

**UNIVERSIDAD DE COSTA RICA  
SISTEMA DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO  
PROGRAMA DE MAESTRÍA EN LITERATURA INGLESA  
Prof: M. L. Joe Montenegro Bonilla**

**SP-9220 LITERATURE AND THE LANGUAGE OF NARRATIVE FILM**

**I. Course Description**

This course intends to lead graduate English literature students into the study of film as a narrative genre and how its alliances with and divergences from literature inform and transform the ways in which it communicates with its audience.

Film and literature are in constant interrelationship, borrowing and lending from one another, exploring and getting inspired by the creative possibilities of the other. However, each speaks a very particular and well-defined language, and such specificity accounts for the richness that both forms of art contribute to the interpretive experience. Aside from the possible translations that literature may suffer at the hands of cinema and the inevitable expectations that the former often imposes on the latter, each art offers a unique way of perceiving and communicating realities, both cultural and individual, inasmuch as it wields its own arsenal of tools and strategies for signification.

This course aims to engage students in the study of film linguistics as a theoretical platform from which to analyze how cinema produces meaning. Viewed as a language and as a system of signification, film is approached, both structurally and comparatively in relation to literature, in order to establish effective critical practices. Through the extensive and intensive reading of both literary and cinematic texts, an understanding of the aesthetics of both forms of art is gradually built.

**II. General Objective**

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

Analyze literature and film in terms of their aesthetic and critical relationship as two separate signifying systems

**III. Specific Objectives**

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- A.** Compare and contrast the languages of literature and film as they strive to narrate stories

- B. Evaluate the processes and practices of translation, adaptation and intertextuality that take place between specific films and literary works in English
- C. Analyze various films and literary works in English as cultural and intellectual products, through a careful examination of their distinctive matters of expression
- D. Theorize about the most effective and/or significant ways in which film and literature communicate and signify

#### **IV. Contents**

- The relationship between film and literature
- The language of film
- Semiotics and film linguistics
- Narratology in film and in literature
- Adaptation, translation, and intertextuality
- The screenplay
- The issue of genre in film and literature
- Extra-cinematic codes

#### **V. Methodology**

Active learning strategies are at the center of the methodology of the course. Students will be responsible for actively approaching the material, completing all the reading assignments, and watching the films that have been selected or suggested for the course. A flipped-classroom model will be employed since students will be preparing in this way for their synchronous sessions, during which discussions and other practical activities are to take place. Post-class activities like one-to-one sessions and feedback reports will also be implemented. Higher-order cognitive skills are prioritized as the focus of the learning process. The professor will organize and guide all activities and will provide constant criticism and advice upon students' weekly work.

Both extensive and intensive reading of narrative literary and cinematic texts will be essential to explore the relationship between literature and film. Novels, novellas, short stories, dramatic plays, full-length feature films, short films, and film scenes and clips will be the primary recipients of criticism and interpretation. Screenplays might also be used as the process of adaptation is studied. The theoretical frameworks for critical analysis will be mainly introduced by the professor, but further exploration of theory by the students will be necessary for developing individual work.

Finally, the course employs a 100% virtual mode, which implies that no *in situ* sessions will be held. Materials, assignments, and most activities will be made available or carried out via *Mediación Virtual*, although other virtual environments may also be used. 60% of classwork be realized synchronously during virtual sessions held on the *Zoom* platform. During these sessions, active participation and full engagement on the part of the students will be expected, so they will be required to always maintain their webcams on.

## VI. Evaluation

A. Classwork	25%
B. Film-watching journal	20%
C. Group seminar presentation	20%
D. Midterm paper	15%
E. Final paper	20%

**A. Classwork (25%):** All tasks that are assigned as part of the course work will be granted a percentage of the final grade upon submission. The relative value of each will depend on the number of activities of this type that are carried out throughout the course.

**B. Film-watching journal (20%):** Throughout the semester, every student will record their movie-watching activity by entering in a personal journal his/her critical takes on whatever narrative films or TV shows they have recently watched. By the end of the semester, the journal must include at least ten entries about various film texts.

