

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH [Undergraduate Program]

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ENGLISH 4225: American Myths and Values in Literary Genres and Film

Class Program Spring [Jan-May 2008: Thursday 2:30-5:20 pm / PED 106]

Course Description:

The study of significant literary and film works within selected genres: the western, gangsterism, horror, war, comedy, science fiction, etc. The analysis of the theoretical and ideological framework within typical American literary genres which films share, as a visual narrative, that express and shape the contours of the contemporary mind more effectively than any competing narrative mode. Emphasis will be given to certain topics such as directorial and/or literary style and theme.

Course Objectives:

The student will be expected to:

- study significant works within selected American genre films such as the western, the war film, gangster films, and "movements" such as the uniquely American "black cinema" (Film Noir).
- place these narrative modes within a social and ideological framework to aid the understanding of what these films respond to in terms of history, trends, collective and/or individual artistic expression.
- connect film as an expressive narrative mode to literature, in how one art form may influence the other not only technically, but thematically (as Gothic fiction and German expressionism helped shape the American horror film); and ideologically (as the fiction of Dos Passos and Steinbeck influence American filmmaker John Ford).
- understand uniquely American genre films and the literature these come from, through the examination of their narrative structure, style, and theme within the context of the general social setting (family, school, business, and politics), and through the readings of influential literary texts and film theory, this course will approach the American cinema both as an art-form and as a social institution capable of influencing and structuring the views of the world.
- understand and interpret American movies, its relation to the dreams it manufactures and to our society in order to develop a wisdom in the way of images, and the capability to distinguish the trustworthy from the deceitful image.

Course Outline [subject to change; check current *Course Calendar* for details]:

Week I: Introduction—Are movies shapers OR reflectors of reality? / Genre Conventions, Values & Myths in America—the Social Consequences of Formula Films

Screening: *America at the Movies* [doc.]; selection of scenes for understanding film art

Readings:

Schatz, Hollywood Genres, Chaps. 1 & 2

Hess Wright, J. Genre Films and the Status Quo" [from Film Genre Reader]

Sobchack, T. "Genre Films: A Classical Experience" [from Film Genre Reader]

Week II: The Comic Mode in literature and film—Chaplin's genius and American mythology /

The American Dream in literature and film: Horatio Alger, Mark Twain and Charlie Chaplin

Screening: Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*

Readings: Agee, James. "Comedy's Greatest Era" [from Film: An Anthology]; Review: *The Gold Rush*; literary selections by Alger, Twain.

- Week III:** America's Myth of the Land & the West / The Hollywood Western—A Ritual of Death
Screening: *High Noon*; assigned: *Stagecoach*, *Shane*
Readings: Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, Chap. 3; Warshow, R. "The Westerner" [from *Film: An Anthology*]; poems by Walt Whitman & Robert Frost.
- Week IV:** The New Western—Are the "Lone-Hero" and the "Out West" Myths Dead? / Native Americans and Revisionism
Screening: *The Unforgiven*; assigned: *The Searchers*, *Little Big Man*, *Thunderheart*, *Lonely Are the Brave*
Reading: Kehr, D. "The Unforgiven" [from *They Went That A Way*]
- Week V:** Urban & Industrial America in Pulp Fiction and Film: the Crime Genre.
Screening: *The Public Enemy*; on reserve in Lab: *Underworld* (1927), *Scarface* (1932)
Reading: Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, Chap 4
- Week VI:** Gangsterism yesterday and today: from Cagney to Brando, from De Niro to Travolta
Screening: *Angels with Dirty Faces*; assigned: *Clockers* or *Boyz 'N the Hood*, *White Heat*, and *The Godfather I & II*, *Goodfellas*, *Pulp Fiction*
Reading: Wilmington, M. "Goodfellas" [from *They Went That A Way*]
- Week VII:** Orson Welles: White-collar crime in America / The Rising Shades of *Film Noir*
Screening: *Citizen Kane*
Reading: Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, Chap. 5
- Week VIII:** The Great American Private-Eye Yesterday and Today; the Bogart Mystique
Screening: *The Maltese Falcon*; assigned: *Dirty Harry*
- Week IX:** American Film Noir—From Idealism to Dark Days of McCarthyism
Screening: *Double Indemnity*; on reserve in Lab: *The Killers*, *Lady from Shanghai*, *Touch of Evil*; assigned: *Body Heat*, *Dead Again*, *L.A. Confidential*, *Guilty by Suspicion*
Reading: Schrader, P. "Notes on Film Noir" [from *Film Genre Reader*]
 Recommended: Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*; Hemingway's "The Killers"
- Week X:** The Horror Film: Gothicism in America—Monsters, Martians and Zombies.
Screening: *Halloween*; on reserve in Lab: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; assigned viewing: *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Psycho*, *The Birds*, *The Shining*
Readings: Solomon, "The Nightmare World" [from *Beyond Formula*]
 Kawin, Bruce. "Children of the Light" [from *Film Genre Reader*]
 Recommended: stories by Washington Irving and Edgar Allen Poe
- Week XI:** American Warfare & Ideology, Cold or Hot—the "Real" War vs. the "Reel" War
Screening: *Platoon*; assigned: *Casablanca*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Top Gun*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Saving Private Ryan*
Readings: Solomon, "Wars: Hot and Cold" [from *Beyond Formula*] Sragow, M. "Platoon" [from *They Went That A Way*]
- Week XII:** Away from Innocence—Cinema as a Tool for Propaganda or Conscientiousness
Screening: *Missing*; on reserve in Lab: *Meet John Doe*; assigned viewing: *Salvador*, *Do the Right Thing*
- Week XIII:** On the Road Again—From the Road Novel to the Road Movie
Screening: *Thelma & Louise*; on reserve in Lab: *The Wild One*, *Easy Rider*, *Smoke Signals*; assigned: *Natural Born Killers*, *The Mexican*
Reading: Travers, P. "Thelma and Louise" [from *They Went That A Way*]
 Recommended: Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*
- Week XIV:** Questioning the Faith—Independents vs. Hollywood: How "Independent" are they?
Screening: *American Beauty* assigned viewing: *Clerks*, *Ghost World*, *Dogma*

