

FILMED ADAPTATIONS OF LITERATURE

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Having just recently begun my job as director of the Language Learning Resource Center (LLRC) at Loyola University of Chicago, I was at first a little overwhelmed by a task given to me by my supervisor. She asked me to find out which literary works the modern languages faculty would be teaching next semester and then compile "personalized" information sheets for each instructor outlining both the resources housed in our center and those available for rent or purchase which may be relevant to their courses.

Given the administrative structure of the LLRC at Loyola, this request was both reasonable and routine. The LLRC is part of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, and thus is very supportive of department faculty in their efforts to locate and use materials which enhance their classroom teaching. In the upper level classes the study of literature plays a major role. Instructors are occasionally interested in audio recordings (readings) of literature, but most often they are interested in using filmed adaptations of the literary works they are teaching.

In my effort to assist the faculty, I decided to concentrate my efforts on videos. First, I sent a questionnaire to each faculty member to find out which literary works they would be teaching next semester. Based on this data, I began collecting information. In short, this stage consisted primarily of 1) learning more about the videos already contained in our collection(!), 2) scanning the catalogues of commercial video distributors, and

3) conducting initial research to try and determine which, if any, films have been made based on specific works of literature faculty will be teaching.

After a good deal of research, I was able to provide most instructors with information that I hope will be helpful to them in the planning and teaching of their literature courses. Each received a "mini-catalogue" of films that are generally relevant to their language area, e.g. "LLRC German Video/Film Catalogue". These catalogues not only list the film titles, but give information on each film's origin, and if a film is based on a piece of literature, information regarding its historical context, etc. Instructors also received specific information about films which relate to the literary works/authors they will be teaching next semester, primarily based on my research of what the major foreign language video distributors have to offer. In some cases I provided information on films which I thought might be of interest to them someday in the future, for example all of the films based on the writings of one author or all films made by a particular director. I also asked them to tell me which films they are interested in acquiring in the future, including sources if possible.

In the process of working at this task, I have learned a few things regarding "filmed literature". Some of you may also have experience in this area and could offer me and others a few tips.

First, in order to give instructors helpful information about films already owned by a media center, it seems essential that a good

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Lab Notes

cataloging system be in place. At the first MWALL meeting in October, Kelly Nelson from the University of Iowa described her work with the "Notebook" computerized data base program for cataloging video tapes. The program I am using is "Q&A", which provides similar possibilities for cataloging. Regardless of which program is used, it should be one which allows the user to 1) catalogue a large number of items, 2) create data fields which are unlimited in length, 3) conduct searches by keying in on any one topic (such as the country of origin of a feature film), and 4) produce reports in a variety of formats depending on the needs of the user. This last feature seems especially critical as it allows you to print out customized listings of films based on any one feature you choose, such as language.

A data base on feature films should minimally include: title, director, place and year of production, language (including whether or not there are English subtitles), running time in minutes, format (VHS, BETA, 16mm), and catalogue number. When cataloging filmed adaptations of literature, it is also important that a field be created for entering standardized key words that can later be used for conducting searches. For example, key words for the film "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" (1958) might be: Molière (the author's—not the director's!—last name); French Literature; French Drama; 17th Century. It is extremely helpful to receive information on a film's relationship to the particular piece of literature it is adapted from, the literary work's historical significance, information about the actors starring in the film, etc. when you are ordering the film for rental or purchase. In most cases, of course, the faculty members requesting particular films should be able to provide you with most of this information.

Getting information about filmed adaptations of literature which are generally available for rent or purchase is probably best accomplished by browsing through the catalogues of the commercial distributors

themselves. Some distributors have catalogues which highlight and describe the "filmed literature" which they offer. Some of the distributors which have large collections of foreign language films/videos pertaining to literature are listed below. There are certainly other distributors with similar offerings, and I would appreciate hearing about them.

A note regarding purchasing filmed adaptations of literary works might be helpful here. Our resource center has had the unfortunate experience of buying a film and then have it turn out that the instructor(s) were totally unhappy with it. This usually occurred when they were not familiar with the film before the decision was made to purchase it. Sometimes upon viewing the film for the first time, they discovered that it diverged too much from the original story. Occasionally the film was technically unsatisfactory: poor sound, images or subtitling. A problem can also arise when a film was originally produced in a foreign language but has been dubbed in English. In order to avoid making permanent acquisitions that may never be used (or only once!), it is best to try and rent films first and let instructors preview them before deciding whether or not to purchase.

Finally, the entire task of finding out what, if any, filmed adaptations of a particular piece of literature have been made and where they are available is a much more difficult task. I conducted some research in the library using a variety of reference guides, but none of them was especially helpful. I found quite a bit of information about American-made films, but little about films produced in foreign countries. The whole job would be made much easier if there were a catalogue or reference book which listed films according to the *author's* name, and included, of course, foreign authors. I have not yet located such a guide, and would be very grateful to hear if anyone knows of one.

In summary, the faculty have responded positively to the various types of information regarding "filmed literature" that I have given

them. The information is not complete, but I plan to update it in coming semesters. This should be fairly easy because the data is saved in separate computer files for each course, e.g. "Spanish Novel 280". It may be harder to find the time to watch some of these great films myself.

Among the several distributors offering literature-related foreign language videos are:

- Axon Video Corporation
1900 Broadway
New York, NY 10023
- Center for Cuban Studies
124 West 23rd Street
New York, NY 10011
(212) 242-0559
- Facets Multimedia, Inc.
1517 W. Fullerton Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60614
(800) 331-6197
- Films for the Humanities
P.O. Box 2053
Princeton, NJ 08543
(800) 257-5126
- German Language Video Center
Division of Heidelberg Haus Imports
7625 Pendleton Pike
Indianapolis, IN 46226
- Insight Media
121 West 85th Street
New York, NY 10024
(212) 721-6316
- Tamarelle's International Films, Inc.
1070 Marauder St. Ste G
Chico, CA 95926
(916) 895-3429
- Vedette Visuals
4520 58th Avenue W
Tacoma, WA 98466
(206) 564-4960
- World Video
P.O. Box 30469
Knoxville, TN 37930-0469
(615) 691-9827

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