ADVANCED STUDIES IN FILM: ADAPTATION  
FILM 481-01

Instructor: Tobin Addington  
Day & Time: Fri 9:00-11:50  
E-mail: tobin.addington@mso.umt.edu  
Office Hours: Wed 1-3 & by appointment in McGill 234

Readings:  
Emma, by Jane Austen  
All You Need Is Kill, by Hiroshi Sakurazaka  
The Orchid Thief, by Susan Orlean  
Additional readings will be posted on Moodle and handed out in class

Assignments:  
In-class essay assignments (4)  
Screenwriting assignments (3)  
Treatment for film based on published material  
Revised treatment  
First Draft – Script for chosen scenes  
Final Draft – Script for chosen scenes  
Final Exam

Course Goals/Objectives:  
The art and craft of adaptation has always been central to cinema. From the very beginnings in the 1890s, filmmakers have turned to existing literature, theater, journalism, and folklore for inspiration. This has never been as true as it is today. The economic forces at work in the modern global film industry encourage filmmakers to build their stories around previously published material – for reasons we’ll discuss throughout the semester.

This course will examine the process of cinematic adaptation through a close reading of both the pre-existing texts and the scripts/films adapted from them. We will begin by analyzing the specific requirements, challenges, pitfalls, and rewards of the adaptation process – concerned with the demands, advantages, and drawbacks of dramatic writing vs. prose fiction and non-fiction. We will read and compare examples of both, and watch the resulting films.

Throughout the semester, we will learn the screenwriting form, through in-class and take-home screenwriting challenges. By the end of the semester, each student will choose a text they would like to adapt, build a plan for translating that text’s plot, characters, setting, theme, etc. into a feature film, and then write sample scenes based on two scenes in the original text. By practical application of the adaptation strategies we’ve explored, we’ll come to a deeper understanding of the pre-existing material, the resulting screenplay, and the process of adaptation itself.

Oh, and it should be fun!
Course Notes:
1. Each absence beyond 3 will drop your final grade by one letter.
2. Punctuality and participation are mandatory and will significantly affect your final grade.
3. Late assignments and papers are eligible for only 50% of the original grade and will only be accepted up to one week late. All papers must be typed and proofread.
4. Violations of the Policy on Academic Integrity will not be tolerated – all work must be your own. If you have questions about what counts as plagiarism, please don’t hesitate to ask!

Grade Determination:
20 points (10%) . . . . . . . . . Attendance and Participation
40 points (20%) . . . . . . . . . In-class essay assignments
30 points (15%) . . . . . . . . . Screenwriting assignments
10 points (5%) . . . . . . . . . Treatment for film based on a work of classic literature
10 points (5%) . . . . . . . . . Revised treatment
20 points (10%) . . . . . . . . . First Draft
30 points (15%) . . . . . . . . . Final Draft
40 points (20%) . . . . . . . . . Final Exam

Class Participation (10%)
Students will arrive to class on time, having read and/or viewed all relevant material, and will participate in class discussions of the text and films.

In-class Essay Assignments (20%)
Students will answer brief essay questions based on the novels and short stories that we read for class.

Screenwriting Assignments (15%)
Students will complete three screenwriting assignments.

Treatment (5%)
Students will choose a work of classic literature and write a treatment for an updated film adaptation – we will discuss what a treatment is and how to write one as we approach this assignment.

Revised Treatment (5%)
Students will revise and present their treatments to small groups, and in some cases the class as a whole.

First Draft – Final Script (10%)
Students will write and workshop a short screenplay based on a few scenes from a previously published work. (This will include a treatment for the full film.)

Final Draft – Final Script (15%)
Students will revised and workshop a short screenplay based on a few scenes from a previously published work.

