

Eng Lit 0400
Spring 2003
Dione J

LIT 0400

Intro to Film: DECONSTRUCTING THE FILM, CONSTRUCTING THE BLOCKBUSTER--Spring 03
CRS 0400 CRN 30508 LAWRN207 Not "W" designated MW 9-10:50 Instructor: Jill Dione
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Texts: At the bookstore: American Cinema, American Culture, John Belton. On reserve at Hillman: Gladiator, ed. Diana Landau; The American Film Musical, Rick Altman; "Hitchcock's Washington" chapter from Hitchcock's America, ed., Freedman & Millington. Additional reading will be provided on an ad hoc basis.

Course Description: In Film, Form, and Culture, author Robert Kolker contends that "[w]e find films realistic because we have learned certain kinds of responses. . . from them, and when we see. . . or feel these responses again in a film, we assume they are real--because we've felt and seen them before. . . [and] probably even imitated them" (xv). Thus, through this cycle--of seeing films that reaffirm the very behavior that they have taught us to emulate--we construct a notion of what is realistic. But because we construct this notion of reality from "the infinite loop" of cinematic-reaffirmation-of-cinema-learned-behavior, "[w]hat we call 'realistic' in film is, more often than not, only the familiar" (xv). Only by examining film's form and content, then, can we disrupt this "infinite loop"--wherein familiarity masquerades as reality--and subsequently "denaturalize our responses" by attempting to understand not only how such responses are culturally determined but also the ways in which films contribute to--or even conspire in--such determination. In this course, we'll engage in these kinds of critical and "denaturaliz[ing]" examinations of films in an attempt to identify the cultural determinations at work in them and on us. Then, as a kind of grand finale, we'll use our findings to aid us in a study of the recent blockbuster film Gladiator (Ridley Scott, 2000), wherein we may re-discover--in more grandiose form--some of the same kinds of genre conventions and cultural motifs at play in the "non-blockbuster" films.

Course Requirements & Grading:

Attendance: Chronic tardiness will count toward absenteeism. Four absences will result in a deduction of ten points from your final grade, and five absences will result in a failing grade. If, however, in spite of these caveats, you **MUST** miss a class, it is **YOUR** responsibility to: (1) let me know--in advance, if possible; (2) see any film whose in-class screening you have missed; and (3) ask a **CLASSMATE TO TAKE NOTES**, obtain copies of any handouts, etc. so that you will not miss out on crucial information that will enable you to complete your work for this course.

In-class Quizzes--10%: Quizzes may be announced or unannounced. In either event, passing them will pose no problem if you watch all films attentively and take thoughtful notes on them and the related class discussions.

Film Journal--20%: For the class meeting following each screening, you will be required to write at least 1 short, thoughtful (vs. affective) paragraph about a particular aspect of the film. If you handwrite this journal entry, make it legible, for we may exchange journal entries in class. In that case, one of your colleagues, rather than you, may be called upon to read your entry aloud to the class. Please file each journal entry separately in a 3-ring notebook, which you may also use for your notes and for handouts.

Class Participation--10%: Do **NOT** remain mute. Engage w/the film & w/your colleagues. **SPEAK!**

Midterm--20%: The exam will consist mainly of essay questions.

Research & Presentation--20%: Early in the semester, you will sign up for one of the Gladiator Groups specified in Part II of the Class Schedule. On the date indicated therein, you & the rest of the group electing such topic will present to the rest of the class the results of your research. Presentations should last approx. the entire class period and use film clips, handouts, etc., as appropriate.

Final--20%: The exam will consist mainly of essay questions.

Note: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources & Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

W/respect to the following schedule: Screening times are approximate. Abbreviations: ACAC=American Cinema, American Culture; AR=Additional Reading handout; GG=Gladiator Grp.

CLASS SCHEDULE--PART I--DECONSTRUCTING THE FILM

1/6, 1/8: Classic Narrative Cinema; Director-as-Auteur Film #1

Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960), 109 min. Read: ACAC Chpts. 2 & 3 "Classical H'wood Narrative & Style"; Mulvey AR. For Journal Entry #1 (due 1/8), discuss the mise-en-scene in Psycho's parlor scene.

1/13, 1/15: PR, The Studio System, Comedy, Self-Reflexivity

Singin' in the Rain (Donen & Kelly, 1952), 102 min. Read: ACAC Chpt. 4 "The Studio System," Chpt. 5 "The Star System," & Chpt. 7 "American Comedy"; American Film Musical (on reserve), pp.200-212, 254-258.

1/20: Martin Luther King Day, No Class

1/22: General Cinematic Concepts

1/27, 1/29: Documentary

One Day in September (MacDonald, 2000), 90 min.

2/3, 2/5: Film & Nation; The Western; Star-Text; Gender Roles

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (Ford, 1962), 119 min. Read: Cohan AR.

2/10, 2/12: Director-as-Auteur Film #2; Film Noir

Strangers on a Train (Hitchcock, 1951), 101 min. Read: ACAC Chpt. 14 "Auteurism & Film School Generation" & Chpt. 9 "Film Noir"; "Hitchcock's Washington" (on reserve); Smith AR.

2/17, 2/19: view Gladiator (Scott, 2000), 165 min.

2/24, 2/26: The War Film

The Dirty Dozen (Aldrich, 1967) 150 min. Read ACAC, Chpt. 8 "The War Film" & Chpt. 13 "Counterculture"

3/3, 3/5: Spring Break

3/10: Review for mid-term exam on 3/12

3/12: Mid-term exam

CLASS SCHEDULE--PART II--CONSTRUCTING THE BLOCKBUSTER

(each group will also receive topic-specific handouts)

3/17: BT #1: The historic vs. diegetic Roman Empire under Marcus Aurelius.

3/19: BT #2: Gladiator's narrative style (ACAC Chpt. 3)

3/24: BT #3: Gladiator's publicity (advertising, trends, trailers)

3/26: BT #4: Gladiator and genre (ACAC Chpts. 8, 9, 10)

3/31: BT#5: Gladiator w/respect to star-texts and auteurism (ACAC Chpts. 5 & 14)

4/02: BT#6: Gladiator w/respect to The Patriot

4/07: BT#7: Gladiator & Spartacus

4/09: BT#8: Gladiator & Remember the Titans

4/14: Review for final exam on 4/16

4/16: Final exam

All outstanding papers due in my mailbox in 501CL by noon Monday 4/28.

Have a great summer!