University of Southern California, Spring 2017

**CORE 200: Liberal Arts Reading Salon (Section 63573)**

**“The Book was Better”: Literature, Film, and Adaptation**

Instructor: Dr. Michael Petitti Course Location: THH 107

Office: AHF 403 Course Time: Monday 5-6:50pm

Email: petitti@usc.com

Office Hours: By appointment

Since its inception, film has turned to literature for narrative inspiration. For instance, *A Christmas Carol* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were both frequently adapted into film before movies even had sound. When we envision the audiences at this moment in primitive cinema, we can almost hear the obvious retort: “Well, the book was better.” Why do people so frequently argue that cinematic adaptations fail the literature being adapted? Is it something essential to adaptation, or the medium (visual versus tactile)? Working from these questions and more, we will examine a handful of adaptations in order to discuss issues of taste, value, judgment, and art. Together, we will start two sets of complex book-into-film adaptations before collectively selecting our texts for consideration.

*CORE 200 lasts for twelve weeks (instead of the usual fifteen) and meets once each week for two hours in a seminar setting. The Salon encourages the sharing of ideas and thoughts, highlights common themes and interdisciplinary connections as they emerge from discussion. Discussions that grow out of reading groups can become the starting point for future research. The two-unit Salon is an integral part of the Thematic Approaches to Humanities and Society minor. A special feature of the Reading Salon is that some of the books to be read by the participants will be selected by the students. The course is graded Credit/No Credit.*

**Required Texts:**

Highsmith, Patricia. *Strangers on a Train*. 1950.

Orlean, Susan. *The Orchid Thief*. 1998.

*Adaptation.* Dir. Spike Jonze. 2002.

*Strangers on a Train*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. 1951.

We will work together to formulate a required reading list for the last part of the semester.

**Course Requirements:**

**Attendance & Participation:** This class is graded pass/fail; in order to pass, you need to come to class and actively participate in our discussions. You are allowed a maximum of four absences for any reason. If you know you will be absent in advance, please email me to let me know.

Please arrive on time with all the relevant course materials in hand. Please do the assigned reading—and have *thought thoroughly about* the assignedreading—in advance, so that you’re prepared to ask questions, express opinions, and respond to the comments of your classmates with respect and intelligence. There is no sitting on the sidelines in this class. Everyone needs to be an active member of our community. Keep all laptops, cell phones, and other distracting devices turned off and out of sight.

**Class Schedule:**

Week 1: January 9

Reading: None

Week 2: January 16

NO CLASS (MLK DAY)

Week 3: January 23

Reading: Orlean, *The Orchid Thief*

Week 4: January 30

Screening: Jonze, *Adaptation*

Week 5: February 6

Reading: Highsmith, *Strangers on a Train*

Week 6: February 13

Screening: Hitchcock, *Strangers on a Train*

Week 7: February 20

NO CLASS (PRESIDENTS’ DAY)

Week 8: February 27

Reading: TBD by class

Week 9: March 6

Screening: TBD by class

March 13-17: Spring Break

Week 10: March 20

Reading: TBD by class

Week 11: March 27

Screening: TBD by class

Week 12: April 3

Reading: TBD by class