

EN3324 Great Adaptations
Spring 2018
Stokes S476, 3-4:15

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Stokes S487, 2-3702
Office hours; T 1-3
W 10:30-12

How does a writer make a new story out of an old story? And why? Shakespeare did it, and James Joyce, and the author of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*: TV and film studios do it constantly. Adaptations, versions, retellings from a different angle or flavor: what do we learn from watching and thinking about this process, learn about the story, the history of story, the role of media platforms? About ourselves as 'consumers' of story? And 'makers' of story? This one-credit course will center on Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) and then move to two 1990's adaptations, Peter Carey's 'Neo-Victorian' novel *Jack Maggs* (1997), which features a version of Dickens himself as a character, and Alfonso Cuarón's Americanized 1998 film of Dickens's novel, which echoes both its source – and the American (anti)hero Huckleberry Finn. We'll familiarize ourselves generally with Dickens's biography and read a few pieces of his journalism to see what the author "adapts" and transforms in his novels, and what license this gives to other "adapting" artists.

As a seminar, this course will foreground discussion. Writing: some in-class writing to facilitate discussion, two short reflection papers, two take-home essay questions as a final exam. Grading: 30% participation, 40% papers, final essays 30%

Schedule of readings, writing, discussion

Wed. Jan 17: Introduction. Processes and examples of "adaptation" from the class; changing meanings of "expectations." Dickens's story and storytelling: "The Blacking Factory" (pdf to be emailed for advance reading and in-class discussion) and three short sketches from Dickens the journalist (handed out/discussed in class).

Wed. Jan. 24: Discussing opening movements in *Great Expectations*: please read up through chapter 19, 'The End of the First Stage of Pip's Expectations.' Think about Mrs. Joe and Pip, Miss Havisham and Estella. **Sign up for get-acquainted conferences next week.**

Wed. Jan. 31: *Great Expectations*; country boy in the city: reading/discussing up through chapter 39, the second 'stage.' Think about Jaggers and Wemmick.

Wed. Feb. 7: *Great Expectations*; fires and waters; reading/discussing up through chapter 54. Think about Compeyson and Orlick. **Handout on writing first paper.**

Wed. Feb 14: Ending movements in *Great Expectations*, chapters 55-59, including the two endings. Discussing novel: **First paper due in class; Handouts given for the next class.**

Feb. 21: Transition to adaptations: 'Maggsmen,' 'Mesmerism' and Mary. Discussing the handouts and the first 54 pages of Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*: 'adapting' Dickens.

Feb. 28: *Jack Maggs* up through p. 179, 'adapting' Estella, and Pip.

Spring break

Mar. 14: Discussing *Jack Maggs* up through p. 304: women bearing children, men writing.

Mar 21: Finish *Jack Maggs*, **second paper due in class.**

Mar. 28: revisiting Estella: please watch the film 'A Suitable Woman' for discussion.

Apr 4: Discussing Alfonso Cuarón's film "Great Expectations." 'Adapting' to America.

Apr. 11: See Cuarón's film again for continuing discussion. Also, I will hand out two essay questions as a final assignment: **essays to be turned in by the next Wednesday, April 18.** (Some scope for independent work here: discuss with me any special 'adaptation' work you wish to write on as a substitute for the second exam question and that will be possible.)

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Look again at <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity> for the university's policy on plagiarism, defined as "the act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person or source and presenting them as one's own". Read with attention, think your own thoughts, write your own reflections. Visit my office hours for any help you'd like or aspects of the readings you want to continue to discuss.

Brief timeline for Dickens and *Great Expectations*:

1812: Dickens born in Portsmouth, father a clerk in the Naval Pay Office.

1824: In London, father imprisoned for debt, Charles sent to work in the Blacking Factory.

1829-34: Dickens a free-lance reporter on politics and city scenes, "Sketches by Boz."

1836: marries Catherine Hogarth (10 children); sister Mary lives with them, Mary dies 1837.

1838: *Oliver Twist* (his second novel)

1842: after trip to America publishes somewhat critical travel narrative, *American Notes*.

1843: *A Christmas Carol*; the first of a series of regular Christmas themes short fictions

1850: eighth novel, *David Copperfield*, incorporates several autobiographical elements.

1857-58: eleventh novel, *Little Dorrit*, features imprisoned protagonist: 45 year old Dickens develops passion for 18 year old actress Ellen Ternan, begins secret lifelong affair, separates publically/legally from his wife; also begins a lifelong and lucrative habit of giving public readings of his works.

1860-61: publishes his 13th novel, *Great Expectations*, first as serial in his own magazine, then as book.

1865: *Our Mutual Friend*, a male protagonist suffers a destructive unreciprocated passion.

1868-70: health worsens during a series of 75 public readings, dies of a stroke in the middle of serializing his fifteenth novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

"Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication, And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying." Linda Hitcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006)

"Maybe Dickens would indeed be producing a web sitcom or pilot for HBO or Showtime if he were 25 years old today, but then *he would not be Charles Dickens*, and that's the point...The fear (of degradation) may be that the film/TV adaptation, or the contemporary fictional rewriting, will just become a kind of bad copy. And the still broader concern, I suspect, is that we ourselves have more generally *become* that bad copy – that the 21st century and its media are orphaned, cut off from a past associated with print culture, liberal individualism, and literacy. That *we* are degraded, debased, and illiterate..." Ivan Kreikamp, "Television for Victorianists" (2013).