

USSY 2940: **Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare**
Instructor: James Newlin **Term:** Spring 2021
Times: MW: 12:45 – 2 p.m. **Classroom:** [Zoom meeting room](#)
Email: jtn33@case.edu **Website:** <http://www.jamesnewlin.com>
Office Hours: By appointment via the WRC website at: <https://case.mywconline.com/> or
by e-mail.

Course Description and Objectives:

It is a truth universally acknowledged—at least in high school English classrooms—that the book is always better than the movie. But is this actually the case? In fact, in recent years, many critics have challenged the assumptions that a film adaptation is necessarily inferior to its literary source and that an adaptation should strive to be as “faithful” to its source as possible. This has been a particularly important discussion for scholars who study Shakespeare. Shakespeareans have long been interested in examining the ways that Shakespeare’s texts are realized in performance and repurposed in intellectual history. These critics might ask whether a radical adaptation of one of Shakespeare’s plays might be in some ways more faithful to the “spirit” of Shakespeare’s work than a traditional staging. At the same time, other scholars are focused on examining how adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays help to redress the ways that his texts reflect, or may have even contributed to, outmoded cultural values and attitudes. They ask whether it might in fact be unethical to replicate the author’s vision if his understanding of the world is out of date or regressive.

In this class, we will interrogate these familiar—but still pressing—debates, by considering several unconventional adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. These films may not be marketed as being “based on” Shakespeare’s plays, but they may invoke his drama—including underexamined or uncomfortable aspects of his drama—all the same. Examining the relationship between Shakespeare’s drama and its wildest revisions may encourage us to interrogate our preconceptions about artistic originality and influence. At what point does an adaptation go from being “Shakespeare” to “Not Shakespeare?”

Required Course Texts:

Shakespeare, William, *Othello*, Arden 3 edition (Revised), eds. EAJ Honigman and Ayanna Thompson, ISBN: 9781472571762

Shakespeare, William, *The Tempest*. Arden Third Edition (Revised), eds. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughn, ISBN: 9781408133477

Shakespeare, William, *The Winter's Tale*, Arden 3 edition, ed. John Pitcher, ISBN: 9781903436356

Recommended (but *not* required) Course Text:

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say*. Fourth edition. ISBN: 9780393631678

Participation and Attendance

This course is a seminar and requires careful reading of a number of texts, which will be discussed in detail in class sessions. Students must come prepared to discuss the assignments (assignments read, with annotations in the course text or on a separate outline, etc.). Everybody is expected to speak during each class period.

In general, Dr. N does not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. Excessive absences (i.e. more than four class periods) will affect your final grade. Generally, five or more absences will result in a grade penalty of one letter grade. If you are aware of any reason why you will miss more than four class periods, please contact Dr. N within the first week of class. Of course, exceptions will be made to accommodate students impacted by the current COVID-19 crisis. If you must miss class for this reason, please contact Dr. N as soon as possible.

During remote class sessions, such as those held on Zoom, please observe basic “net-iquette.” Please keep your video turned on at all times (exceptions can be made for students with bandwidth or other connectivity problems). If you are not speaking, please mute your microphone. Please use the “hand clapping” reaction emoji to indicate that you would like to speak. Take advantage of the “chat” to add additional comments or link to information during discussion – though always do so respectfully! Please dress presentably during video sessions (whatever you would wear to class is fine). Stay engaged!

Our class will maintain a collaborative [note-taking document](#), where students can outline class lectures and discussions, introduce discussion questions, and share insights into our class readings. Participation on this document is optional, but encouraged. It will provide a valuable resource for students who are unable to attend class.

Classroom Behavior

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. I absolutely require that you demonstrate respect for your classmates and for ideas that may differ from your own. Our goal is for dialogue to occur, not conflict or proselytizing.

