

USSY 292U: Problems of Genre in Shakespeare and Film
Instructor: James Newlin **Term:** Spring 2017
Times: MWF 9:30 – 10:20 AM **Classroom:** Crawford 09A
Email: jtn33@case.edu **Website:** <http://www.jamesnewlin.com>
Office Hours: Fridays 10:45-11:45 AM, Bellflower Hall 209
or by appointment via the WRC website at: <https://case.mywconline.com/>

Course Description and Objectives:

We use categories in order to make sense of the world. But unlike, say, the science of taxonomy, the study of literary genre may say more about us than it does about the works being categorized. Why do we consider Shakespearean tragedy to be a "high" genre and romantic comedies or detective stories to be "low" genres? Who determined these hierarchies? More importantly, what do they say about what we value in culture and in society? In this course, we will consider the impact of these issues upon not only Shakespeare's age but also our own, by reading a series of his plays alongside examples of American cinema. What happens when we read one of Shakespeare's plays as an "example" of noir or screwball comedy? Would that reading demonstrate or challenge the claim that Shakespeare's art is somehow "universal?" On the other hand, would we think more highly of a "slasher" film if we were to consider it in terms of a tragedy like *Macbeth*? In answering these and related questions, we will examine our own cultural assumptions about Shakespeare's legacy, while considering the aesthetic, political, and ethical issues informing the study of genre.

Required Course Texts:

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Arden 3 edition, ed. Sandra Clark, ISBN: 9781904271413

William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Arden 3 edition, ed. Claire McEachern, ISBN: 9781472520296

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

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

Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics, ISBN: 9780198711728

Class course pack (available at CWRU bookstore).

*NB: You must use **print**, i.e. not digital/tablet/etc., editions of these texts!* A selection of relevant course-texts, as well as DVD copies of all of the assigned films, has been placed on reserve at KSL.

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 every class period – if you do *not* speak up in class, you may be marked absent.

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.

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 Make-Up 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 annotated bibliography or abstract assignments.

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, presentations, or the annotated bibliography and abstract assignments. Exceptions will be made for documented medical emergencies or ongoing medical conditions, religious observance, etc.

Special Accommodations

Students who require special accommodations for test-taking, presentations, etc., are requested to contact Educational Services for Students (470 Sears Building, 216-368-5230, essinfo@case.edu). All personal information shared with the office of disability resources will remain confidential, but the professor will be instructed on what specific accommodations the student requires.

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, stapled, numbered pages with your name, course, and section number at the top of the page. Also, unless requested specifically by the instructor, all papers *must be handed in as paper copies*. ***Electronic submissions will not be accepted.***

strong, identifiable thesis statement supported by evidence from the text and correctly identified literary techniques. You do not need to cite any outside sources.

We will examine several close readings in class, but here is an excerpt from a former student's paper on Edmund Spenser's *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 end. 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 Film

3-5 pages

15%

Write an original essay focusing on how genre conventions inform a single, brief detail from one of the films screened for our course. 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 do not need to cite any outside sources, but you are encouraged to use "screen grabs."

We will examine several close readings in class, but here is an excerpt from a former student's paper on Steve McQueen's film *Hunger*, in order to offer a sense of what is expected:

In the famous long take depicting a conversation between Bobby Sands and the priest in *Hunger*, I believe that McQueen is directing referencing the chess-sequences Bergman's *Seventh Seal*. As you can see in the screen grabs below, the placement of Sands and the priest on alternate sides of the frame closely resembles that of Antonious Block and Death in Bergman's film. Yet in referencing Bergman's film, McQueen inverts its message. Visually, the priest resembles Death garbed in black, but he argues for life. Sands, on the other hand, insists on the righteousness of intentionally dying for a cause.

The film includes numerous scenes of contemplation—the guard smoking a cigarette, the inmate playing with the fly crawling on the window's grill—but rather than encourage the audience to meditate on these images themselves, the film's invoke the audience's suspense: a riot sequence or shooting could be just another jump cut away. Perhaps modern audiences are trained by thrillers and horror films to associate long takes with tension, rather than contemplation. In any case, McQueen is inverting viewers' expectations of what a "confession" or art film should do and of

what a “thriller” or “prison film” should do. This inversion of values reveals *Hunger* to be a much more complex film than it may seem when looking at plot alone.

