Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.
ENGL 493
Literature and Film
Spring Session, 2015
Class Meetings: Tuesdays & Thursdays: 2:00PM - 3:15PM (HH 222)
Office: AL-255
Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:30-12:00 (and by appointment)
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This is a course in literature and film; as such it focuses on cinematic adaptation of literary works, exploring how theme, form, technique, and style manifest in both film and written text (primarily the novel, but also the short story). To simplify our investigations, we will limit ourselves to conventional prose narrative and (largely) the so-called “Hollywood” film (as opposed, that is, to experimental or avant-garde works—although we will be reading at least one comic book, which will provide some provocative complications to what I write below).

Consider: prose literature is a silent form, a still form (unless we choose to read it aloud—or listen to an audio version of the text). Conventionally, though, the words just sit there, unmoving and unheard: black letters on a white page (or illuminated screen, I guess, if we’re reading on a Kindle, smart phone, or computer). Film, however, is a collage of scenes, each scene containing hundreds or thousands of still images (frames), sometimes in color, sometimes synced to sound (diegetic and non-diegetic), blurring together at (usually) 24 frames per second, our persistence of vision tricking the brain into perceiving movement instead of a series of still images. A single scene can contain dozens of cuts (or maybe one long take). We stare at a single screen and assemble these edited cuts into something whole—the experience of characters doing something: talking, walking, making love, fighting. However, this “something whole” is wholly artificial, as different from lived experience as is a page of printed words.

When we read, we have complete control over the pace at which we read: we linger over a sentence, reread a passage, skip to the end, start over. We read either in silence or surrounded by noise (or music), sometimes of our choosing, sometimes dictated by our environment: we lose ourselves in a novel at the bus stop or in a noisy coffee shop or quietly at home, the words accompanied, perhaps, by only the purr of our cat, the rough scratch of her grooming tongue. We read aloud or silently, or are read to by a lover or friend. Consider how differently we experience film: in a theater, plunged into darkness, soundtrack exploding around us as we’re propelled through the action, the sounds of audience members (or crying babies) distracting us or adding to our exhilaration (what a rare and wonderful thing when a theater crowd seems of one mind to burst into applause or laughter, when a sold-out crowd gasps in unison at a jump scare (when something—often a harmless cat, sometimes an axe-wielding maniac—leaps from the darkness during an especially tense moment). Or when we watch at home on our TV (or phone or iPad or laptop), perhaps while we’re doing dishes or cleaning the litter box or nodding off to sleep, the film playing in the background: we pause it, rewind to watch a scene again, skip past a boring montage or mute the sound while taking a call, watching the images play silently or listening only to sound, our eyes closed after a long day.

Literature and film: so distinct, so utterly different—both in how they’re produced (film: generally collaborative and relatively expensive, versus the novel: cheaply wrought, usually written by a single author) and in how they’re received (see above). And yet so often films and literary prose tackle the same subjects, the same material. We complain when a film adaptation isn’t “faithful” to the novel on which it’s based (what does that even mean, “faithful”?). But, really, how faithful could a film adaptation ever be, considering how different film is from fiction? (Nota bene: Alfred Hitchcock used the term pure cinema to refer to those cinematic moments in which camera movement, editing, music, and sound communicated to the audience without language. That is, pure cinema involves every element of filmmaking unavailable to the writer of fiction. For Hitchcock, at least, film and literature couldn’t be more different.)
In this course we will learn basic film terminology as a means of investigating how literary elements (such as plot, character, metaphor, and theme) are translated into film. We will ask, for example, How do films and novels convey character differently; how is plotting handled in film as opposed to the novel (or short story); how do they develop themes and deploy metaphors? (And we'll think hard, all the while, about the similarities and differences between the “language” of literature and the “language” of film.) We will ask, What is lost in the adaptation? What is gained? How can one—or should one—compare such drastically different aesthetic forms (the 90 minute film versus the four-hundred page novel). These are but some of the subjects we’ll be considering over the semester.