Late Work and Revision Policy

Late work will generally be penalized by a letter grade per calendar day. I do not accept work submitted over a week after the due date. If you anticipate that a paper will be late, email me *immediately* to make arrangements to submit your paper as soon as you can, lest too many penalties accrue. I do not accept late quizzes, in-class writing assignments, or “minor” writing

assignments such as the research paper topic, annotated bibliography, etc. (Again, an exception will be made to accommodate students impacted by the current COVID-19 crisis. If you are to miss a deadline for this reason, please contact Dr. N as soon as possible).

During the course of the semester, you may rewrite one individual assignment of your choosing, after discussing the matter with me during office hours. (Your new grade, *which may be lower than the original grade*, will replace the previous one.) In addition to the revised project, you must also write a one-page memo addressed to me in which you detail what, how, and why you've revised. You must also attach the original, graded project with my annotations. There is no re-write option for quizzes, footnotes, or other completion-grade assignments. Exceptions will be made for documented medical emergencies or ongoing medical conditions, religious observance, etc.

Special Accommodations

In accordance with federal law, if you have a documented disability, you may be eligible to request accommodations from Disability Resources. In order to be considered for accommodations, you must first register with the Disability Resources office. Please contact their office to register at [216.368.5230](tel:216.368.5230) or [get more information on how to begin the process](#). Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive.

Format Guidelines

All essays must follow MLA guidelines. Additionally, they must be typed, printed in black ink, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font or equivalent; one inch margins, numbered pages with your name, course, and section number at the top of the page. Papers will be submitted *via* Canvas. Please upload your paper as a Microsoft Word or Google Doc file, giving your file a filename in this style: YOURLASTNAMEassignmentname.doc. ***Do not*** upload your paper as a PDF file.

Syllabus

Depending on time constraints, availability of readings, and other factors, the instructor may alter the syllabus during the semester. (For example, we may have to move the class entirely online, in the event of a significant COVID-19 outbreak.) Students will be given ample notice of such alterations. Alterations will be distributed to students *via* e-mail and made on the class's Google Doc syllabus.

Plagiarism

Students at Case Western Reserve University are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards of academic conduct. Academic integrity addresses all forms of academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, obstruction, and submitting without permission work to one course that was completed for another course. Please review the complete [academic integrity policy](#). Any violation of the policy will be reported to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards.

Assignments and Grading Criteria

Reading Presentations + Leading Class Discussion 10 minutes 10%

Once during the semester, and working with a partner, you will be required to deliver a presentation to the class, of no more than ten minutes. You should provide a critical summary of the previous night's reading, informed by an understanding of the scholarly discussion surrounding the play that you have gained from reading the introductory essay in the Arden edition. Topics for discussion are listed on the syllabus schedule.

While your summary should clarify the overall plot of the reading, you should not simply list the play's events one-by-one. The goal of these presentations is to begin reading closely, and critically, as a scholar would. After giving the necessary context, move on to address a specific problem in the play's context or critical history to encourage the class to consider the reading from a different perspective. For example, if you were presenting on *Othello*, you might describe the tradition of reading the play as a "comedy," as discussed on pages 54-7, and then ask the class to reconsider specific passages in the play: are there any moments that are supposed to be "funny?" How so?

You should use a Google Slide document during your presentation, on which you can include relevant quotations or images. Each presentation should end with a slide listing four-to-five discussion questions. Presenters will also have an opportunity to respond to their "respondents" (see below). Each presenter will then lead a "breakout room" discussion, responding to these questions. The purpose of these presentations is to bring the assigned reading to life and "warm us up" for discussion. The goal should be to devise a memorable way to grab and retain your classmates' attention, challenging them to respond to the reading on a deeper, personal, and unexpected level. You will be evaluated on the carefulness of your reading, the creativity of your presentation, and the success with which you engage your classmates. Please sign up for a presentation date on the Google doc [here](#), by February 6.

