

On Page and Screen

Adaptations of Literature in Recent Film

Welcome

Thank you for joining *On Page and Screen* – it's lovely to have you on the course. Literature provides important source material for many films and in our six weeks together we'll discuss some striking recent examples of books that have been brought to the screen. We'll reflect on what happens when stories move from the written word to film and we'll explore diverse genres: science fiction, memoir, comedy horror, cultural history and political thriller. I'm sure we'll have some lively and varied discussions as we share our responses to the films and books.

Daniel Cordle (course tutor)

Programme

The classes run 7pm-8.30pm on Friday evenings in the Studio at Broadway cinema.

Session	Film	Book
1 9 May	<i>Mickey 17</i> (Bong Joon Ho, 2025)	Edward Ashton, <i>Mickey7</i> (2022)
2 16 May	<i>The Outrun</i> (Nora Fingscheidt, 2024)	Amy Liptrot, <i>The Outrun</i> (2016)
	No class week of 23 May	
3 30 May	<i>Nightbitch</i> (Marielle Heller, 2024)	Rachel Yoder, <i>Nightbitch</i> (2021)
4 6 June	<i>Conclave</i> (Edward Berger, 2024)	Robert Harris, <i>Conclave</i> (2016)
5 13 June	<i>Dune: Part Two</i> (Denis Villeneuve, 2024)	Frank Herbert, <i>Dune</i> (1965)
6 20 June	<i>A Complete Unknown</i> (James Mangold, 2024)	Elijah Wald, <i>Dylan Goes Electric!</i> (2015)

Adaptation from page to screen

Literature and film are different ways of seeing the world. When stories move from one to the other, they change. These changes don't just result from tweaks the filmmaker makes to the plot of the book, but arise, too, from the fundamentally different media of page and screen: a book is a different way of knowing the world to a film. Some questions we'll keep in mind during the course are:

- How does the experience of reading a book differ from that of watching a film?
- How do film and book overlap, and how do they differ? How do they speak to one another?
- What happens when a world constructed from words is translated into a world constructed from images and sounds?

We will also, though, treat the books and films on their own terms. Please see the sessions as opportunities to share your responses, interpretations and questions about *Mickey 17*, *The Outrun*, *Nightbitch*, *Conclave*, *Dune: Part Two*, and *A Complete Unknown*, and the books on which they are based. What do you think these books and films are about? Which do you

prefer and why? Which moments in these films, or passages in these books, speak most strongly to you? There are many ways of interpreting the films and books, so I expect we'll all learn much from each other's responses.

Linking the sessions

The choice of films and books has in part been dictated by the serendipity of cinema release schedules over the last year. Nevertheless, expect to find some intriguing connections as our conversation develops from week to week.

For example, we might branch out from *Dune: Part 2* to discuss how its treatment of politics and religion compares with that in *Conclave*, or to explore how Paul Atreides' ambivalence about being hailed as a messiah compares to Bob Dylan's ambiguous response when he's lauded as the saviour of the folk music scene in *A Complete Unknown*. In considering the transformation of the 'Mother' into a dog in *Nightbitch*, we might hear echoes of folktales about transformations of humans into animals, like the myths of the selkies (humans/seals) that Amy Liptrot discusses in *The Outrun*.

If there's a single linking theme between the sessions, it is perhaps that of identity. In *Mickey 17/ Mickey7*, poor Mickey Barnes is 'reprinted' every time he dies. What, the story asks, does it mean to be an individual? Is Mickey7 the same person as his predecessor, Mickey6? In her book *The Outrun*, Amy Liptrot recounts her attempt to find herself by forging an identity amidst and beyond addiction. Similarly, the protagonist of *Nightbitch* is searching for a sense of self amidst the challenges and rewards of motherhood. In *Conclave*, cardinals manoeuvring to elect a new pope face struggles between their personal experiences of faith and the politics of the Vatican, while in *Dune* Paul Atreides is caught between identities as an avenging son and as leader of an uprising he can only partially control. In *A Complete Unknown* we see how Robert Zimmerman is both liberated and trapped by his new identity when he transforms himself into Bob Dylan.

Getting the most out of the sessions

I recommend you watch the films before each session and I warmly encourage you to read the books beforehand too. The more you're able to watch and read the more you'll get out of the course (though, of course, I understand that pressures of time/access might mean this isn't always possible – please do come along in any case; you'll be most welcome).

My style of teaching is that of a structured conversation: I intersperse mini talks, in which I present information and key perspectives, with space for discussion. I therefore warmly encourage you to share your responses. It'll be a conversation 'with spoilers,' so we can reflect on all aspects of the films/books. We'll make sure there's space both to discuss the films/books in a broad sense and to focus on film clips and key passages from the literature.

I want you to find the classes enjoyable, interesting and educational. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

A bit about me

In a long career in higher education as a lecturer and researcher, most of it at Nottingham Trent University, I taught a wide range of literature and film. Although I've taught many different things, from *Beowulf* and Shakespeare to science fiction and Westerns, I focused particularly on American literature, and on the culture and history of the nuclear age. I am now a freelance writer, researcher and teacher. Further information can be found at <https://danielcordle.com/>.

