Course Title and Number: ENGL 658.600, Film Noir

Term: TBA
Meeting Times and Location: TBA

Course Description

Catalog Description for ENGL 658: Topics in Film History. (3-0). Credit 3. Topics in the history of the production, reception, and institutional contexts of cinema; may focus on national cinemas, genres, movements, styles, film industries, film’s relation to other media. May be taken three times for credit as content varies.

Course Description: This course will investigate the phenomenon of the film noir as it appears in American cinema from the 1940s to the present. The emphasis will fall upon film noir production from the early 1940s through the early 1960s, although we will examine a number of so-called "color noir" films as samples of recent film noir production. We will examine film noir’s cinematic and literary antecedents (e.g., the gangster film, the hard-boiled detective novel but also its sources in women’s fiction), its connections to a variety of foreign cinemas (particularly those of France, Germany, and Italy), its associations with documentary, and its interest in psychoanalysis as a mode of investigation and as a framework for narration. We will take up the issue of film noir’s apparent misogyny, both in narrative terms and its deployment of particular male and female performance styles through a closer examination of the work of Humphrey Bogart and Rita Hayworth. We will consider a variety of cultural pressures on film noir production, including changes in the studio system, the influence of a climate of political and social suspicion generated by Congressional investigations of Hollywood, and the Cold War generally. We’ll conclude by considering recent film noir production so as to reconsider film noir’s adjacency to other genres, including the screwball comedy, the western, and the science fiction film.

Instructor Information

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Required Resource Material

- James Naremore, More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts (Updated and Expanded)
- James Kitses, Gun Crazy
- Noah Isenberg, Detour
- Melvyn Stokes, Gilda
- Andrew Pulver, Night and the City
- Michael Eaton, Chinatown
- Coursepak available from E-Reserves
- Weekly film screenings as detailed below; see course requirements for screening information.

Grading Policies

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Class participation 15%
Seminar paper (due at the end of the semester; 5% of grade is based on abstract and annotated bibliography) 55%
Book review (rolling deadlines, per negotiation) 15%
Grading Scale
F: 0-59, D: 60-69, C: 70-79, B: 80-89, A: 90-100

Incompletes
In order to qualify for an incomplete, you must have completed at least 60% of the course work. See Student Rules for more information on the grade of I.

Viewing and Reading Schedule

Week One: Cycle, Movement, Style, or Genre?
Screening: Double Indemnity (Wilder, 1944, 106m) and Out of the Past (Tourneur, 1947, 97m)
Naremore, “The History of an Idea”
Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir”
Altman, “Are Genres Stable?”
Place and Peterson, “Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir”
Evans, “Double Indemnity (or Bringing Up Baby)”

Week Two: Film Noir’s Antecedents
Screening: The Maltese Falcon (Huston, 1941, 101m) and The Killers (Siodmak, 1946, 103m)
Naremore, “Modernism and Blood Melodrama”
Krutnik, “‘Hard-Boiled’ Crime Fiction and Film Noir”
Elsaesser, “A German Ancestry to Film Noir? Film History and Its Imaginary”
O’Brien, “Film Noir in France: Before the Liberation”
Munby, “The Un-American Film Art: Robert Siodmak and the Political Significance of Film Noir’s German Connection”
Wexman, “Kinesics and Film Acting: Humphrey Bogart in The Maltese Falcon and The Big Sleep” (recommended)

Week Three: Wounded Masculinity: The Homosocial World of Film Noir
Screening: Crossfire (Dymtryk, 1947, 86m)
Krutnik, “Masculinity and Its Discontents”
Fox, “Crossfire and HUAC”
Raths and Trager, “Public Opinion and Crossfire” (skim)
Maltby, “The Politics of the Maladjusted Text”
Selections from Richard Brooks’s The Brick Foxhole

Week Four: Film Noir and Psychoanalysis
Screening: Murder My Sweet (Dmytryk, 1944, 95m), selections from Dick Powell musicals shown in class, and Laura (Preminger, 1944, 88m)
Krutnik, “Film Noir and the Popularisation of Psychoanalysis”
Telotte, “Noir Narration”
Thomas, “Psychoanalysis and Film Noir”
Selections from Vera Caspary’s Laura

Preliminary statement of seminar paper topic due

Week Five: The Circumstances of Production and Reception
Screening: Gun Crazy (Lewis, 1950, 87m) and Detour (Ulmer, 1945, 68m)
Kitses, Gun Crazy (all)
Isenberg, Detour (all)
Britton, “Detour”
Modleski, “Film Theory’s Detour”

