

ENGL 245—INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA STUDIES

Spring 2019

Section 1

Tues/Thurs: 9:30-10:45 am, Combs Hall 139

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WEBSITE (for blog posts and readings)

www.literatureoftheamericas.com

OFFICE HOURS (Combs Hall 324):

Tues/Thurs: 8:30-9:30 am

11:00-12:30 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designated “general education” (GE) and provides students with the basic tools for a critical understanding of the cinema and of the industry that produces it. Keeping an overall emphasis on the Hollywood tradition, we examine filmmaking in relation to narrative techniques and the business demands of production, distribution, and exhibition. Next, we explore the conventions of a particular genre, the role of individual cinema artistry, and intersections of literature and audiovisual aesthetics.

COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

To encourage active viewership by introducing students to the fundamentals of filmmaking, including business aspects (production, distribution, and exhibition) and aesthetic endeavors (including mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound).

To analyze at least one major film genre through a combination of secondary readings and film examples. Careful attention will be paid to the historical and cultural development of the genre’s conventions and to the concept of genre itself.

To introduce the role of individual artistry within the multimillion dollar film industry through a combination of secondary readings and primary examples that focus on at least one major filmmaker.

To introduce students to cinema adaptation through the in-depth study of at least one literary text and one or more corresponding cinematic texts. We take a medium specific approach that underscores the fundamental differences between audiovisual film language and literature.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at the University Bookstore)

Aronofsky, Darren. *The Wrestler* (20th Century Fox, Blue Ray/DVD)

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill, 11th edition)

Cain, James M. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Vintage)

FILM SCREENINGS (Held at 6:00 pm in Simpson Library 225)

**** (Thereafter available under “Reserve: Barrenechea” in Simpson Library)****

Mon. 2/18 – Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (2 hrs. 29 mins.)

Mon. 2/25 – Ridley Scott, *Alien* (1 hr. 56 mins.)
Wed. 3/13 – Darren Aronofsky, *Black Swan* (1 hr. 48 mins.)
Mon. 3/18 – Darren Aronofsky, *Mother!* (2 hrs. 1 min.)
Mon. 4/22 – Tay Garnett, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1 hr. 53 mins.)
Wed. 4/24 – Bob Rafelson, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (2 hrs. 2 mins.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course has a constant and sometimes demanding workload. Active participation during class discussion is essential to doing well. At a minimum, I expect you 1) to have excellent attendance, 2) to arrive and leave on time, 3) to have done assigned readings/viewings carefully before class, 4) to turn in your work on time, 5) to bring the necessary materials and texts to class, 6) to listen respectfully to me and to your classmates, and 7) to contribute to class discussion and activities on a regular basis. **It is your own responsibility to find out what you miss when you are not in class.** *I suggest that you exchange email information with at least one other classmate in order to ensure that you are always prepared. Do not email me to ask what you missed.* Note that you will receive an *unsatisfactory* mark on your mid-semester report if you fail to comply with these requirements and/or have a working course grade lower than a C. **I will accept no late submissions of any kind from you without a medical note.**

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

I want students to learn and to earn the grades that they deserve, so please make an appointment with me should you have undue difficulty with the course. Written assignments include: 1) two blog posts, 2) a midterm exam consisting of a 5-page shot-by-shot breakdown and analysis of a scene from *The Wrestler*, and 3) three screening reports. Oral assignments include a 20-minute group presentation of a shot-by-shot cinematic rendering of a literary passage from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. You will receive instructions for completing these assignments before they are due. Here is the course grade distribution:

Attendance and Blog Posts: 20%
Group Presentation: 20%
Midterm: 30%
Screening Reports: 30%

GRADING CRITERIA

I have designed the following criteria guidelines to help you grasp how I conduct a large part of the grading. I divide formal written assignments in the following ways:

****Papers: Content and Analysis (70%)***

--An average paper (C) demonstrates a superficial understanding of the topic; it is usually based almost exclusively on class notes. It generally relies too much on summary rather than explicit analysis of textual points, and uses quotations ineffectively.
--A better paper (B) incorporates readings that have been assigned in other contexts (including in-class assignments), analyzes literary and film devices as they are employed in a text, and uses specific quotations from texts in order to illustrate the grounding of its analysis.
--A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a “B” paper, and includes a more sophisticated understanding of the chosen topic. That is, an “A” paper uses the tools of textual analysis, apt use of quotation, concise and explicit remarks justifying that analysis, while drawing on all the available resources of the course.

****Papers: Form, Style, Mechanics and Usage (30%)***

--An average paper (C) demonstrates a reasonable control of basic English syntax, verb and subject (including pronoun) agreement, tense consistency, proofreading, paragraph organization, etc.

