ENG 245 Special Topics in Film
The Detective in Film and Television

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<tr>
<th>Professor: Thomas Cohen</th>
<th>Office: Palmer 308</th>
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<td>Time: MWF 11:30-12:30</td>
<td>Office hours: T, W and R 10-11 a.m.</td>
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<td>Screening: W 7:30-10 p.m.</td>
<td>Messages: ext. 3399</td>
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<tr>
<td>Room: FJB; FJA (screening)</td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:cohent@rhodes.edu">cohent@rhodes.edu</a></td>
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Goals

Focusing on the detective figure in motion-picture media, this course offers a study of genre (*film noir*), an investigation of cultural productions (the movie serial, the television series), and an introduction to a formal interpretive system (semiotics). Prerequisite: ENGL 151.

Required Texts

- *Film Noir Reader 2*–Ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini
- *Introduction to Communication Studies*–John Fiske
- *Introducing Semiotics*–Paul Cobley and Litza Jansz
- *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*–Ed. David Lavery
- On-line readings

Course requirements

- Two 8-10 page papers
- 10 unannounced reading and viewing quizzes
- 5 short paragraphs
- Class participation

Overview

The first half of the course focuses on the *film noir* genre in cinema. Expanding to include other audiovisual media, the second half examines the detective as a figure in a serial or series. The entire course is designed to teach students the basics of semiotic analysis.

Paper Assignments

**Essay one:** Working with concepts borrowed from the field of semiotics, compose an essay on some aspect of *film noir*.

**Essay Two:** Compose an essay on some aspect of the films or television episodes we have watched. This second essay should employ more sophisticated concepts of logic and semiotics.

Grading
• 2 papers=30% each (60% total)
• Quizzes=10% total
• 5 paragraphs=4% each (20% total)
• Participation=10%

Grading Criteria for Papers

• A  Excellent work. The essay states a clear thesis or objective. Ideas are logically developed. The essay is organized as a whole and on the paragraph level. Points are supported with examples. Quotations are introduced appropriately. The writer has engaged assigned readings and film(s) and has demonstrated command of tone and word choice. Free of serious mechanical errors.
• A- Very fine work. Shares many qualities with A work but lacks the sophistication and polish of the latter.
• B+ Very good work. Contains a clearly stated thesis that is logically developed. Demonstrates engagement with assigned readings and films. May contain some awkward expressions. Style shows competence if not polish. No serious mechanical errors.
• B  Good work. Fulfills the assignment requirements. Demonstrates the writer has read the assignments, seen the films, and attended class. Free of serious, chronic mechanical errors but may need improvement on grammar and style.
• B- Fair work. Shares most of the qualities of B paper but may contain more mechanical errors, awkward expressions, or flaws in logical development.
• C (+) Satisfactory but needs improvement.
• F  Unsatisfactory work.

Participation
The grade depends on the student’s contributions to class discussion. Quality rather than quantity counts.

Quizzes
Because these quizzes test whether students have done the assigned reading and viewing, I do not assign letter grades. Rather, a student receives credit, half credit (at my discretion), or no credit for each quiz. No make-ups are allowed; however, I will give each student credit for one quiz “free.” In other words, a student may miss or fail one quiz without penalty.

Paragraphs
These assignments are designed to improve students’ writing and will cover the following areas: 1. Plot synopsis; 2. Introductory paragraphs; 3. Quoting and paraphrasing; 4. Subordination and coordination. 5. Revising. The schedule gives due dates for these assignments.
Screenings

8/28: *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946)
9/4: *Farewell, My Lovely* (Dick Richards, 1975)
9/11: *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974)
9/18: *Kiss me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955)
9/15: *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)
10/2: *The Bride Wore Black* (Francois Truffaut, 1967)
10/9: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)
10/16: No screening
10/23: *The Thin Man* (W. S. Van Dyke, 1934)
10/30: Jon Jost visit
11/6: Episodic of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
11/13: Episodic of Twin Peaks
11/20: Episodic of The X-Files
11/27: No screening
12/4: Screening TBA

Schedule

8/28: Introduction
8/30: Frank, “New Kind of Police Drama”; Chartier, “Americans”
9/2: No class. Labor Day
9/4: Neale, “Film Noir”*
9/6: Discussion. Clips from *The Big Sleep* (1978)
9/9: **Paragraph one due.**
Clips from *The Long Goodbye, Murder, My Sweet, Lady in the lake*

9/11: Ewing, “Film Noir: Style and Content”
9/13: Jameson, “Son of Noir”; Cobb, “Writing the New Noir Film”
9/16: Fiske, Introduction and chapter 1; Cobley and Jansz, 8-17 (on Saussure) and 115 (on Shannon and Weaver); Berger, “Auteur Criticism”*
9/18: Fiske, chapter 3 and 4; Cobley and Jansz, 142-150 (on Jakobson)
9/23: **Paragraph two due.**
Fiske, chapter 5
9/30: Fiske, chapter 6
10/2: Nevins, “Translate and Transform”
10/4: Noir and the French New Wave; Chabrol, “Evolution”
10/7: Cobley and Jansz, 43-52; Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image”*; “The Romans in Film”* “Garbo’s Face”*
10/9: **Paragraph three due.**
Discussion on Hitchcock and Noir
10/11: Silver, “Footnotes of the Mirror”
10/14: Workshop on revising paragraphs
10/16: Review
10/18: **ESSAY ONE DUE**
10/21: No class. Fall break
10/23: Introduction to part II
10/25: Eco, “Interpreting Serials”
10/28: Ducrot and Todorov, “Semiotics” and “Character”*
10/30: Jon Jost visit
11/1: Poe, “Murders in the Rue Morgue”*
11/4: Peirce, “Abduction and Induction”*; Cobley and Jansz, 18-37 (on Peirce)
11/6: Discussion
11/11: **Paragraph four due.**
Cobley and Jansz, 53-66 (on Levi-Strauss and structuralism)
11/15: Dolan, “Twin Peaks and Serial Creativity”
11/18: Hague, “Infinite Games”
11/20: Telotte, “The Disorder of Things in Twin Peaks”
11/22: Malach, “I Want to Believe . . . in the FBI”*
11/25: Wilcox and Williams, “The X-Files, Liminality and Gender Pleasure”*
11/27: No class.
Thanksgiving
11/29: No class.
Thanksgiving
12/2: Fiske, chapter 7
12/4: Fiske, chapter 9
12/6: Fiske, conclusion
12/9: **Paragraph 5 due**
12/11: Conclusion
12/16: **ESSAY TWO DUE**