

Level: graduate seminar  
Focus: theory  
System: semester  
Class size: 5-10

## Adaptation and Dramaturgy

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**Office Hours:** TBD

In the words of Linda Hutcheon, one of the primary theorists we will be reading in this course, “Adaptation has run amok.”<sup>1</sup> Along with the scores, if not hundreds, of adaptations she cites in her work, she includes fascinating statistics about the acclaim that adaptations garner in our culture: 85% of Oscar-winning Best Pictures and 95% of all Emmy-winning miniseries.<sup>2</sup> Nor is this phenomenon anything new—re-tellings of preexisting stories have dominated stages as far back as the ancient theaters of Greece and India, to name just two. Many of the most famous works of playwrights we study are based on other plays, and the colonial and postcolonial encounters that continue to shape our modern world have birthed thousands of hybrid adaptations that build on preexisting stories from two or more cultures.

Given the ubiquity of this phenomenon, the study of adaptation demands attention from theater scholars. In this course, we will examine branches of literary and performance theory that can help us conceptualize what an adaptation is, how it functions, and what it tells us about theater, storytelling, and society. Specifically, we will approach adaptation through the lens of dramaturgy. Because theorizing adaptation as a phenomenon has largely been considered the purview of literary scholars (and to some extent film scholars, as well), much of the work on adaptation has been done in the context of literary theory. Dramaturgy, the most literary of theatrical pursuits, offers us a way to form connections between this existing body of scholarship and our own situated knowledges as scholars of theater and performance. In your papers and throughout the course, I encourage you to look for other ways to link your own theoretical background to the texts we study, as we try to create a performance studies dialogue around a subject that has so long been dominated by other fields.

Alongside our theoretical readings, we will also focus on a practical case study of the transhistorical phenomenon of adaptation: the story of Medea. Figured as the consummate 'Other' from her first appearance in print, Medea offers a unique and interesting look at the social functions of adaptation as her story is figured and re-figured over the course of centuries. This story will allow us to look at a single source myth within wildly different contexts, conceptualized by wildly different authors, and figured for wildly different audiences. Her status as 'Other,' and the resulting adaptations she engenders, will allow us to theorize both social

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Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York: Routledge (2006), xi.

Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, 4.

change and social continuity through a variety of different scholarly lenses (feminist, postcolonial, and queer, to name a few). Our discussions of the Medea adaptations will take place in the context of the theoretical books we read, as each week pairs a theoretical reading with one adaptation of Medea. By the end of the course, we should (hopefully) be able to form our own class discourse around theatrical adaptation, using Medea as our collective case study.

### **Course Requirements:**

1 class instruction (15%)

1 syllabus relating to dramaturgy and/or adaptation (15%)

1 conference paper (20%)

1 research paper on a topic relating to dramaturgy and/or adaptation (50%)

Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory.

**Class Instruction:** Each student will serve as the instructor for one of the class sessions during the semester. This should be seen as an exercise in teaching, and students are encouraged to re-format and instruct the class however they wish. Try to tailor your teaching to the kind of position you hope to have someday—Hoping to teach at an R1? Do a lecture with visuals. Want to wind up teaching movement theater? Have us do an exercise that illuminates the material. Keep in mind, however, that all class instructions should be helpful to your peers at a graduate level, regardless of the format you adopt.

**Syllabus (due week 8):** Create a syllabus for a course you might like to teach someday, relating to the content of this class. Be sure to include:

- grade level (intro, upper division, or grad)
- course concept/intro
- required reading list (and recommended reading list if applicable)
- means of assessment
- weekly schedule

**Conference Paper (due week 11 or 12):** During class for weeks 11 and 12, we will be holding a mock mini-conference on dramaturgy and adaptation. Each student will write a short paper (7-10 pages) to be delivered aloud as a conference presentation. Students are strongly encouraged to use this short paper to work through initial conceptualizations of their final research papers.

**Final Paper (1<sup>st</sup> draft due week 14, final draft due finals week):** A research paper on a topic of your choice relating to the course. This paper should be written as a potential journal article. Consequently, you will be asked to choose a first-choice journal to submit your essay to, and to format your paper in accordance with that journal's submission guidelines (including limitations on page numbers). Two weeks before the deadline, we will do an in-class peer review workshop on the first drafts of these papers, so that what you turn in to me during finals week will already be a polished and formatted second draft.

## **Required Reading:**

Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Jonas, Susan, Geoff Proehl and Michael Lupu, eds. *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1997.

Kennedy, Dennis. *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Proehl, Geoff. *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey*. Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008.

Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

## **Course Reader:**

Anouilh, Jean. *Medea*, Luce and Arthur Klein, trans. In *Jean Anouilh...Plays*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1958. 57-87.

Corneille, Pierre. *Médée: tragédie*. Genève: Droz, 1978.

Eagleton, Terry. "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory." In *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 47-78.

Euripides. *Medea*, Ruby Blondell, trans. In *Women on the Edge: Four Plays By Euripides*, Ruby Blondell, Mary-Kay Gamel, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and Bella Zweig, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 1999. 147-215, 411-32.

Fisher, John. *Medea: The Musical*. PDF from artist's website: <http://www.johnfisher.biz/productions/medea-the-musical.html>. Accessed 18 March, 2013.

Grillparzer, Franz. *Medea*. In *Five German Tragedies*, F. J. Lamport, trans. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969.

Hoffmann, François-Benoît. Libretto to Cherubini's *Médée*. Reprinted from Opera Folio online: <http://www.operafolio.com/libretto.asp?n=medee>. Accessed 18 March, 2013.

LaBute, Neil. *Medea Redux*. In *Bash: Latterday Plays*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1999.

Moraga, Cherríe. *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. Albuquerque: West End Press. Distributed by University of New Mexico Press, 2001.

Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Medea*, H. M. Hine, trans. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2000.

Svich, Caridad. *Wreckage*. In *Blasted Heavens: Five Contemporary Plays Inspired by the Greeks*. Roskilde: EyeCorner Press, 2012. 221-91.

## **Schedule:**

Week One: course intro

Week Two: Jonas, *et al*, *Dramaturgy in American Theater* Intro & Parts 1 and 2; and Euripides, *Medea*

Week Three: Jonas, *et al*, *Dramaturgy in American Theater* Parts 3 and 4; and Seneca, *Medea*

Week Four: Proehl, *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility* Part I; and Corneille, *Médée*

Week Five: Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (skip Ch. 2); and Cherubini, *Médée* (read and listen)

Week Six: Eagleton, *Literary Theory* Ch. 2; and Grillparzer, *Medea*

Week Seven: Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*; and Anouilh, *Medea*

Week Eight: syllabus due (no reading)

Week Nine: Allen, *Intertextuality* Parts 1 and 2; and Fisher, *Medea: the Musical*

Week Ten: Allen, *Intertextuality* Parts 3, 4, and 5; and Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*

Week Eleven: mini-conference (no reading)

Week Twelve: mini-conference (no reading)

Week Thirteen: Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle* Parts I and II; and Labute, *Medea Redux*

Week Fourteen: paper workshop (no reading)

Week Fifteen: Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle* Part III; and Svich, *Wreckage*