Respondent Presentation + Leading Class Discussion ~2-4 minutes 5%

Once during the semester, you will give an "impromptu" presentation responding to one of the formal presentations on the assigned reading. Your response should be between 2-4 minutes long. As a respondent, you will need to carefully read the relevant reading well ahead of time, so that you can respond critically (but respectfully) to the presentation. When your classmates linked a specific moment from the play to a discussion from the play's reception history, did they overlook a better example? Do you read that scene differently? What other details from the night's reading are worth responding to? Feel free to coordinate with the presenters beforehand. We are not looking for "gotchas." The goal is to develop a productive conversation about the plays, showing the array of possible responses to this text. Each respondent will then facilitate a breakout room group discussion. The respondent presentation will be a "completion" grade. If

you deliver an engaged, informed, and thoughtful response to your classmates' presentation, you will receive full credit.

Diagnostic Writing Assignment

2-3 pages

5%

Write an original essay about one of the most recent adaptations that you have considered in your personal viewing or reading (e.g. a film based on a book or historical event, a video game based on a movie, etc.). Identify one of the fallacies of contemporary adaptation theory identified by Thomas Leitch and reconsider the adaptation you selected in light of Leitch's critique. Using this adaptation as an example, indicate whether you disagree or agree with this claim from Leitch's provocative essay.

Close Reading of Shakespeare

2-3 pages

10%

For this assignment, write an original essay focusing on a single, brief passage from *Othello*, comparing it to a detail from Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. By closely considering Shakespeare's technique as a dramatist, consider whether Shakespeare is faithful or unfaithful to his source – and why that matters. (Hint: you may want to revisit the chapters on “So What? Who Cares?” in Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say* from your FSEM!). While your writing may be somewhat exploratory, you should still have a strong, identifiable thesis statement supported by evidence from the text and correctly identified literary techniques. You do not need to cite any outside sources.

Here is an excerpt from a former student's paper on *The Faerie Queene* to offer a sense of what is expected:

The notion of “original sin” suggests that all humans sin, so Guyon must at some point sin like any other human being. In stanza 68, “grace” and “fall” appear at the end of their lines (605, 606), referring to Sir Guyon's possible ends. This instance of syntax predicts Guyon's end and his own fall from grace if he chooses to succumb to passions and desires excited by the “wanton Maidens” (586). In describing the blushing and laughing woman in this excerpt, Spenser uses a chiasmus: “That her blushing to her laughter gave more grace / And laughter to her blushing, as did fall” (605-6). This literary device is here used to capture the subtle manipulations of the women as they attempt to entice Guyon. Spenser notes that when the woman laughs, she adds blushing in order to show innocence, and this promotes her “Grace”; then she adds laughter to her blushing to ironically continue the playful enchantment of the knight. The rearrangement of words and flow of this chiasmus correspond to the subtle craftiness of the women as they lure Guyon toward them. They are manipulating him with their masterful design in tempting men, with the intricate blushing and laughing sequence as an example.

Note how this student identifies a specific literary device that others may have missed (the chiasmus in lines 605 and 606), analyzes its properties (it corresponds to the “wanton maidens” flirtatious irony), and then reads the detail in the context of the poem’s thematic concerns (sin, grace, etc.). The passage is specific, thoughtful, original, and well written.

Close Reading of a Shakespeare adaptation 3-5 pages 15%

Write an original essay focusing on a single, brief detail from *A Touch of Evil* or *Ex Machina*, comparing it to a moment from Shakespeare’s *Othello* or *The Tempest*. What does this moment tell us about the way Welles or Garland appropriates Shakespeare, and for what purpose? Is this a faithful appropriation of Shakespeare’s text, and by what measure? You should also cite Leitch, Lanier, Leininger, or Desmet. You should still have a strong, identifiable thesis statement supported by an effective description of the film’s details, using correctly identified film techniques. You are encouraged to use “screen grabs,” to support your discussion of Welles’s or Garland’s techniques as a director.