--A better paper (B) demonstrates an ability to vary sentence structure, has few if any proofreading errors, employs careful transitions and organization in a more sophisticated way, and controls grammar.
--A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a “B” paper, and in addition demonstrates an ability to control complex sentence structure, vary verbs effectively, and contains no proofreading errors.

***Blog Posts:**

I will grade these as part of your overall “participation grade.” I require that you 1) post by the deadline, 2) respond to the opening post with ample evidence that you have completed the reading/viewing for the unit, and, 3) post a response only after careful reflection, and using correct grammar and punctuation.

***Screening Reports:**

I will grade each of these: 10-9 (outstanding), 8-7 (very good), 6-5 (satisfactory), 4-3 (has weaknesses), 2-1 (requires improvement), or 0 (insufficient/not completed). At the end of the term, I will total these numbers for your overall screening-response grade (out of a total of 30 points: 30% of your course grade).

***Group Presentation:**

I will assign your group a letter grade based upon how well you apply the critical terminology of cinema grammar to the literary passage, and on the overall care of your visual diagram. I will also grade you on how well you collaborate with your classmates to create a coherent vision. You must keep to the allotted 20-minute timeframe, which is designed to ensure that everyone gets an equal opportunity to present.

SPECIAL NOTE (*Please Read Extra Carefully*)

I believe that a university is a place where we should stretch our intellectual capabilities in untried, and even uncomfortable, directions. Be assured that we will approach the materials in this course in the spirit of scholarly inquiry, and with the aid of serious academic sources. However, please note that all of the films shown for this course will—at one time or another—violate taboos regarding race, sex, gender, class, and religion. I do not recommend that you enroll in this class if you are easily offended by ideas, language, or fictional depictions that challenge mainstream standards. I ask that you go home today and look up the films we will study this semester. *If you are unsure about whether or not to remain in this class after doing so, I encourage you to speak with me privately. There will be no alternate assignments!

Engl 245—Introduction to Cinema Studies

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Section 1

Week #1

1/15 Tues
1/17 Thurs

CINEMA GRAMMAR

Introduction to the course
Industry: Bordwell/Thompson, *Film Art* [chapter 1]

Week #2

1/22 Tues
1/24 Thurs

Form: Bordwell/Thompson, *Film Art* [chapters 2-3]
Mise-en-Scene: Bordwell/Thompson, *Film Art* [chapter 4]

Week #3

1/29 Tues
1/31 Thurs

Cinematography: Bordwell/Thompson, *Film Art* [chapter 5]
Editing: Bordwell/Thompson, *Film Art* [chapter 6]

Week #4

2/5 Tues
2/7 Thurs

Sound: Bordwell/Thompson, *Film Art* [chapter 7]
***Midterm Due in Class**

Week #5

2/12 Tues

2/14 Thurs

GENRE: Science Fiction
Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* [excerpt]:
<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Thomas-Schatz-Hollywood-Genres1.pdf>
Georges Méliès, “A Trip to the Moon” (1902):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEQQefvfnk4>

Week #6

2/19 Tues
2/21 Thurs

Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
***50-Word Blog Post Due by 9:00 am (#1)**

Week #7

2/26 Tues
2/28 Thurs

Ridley Scott, *Alien* (1979)
Ridley Scott, *Alien* (1979)
***Screening Report Due in Class (#1)**

Week #8

3/5 Tues
3/7 Thurs

Spring Break
Spring Break

Week #9

3/12 Tues

3/14 Thurs

AUTEURSHIP: Darren Aronofsky
Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962”:
<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Notes-on-the-Auteur-Theory-in-1962.pdf>
Darren Aronofsky, *Black Swan* (2010)
***50-Word Blog Post Due by 9:00 am (#2)**

Week #10

3/19 Tues
3/21 Thurs

Darren Aronofsky, *Mother!* (2017)
Darren Aronofsky, *Mother!* (2017)
***Screening Report Due in Class (#2)**

Week #11

3/26 Tues

3/28 Thurs

ADAPTATION: The Postman Always Rings Twice
Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* [excerpt]:
<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Brian-McFarlane-Novel-to-Film.pdf>
James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) (ch. 1-7)

Week #12

4/2 Tues
4/4 Thurs

James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) (ch. 8-11)
James M. Cain, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) (ch. 12-16)

Week #13

4/9 Tues
4/11 Thurs

***Group Presentations**
***Group Presentations**

Week #14

4/16 Tues
4/18 Thurs

Instructor Away on a Class Trip
**Group Presentations*

Week #15

4/23 Tues
4/25 Thurs

Kemp Symposium Conferencing
Kemp Symposium

Week #16

**Final 2-page Screening Report Due via Email*