Final Exam (20%)
Students will complete a cumulative final exam.
**Grading System:**

180-200 points (94 to 100%) .......... A
180-186 points (90 to 93%) .......... A-
174-178 points (87 to 89%) .......... B+
168-172 points (84 to 86%) .......... B
160-166 points (80 to 83%) .......... B-
154-158 points (77 to 79%) .......... C+
148-152 points (74 to 76%) .......... C
140-146 points (70 to 73%) .......... C-
130-138 points (65 to 69%) .......... D+
120-128 points (60 to 64%) .......... D
Under 120 points (Under 60%) .......... F
Class Schedule

WEEK #1: January 27
INTRODUCTION
Introduce ourselves – Introduce the syllabus – My expectations/your expectations –
Framework for class – What is adaptation? – Introduction to dramatic writing – What is a
screenplay?
SCREENINGS:
Clip from Jesus’ Son, written by Elizabeth Cuthrell, David Urrutia, and Oren Moverman

WEEK #2: February 3
BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN – the short story
In-class essay on Brokeback Mountain – Discuss the story – Discuss of the script –
Further discussion of dramatic writing vs. prose – Screenplay format – In-class
screenwriting exercise
SCREENING:
A short film based on Two Men, by Denis Johnson
READINGS for today:
- Brokeback Mountain, by Annie Proulx
- Brokeback Mountain, screenplay by Larry McMurtry & Diana Ossana
- Screen Adaptation, Portnoy – “Introduction” – pages 1-8

WEEK #3: February 10
BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN – the film
View & discuss the film -
SCREENINGS:
Brokeback Mountain (2005/dir. Ang Lee; w. Larry McMurtry & Diana Ossana)
READINGS for today:
- Screen Adaptation, Portnoy – “Principles of Dramatic Writing” – pages 11-19
ASSIGNMENT due today:
- Screenwriting assignment 1

WEEK #4: February 17
ALL YOU NEED IS KILL – the novel
In-class essay on All You Need Is Kill – Discussion of the novel – In-class screenwriting exercise
READING for today:
- All You Need Is Kill, by Hiroshi Sakurazaka

WEEK #5: February 24
ALL YOU NEED IS KILL – the film
View and discuss the film – Discuss the script
SCREENING:
READING for today:
- All You Need Is Kill, screenplay by Christopher McQuarrie and Jez & John-Henry Butterworth
- Screen Adaptation, Portnoy – “Characterization” – pages 21-31
ASSIGNMENT due today:
- Screenwriting assignment 2
WEEK #6: March 3
EMMA – the novel
In-class essay on Emma – Discussion of the novel – Creating characters – Compositing characters – Empathy vs. sympathy – In-class screenwriting exercise
READING for today:
- Emma, by Jane Austen

WEEK #7: March 10
CLUELESS – the film
View and discuss the film – What is screenplay structure? – Beat Sheet
SCREENING:
Clueless (1995/w. & dir. Amy Heckerling)
READING for today:
- Screen Adaptation, Portnoy – “Structure” – pages 35-48
ASSIGNMENT due today:
- Screenwriting assignment 3

WEEK #8: March 17
THE ORCHID THIEF – the book
In-class essay on The Orchid Thief – Discussion of the novel – Finish structure discussion – In-class screenwriting exercise
READINGS for today:
- The Orchid Thief, Susan Orlean
ASSIGNMENTS for today:
- Treatment for updated classic literary adaptation
- *** Lesson plan for ENT students ***

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS!

WEEK #9: March 31
ADAPTATION – the film
View and discuss the film – Discuss the script – How far can you push an adaptation?
SCREENINGS:
READING for today:
- Adaptation, screenplay by Charlie Kaufman

WEEK #10: April 7
PRESENTATIONS – UPDATED CLASSIC
Small group discussions of updated classics – present to group
READINGS for today:
- tbd
ASSIGNMENT for today:
- Revised treatment for classic literary adaptation

WEEK #11: April 14
SCRIPT WORKSHOPS – GROUP A
Group A presents first draft
ASSIGNMENTS for today:
- Group A first draft
WEEK #12: April 21
SCRIPT WORKSHOPS – GROUP B
Group B presents first draft
ASSIGNMENTS for today:
- Group B first draft

WEEK #13: April 28
SCRIPT WORKSHOPS – GROUP A
Group A presents final draft
ASSIGNMENTS for today:
- Group A final draft

WEEK #14: May 5
SCRIPT WORKSHOPS – GROUP B
Group B presents final draft
ASSIGNMENTS for today:
- Group B final draft

May 12, 10:10-12:10
FINAL EXAM