Paper Topic and Sources for Final paper 2-3 sentences 5%

This assignment complements the final paper assignment. Strong, effective writing demands planning and drafting. Submit a two-to-three sentence description of your anticipated paper topic, as well as the MLA citation for three potential secondary sources that you plan to use in your paper. The source you select must be a peer-reviewed or established academic source, accessed via the KSL library’s resources. This assignment will be for a “completion” grade: if you make a good faith effort to prepare a thoughtful, clear account of what you want to write about for your final project, you will receive full credit.

Annotated Bibliography 3-4 pages 10%

This assignment complements the final research assignment. A bibliography is, simply, a list of sources cited in a research project. An *annotated* bibliography is a bibliography that includes brief descriptions summarizing each source listed. For this assignment, you should list at least five different sources, cited in proper MLA format. Then, you should summarize the main thesis statement of each source, analyze the source’s argument and credibility, synthesize a relationship between this source and other sources listed in the bibliography, and explain each source’s purpose or use for your final paper. Ideally, each bibliography entry should be two paragraphs long: an “abstract” paragraph and a “discussion” paragraph. The annotated bibliography should be 1000-1300 words in length, or roughly three-to-four pages. The annotated bibliography must be properly formatted according to MLA conventions. Improperly formatted bibliographies will not receive a grade higher than C-. Examples and advice can be found at the OWL Purdue website [here](#). A (slightly out of date and underwritten) sample annotated bibliography can be found [here](#).

Paper Abstract 1 page 5%

For this assignment, prepare a formal abstract of your final research project. An abstract is a formal summary of the research completed and the projected argument of your final research project. As you know from your annotated bibliography assignment, an abstract should summarize a project's key ideas, by indicating the purpose, argument, scope, methods, and conclusions of that project. Think of it as a "promo" or advertisement for your final research paper. The Paper #3 abstract should be 300 to 500 words in length, or roughly one page. Advice on how to prepare a paper abstract, as well as examples, can be found here: <http://goo.gl/DJcJxR>

Research Presentation

3-5 minutes

5%

In addition to summarizing your proposed argument in the paper abstract, you must also make a brief presentation to the class about the project, in order to solicit feedback. This will be a valuable exercise in both rehearsing your argument for an audience, as well as a means of receiving valuable suggestions from your classmates and instructor. This assignment will be for a "completion" grade: if you make a good faith effort to present a thoughtful, clear account of your final project, you will receive full credit.

Final Research Project

10-12 pages

20%

We have only begun to consider the scope of adaptations or revisions of Shakespeare's plays, and we have barely touched on the (often quite contentious!) arguments made in the fidelity debate in adaptation studies. For your final paper, write an original analysis of an adaptation of one of Shakespeare's plays—or another literary text of comparable import or quality—drawing upon original research. You may analyze one of the texts examined in our class, either in our course readings or in the student presentations. Or you may refer to José Ramón Díaz Fernández's bibliographies for suggestions for a new film or text.

Your project must have an original thesis statement, and this thesis must be supported by close readings of the text you have chosen, its literary source, and original research. Questions you may wish to consider: what are the specific national, ethnic, historical, or political conditions that shaped this artist's reading of Shakespeare? If the adaptation changes the genre of the original text—like, say, updating one of Shakespeare's plays for a film noir or sci-fi flick—what are the conventions of that genre, and how does that impact reading the film's fidelity to its source? You should also demonstrate familiarity with the critical reception of Shakespeare's original text. In what ways does this film engage the questions posed by Shakespeare scholars? Refer to the bibliographies in the Arden Shakespeare editions, in order to get started on gauging the critical "conversation" about that text.

Class Participation

10%

Students are to complete all assignments in advance, to take notes on the assigned readings, and to be able to discuss the readings in class. To receive full credit for class participation, students must participate in class frequently, thoughtfully, and voluntarily. Pop quizzes will be assigned

on an as-needed basis. If in-class discussions are energetic, thoughtful, and demonstrate that students are completing the reading adequately, quizzes may not be necessary. As a result, it is in every student's best interest to actively participate and contribute during class time!