WARNING/TEASER: Be aware that in this course we will be discussing race, class, sexuality, politics, violence, love and other touchy subjects, along with more conventional literary topics such as aesthetic value and form. If you believe that discussing these issues in a rigorous, intellectual fashion might be too much for you, then consider taking another course this semester. However, you might also consider staying in the course and confronting/interrogating these issues alongside your sensitivities and their ideological and cultural roots. Regardless, if you ever feel that our discussions are needlessly offensive and/or unsettling, please come to my office hours and voice your concerns, especially if you feel that your classmates or I are not treating the issues with the sensitivity they deserve.

Books

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series*
Carroll, Lewis. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass*. [Online]
Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*
Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle* (Parts One & Two) [Online]:
   Part One: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm
   Part Two: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/2.htm
Dick, Philip K. *A Scanner Darkly*
Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*
Moore, Allen & David Lloyd. *V for Vendetta*
Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*
Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*

Films (On Reserve—or you can find your own copies to watch)

*Alice in Wonderland*
*American Psycho*
*Fight Club*
*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
*The Hobbit* (Part I & II)
*The Hunger Games*
*A Scanner Darkly*
*V for Vendetta*
Attendance and Quizzes:

Because the success of the class depends upon your discussion and interpretations of the various texts we encounter, you should attend every class session. I will compose tests based on what we do in the classroom—from my lectures and your comments and ideas. This course is designed to facilitate your learning; thus, we will spend a large amount of our time discussing and interrogating what you find interesting and compelling about the works I assign. Of course, I will lead our analysis, playing, at times, devil's advocate, providing you with various and sometimes contentious readings of the literature. You will be evaluated on how actively you participate in and extend our classroom discussions, so please come to class with something to say. I may give reading quizzes if it seems that the class is consistently unprepared.

Late Work:

Work will be turned in on the date due or not at all. We all have schedules, and it is imperative that we keep to them. However, I am not completely draconian. In extreme cases I may accept late work, but don't count on it.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is taking someone else's words, idea, or argument and claiming it as your own. Don't do it unless you have a interesting and rigorous intellectual or aesthetical reason. Cite all your sources unless you discuss your appropriation with me first. Instances of plagiarism designed to avoid intellectual work will earn you an F for the course, and, in egregious cases, may result in expulsion from the university. Please familiarize yourself with SDSU plagiarism policies, discussed in your handbook. Throughout the syllabus and my links page are links to many useful web sources. Do not take the words or ideas from any of these sources without providing the appropriate citations unless, again, you discuss your aims with me first. This goes for oral presentations as well as written work.

GRADES:

Tweets: 10%
Daily Grades & Attendance: 15%
Group Film/Book Presentation: 15%
Group Short Story/Film Class: 20%
Mid-Term: 20%
Final Exam: 20%

Tweets (10%):

You need to write (at least) two (2) tweets every week. (Remember: these are just 140 characters—including any hashtags—so I'm not asking too much.) They should end with the hashtag

#LF493

Don't tag ME in your tweet unless you're specifically asking me something. Typically, you'll just use the #LF493 hashtag (or tag another classmate if you want to tweet to them). I'll see what you've tweeted; I'll visit your Twitter page every week and count your class-related tweets.
You should have tweeted at least twenty eight (28) times by the end of the semester.

Your tweets for class should comment on or relate to the readings and films. Try to make each tweet individual, so it can stand by itself (that is, avoid multiple tweets that add up to one LONG, serialized tweet: the point is to craft concise, interesting commentary.)

Again: you can engage with your classmates, tweet to me, post links to relevant online commentary or whatever. Retweets don’t count as one of your weekly tweets. But please, do retweet. They’re not “for credit,” but they’re fun. (And if I retweet one of yours, you know it’s especially good. ;-) Have fun with this part! Be imaginative and playful (or imaginative and serious). But don’t stress out about it. Mostly, it’s just a way for us to all interact on Twitter—like informal chatting before or after class. It’s a way for me to get to know you. Follow me as soon as you get your account up and running. You might want to create a special account especially for this class.

