

# The Emergence of the Cinema and Literature of Age

## The Elderquest in Today's Movies and Novels

Presented by: The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at  
The University of Southern Mississippi

### EIGHT WAYS TO LOOK AT AN ELDERQUEST: An Introduction to the Elderquest: Its Characteristics, Its Origins, and Its Implications

Excerpts from various films including *The Lord of the Rings* (a heroic, midlife quest), *Easy Rider* (a youthful, rebellious, and pessimistic road movie), *The Straight Story* (a more optimistic Elderquest/road movie), the BBC production of Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* (the ancient prototype for the *Elderquest*) and *Wild Strawberries* (its modern prototype).

Date: Feb. 22, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Dr. Patricia Black

### THE PROTOTYPE FOR THE MODERN *ELDERQUEST*: *WILD STRAWBERRIES*

A movie by Victor Sjöström, Bibi Andersson, Max von Sydow, 1957 (Swedish; with new, easy to read subtitles).

Written and directed by Ingmar Bergman. An aging professor, on the road to accept an award, must come to terms with his past as well as his present. Rated by one international survey as among the 20 best films of all time. (black and white, 1 hour, 30 minutes) The DVD in the Criterion Collection is especially recommended for its visual quality and its added features, including a film-length commentary by Beter Cowie.

Date: March 10, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Marianne Hartfield

### *COMING HOME: THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL*

A movie by Horton Foote

Geraldine Page, John Heard, Rebecca DeMornay, 1985. Directed by Peter Masterson from a Horton Foote screenplay. Best Actress Award: Page. An aging woman, living in a small apartment with her son and his wife, returns to Bountiful, her childhood home, even though it no longer exists, and it gives her “enough to last me for the rest of my life.” (color, 1 hour, 47 minutes)

Date: March 24, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Sandra Bender

### *HITTING THE ROAD AGAIN: THE STRAIGHT STORY*

A movie by David Lynch

This gem of a movie by David Lynch chronicles a trip made by 73-year-old Alvin Straight from Laurens, Iowa, to Mt. Zion, Wisconsin, in 1994 while riding a lawn mower (his poor eyesight wouldn't allow him to renew his driver's license). He takes this strange journey to mend his relationship with his ill and estranged 75-year-old brother Lyle, and it is a superb example of late life revitalization and transformation. Richard Farnsworth's performance earned him Golden Globe and Oscar nominations for best actor. At 79, he is the oldest to be so honored. (112 minutes)

Date: April 5, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Nathan Bender

### *FROM DESPAIR TO INTEGRITY* (part 1): *BRAZIL'S CENTRAL STATION*

A movie by Fernando Montenegro and Vinicius de Oliveira, 1998 (Portuguese with excellent subtitles).

This Brazilian masterpiece may be the best intergenerational film ever made. It is also an excellent example of an *Elderquest*, a middle passage, desperately needed, and successfully completed. Dona Dora, old, angry, and totally hopeless, writes letters for the young and still hopeful in Rio's Central Station, then throws them away. But she is gradually and against her will drawn into the life of nine-year-old Josue, whose mother writes a letter trying to reunite him with his father. They embark on an endless odyssey in search of both of their lost fathers. A heartbreaking, realistic, and revelatory story of how the *Elderquest* can give us the power to redefine not only our own lives, but those of our descendants as well. (106 minutes)

Date: April 19, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Dr. Jeanne Gillespie

### *FROM DESPAIR TO INTEGRITY* (part 2): *PRAISESONG FOR THE WIDOW*

A novel by Paul Marshall, 1983

Seventy-something Avey Johnson, a middle class widow, jumps ship in mid-cruise to rediscover her Afro-Caribbean roots and re-establish her identity in a harrowing and heroic *Elderquest*. **Participants are required to read the novel prior to the session.**

Date: May 5, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Dr. Andrew Haley

### ***A FAILED ELDERQUEST: ABOUT SCHMIDT***

A movie by Alexander Payne, 2002

Jack Nicholson as Warren Schmidt, a clueless 65 year old retired insurance executive from Omaha sets out on a hilarious but doomed *Elderquest* in the huge camper his recently deceased wife had bought for traveling in their golden years. But he is so shut down emotionally that his encounters - with his daughter, his son-in-law and her mother (Kathy Bates) - all end badly. Based on a novel by Louis Begley, which is totally different □ not an *Elderquest* □ and about a successful upper crust insurance executive from New York City who retires to Long Island. (124 minutes)

Date: June 7, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Facilitator: Dr. Jim Flanagan

### ***SUMMING UP: CARRY ME ACROSS THE WATER***

A novel by Ethan Canin (2001)

August Kleinman, a successful retired Jewish brewer, takes off in his mid-70s to redeem himself and restore his integrity by returning to Japan to confront the descendants of a Japanese officer he has killed in the south Pacific in WWII, another harrowing but heroic *Elderquest*. **Participants are required to read the novel prior to the session.**

Date: June 21, 2006

Time: 2-5 p.m.

Dr. Patricia Black

*NOTE: Each of the eight, three-hour sessions will consist of an introductory presentation, the film screening (and/or reading), a break, and a facilitated discussion.*

*Handouts will be distributed in class and additional readings will be posted on the Elderquest Website -- [www.oli.umb.edu](http://www.oli.umb.edu). Books may be purchased online, at a local bookstore or the USM Bookstore.*

To register for this class # OLL4042006, call 601.266.4186 or 601.266.4187. There is no fee but PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

Registration Deadline is February 15, 2006