

ENGL 281, SPECIAL TOPICS: SCRIPTWRITING

Department of English and Comparative Literature

San José State University, Spring 2021

Instructor:	Dr. Matthew Spangler
Office location:	HGH 206
Telephone:	408-924-1373
Email:	matthew.spangler@sjsu.edu
Office hours:	Wednesdays 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm
Class days/time:	Wednesdays 4:00 pm to 6:45 pm
Classroom:	Online

Course Description

The adaptation of novels, short stories, and historical texts is one of the most popular forms of scriptwriting. **In the last ten years, over half the plays on London's West End and on Broadway were adaptations of source texts.** Examples include: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Kite Runner*, *Matilda*, *War Horse*, 1984, *Wolf Hall*, *The Woman in Black*, *Les Misérables*, *Wicked*, and *Hamilton*, among many others. Some adaptations are screen-to-stage, like *The Twilight Zone* or *Network*, but stage adaptations of literature, the primary focus in this course, have a long history in Western theatre. And adaptation for screen is probably *even more* ubiquitous: *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Great Gatsby*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *The Double*, *Enemy*, *Of Mice and Men*, 1984, *Fight Club*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and the list goes on and on.

This scriptwriting seminar will focus on the adaptation of literary texts for the stage and screen. We will also consider three examples of adaptation from historical events. You will read and view a wide range of adaptations including Simon Stephen's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (from the novel by Mark Haddon), Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon*, Larry McMurtry's *Brokeback Mountain* (from the short story by Annie Proulx), Steph Green's *The New Boy* (from the short story by Roddy Doyle), Halsted Welles's Hitchcock Presents "O Youth and Beauty!" (from the short story by John Chever), and my own adaptations of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (London West End; San Francisco Theatre Critics Circle Award for Best Original Script and Best Overall Production) *Albatross* (based on "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," off-Broadway; recipient of Boston's Elliot Norton Award for Best Production), and *Operation Ajax*, about the CIA coup in Iran. You will also chose one work to study on your own.

You can approach this course either as a creative writing seminar, in which you will write your own adaptation of a text; or you can approach the course as an analytical study of adaptation, in which you will write a paper examining an aspect of adaptation practice and / or theory.

MFA Creative Writing Learning Objectives

1. Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Students will demonstrate high-level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.

4. Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline; d) write under time constraints.
6. Students will demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

MA English and Comparative Literature Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
2. Students will demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research.
3. Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
4. Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion, b) formulate and defend original arguments, c) employ effectively the language of their discipline and d) write under time constraints.
5. Students will demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate an understanding of certain literary theories as they apply to adaptation.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of scriptwriting practices as they apply to adaptation.
3. Write an original stage or film adaptation based on source material (or CLO #4).
4. Write an analytical paper examining an aspect of adaptation theory and / or practice (or CLO #3).

Required Texts

- 1) Either Vincent Murphy's *Page to Stage: The Craft of Adaptation* [for those who want to create their own original adaptation in this course]
- 2) Or Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* [for those who would like to make this course an analytical study of adaptation]
- 3) Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*
- 4) Matthew Spangler's *Kite Runner*
- 5) Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- 6) Simon Stephens's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- 7) Peter Morgan's *Frost Nixon*
- 8) Matthew Spangler's *Albatross* -- this one is a brand new publication and you can get it here: <https://www.stagerights.com/allshows/albatross/>
- 9) Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*
- 10) Mary Manning and Sinead O'Brien's *Striking Back*

These books are available at the campus bookstore. They are also available on-line and in audio formats.

Other readings will include articles online and online viewings of films and videos.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Detailed information about each assignment will be available on the class Canvas site.

10 Discussions on the Reading on Canvas (50 points each)	500 points
Final Script or Paper	300 points
Final Presentation	100 points
(This presentation counts as the 4 th unit engagement activity for this course).	
Participation	100 points
(includes Zoom meetings and any non-graded, but date dependent submissions on Canvas)	
TOTAL:	1,000 points

Grading Scale

Point Range	Letter Grade
930-1000 points	A
900-929 points	A-
880-899 points	B+
830-879 points	B
800-829 points	B-
780-799 points	C+
730-779 points	C
700-729 points	C-
680-699 points	D+
630-679 points	D
600-629 points	D-
< 600 points	F

Policy on Participation and Late Assignments

Generally, I will not accept late papers or performances. But if you know you are going to be late with an assignment, let's talk.