Make sure the Twitter account you use for this class is PUBLIC: if you have your account set as “private” no one will be able to see what you tweet (and you won’t get credit).

My Twitter handle is: @josephsdsu (And, yes, feel free to unfollow me as soon as the semester is over. There’s no harm in that.)

And remember: this is a large class. I’ve added this social media assignment to my courses to build community, to get you all talking to one another. So read each other’s tweets; follow each other; interact (if our class is full, every student in this class should have at least 50 followers).

Daily Grades & Attendance (15%):

If the class seems consistently unprepared (if our discussions aren’t lively and engaged with specifics from the readings and films) I may give you short (usually five question) quizzes. I might also give you short, in-class writing assignments before or after we begin discussing each work. These assignments count as quiz grades, and will be graded pass/fail. To earn a passing grade, you have to show a familiarity with the assigned text and some degree of critical engagement. In-class work cannot be made up.

Group Film/Book Presentation (15%):

In a group of five or six, you will select a book or film from our reading list and prepare a 15-minute report on it and its creator(s). You will also prepare a one-page handout outlining important information. The form of your presentation and of your handout is up to you. Ideally, your presentation will help us segue into our discussion of the work at hand. Remember, you need to have fifteen minutes of discussion planned. You can go over, but I’d like you to be as close to fifteen minutes as possible. So rehearse and plan. These should be tight, well planned, and to the point. Important: this is a group presentation, yes, but it’s one presentation. That is, it’s not a collection of five or six mini presentations that don’t have much to do with one another. So work together so that your presentation works as a coherent statement about the work.
In your presentation you’ll want to:
Discuss biographical information about those who made the piece (be selective, choosing details relevant to your overarching argument or position on the work)
Engage the historical moment in which the work was produced (again, be selective: talk about history and context when it relates to your overarching position on the work)
Use terms and concepts from the course
Relate the piece to other works we’ve read and discussed so far in the semester (make connections to previous discussions, yes, but when talking about previous works we’ve read or watched for class, consider how your work relates to themes or scenes or techniques that we didn’t discuss class)

Group Short Story/Film Class (20%):

For this assignment, you’ll get into a large group early in the semester (there will be a total of four groups). Your first objective will be to choose a short story on which a film (or an episode of television) is based (some episodes of The Twilight Zone, of instance, are based on short stories). By midterm, you will let me know what short story/film combination you’ve decided on, and we’ll make these stories (and films) available to the class.

Then, at the end of the semester, each group will lead the class in a discussion on the film and story. Part of your class session will involve what amounts to an extended version of a Group Film/Book Presentation (see above). After this more formal presentation, you will be responsible for leading the class in a discussion on the work: there are many strategies you can use for leading the class (activities, open discussion, directed analyses of specific scenes or characters, etc. etc.) As your presentation day approaches, you’ll want to come by my office and discuss the project with me, and, of course, I’ll be in class too: so I’ll be there to pick up the slack if things get a little too loose.

Mid-Term: (20%): 

Your mid-term will be composed of a short answer section and an essay section. If you read and actively engage in class discussion you should do fine. This exam is an occasion for you to discuss the knowledge you’ve produced—so don’t expect it to dwell on minutiae. It cannot be made up.

Final Exam (20%):

As with the mid-term, your final will be composed of a short answer section and an essay section. Again, if you read and actively engage in class discussion you should do fine. This exam is an occasion for you to discuss the knowledge you’ve produced—so don’t expect it to dwell on minutiae. It cannot be made up.