**C. Group seminar presentation (20%):** In small groups, students will analyze and evaluate the dialogic relationships between a narrative literary text and a film of their choice. They will share their views and interpretations orally with the rest of the class during a short virtual seminar that will be held at the appropriate time.

**D. Critical papers (35%):** Individually, students will write two short papers (4 to 6 pages) during the semester. A midterm paper (15%) must analyze the language of a narrative film text and interpret its theme accordingly, or else it must compare the narrative languages and significations of a literary and a cinematic text. The final paper (20%), however, must theorize about the ways in which film and literature communicate meaning. Based upon a careful exploration of film theory, narratology, and other theoretical standpoints, and through the sample analyses of various literary and cinematic texts, the final paper should ultimately propose a way to look at the relationship between film and literature and their processes of signification.

## VII. Bibliography (and Filmography)

*A Streetcar Named Desire*. Directed by Elia Kazan, performances by Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, and Kim Hunter, Warner Bros., 1951.

Andrew, Dudley. *Concepts in Film Theory*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

*Big Fish*. Directed by Tim Burton, performances by Ewan McGregor, Billy Crudup, Albert Finney, Jessica Lange, and Helena Bonham Carter, Columbia Pictures, 2003.

*Black Swan*. Directed by Darren Aronofsky, performances by Natalie Portman, Vincent Cassel, and Mila Kunis, and Winona Ryder, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2010.

*Blue Jasmine*. Directed by Woody Allen, performances by Cate Blanchett, Alec Baldwin, Sally Hawkins, and Peter Sarsgaard, Focus Features International, 2013.

Braudy, Leo, and Marshall Cohen, editors. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 5th ed., Oxford University Press, 1999.

Butler, Andrew. *Film Studies*. E-book, Pocket Essentials, 2005.

Corrigan, Timothy. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*. Prentice Hall, 1999.

Cook, David A. *A History of Narrative Film*. 5th ed., W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2016.

Doughty, Ruth, and Christine Etherington-Wright. *Understanding Film Theory*. 2nd ed., Bloomsbury, 2017.

Elsaesser, Thomas, and Malte Hagener. *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2015.

Edgar-Hunt, Robert, et al. *The Language of Film*. E-book, Ava Publishing, 2010.

*Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, performances by Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Jamie Lee Curtis, and Ke Huy Quan, A24, 2022.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button." *Tales of the Jazz Age*. 1922. Macmillan Collectors' Library, 2016.

Hollows, Joanne, et al., editors. *The Film Studies Reader*. London, Arnold, 2000.

Montenegro-Bonilla, Joe. "Film and Literature: A History of Sibling Rivalry." *Letras*, vol. 1, no. 55, 2014, pp. 129-145.

*Revolutionary Road*. Directed by Sam Mendes, performances by Kate Winslet, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Kathy Bates, DreamWorks Pictures, 2008.

Stam, Robert. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. 2000. Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Directed by David Fincher, performances by Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Tilda Swinton, and Julia Ormond, Warner Bros., 2008.

Villarejo, Amy. *Film Studies: The Basics*. E-book, Routledge, 2007.

Wallace, Daniel. *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*. 1998. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2012.

Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. 1947. New Directions, 2004.

### VIII. Tentative chronogram

Week	Date	Topic	Evaluation	Literary and film texts
1		Introduction to the course		
2		Film and literature		
3		Film and literature		📖 <i>Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions</i> 🎬 <i>Big Fish</i>
4		The language of film		
5		Semiotics and film linguistics		🎬 <i>Revolutionary Road</i>
6		Adaptation, translation, and intertextuality	Group seminar	📖 <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> 🎬 <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>
7		Adaptation, translation, and intertextuality	Group seminar	🎬 <i>Blue Jasmine</i>
8			Midterm paper	
9		Narratology in film and in literature		📖 "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"
10		Narratology in film and in literature	Group seminar	🎬 <i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>
11		The screenplay		
12		The issue of genre in film and literature	Group seminar	🎬 <i>Black Swan</i>
13		The issue of genre in film and literature		🎬 <i>Everything Everywhere All at Once</i>

14		Extra-cinematic codes		
15			<i>Journal (final version)</i>	
16			<i>Final paper</i>	

\*Shaded rows correspond to asynchronous sessions.