept 12: *The Grapes of Wrath*, Dir. John Ford, 1940.

- Group 1 Presentation

Sept 15: *The Grapes of Wrath*, Dir. John Ford, 1940; Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1935.

\*Optional Additional Reading: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkimer, "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," 1944.

Weeks 3-5

#### **Play: Resisting the Conventions of Midcentury Theater, Film, and Society**

Sept 19: Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, 1962. (Acts I & II)

- Group 2 Presentation

Sept 22: Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, 1962. (Act III)

Sept 26: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Dir. Mike Nichols, 1966

- Group 3 Presentation

Sept 29: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Dir. Mike Nichols, 1966; Martin Esslin, excerpt from *The Theater of the Absurd*, 1962.

\*Optional Additional Reading: Antonin Artaud, excerpt from *The Theatre and its Double*, 1938.

Weeks 5-7

**Novella: "The Horror" Across Mediums and Historical Contexts**

Oct 3: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899. (Part I)

- Group 4 Presentation

Oct 6: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899. (Parts II & III)

Oct 10: *Apocalypse Now*, Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979.

- Group 5 Presentation

Oct 13: *Apocalypse Now*, Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979; Edward Said, "Two Visions in Heart of Darkness," *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993.

\*Optional Additional Reading: Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'," 1977.

Weeks 7-9

**Autobiography: Identity, the Life Story, and Civil Rights Activism**

\*No Mandatory Screening, please watch *Malcolm X* independently

Oct 17: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 1965. (chs. 1-2 and 14-15)

- Group 6 Presentation

Oct 20: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 1965. (chs. 16-19)

Oct 24: NO CLASS

- Midterm Essay Due

Oct 27: *Malcolm X*, Dir. Spike Lee, 1992.

- Group 7 Presentation

\*Optional Additional Reading: Kenneth Surin, Introduction from *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*, 1999.

Weeks 9-10

**Myth: Reimagining the American Frontier for Reagan-Era America**

\*Mandatory Screening of *Near Dark* on **Monday, Oct 30** in Walsh Auditorium @ **6PM\***

Oct 31: Richard Slotkin, "Myth of the Frontier," *Gunfighter Nation*, 1998.

Nov 3: *Near Dark*, Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1987.

Nov 7: *Near Dark*, Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1987; Sara Gwenllian Jones, "Vampires, Indians, and the Queer Fantastic: Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark*," 2003.

- Group 8 Presentation

Weeks 11-12

**Essay and Nonfiction: The Art of Critique and the Critique of Art**

Nov 10: James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1955), "A Question of Identity" (1955), "Black English" (1979)

- \*Blog Post Due on **Monday, Nov 13** (bring hardcopy to class on Tuesday)\*

Nov 14: James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1955), "A Question of Identity" (1955), "Black English" (1979)

- Group 9 Presentation

Nov 17: *I am Not Your Negro*, Dir. Raoul Peck, 2016.

Nov 21: *I am Not Your Negro*, Dir. Raoul Peck, 2016.

- Group 10 Presentation

Weeks 13-14

### **Poetry: Adapting the Lyric for the 21st Century**

Nov 27: Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, 2004.

- Final Project Workshop (please bring your final project proposal to class)

Dec 1: Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, 2004.

- Last day to withdraw from a course without incurring a WF

Dec 5: *Lemonade*, Dirs. Kahil Joseph & Beyoncé Knowles, 2016.

- Group 11 presentation

Dec 8: *Lemonade*, Dirs. Kahil Joseph & Beyoncé Knowles, 2016 & closing discussion

\*Optional Additional Reading: Alain Badiou, Introduction of *In Praise of Love*, 2009; Byung-Chil Han, *The Agony of the Eros*, 2012; Warsan Shire, "For Women Who Are Difficult to Love" (2012) and "Home" (2009)

**Final Project Due by 11:59 PM on Tuesday, Dec 19th**