Workload in a 4-Unit Course

This is a 4-unit course, so you can expect to spend around 12 hours per week doing the assigned reading, writing, participating in online Canvas activities, and attending our weekly Zoom meeting. Please note the length of the readings (there are three novels to be read for this course) and the running time of the videos and films, so you can budget your time appropriately. **I urge you to read ahead and pace yourself.**

Academic integrity

You commitment as a student to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include your assignment or any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Integrity Policy S07-2 requires approval of instructors.

Plagiarism is defined as copying the language, phrasing, structure, or specific ideas of others and presenting any of these as one's own original work. It includes buying papers, having someone else write your papers, and improper citation and use of sources. When you present the words or ideas of another (either published or unpublished) in your writing, you must fully acknowledge your sources. Plagiarism is considered a violation of

academic integrity whenever it occurs in written work, including drafts and homework, as well as for formal and final papers. I adhere strictly to all university policies regarding academic dishonest and expect students to do the same. An instance of academic misconduct will likely result in a failing grade for the course. To summarize, plagiarism is the following:

- 1) Using another writer's WORDS and presenting them as if they are your own. As a rule of thumb, if you use three or more words in a row from another source, you need to put quote marks around those words and attribute them to the original writer.
- 2) Using another writer's SENTENCE STRUCTURE and presenting it as if it is your own. Simply inserting synonyms in the place of another writer's words is still plagiarism.
- 3) Failing to attribute a source so that it looks like the particular idea is your own, when in fact, you got it from another source.
- 4) And of course, using another person's paper is plagiarism.

Syllabus Information

University Policies: the link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc.

<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>

Laptop and Phone Policy

You may not use laptops or cell phones in the classroom, unless a) the reading for that week happens to have been distributed in electronic format, or b) you have a documented reason for taking notes on your laptop. Otherwise, please take notes with a pen/pencil and paper.

If you would like to read more about this policy and why I have it, please read this article:

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/>

Or this, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking" from the journal *Psychological Science*.

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159>

Professional Organizations devoted to Theatre (mainly to practice)

Dramatists Guild of America

The professional association of playwrights, composers and lyricists

<http://www.dramatistsguild.com/>

Theatre Bay Area

<http://www.theatrebayarea.org/index.jsp;jsessionid=AF68664547D947A05B0EF23D0A0D85EE?hi=1>

Theatre Communications Group

The national organization for the not-for-profit American theatre. TCG publishes the monthly American Theatre magazine.

<http://www.tcg.org/>

Writers Guild of America, West

Official site of the Writers Guild of America, west. The WGAw is the union representing writers in the motion picture, broadcast, cable and new media industries.

<http://www.wga.org/>

Professional Organizations (devoted to theatre scholarship and practice)

Performance Studies International

PSi is a professional association founded in 1997 to promote communication and exchange between scholars and practitioners working in the field of performance.

<http://psi-web.org/>

Performance Studies Division of the National Communication Association

The purpose of the Performance Studies Division of the National Communication Association is to promote study, criticism, research, teaching, public awareness, and application of the artistic, humanistic, and cultural principles of performance.

<http://www.cas.usf.edu/communication/perfdiv/index.htm>

Association for Theatre in Higher Education

The Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) is a comprehensive non-profit professional membership organization. Founded in 1986, ATHE serves the interests of its diverse individual and organizational members, including college and university theatre departments and administrators, educators, graduate students, and theatre practitioners.

<http://www.athe.org/>

Resources for Scriptwriters

Playwrights' Foundation

Excellent set of links for playwrights.

<http://www.playwrightsfoundation.org/links.shtml>

Dramatists Sourcebook

The Dramatists Sourcebook is the annual bible of opportunities for American playwrights. This is how to figure out what to do with your play after you've written it.