Class Schedule

WEEK 1: 1/31 – 2/6

MON: [Course introduction. Discuss “the fidelity debate.”](#)

WED: [Read: Thomas Leitch, “12 Fallacies of Adaptation Theory” \(Canvas\)](#)

Discuss Leitch and diagnostic essay. Discuss presentation and respondent assignments.

SAT: **Diagnostic essay due.** Sign up for presentations and respondent spots.

WEEK 2: 2/7 – 2/13

MON: [Read: Douglas Lanier, “Shakespearean Rhizomatics” \(Canvas\)](#)

WED: [Read: Christy Desmet, “Recognizing Shakespeare” \(Canvas\)](#)

WEEK 3: 2/14 – 2/20

MON: [Read: excerpt from Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi* \(pp 377-97 in Arden *Othello*\) and *Othello* act 1.](#)

Presentation 1: “Genre,” “early modern contexts,” “audience,” “scholarly debates”

WED: [Read: *Othello* acts 2-4](#)

Presentation 2: “Onstage,” “Restaged/Rewritten”

WEEK 4: 2/21 – 2/27

MON: [Read: *Othello* act 5 and Meredith Skura, “Reading *Othello*’s Skin: Contexts and Pretexts” \(Canvas\)](#)

Discuss close reading paper.

TUE: Extra credit: email first two paragraphs of your close reading paper to Dr. N by 2 p.m.

WED: [Writing workshop.](#)

SAT: **Close Reading paper due**

WEEK 5: 2/28 – 3/6

MON: [Watch: *Touch of Evil* \(1958, dir. Welles\)](#)

WED: [Read: Scott Newstok, “Touch of Shakespeare: Welles Unmoors *Othello*” \(Canvas\)](#)

WEEK 6: 3/7 – 3/13

MON: [Read: *The Tempest* Acts 1-2](#)

Presentation 3: “The Play”

- WED: Read: *The Tempest* Acts 3-4
 Presentation 4: "The Context"
- WEEK 7: 3/14 – 3/20
- MON: Read: *The Tempest* Act 5
 Presentation 5: "The Afterlife"
- WED: Read: Lorie Leininger, "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*."
 Discuss next paper.
- WEEK 8: 3/21 – 3/27
- MON: Watch: *Ex Machina* (2014, dir. Garland)
- WED: NO CLASS
- WEEK 9: 3/28 – 4/3
- SUN: Extra credit: email first two paragraphs of your adaptation paper to Dr. N by 2 p.m.
- MON: Writing workshop.
- WED: KSL workshop with Mark Eddy
- SAT: **Close reading of Shakespeare adaptation paper due.**
- WEEK 10: 4/4 – 4/10
- MON: Discuss annotated bibliographies and research topics
- WED: Read: *The Winter's Tale* Acts 1-2
 Presentation 6: "Death and art," "tragedy into romance," "childhood," "knowledge."
- SAT: **Paper topic and list of two potential sources due.**
- WEEK 11: 4/11 – 4/17
- MON: Read: *The Winter's Tale* Acts 3-4
 Presentation 7: "Pastorals," "Nature and Art," "Rules and Types," "Wonder," "Disguising," "Time"
- TUES: Extra credit: email first two entries of your annotated bibliography to Dr. N by 2 p.m.
- WED: Writing workshop.
- SAT: **Annotated Bibliography due.**
- WEEK 12: 4/18 – 4/24
- MON: Read: *The Winter's Tale* Act 5
 Presentation 8: "Making and Remaking the Play"

WED: Watch: *Waves* (2019, dir. Shultz)

SAT: **Paper Abstract due.**

WEEK 13: 4/25 – 5/1

MON: Research presentations

WED: Research presentations

WEEK 14: 5/2 – 5/8

MON: Research presentations

WED: Final paper workshop. (Bring first three paragraphs of paper to class, on Google Doc that can be viewed or edited by anybody with the link)

SAT: **Final Paper due (“Early” Submission)**

WEEK 15: 5/9 – 5/15

SAT: **Final Paper due (“Late” submission)**