Quotations for Session 1 (*Mickey7* / *Mickey 17*) *

- a) Here's a thought experiment for you: Imagine you found out that when you go to sleep at night, you don't just go to sleep. You die. You die, and someone else wakes up in your place the next morning. He's got all your memories. He's got all your hopes and dreams and fears and wishes. He thinks he's you, and all your friends and loved ones do too. He's not you, though, and you're not the guy who went to sleep the night before. You've only existed since this morning, and you will cease to exist when you close your eyes tonight. Ask yourself – would it make any practical difference in your life? Is there any way that you could even tell?

...

I don't just remember what Mickey1 did. I remember being him. Well, all but the last few minutes of being him, anyway. He – I – died after a hull breach during transit. Mickey2 woke up a few hours later, sure as shit that he was thirty-one years old and had been born back on Midgard. And who knows? Maybe he was. Maybe that was the original Mickey Barnes looking out through his eyes. How could you tell? And maybe if I lie down on the floor of this cavern, close my eyes, and pop my seals, I'll wake up tomorrow as Mickey8. [pp. 18-19]

- b) When it was pretty clear [during my training] that my head was full up with technical data for the moment, we switched over to philosophy, which was much more my speed.

Turns out that people have been poking around the periphery of what has become the central question of my life for a long time. That first day, after we were finished talking about the many different ways I could irradiate myself into oblivion, Jemma told me about the Ship of Theseus.

'Imagine,' she said, 'that one day Theseus sets out to sail around the world.'

'Okay,' I said. 'I know I should know this, but who's Theseus?'

'An old Earth hero,' she said. 'Seriously old school – from maybe three thousand years before the Diaspora.'

'Huh. And he's sailing around the world?'

'Right,' she said. 'He's sailing around the world in a wooden ship. As he goes, parts of the ship get damaged or wear out, and he has to replace them. Years later, when he finally comes home, every single board and timber of the original ship has been replaced. So, is this, or is this not, the same ship that he departed in?'

'That's dumb,' I said. 'Of course it is.'

'Okay,' she said. 'What if the ship is destroyed in a storm, and he has to rebuild it all at once before sailing on? Is it the same ship then?'

'No,' I said. 'That's totally different. If he has to rebuild the entire ship, that's Ship of Theseus II, the Sequel.'

She leaned forwards then, elbows on the table. 'Really? Why? What difference does it make if he replaces every component one by one, or if he replaces them all at once?'

I opened my mouth to answer, but then realized that I had no idea what to say.

'This is the key to accepting this job, Mickey. *You* are the Ship of Theseus. We all are. There is not a single living cell in my body that was alive and a part of me ten years ago, and the same is true for you. We're constantly being rebuilt, one board at a time. If you actually take on this job, you'll probably be rebuilt all at once at some point, but at the end of the day, it's really no different, is it? When an Expendable takes a trip to the tank, he's just doing in

* All excerpts from Edward Ashton, *Mickey7* (2022; Oxford: Solaris, 2024).

one go what his body would naturally do over the course of time anyway. As long as memory is preserved, he hasn't really died. He's just undergone an unusually rapid remodeling.' [pp. 105-06]

- c) I'm thinking about wishing her [Cat] a good evening and heading back up to my rack when she says, 'Do you think you're immortal?'

Did not expect that.

'What?'

'Do you think you're immortal? You've been killed, what, seven times?'

'Six,' I say. 'It's only six so far. That's kind of the root of the problem.'

'Whatever. Are you the same person you were when you boarded the shuttle off of Midguard?'

I have to think about that.

'Well,' I say finally. 'This isn't the same body, obviously.'

'Right,' Cat says. 'That's not what I was asking.'

'Yeah,' I say, 'I know. So, yeah, I remember being Mickey Barnes back on Midgard. I remember the apartment he grew up in. I remember his first kiss. I remember the last time he saw his mother. I remember signing on for this stupid expedition. I remember all of that stuff as if it was me who did it, not someone else. Does that mean I *am* Mickey Barnes, though?' I shrug. 'Who the hell knows?'

She's staring at me. Her eyes are narrowed, and I feel that chill from this morning running down the back of my neck again.

'I looked up that Ship of Theseus thing. You did a terrible job describing it.'

'Yeah,' I say. 'I know. That's one of those things that I thought I remembered from training, but then when I started talking I realized that, no, I didn't actually remember it at all.'

'I'm surprised. It's a pretty tight analogy for your life. I'd think it would have stuck with you.'

I shrug. 'Sorry.'

'It's a pretty airtight argument, don't you think?'

I start to answer, then shake my head and start again. 'I'm confused, Cat. Where are you going with this?'

'Where I'm going is, I want to know if you're Mickey Barnes, or if you're just some other guy running around in his clothes.'

'I told you,' I say. 'I don't know. I know what Jemma told me back on Himmel Station, and I know that I *feel* like I'm the same person I was back on Midgard, but ... I don't know. That's the flip-side of the argument, isn't it? The fact that it doesn't make any measurable difference in any way whether I'm the same person or I'm not means that there's no possible way for me to know for sure. It's an unanswerable question.'

'Still,' she says, 'you don't know that you're *not* him, right?'

'No,' I say. 'I guess I don't.'

She doesn't respond. We sit in silence for a while. I'm about to ask if we're done here when she says, 'You know, I've been thinking a lot these past two days.'

'Um,' I say. 'Okay. What about?'

'Dying. I've been thinking about dying. I'm only thirty-four years old. I shouldn't have to think about dying for another fifty years, but here we are.'

Beachhead colonies are dangerous places. I wonder if they emphasized that as heavily in her training as in mine. [pp. 232-34]