Teaching strategies*: Seminar based on lectures, class discussions, and student-generated analysis.

*Students that receive services from *Occupational Rehabilitation* should contact me at the start of the semester to plan for reasonable accommodation and any assistive equipment as recommended by the *Oficina de Asuntos para las Personas con Impedimento (OAPI)* of the *Office of the Dean of Student Affairs*. Any student who has special needs or requires any type of assistance or accommodation should see me. **[Los estudiantes que reciban servicios de Rehabilitación Vocacional deben comunicarse conmigo al inicio del semestre para planificar el acomodo razonable y equipo asistivo necesario conforme a las recomendaciones de la Oficina de Asuntos para las Personas con Impedimento (OAPI) del Decanato de Estudiantes. Todo aquel con necesidades especiales que requieren de algún tipo de asistencia o acomodo deben de comunicarse conmigo.]*

Method of Evaluation: Three grades (each one: 33.9%)

- Exam I (Take-Home) @ 100 points
- Exam II (Take-Home) @ 100 points
- 4 to 5 Assignments @ 100 points

**A differentiated evaluation system is available for students with special needs. {Evaluación diferenciada disponible para estudiantes con necesidades especiales.}*

Grading System: A, B, C, D, F.

Recommended Bibliography:

[Note: A *selection of essays from the marked books will be available for you to read at the *Seminario de Multidisciplinas*, 2nd floor LPM; check our current *Course Calendar* for details and due dates]

Browne, Nick. Refiguring Film Genres: Theory and History. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.

Chatman, Seymour. Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978.

_____. Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990.

*Cook, David A. A History of Narrative Film. [3rd ed.] New York: Norton, 1996.

Gehring, Wes D., Ed. Handbook of American Film Genres. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Grant, Barry Keith. Film Genre Reader. Austin: U of Texas P, 1990.

Harrington, John, ed. Film and/as Literature. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977.

*Jameson, Richard T., Ed. They Went That A Way: Redefining Film Genres. San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994.

Magney, Claude-Edmonde. The Age of the American Novel: Film Aesthetic of Fiction Between the Two Wars. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972.

Mast, Gerald, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, Eds. Film Theory and Criticism. New York: Oxford U P, 1992.

Neale, Steve. Genre and Hollywood. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Schatz, Thomas. Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Hollywood System. New York: McGraw Hill, 1981.

Shadoian, Jack. Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster Film. New York: Oxford U P, 2003.

*Solomon, Stanley. Beyond Formula: American Film Genres. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976.

*Talbot, Daniel. Film: An Anthology. Berkeley: U of California P, 1975.

CLASSIC LITERARY SELECTIONS which might prove to be helpful are:

- Alger, H. From Rags to Riches [comedy / American Dream motif]
- Chandler, R. The Big Sleep, The Maltese Falcon [crime / film noir]
- Frost, Robert. Poem: "The Gift Outright" [western / war]
- Hemingway, E. "The Killers" [crime / film noir]
- Irving, Washington. Story: "Adventure of a German Student" / "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" [horror]
- Poe, Edgar. Story: "Murders in the Rue Morgue" [horror]
- Kerouac, J. On The Road [road motif]
- Twain, Mark. Huckleberry Finn (Chaps. 1 & 9) [comedy]
- Whitman, Walt. Poems: "Reconciliation," "Long, Too Long America," "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak," "Cavalry Crossing," "Facing West From California's Shores" [war]

Electronic resources:

- <http://www.thenation.com>
- <http://www.imdb.com>
- <http://www.lanic.utexas.edu/project/arl>.
- Norton Anthology's student Web site: <http://www.wwnorton.com/nal>
- Library of Congress digital/digitized collections:
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>
[http: www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html)

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