<http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/sourcebook.html>

Hollywood Creative Directory

Up-to-date, comprehensive info on executives in the film and television industry

<http://www.hcdonline.com/>

U.S. Copyright Information

<http://www.copyright.gov/>

Script Development

<http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/development.html#sr>

Free Scriptwriting Software: Celtx

<http://celtx.com/download.html>

ENGL 281, SPECIAL TOPICS: SCRIPTWRITING, Spring 2021 Class Schedule

Please note:

This syllabus may change as the needs of our class change.

Week	Description	Assignments/Reading
Week 1 February 3	Foundations of adaptation scriptwriting and theory	<p>Read the following:</p> <p>(1) Linda Hutcheon's <i>A Theory of Adaptation</i> Preface to first and second editions; pages 1 to 113.</p> <p>(2) OR Vincent Murphy's <i>Page to stage: The Craft of Adaptation</i> pages 1 – 144.</p> <p>DUE: Canvas Discussion #1 by 4:00 pm February 3</p>
Week 2 February 10	Adapting short stories for short film: Roddy Doyle and John Cheever	<p>Read the following:</p> <p>(1) Roddy Doyle's "The New Boy" (pdf)</p> <p>(2) John Cheever's "O Youth and Beauty" (pdf)</p> <p>(3) Matthew Spangler's "<i>Playboy: A New Version in Adaptation Theory and Practice</i>" (pdf)</p> <p>(4) Either Hutcheon pages 113-177 OR Murphy pages 123 – 143 and 160 – 175.</p> <p>View the following:</p> <p>(5) <i>The New Boy</i> (11 min.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdeioVndUhs</p> <p>(6) <i>O Youth and Beauty</i> (30 min.) https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5argaa</p> <p>(7) DUE: Canvas Discussion #2 by 4:00 pm February 10</p>
Week 3 February 17	Adapting a short story for feature length film: Annie Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain"	<p>Read the following:</p> <p>(1) Annie Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain" https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/10/13/brokeback-mountain</p> <p>View the following:</p> <p>(2) <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> (film) (2 hr. 14 min.)</p> <p>(3) DUE: Canvas Discussion #3 by 4:00 pm February 17</p>

Week	Description	Assignments/Reading
Week 4 February 24	Adapting a novel for the stage #1: <i>The Kite Runner</i>	Read the following: (1) Khaled Hosseini's <i>The Kite Runner</i> (2) Matthew Spangler's <i>The Kite Runner</i> (3) DUE: Canvas Discussion #4 by 4:00 pm February 24
Week 5 March 3	Adapting poetry for the stage: "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"	Read the following: (1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834 (2) Matthew Spangler's <i>Albatross</i> View the following: (3) <i>The Kite Runner</i> (film) (2 hours) (4) DUE: Canvas Discussion #5 by 4:00 pm March 3
Week 6 March 10	Adapting non-fiction for theatre and film: <i>Striking Back</i> and <i>Frost Nixon</i> Mary Manning (author) and Sinead O'Brien (author) and Kellie Hughes (director) will join us from Dublin, Ireland.	(1) <i>Striking Back</i> by Mary Manning and Sinead O'Brien (2) Read: "How a 21 Year Old Dunnes Stores Worker Stood Up Against Apartheid" https://www.thejournal.ie/dunnes-stores-strike-8-3690382-Nov2017/ (3) View <i>Striking Back</i> Staged Reading at the Dublin Theatre Festival 2020 (45 min) Link to come TBA (4) Read Peter Morgan's <i>Frost Nixon</i> and/or view the film (2 hours) (5) <i>Frost Nixon</i> May Stretch the Truth, But Isn't that Just Art Imitating Life" https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/sep/03/forst-nixon-reel-history-ron-howard (6) DUE: Canvas Discussion #6 by 4:00 pm March 10
Week 7 March 17	The Politics of Adaptation: Adapting James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Dublin, Ireland	(1) Read: Spangler's "Winds of Change: Immigration, Bloomsday, and 'Aeolus' in Dublin Street Theatre." <i>The James Joyce Quarterly</i> 45.1 (Fall 2007): 47-68.