Note:
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as
soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Final Comments:**

This class should be challenging, but it should also be fun. Remember, I want you to do well. I don't lecture too much; mostly I like to chat with you, to get your impressions, to help you to understand some of the complexities and subtleties that might not be obvious. I'm here to give you biographical and historical data that will enable you to make your interpretations and conceptions of literature and film more convincing, to show you how other critics interpret the assigned texts, and maybe to tell you how I interpret them. I look forward to working with each of you.
Weekly Syllabus  
**Tentative**  
This schedule can change.  
However, all changes will be announced in class

**Week One:**  
Thursday, Jan. 22  
Introductions

**Week Two:**  
Tuesday, Jan. 27  
Berger, Ways of Seeing  
BBC Miniseries, Ways of Seeing [Online]  
Part One: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk  
Part Two: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1Gl8mNU5Sg  
Part Three: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7wi8jd7aC4  
Part Four: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jTUebm73iY

Thursday, Jan. 29  
*Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography [In Class Viewing]*;  
Determine Presentation Groups

**Week Three:**  
Tuesday, Feb. 3  
*Visions of Light*, cont.; Film Terms & Concepts

Thursday, Feb. 5  
Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*

**Week Four:**  
Tuesday, Feb. 10  
*Fight Club* [Film: Reserved in Library]  
Theodore Kaczynski, Industrial Society and Its Future (AKA: The Unabomber Manifesto)  
Film School Rejects (Broken Projector) [Listen to the podcast]  

Thursday, Feb. 12  
*Fight Club* [Film: Reserved in Library]  
Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (Parts One & Two) [Online]:  
Part One: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm  
Part Two: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/2.htm
Week Five:
Tuesday, Feb. 17
*American Psycho* [Film: Reserved in Library]

**Group One Presentation (on film)**

Thursday, Feb. 19
Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*

**Group Two Presentation (on novel)**

Week Six:
Tuesday, Feb. 24
Dick, Philip K. *A Scanner Darkly*

**Group Three Presentation (on novel)**

Thursday, Feb. 26
*A Scanner Darkly* [Film: Reserved in Library]

**Group Four Presentation (on film)**

Week Seven:
Tuesday, Mar. 3
Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass* (Guest Scholar: Michael Heyman!)

**Wednesday, March 4th: Extra Credit**
Leon Williams Room, Love Library (LL 430-431); 5:00PM-5:50PM
Lecture on Alice, Carroll, and Nonsense, by Michael Heyman

Thursday, Mar. 5
Disney, *Alice in Wonderland* [Film: Reserved in Library] (Guest Scholar: Michael Heyman)

Week Eight:
Tuesday, Mar. 10
MIDTERM EXAM!!!!

Thursday, Mar. 12
*The Hunger Games* [Film: Reserved in Library]

**Group Five Presentation (on film)**
Week Nine:
Tuesday, Mar. 17
Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*
Group Six Presentation (on novel)

Thursday, Mar. 19
Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*

Week Ten:
Tuesday, Mar. 24
Moore, Allen & David Lloyd. *V for Vendetta*
Group Seven Presentation (on comic)

Thursday, Mar. 26
*V for Vendetta* [Film: Reserved in Library]
Group Eight Presentation (on film)
Deconstructing Comics: http://deconstructingcomics.com/?p=4596

Week Eleven:
NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS

Week Twelve:
Tuesday, Apr. 7
Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
Group Nine Presentation (on novel)

Thursday, Apr. 9
*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* [Film: Reserved in Library]
Group Ten Presentation (on film)

Week Thirteen:
Tuesday, Apr. 14
Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*
Group Eleven Presentation (on novel)

Thursday, Apr. 16
Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*

Week Fourteen:
Tuesday, Apr. 21
*The Hobbit* 1 & 2 [Film: Reserved in Library]
Group Twelve Presentation (on films)

Thursday, Apr. 23:
*The Hobbit* 1 & 2 [Film: Reserved in Library]
Week Fifteen:
Tuesday, Apr. 28
GROUP A

Thursday, Apr. 30
GROUP B

Week Sixteen:
Tuesday, May 5
GROUP C

Thursday, May 7
GROUP D

May 8-14: Final Exam Week