Film/Literature Encounters: History, Theory, Criticism

Film and Literature MA core module, Autumn Term 2016

Tutors:
Professor Judith Buchanan (weeks 2, 4, 7, 9)
Dr Michael McCluskey (weeks 3, 5, 8, 10)

Module arrangements:
Pre-term Film & Lit MA induction meeting: 11:00 – 12:00 Thursday 29 September BS/007
We look forward to seeing you there: attendance essential.

Weekly seminar: Fridays, 11:00 – 13:00 in BS008 (not Week 6)

Screenings: 10:00 and 13:00 on Tuesdays in the Bowland, BS005 (not Week 6)

Additional MA group outing to the live theatre broadcast of the RSC’s King Lear (Gregory Doran/Antony Sher) at York CityScreen, 12 October 2016.
Meet 18:45 in City Screen foyer.

NB: all arrangements and requirements will be clarified in the pre-term induction meeting.

The module:
The starting point for this module is the idea of the ‘encounter’ between film and literature, and the various ways and means in which that encounter takes place: film and literature as media with their own aesthetic and narrative codes; the social and institutional structures that facilitate (and/or impede) the transfer of material between the two; the intellectual systems through which the questions of meaning and value raised by this process are addressed. Each ‘Film/Literature Encounter’ case study is supported by critical and/or theoretical reading and considered in the context of the cultural-historical circumstances from which it emerged and into which it was received.

The modes of encounter with these materials are also of interest here. How do we view and read in different media, and in different genres within those media, and how do we reflect on and discuss what we have viewed and read? Seminar members will be encouraged to explore their own ideas, to respond to the approaches taken by others (in print and within the seminar group) and to identify and hone their own critical perspectives. Classes will combine close reading sessions with small and large group discussions; seminar members will also sometimes be asked to work together outside classes to prepare short presentations for our seminars.

All the required reading for this module will be made available for seminar members: in the University Library and Key Text collection; as pdfs that you can download from the module VLE site; and via electronic databases which you can use via the University website. The workload is designed to be manageable within the time between one seminar and the next. However, there are three primary texts which seminar members might like to read in advance: Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities for Week 2, Shakespeare’s King Lear for Week 4 and Evelyn Waugh’s Vile Bodies for Week 8.

Required viewing and reading lists for each week are supplied here. These build on the pre-term sent out in the pre-term MA letter. A small amount of supplementary viewing and reading is suggested which can be pursued if interest leads and time allows. Most substantial supplementary viewing and reading lists for each week will be issued during term to suggest extension reading and viewing for those subjects that fire your imagination and invite further exploration.
Weekly programme

Week 2 (w/b 3 Oct ’16) (JB)
Adaptation in the silent era: Dickens

_A Tale of Two Cities_ (Frank Lloyd, 1917)
_A Tale of Two Cities_ (Ralph Thomas, 1958)

The first section of this seminar will be spent on a preliminary exploration of the film industry’s relationships to literary source material in the silent era, informed by the reading. Discussion will then move to the Dickens novel and the cinematic adaptations in detail. In thinking about the novel, we will concentrate most particularly on the storming of the Bastille, Dr Manette’s retrospective account of his fate and the novel's final chapter. In thinking about the films, areas of interest might include patterns of editing, performance style(s), the “doubled” body on screen (William Farnum encountering himself in both central roles in the 1917 film), the use and character of the inter-titles, the life of the cinematic crowd on screen (and the stylistic dependences of the 1958 film in this respect) and the significance of the concluding scenes of the film.

Required reading:
Charles Dickens, _A Tale of Two Cities_. (Any edition - and bring to seminar with you.)

Supplementary reading:

Supplementary viewing:
_Early Cinema: Primitives and Pioneers_ (BFI DVD)

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Week 3 (MCM)
The Cinematic City

_Man with a Movie Camera_ (USSR, 1929)
_In the Street_ (US, 1948)
_London_ (UK, 1994)
This seminar looks at cinematic studies of the city as a way of exploring geographical approaches to film and literary analysis. We start with a look at the ‘city symphonies’ of the 1920s: films that celebrate the crowds, machines, and structures that constitute urban modernity. The expansion of European and American cities in the early twentieth century was a source of inspiration for both writers and filmmakers, and we make connections between these through their shared interests in architecture, urban rhythms, social patterns, and orchestrated movements. We also consider more recent examples of these examinations of urban life and the ways in which they shape our own perceptions of particular cities such as London, New York, and Los Angeles. Walking through the city will be a particular point of focus as we examine the activities of individuals and crowds, efforts to control their movements, and the ‘tactics’ used to disrupt order.