Week	Description	Assignments/Reading
		(2) Make appointment to meet with me between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm, or 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm to discuss final projects. (3) DUE: Canvas Discussion #7 by 9:00 pm March 17
Week 8 March 24	Adapting a novel for the stage #2: <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i>	Read the following: (1) Mark Haddon's <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> (2) Simon Stephens's <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> (3) DUE: Canvas Discussion #8 by 4:00 pm March 24
Week 9 March 31	Spring Break (no class)	Spring Break (no class)
Week 10 April 7	Source text to film – your choice	(1) Read a text and see the film adaptation from the list provided (2) DUE: Canvas Discussion #9 by 4:00 pm April 7
Week 11 April 14	Adapting historical and personal events #2: <i>Operation Ajax</i> and <i>Our Friend</i> / “The Friend”	Read and View the Following: (1) NPR Throughline, “How the CIA Overthrew Iran’s Democracy in 4 Days” (37 min) https://www.npr.org/2019/01/31/690363402/how-the-cia-overthrew-irans-democracy-in-four-days (2) Farshad Farahat and Matthew Spangler’s <i>Operation Ajax</i> (3) Matthew Teague’s “The Friend” https://www.esquire.com/lifestyle/a34905/matthew-teague-wife-cancer-essay/
Week 12 April 21	Collaboration in adaptation and theatre: <i>The Story of Zahra</i> Optional 9:00 am meeting with Raeda Ghazaleh (author and director) and Yasmin Sameer (actor) From East Jerusalem, West Bank / Israel	Read and View the Following: (1) Thames TV, “The Civil War in Beirut” (26 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NWwuEIsiZk (2) Interview Raeda Ghazaleh and Yasmin Sameer (20 min) Link to come TBA (3) <i>The Story of Zahra</i> by Raeda Ghazaleh and

Week	Description	Assignments/Reading
		<p>Matthew Spangler</p> <p>(4) View <i>Our Friend</i> (film) (2 hr. 4 min)</p> <p>(5) Read: “When Some Critics Reject the Film That’s About Your Life,” <i>New York Times</i> https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/movies/our-friend-matthew-teague.html</p> <p>(6) Read: “<i>Our Friend</i> Review: Feel-Good Film Betrays Award-Winning Essay’s Wrenching Portrait of Death,” <i>Variety</i> https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/the-friend-review-1203326629/</p>
<p>Week 13 April 28</p>	<p>Adapting a novel for the stage #3: <i>The Beekeeper of Aleppo</i></p> <p>Optional 9:00 am meeting with Ammar Haj Ahmad (actor and author) and Christy Lefteri (author)</p> <p>From London, UK</p>	<p>Read and View the Following:</p> <p>(1) Read Christy Lefteri’s <i>The Beekeeper of Aleppo</i></p> <p>(2) View Vox “Syria’s War, Who is Fighting and Why” (2017) (6 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFpanWNgfQY</p> <p>(3) View Interview with Ammar Haj Ahmad and Christy Lefteri (20 min)</p> <p>Link to come TBA</p> <p>Optional resources:</p> <p>(4) Khaled Hosseini’s “Sea Prayer” (7 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKBNEEY-c3s</p> <p>(5) Vice on HBO, “This is What Life is Like inside Assad’s Syria” (23 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESWCzPy7SgQ&t=439s</p> <p>(6) DUE: Canvas Discussion #10 by 4:00 pm April 28</p>
<p>Week 14 May 5</p>	<p>Short Paper or a Scene from your Script</p>	<p>DUE: 5 pages of your final paper, or a scene from your adaptation.</p>
<p>Week 15 May 12</p>	<p>Review</p>	<p>Review the course, discuss final papers and scripts</p>
<p>Week 16 May 19</p>	<p>Final Papers and Scripts and Presentations</p>	<p>DUE: 5-7 minute oral presentation of your final paper or script.</p>

Week	Description	Assignments/Reading
5:15 pm to 7:30 pm		DUE: Final Papers and Scripts