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ENGL 241-01 and 02, History and Criticism of American Cinema, Fall 2002

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ENGL 241 History and Criticism of American Cinema

Professor: Thomas Cohen	Office: Palmer 308
Time: T and R 11:20 AM-12:50 PM (section 2)	Office hours: T, W and R 10-11 a.m.
Screening: T 7:30-10 p.m.	Messages: ext. 3399
Room: Palmer 206; FJA (screening)	E-mail: cohent@rhodes.edu

Goals

This course offers a chronological survey of American cinema, addressing such topics as the development of cinematic technologies and the evolution of film “language.” Students will compose essays that demonstrate their grasp of film history and analysis.

Required Texts

- *Short Guide to Writing about Film*–Timothy Corrigan
- *The Genius of the System*–Thomas Schatz
- *The New American Cinema*–Ed. Jon Lewis (On reserve)
- *American Cinema and Hollywood*–Ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson
- *Spike, Mike, Slackers, and Dykes*–John Pierson

Course requirements

- Two papers approximately ten pages each
- 10 unannounced reading and viewing quizzes
- Film Terms Test
- Class participation

Overview

The course consists of two major units. The first examines “classical” Hollywood during the studio era. The second unit focuses on the blockbuster’s emergence and the independent film renaissance that followed Hollywood’s fall in profits in the early 1970s.

Paper Assignments

Essay one: Imagine the process of turning a certain play or novel into a film. Write a paper that describes how different production conditions would affect both the filmmaking process and the finished product. For example, how would making a picture for MGM in the 1930s differ from making one for Warners in the 1940s or for a television studio in the fifties? Use concrete examples from class readings and films.

Essay Two: Compose an essay on some aspect of “post-classical” Hollywood or independent filmmaking.

Grading

- 2 papers=35% each (70% total)
- Quizzes=10% total
- Film terms test=10%
- 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.

Screenings

- 9/3: It Happened One Night (Frank Capra, 1934)
- 9/10: The Divorcee (Leonard, 1930)
- 9/17: I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (Mervyn LeRoy, 1932)
- 9/24: Jezebel (William Wyler, 1938)
- 10/1: Singin' in the Rain (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952)
- 10/8: Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)

10/15: The Long, Long Trailer (Vincente Minnelli, 1954)
10/22: No screening
10/29: Jon Jost film TBA
11/5: Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967)
11/12: Do the Right Thing (Spike Lee, 1989)
11/19: sex, lies, and videotape (Steven Soderbergh, 1989)
11/26: No screening
12/3: Raiders of the Lost Ark (Steven Spielberg, 1981)
12/10: Living in Oblivion (Tom DiCillo, 1995)

Schedule

8/29: Introduction to course
9/3: Corrigan, chapters 1 and 2; Schatz, Introduction
9/5: Corrigan, chapter 3; Hill, General Introduction
9/10: **Film terms test.** Tom Gunning, "Early American Film"; Schatz, chapter 2 (MGM)
9/12: Schatz, Chapter 7 (MGM and Thalberg); chapter 10 (MGM in the Mid-thirties)
9/17: Schatz, chapter 9 (Warner Bros.)
9/19: Schatz, chapter 12 (Warner Bros.)
9/24: Butler, "The star system and Hollywood"; Kaplan, "Classical Hollywood film and Melodrama"
9/26: Ryall, "Genre and Hollywood"
10/1: Corrigan, chapter 4; Belton, "American cinema and film history"
10/3: Schatz, chapter 14 (MGM: Life After Thalberg)
10/8: Corrigan, chapter 7; Crofts, "Authorship and Hollywood"
10/10: Schatz, chapter 17 (Selznick), chapter 20 (Selznick and Hitchcock)
10/15: Schatz, chapter 21- 24 (70 pgs.)
10/17: **FIRST ESSAY DUE**
10/22: No class.
10/24: Introduction to part II
10/29: Gomery, "Hollywood as industry"
10/31: Petrie, "History and cinema technology"
11/5: Discussion
11/7: Kramer, "Post-classical Hollywood"
11/12: Pierson 1-82
11/14: Pierson, 83-125
11/19: Pierson, 126-184
11/21: Pierson, 185-211
11/26: Kellner, "Hollywood film and society"; Ray, "Hollywood and ideology"
11/28: No class. Thanksgiving
12/3: Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation" (in *New American Cinema*)
12/5: Toby Miller, "Hollywood and the world"
12/10: Kleinhans, "Independent Features" (in *New American Cinema*)
12/16: **SECOND ESSAY DUE**

The instructor reserves the right to alter this schedule.