Required reading:

Supplementary reading:

Supplementary viewing:
Berlin (Germany, 1927)
Los Angeles Plays Itself (US, 2003)
Of Time and the City (UK, 2008)

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Week 4 (JB)
Cinema, theatre and medium-hybridisation: King Lear

Ran (Akira Kurosawa, 1985)
King Lear (dirs. Trevor Nunn and Chris Hunt, 2008), starring Ian McKellen

NB: group MA outing to live theatre broadcast of the RSC’s King Lear (Doran/Sher)
at York City Screen: 19:00 12 October 2016. Meet 18:45 in City Screen foyer.
Tickets have been pre-purchased.

What are the challenges and what is at stake in adapting a Shakespeare play for the screen? What can a play withstand in terms of radical intervention and re-envisioning and still retain a recognisable identity? What is the transmission history of King Lear as text, stage play and film? What has this play been taken to signify at different historical moments and in different cultural contexts as adapted across media? How might those interpretive preferences
be illuminating about broader social, cultural and political landscapes? And – importantly in the context of the live theatre broadcast – what is a work of theatre and what is a film and how have these media been theorised? What critical frameworks about presence and about liveness do we need to interrogate anew in order to discuss the medium hybridity of a live relay theatrical broadcast?

Required reading:
William Shakespeare, King Lear (any scholarly edition).
Noel Carroll, ‘The Specificity Thesis’ (from Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory, 1988) [pdf]
Judith Buchanan, Shakespeare on Film, Introductory chapter and pp.71-2, 80-89 (on <i>Ran</i>).

Supplementary reading:
Shakespeare Survey, 55 (2002); this is a volume devoted to Lear in performance. Dip as suits.
John Wyver, “‘All the Trimmings?’: The Transfer of Theatre to Television in Adaptations of Shakespeare Stagings’, Adaptation 7.2 (2014).

Supplementary viewing
Any other versions of <i>King Lear</i> – eg Grigori Kozintsev, Peter Brook.

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**Week 5 (MCM)
Documentary and Surveillance**

<i>Housing Problems</i> (UK, 1935)
<i>Coal Face</i> (UK, 1935)
<i>The Fairy of the Phone</i> (UK, 1936)
<i>N or NW</i> (UK, 1937)
<i>Spare Time</i> (UK, 1939)
<i>To Be a Woman</i> (UK, 1951)

Documentary emerged in Britain in the 1930s as part of an effort to promote trade and new technologies, to inform audiences of the changing world in which they lived, and to teach audiences how to adapt to these changes. This film movement coincided with other projects aimed at opening up British homes and industries to public scrutiny. In this seminar we look at this first generation of documentary filmmakers and analyse their aims, strategies, interconnections with documentary projects of the period, and their impact on later filmmakers. We’ll discuss the different modes of documentary, their sometimes Surrealist techniques, and the broader political, economic, and aesthetic discussions to which these films contribute. We’ll also look at these films as instances of state-sponsored attempts to monitor the everyday lives of British citizens, part of the development of the surveillance society in which we now live.

Required reading:


Supplementary reading:


Suggested viewing:
*Nanook of the North* (US/Canada 1922)
*Night Mail* (UK, 1936)
*Today We Live* (UK, 1937)
*Everyday Except Christmas* (UK, 1957)

*NO SCREENINGS OR SEMINARS IN WEEK 6*

*Week 7 (JB)*

**Telling Tales: Little Red Riding Hood**

*Little Red Riding Hood* (Walt Disney, 1922) - view this short animation on Youtube
*A Company of Wolves* (Neil Jordan, 1984)
*Little Red Riding Hood* (David Kaplan, 1997) - short film

A girl, a wolf, a grandmother: startlingly simple story elements giving rise to rich and complicated evolving narrative traditions across media. In tracing the evolving story and self-revising meanings of *Little Red Riding Hood* across time and culture, we will look at an early version that was in oral circulation in early modern France (recuperated and recorded by Paul Delarue), Charles Perrault (1697, French), the Brothers Grimm (1812, German) and Angela Carter (1979, British). We will also consider a Walt Disney animated cartoon from 1922, Neil Jordan’s film *The Company of Wolves* (1984, British) adapted from Angela Carter’s short story of the same name and David Kaplan’s 1997 b/w short which attempts to recuperate a pre-Perrault take on the tale. We will be reading all versions in English. (However, you may also, if you prefer, read Perrault in French—http://chaperon.rouge.online.fr/perraultfr.htm—and/or Grimm in German — www.grimmstories.com/de/grimm_maerchen/rotkaeppchen.) Freud’s 'The Uncanny' will be relevant to our considerations as part of this week's seminar.

