

Final Project, Option 4
Film Adaptation Analysis

Due: May 5, 2014

This final project option allows you to explore the relationship between a Shakespeare play and a film adaptation of that play. "Adaptation" here refers to any film that consciously draws on a Shakespeare play. Thus, Branagh's *Henry V*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*, Almareyda's *Hamlet*, Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, and Kurosawa's *Ran* all count as adaptations.

Goal: The goal of this assignment is to make and defend an interpretive claim about how a Shakespeare film adapts its source text(s). In other words, your task is to give a strong, argumentative answer to the question, "What is this film doing to Shakespeare's play(s)?" To do so, you must address what the film is adapting, how it's adapting it, why it's adapting it that way, and what it means that it's adapting it that way.

Choosing a film: The first step is to choose a film. There are dozens and dozens of them. The basic criterion of selection is that the film you choose must knowingly incorporate some elements of a Shakespeare play. Thus, even though *The Lion King* basically recapitulates the plot of *Hamlet*, Disney wasn't deliberately adapting Shakespeare's play. Feel free to talk with your professor about good film choices. You should also consult the great Wikipedia page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_William_Shakespeare_screen_adaptations

You must inform your professor that you're choosing this option by **April 23rd**, and you must choose your film and inform your professor by **April 28th**.

Next steps: Once you have chosen your film, you should read the source play. If we've read the play in class, you should reread it. You should also watch the film at least twice. Watson library has quite a collection of Shakespeare adaptations. You should also ask your professor, who has access to a few more films. You are also free to rent or purchase the film for yourself. After reading the play and watching the film, you should begin to construct your essay. It may help you to consult reviews of the film when it was released. Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com) and other sites collect reviews, even of older films. The key as you think about the film and its sources is to consider what the adaptation is *doing* to Shakespeare and what it stands to gain by doing those things. You must think critically about the act of re-creation.

Warning: Writing about film has its own vocabulary, conventions, and expectations. *Do not choose this paper option unless you are confident writing about film or are willing to learn.* This paper will be graded as an essay about film, not an essay about literature. Here are two good resources for writing about film:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/humanities/film.shtml>

<http://www.amazon.com/Short-Guide-Writing-about-Film/dp/0205236391>

The book is available in Watson library, though you may have to race your classmates for it. The Dartmouth website is extremely helpful—and free!

The Paper: A strong thesis will constitute a compelling, argumentative claim about the film in question. Often the best way to write a thesis for this kind of paper is to let your syntax embody the relationship you want to express. For instance, don't just write that "Branagh's *Henry V* presents Henry as a strong, persuasive king." Instead, write that "Branagh's *Henry V* removes some of the

problems with Shakespeare's king and introduces others to create a Henry for post-Imperial England." (In the same paragraph you would, of course, state more specifically what the film does to the play. This is merely the thesis statement.) *Remember* that it is crucial for you to talk about the film *as a film*, not as a book or even a play.

A very successful paper will:

- be properly formatted
- be free of grammatical errors and stylistic unclarity
- address the central questions of the assignment clearly and cogently
- have a strong, clear thesis that unifies the paper into an interpretive claim about a Shakespeare film
- be thoughtfully organized into a paragraph structure that most persuasively articulates the paper's argument
- have paragraphs that contain discernible topics, transitions, and a cogent structure
- marshal appropriate evidence and analysis to advance the thesis, making particular use of the language of film writing
- cite all sources appropriately

Format: the essay should be between 5-7 pages long and should follow MLA formatting guidelines. If you are not familiar with MLA formatting, see me. Late papers will not be accepted. **Do not hesitate to contact me with questions or problems—especially in the early stages of writing, when you are choosing and researching a topic. Past students have described paper consultations with me as "so helpful I got a horrible nosebleed," "my shoes have never been clean again," and "I thought this was a science class."**