

INSTRUCTOR: DR. CE GITTINGS

Fall 2020

OFFICE: UC 4414

TELEPHONE: 661-2111 X 85781

E-MAIL: gittings@uwo.ca but for the most part contact via OWL mail.

OFFICE HOURS: TBA

FILM 3330F—National/Transnational Cinemas—Family Melodrama

Film Studies Program

Department of English and Writing Studies

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Western Ontario

SCREENINGS: Mondays 14:30-17:30 Virtual Screen Sharing Screening

LECTURES: Tuesdays 15:30-17:30 posted to OWL Collaborate UE

Tutorial Discussions on Zoom: TBA

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

COURSE AIMS

Students will interrogate the genre of the family melodrama through critical readings and the screening of films and television programs across Hollywood and three other national cinemas. 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, a form that has transnational resonances both in its inflection of other cinemas and those cinemas' reception, consumption and reworking of the genre. Genre 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, *Now Voyager* (USA, Irving Rapper, 1942), *Mildred Pierce* (USA, Michael Curtiz, 1945), *All That Heaven Allows* (USA, Douglas Sirk, 1955), *Pleasantville* (USA, Gary Ross 1998), *Far From Heaven* (USA, Todd Haynes, 2002), *Fear Eats the Soul/Angst essen Seele auf* (West Germany, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974), *Muriel's Wedding* (Australia, P.J. Hogan, 1994), *Todo sobre mi madre/All About My Mother* (Spain, Pedro Almodóvar, 1999), *There Will be Blood* (USA, Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007), and *Parasite* (South Korea, Bong Joon Ho, 2019) 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 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 national/transnational, will frame our investigation of family melodrama.

Course Readings:

A package of photocopied readings **CP**

Available from the UWO bookshop

PDF Readings available on **OWL**

On Reserve at Weldon:

Landy, Marcia (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*.

Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All students will attend virtual screenings and seminars prepared to **participate** in discussions based on the week's assigned readings and screenings. Lectures will be posted to OWL Collaborate UE. 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.