Required primary reading:
Jack Zipes, ed. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1983. 3-8, 42-50. [I recommend this Zipes compendium as a good buy. Whether you buy published versions or print out from online versions, please bring a hard copy of each of the required reading primary texts to the seminar with you]


**Required critical reading:**


<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/jun/24/classics.angelacarter>


**Supplementary reading:**


**Supplementary viewing:**

*Little Red Hot Riding Hood* (Tex Avery, 1943)

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**Week 8 (MCM)**

**Dialogue: Talking and the ‘Talkie’**

*It Happened One Night* (US, 1934)

*The Lady Vanishes* (UK, 1938)

With the introduction of sound to cinema in the late 1920s, the increase in radio listening, and the spread of telephones, ‘talk’ became not just a means of communicating information in interpersonal exchanges but a focal point of film, literature, and, more broadly, interwar culture. In this seminar we talk about ‘talk’ and the use of dialogue in conveying information, constructing character, creating insiders and outsiders, and commenting on the sound of cinema itself. To initiate these discussions we turn to American and British cinema of the 1930s and its celebration of snappy dialogue. We’ll consider these films alongside the use of dialogue in Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Vile Bodies* and other writings of the period. Coded exchanges, listening in, gossip, miscommunication, and mistaken identity all factor into the different forms of talk. These will help us to analyse conversation as a circuit that connects individuals and generates its own forms of meaning.
Required reading:
Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (1935)

Supplementary reading:

Supplementary viewing:
*Blackmail* (UK, 1929)
*Easy Living* (US, 1937)
*His Girl Friday* (US, 1940)
*Bright Young Things* (UK, 2003)

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**Week 9 (JB)**

**Writers on Screen: Cinematic Reflections on Literary Process**

*The Pillow Book* (Peter Greenaway, 1996)
*The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel bon Donnersmarck, 2007)

What is an author? What is an authorial identity in film and in literature? How is an author implied by, and constructed from, the processes of reading/viewing? How has cinema chosen to configure literary writers and the processes of literary composition and artistic creation?  

Peter Greenaway’s cinema represents a rejection of mainstream Hollywood narrative codes. His work celebrates the image as image – not necessarily as narrative tool. His cinema is visually exciting – visually decadent even - and advertises the exquisiteness and careful choreography of its own visual compositions. It is also self-consciously interested in the processes of artistic composition and these processes come under the spotlight in *The Pillow Book*. The film narrates the story of a female character learning to break from her sense of herself as a canvas and re-conceive of herself as an artist. How are acts of literary and artistic composition treated in this film? And what gender-political meanings is it being asked to carry?  

*The Lives of Others* is a film that specifically engages with the possible political power, institutional efficacy, documentary truthfulness and strategic distortions of the written text. What is it to write an allegedly documentary account of someone else’s life? What is it to read a written account of one’s own life? How does this film engage with acts of political and artistic authorship and with the need for, and role of, an audience in response to each? What role does literature and a broader artistic consciousness play within this film drama? What difference, if any, might it make that this is a cinematic reflection on the role and power of theatre, music, literature and a broader artistic consciousness? What are the film’s dominant aesthetics?

Required reading:
Paula Willoquet-Maricondi and Mary Alemany-Galway, eds., *Peter Greenaway’s Postmodern/Post-structuralist Cinema* (Scarecrow Press, 2001), Chs. 11 and 13 (key texts).


Anna Funder. *Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta, 2003). Chapters 17, 18, 19. [This award-winning account of individual stories from the GDR is a lightweight but illuminating read, and a useful way of reading one’s way into the culture from which *The Lives of Others* emerges.]


Also sample some reviews of *The Lives of Others*, for instance:
Neal Ascherson, ‘Beware, the walls have ears’, *The Guardian* at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2007/mar/11/germany.features/print#history-byline

Supplementary reading:


Supplementary viewing:
*Howl* (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 2010) – view in Week 8

*Enid* (James Hawes, 2009)

*The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1973)

*Good-bye Lenin* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003)

*Prospero’s Book* (Greenaway, 1991)

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**Week 10 (MCM)**

**Memory**

*Beaches of Agnès* (France, 2008)

*Waltz with Bashir* (Israel, 2008)

Remembering past events, emotions, places, and experiences is a process that includes the construction of narrative and disruption of time. This seminar looks into the (re)construction of the past and its intermingling with the present through films and writings about memory. In *Beaches of Agnès*, filmmaker Agnès Varda weaves together excerpts from her films, shots of her revisiting their locations, and personal memories. *Waltz with Bashir* is a documentary that uses animation to represent the seemingly unrepresentable: the trauma of war as experienced by one soldier. Both films can help us to consider theories of memory and trauma, the collective memory that binds groups, memorial sites, and suppressed thoughts.

‘It’s difficult to separate the line between the past and the present,’ says the subject of the film *Grey Gardens*, and in this seminar we’ll discuss how the past informs our experience of the present and the present shapes our understanding of the past.

Required reading:
Sigmund Freud, ‘A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad’ (1925), *Theories of Memory: A Reader* eds. Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

**Supplementary reading:**

**Supplementary viewing:**
*Mirror* (USSR, 1975)
*Grey Gardens* (US, 1975)
*Memento* (USA, 2000)