Note how this student identifies an instance in the film other viewers may have missed (the possible allusion to *The Seventh Seal*) and analyzes it in the context of the film as a whole (other instances where the viewer’s expectations are inverted). The passage is specific, thoughtful, and well written.

Leading Discussion

10%

Once during the semester, you will be required to lead a discussion of one of the secondary texts from the course readings. You must work with a partner. Your goal is to “warm up” the class; you will only lead discussion for twenty minutes of the class period. You should begin with a 5-10 minute presentation, complete with a multimedia component (Powerpoint, Prezi, film clips, handout, etc.), summarizing the reading from a critical perspective. That is, you should give some sense of how *you* are responding to the reading. Then, you should “open the floor” for questions and discussion: prepare four-to-five open-ended discussion questions, direct but do not dominate the class’s conversation, and moderate your classmates’ responses.

You will be evaluated on the clarity, accuracy, and thoughtfulness of your presentation and prepared questions, as well as your ability to direct the conversation, engaging most—if not all—of your classmates. During the first week of class, meet with your partner and rank the top three readings you would like to present, in order of preference. E-mail this list (along with both of your names) to Dr. N by Monday 1/23. You are encouraged to meet with Dr. N during office hours to discuss your presentation and the topics you wish you address during discussion.

Annotated Bibliography

2-3 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. The annotated bibliography should be 600-1000 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-. An example can be found here: <http://goo.gl/Tpzj72>

Paper Abstract

1 page

5%

An abstract is a formal summary of the research completed and the projected argument of your final research project. Your abstract should summarize your key ideas, while also indicating the purpose, scope, methods, and conclusions of your 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

5-7 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.

Final Research Project

10-12 pages

20%

Think back to the beginning of the semester. We examined Stanley Cavell's distinction between screwball comedies and "comedies of remarriage," a subgenre that Cavell claims has a "shared structure" with Shakespearean romance. With Cavell's reading in mind—but not necessarily as a model!—develop a research project arguing that a specific Shakespearean text is an "example" of a film genre or that a specific film is an example of a Shakespearean genre. Begin by establishing the "rules" of that genre, drawing upon original research. Then, using the skills of close-reading developed through the semester, clarify how the text you have chosen follows those rules, as well as why that matters.

For example, if you were going to argue that *Othello* is a *film noir*, you might begin with a discussion of the conventions of *noir* as defined by Paul Schrader and other film critics: the "hard boiled" narrator, narrative tension, paranoia, the "almost Freudian attachment to water," etc. Then, as you clarify the ways in which *Othello* meets those conventions, clarify how that changes our understanding of *Othello*: if *Othello* resembles a *noir*, does that mean it is a product of the sort of cultural "disillusionment" that Schrader associates with *noir*? Alternately, if we read *Touch of Evil* as an example of Shakespearean tragedy, does that mean that Orson Welles shares Shakespeare's understanding of morality, revenge, and identity?

The "Further Reading" section in Danson's *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres* and the bibliographies in the Arden series offer many suggestions for studies of Shakespeare's genres and their conventions. Barry Keith Grant's *Film Genre Reader* is an excellent place to begin examining the conventions of film genre. You are welcome to write about a film or a Shakespearean text that is not on our syllabus, with permission from your instructor.

Class Participation

15%

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!

NB: It is the student's responsibility to keep track of his or her progress in the course. Hold on to your graded assignments and use them to gauge your "current" grade in the course.

Class Schedule

WEEK 1

- W (1/18): Course introduction. Review film and literary terminology.
F (1/20): Discuss Danson “The Genres in Theory” (pp 1-29). *Highly recommended but not required reading*: Danson “The Genres Staged (pp 30-56)

WEEK 2

- M (1/23) Unit 1: *Much Ado About Nothing* and the “Comedy of Remarriage”
Discuss Andrew Tudor “Genre” (CP) and Danson “Mr William Shakespeares Comedies” (pp 57-85)
W (1/25) *Much Ado About Nothing* Acts I-II
F (1/27) *Much Ado About Nothing* Acts III-IV. Drop/Add Closes.

