

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & WRITING STUDIES

*FILM 3359F—FAMILY VIEWING: MELODRAMA*

FILM STUDIES PROGRAM

INSTRUCTOR: DR. CE GITTINGS

FALL

2017

OFFICE: ON 58

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OFFICE HOURS: Thursday 14:30-17:30

SCREENINGS: Wednesday 16:30-19:30 in AHB 3B02

LECTURES/Discussions: Thursday 12:30-14:30 in AHB 3B02

Communications: Check your OWL Email before Screenings and Lecture/Tutorial

**Antirequisite(s):** Film Studies 3360F, if taken in 2013-2014 or 2015-2016.

**Prerequisite(s):** At least 60% in [Film Studies 1020E](#) or [Film Studies 1022](#) or special permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Students will interrogate the genre of the family melodrama through critical readings and the screening of films and television programs. For Louis Althusser, the Family along with the Church works as an Ideological State Apparatus interpellating good subjects for the State. The family's work of forming subjectivities is visible in popular culture representations such as the Hollywood family melodrama genre. Genres will be considered as components of what Stephen Neale calls the mental machinery of cinema: "a machine for the regulation of the orders of subjectivity" (Neale 1980, 19). Tracing a trajectory of family representations ranging across such divergent formations of melodrama as *Birth of a Nation* (USA, DW Griffith, 1915), *Mildred Pierce* (USA, Michael Curtiz, 1945), *All That Heaven Allows* (USA, Douglas Sirk, 1955), *Leave it to Beaver* (USA, 1957-63), *Mad Men* (USA, 2007-2015), *Pleasantville* (USA, Gary Ross 1998), *Far From Heaven* (USA, Todd Haynes, 2002), *Muriel's Wedding* (Australia, P.J. Hogan, 1994), *All About My Mother* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1999) and *There Will be Blood* (USA, Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007), students will investigate, through discussion, collaborative presentation and essay

writing, the interrelationships of race, gender, class, sexuality and the nation as these concepts are performed through the family.

Thomas Elsaesser describes the family melodrama as a genre where plots revolve around the powerless, and their victimization by a corrupt social order as this is represented through family relationships (Elsaesser 1974, 514-15). A genre that tailors "ideological conflicts into emotionally charged family situations" (Elsaesser 1974, 516), the popular family melodrama "facilitates conflict and negotiation between cultural identities" (Gledhill 1987, 37). Family melodramas negotiate the space between the home and the community, and the family's classed, raced and gendered positions within these two spheres. Drawing on the work of Cook, Gledhill and Kleinhans, Hayward has suggested, in melodrama the family becomes the site of patriarchy and capitalism and therefore reproduces them (Hayward 1996, 200). With an emphasis on questions of genre, the course will pay close attention to cinematic and televisual constructions of the home, site of the family, as a symbolic structure of identity, its *heimlich* (canny, homely, familiar) and its *unheimlich* (uncanny, alien, unknown) properties. Relationships between the family, domestic space and the space of the nation will be a central focus of the course. As the course develops, students will begin to understand the shape-shifting nature of genre in general and melodrama in particular through time and culture and the aesthetic and ideological practices of genre bending.

### **Objectives**

By the end of the course successful students will:

- Understand 'melodrama,' 'genre,' 'ideology,' 'parody,' 'pastiche,' and 'postmodernism,' as critical terms in Film Studies and be able to apply these terms effectively to a diverse body of titles in prose and oral discussion.
- Have insights into the diversity and psychosociology of the cinematic and televisual family as this construct is marked by class, race, gender/sexuality nationality and genre.
- The above will be acquired by students through developing a capacity for argument, research, judgment and analysis that will be fostered by essays, presentations and other assignments, and by in-class small-group and whole-class discussion on family melodrama, genre and ideology.
- Communication skills will be imparted through in-class discussion and credit will be given for frequency and quality of contributions.

- Essays and other written assignments are marked in accordance with the grading criteria listed below and include benchmarks for the expectations associated with each grade.
- Awareness of the limits of knowledge will be enhanced by exploring the legitimate differences of opinion and methodology within the field, and by requiring students to negotiate the formulation of their own opinions in-class with the terms and knowledge brought to discussions by other students and the instructor.
- The ability to argue and decide on complex issues will be fostered by essays and in-class discussion. Time management skills will be fostered by the need to prepare properly for class and to deliver assignments in a timely manner. Academic responsibility will be developed by the need to source assignments accurately.

#### **Course Materials:**

- A package of photocopied readings **CP--Required**  
**Available from the UWO bookshop under Film 3359**

- Library Readings available on **OWL**

#### **On Reserve at Weldon:**

Cohan, Steve. *Masked Men: Masculinity and the movies in the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. London: Polity Press, 1995. (Or 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.)

Landy, Marcia (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.

Neale, Stephen. *Genre*, B.F.I.: London, 1992

#### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

All students will attend screenings and seminars prepared to **participate** in discussions based on the week's assigned readings and screenings. Notes should be taken immediately following all screenings. Come to class with questions or comments that have arisen from your readings, the lecture and screening. Make notes during the lectures, and class discussions, with a view to challenging or developing some of the points expressed.

### Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Attendance and Tutorial Participation		10%
Group Presentation (Abstract, Bibliography, research notes, document posting)		20 %
Mid-term	<b>01 November</b>	15%
Essay	<b>09 November</b>	20%

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**TOTAL TERM** **65%**

**FINAL EXAMINATION** **35%**

**A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course.** This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at

[http://www.uwo.ca/film/undergraduate/student\\_forms.html](http://www.uwo.ca/film/undergraduate/student_forms.html)

See also the English departmental site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>