Week Six: Rita Hayworth as the Film Noir Woman
Screening: *Gilda* (C. Vidor, 1946, 110m) and *The Lady from Shanghai* (Welles, 1947, 87m)
Stokes, *Gilda* (all)
McLean, “It’s Only That I Do What I Love and Love What I Do’: Film Noir and the Musical Woman”
Britton, “Betrayed by Rita Hayworth: Misogyny in *The Lady from Shanghai*”
Davidson, “Phantom Limbs: Film Noir and the Disabled Body”

Annotated bibliography of sources for seminar paper due (this assignment does not assume that you have completed the reading of all these sources, but rather that you know much of what you want to look at and why)

**Week Seven: The Documentary Noir**
Screening: *T-Men* (Mann, 1947, 92m) and *Border Incident* (Mann, 1949, 94m)
Telotte, “The Transparent Reality of the Documentary Noir”
White, “T(he)-Men’s Room: Masculinity and Space in Anthony Mann’s *T-Men*”
Conley, “Border Incidence”

**Week Eight: The French Connection Redux**
Screening: *Scarlet Street* (Lang, 1945, 102m) and *La Chienne* (Renoir, 1931, 95m)
Jacobowitz, “The Man’s Melodrama”
Walsh, “Sound Strategies: Lang’s Rearticulation of Renoir”
Bernstein, “A Tale of Three Cities”

**Week Nine: Film Noir as Parable of Hollywood Anxieties**
Screening: *In a Lonely Place* (Ray, 1950, 94m)
Naremore, “From Dark Films to Black Lists”
Naremore, “Low Is High: Budgets and Discrimination”
V. F. Perkins, “*In a Lonely Place*”
Telotte, “The Displaced Voice of *In a Lonely Place*”

**Week Ten: The City in Film Noir**
Screening: *Night and the City* (Dassin, 1950, 101m)
Pulver, *Night and the City* (all)
Selections from Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*

**Week Eleven: Film Noir as Cold War Text**
Screening: *Kiss Me Deadly* (Aldrich, 1955, 106m)
Lang, “Looking for the ‘Great Whatzit’: *Kiss Me Deadly* and Film Noir”
Silver, “*Kiss Me Deadly*: Evidence of a Style”
Staiger, “*Kiss Me Deadly*: Cold War Threats from Spillane to Aldrich”
Willis, “Christina Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelite Noir”

**Week Twelve: Neo-Noir**
Screening: *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974, 131m); you may also want to screen *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976, 113m)
Eaton, *Chinatown* (all)
Naremore, “Old Is New”
Stewart, “‘The Long Goodbye’ from ‘Chinatown’”
Polan, “*Chinatown*: Politics as Perspective, Perspective as Politics”
Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir” (rereading this essay, assigned the first week of the semester, would be helpful)

**Week Thirteen: The Film Noir Family**
Screening: *The Deep End* (McGehee, 2001, 100m) and *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz, 1945, 111m)
Wood, “Plunging Off *The Deep End* into *The Reckless Moment*”
Jurca, “Mildred Pierce, Warner Bros., and the Corporate Family”
Week Fourteen: Black and White Again
Screening: The Man Who Wasn’t There (Coen and Coen, 2001, 116m)
Naremore, “The Other Side of the Street”
Palmer, “The New Sincerity of Neo-Noir”

Week Fifteen: Class Symposium
Our final meeting will be structured as a symposium in which students present ten-minute chunks (approximately five double-spaced pages) of the seminar papers for this course. Because the presentations will be organized into panels and thus grouped thematically by topic, be sure to provide your abstract no later than week thirteen.

Finished seminar-length (18-25 pages, double-spaced) paper due the day scheduled by the university for the final exam in this course.

Other Pertinent Course Information

Attendance
University rules related to excused and unexcused absences are online at http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07. According to TAMU Student Rule #7, students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. If you know in advance that you will miss a class, you are responsible for informing me by email. For excessive excused absences (three weeks or more), I recommend that you see your academic advisor to review the option outlined in TAMU Student Rule 7.6.

Paper Format
Except for the final exam, all written work should be typed, double-spaced, and in conformity with MLA citation style; information on the latter can be found in most writing handbooks or online.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information visit http://disability.tamu.edu.

Academic Integrity

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

For additional information on the honor code, visit http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/.