WEEK 3

- M (1/30) *Much Ado About Nothing* Act V
W (2/1) Leonard Tenenhouse “Shakespeare and the Scene of Reading” (CP) (student-led discussion)
R (2/2) *The Philadelphia Story* screening
F (2/3) discuss *Philadelphia Story*. **Diagnostic writing assignments due.**

WEEK 4

- M (2/6) Stanley Cavell “The Thought of Movies” (CP) (student-led discussion)
W (2/8) David Shumay “Screwball Comedies: Constructive Romance, Mystifying Marriage” (CP) (student-led discussion)
F (2/10) Writing instruction: writing a close-reading

WEEK 5

- Unit 2: *Othello* and *Film Noir*
M (2/13) Danson “Tragedy” (pp 113-141)
W (2/15) *Othello* Acts I-II
F (2/17) *Othello* Acts III-IV

WEEK 6

- M (2/20) *Othello* Act V
W (2/22) Stephen Orgel “*Othello* and the End of Comedy” (CP) (student-led discussion)
R (2/23) *Touch of Evil* screening
F (2/24) Discuss *Touch of Evil*

WEEK 7

- M (2/27) Paul Schrader “Notes on Film Noir” and Robert Warshaw “Gangster as Tragic Hero” (CP) (student-led discussion)
W (3/1) Scott Newstok “Touch of Shakespeare: Welles Unmoors *Othello*” (CP)
F (3/3) Writing instruction: conducting research. **Close reading of Shakespeare due.**

WEEK 8

- Unit 3: *Macbeth* and the “Slasher Film”
M (3/6) *Macbeth* Acts I-II
W (3/8) *Macbeth* Acts III-IV
F (3/10) *Macbeth* Act V

WEEK 9 (3/13 – 17)
SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10

- M (3/20) Danson “History” (pp 86-112), finish discussing *Macbeth*
W (3/22) Stephen Orgel “*Macbeth* and the Antic Round” (CP) (student-led discussion)
R (3/23) Screening: *Psycho*
F (3/24) Discuss *Psycho*.

WEEK 11

- M (3/27) Robin Wood, “An Introduction to the American Horror Film” (CP) (student-led discussion)
W (3/29) Carol Clover “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film” (CP) (student-led discussion)
F (3/31) Writing Instruction: Preparing an annotated bibliography and paper abstract.
Close reading of a film due. Upper-class Withdrawal or P/NP deadline.

WEEK 12

- Unit 4: *The Winter’s Tale* and the Post-Modern Film
M (4/3) *Winter’s Tale* Act I, Arden intro pp. 10-24, 48-53, 58-69
W (4/5) *Winter’s Tale* Act II-III
F (4/7) *Winter’s Tale* Act IV-V

WEEK 13

- M (4/10) Stanley Cavell “Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: Reading *The Winter’s Tale*” (CP) (student-led discussion)
W (4/12) Continue discussing Cavell and *Winter’s Tale*. Discuss final projects.
R (4/13) Screening: *Something Wild*
F (4/14) Discuss *Something Wild*. **Annotated Bibliography due.**

WEEK 14

- M (4/17) Catherine Constable “Postmodernism and Film” (CP) (student-led discussion)
W (4/19) Fredric Jameson “Nostalgia for the Present” (CP) (student-led discussion)
F (4/21) Wrap-up *Winter’s Tale* and post-modernism. Writing instruction: workshop paper abstracts. Discuss research projects.

WEEK 15

- M (4/24) Research presentations and conferences. **Paper Abstract due.**
W (4/26) Research presentations and conferences.
F (4/28) Research presentations and conferences.

WEEK 16

- M (5/1) **Final Paper due.** First-year Students’ Withdrawal or P/NP deadline. Party!