

Rhode Island College
English 337
Topics in the Aesthetics of Film

Topic: Film Genre

In this course, we will examine the concept of genre in film. We will focus on film noir, the dark, edgy Hollywood crime films first developed in the 1940s in classics such as The Maltese Falcon, Murder My Sweet, Double Indemnity, and The Big Heat. We will seek to understand the nature of film genre by contrasting the noir films with films made at the same time but within the alternative genre framework of the musical. We may also examine more recent examples of both genres.

For English majors: Although English 337 does not assume that students have studied film previously, all students will be expected to become familiar with the basic vocabulary of film analysis.

For Film Studies majors: English 337 counts as an elective in the film studies major. The course prerequisites may be waived with permission from the instructor.

Required Text: available at the Off-Campus Bookstore, 1017 Smith Street (861-6270).

Grant, Barry Keith, ed. Film Genre Reader III. Austin: U of Texas P, 2003. (FGR on syllabus)

Critical essays to be distributed in class (* on syllabus)

Additional essays may also be assigned

Course Requirements: Requirements include regular attendance, including attendance at all screenings and demonstrated commitment to the work of the course, including the completion of all reading assignments on time and coming to class prepared to participate in discussion. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to make arrangements to obtain assignments or handouts as soon as possible and before the next class. If you miss a screening, you will need to see the film on your own. Some—but not all—may be available from local video stores. Copies may be available on reserve in Adams Library (check library website for hours); check with me for availability. Other requirements will include short response papers or critical exercises, a critical paper, and a take-home exam. More than two absences will have a negative impact on final grades.

Screening Etiquette: Do not be late to class and do not leave early. Both are disruptive. Do not leave during a screening except for an emergency. Please be quiet (no talking, no food or drink noises) during screenings. And turn off all cell phones and other electronics.

Course Calendar

M June 29 Introduction

T June 30 Grant, “Introduction” (FGR xv-xviii top)
The Maltese Falcon (1941, John Huston)

W July 1 Tudor, “Genre” (FGR)
Buscombe, “The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema” (FGR)

M July 6 Holiday: no class

- T July 7 Sobchack, “Genre Film: A Classical Experience” (FGR)
 Shrader, “Notes on Film Noir” (FGR)
 Spicer, from Film Noir *
Gold Diggers of 1933 (1933, Mervyn LeRoy)
- W July 8 Cohan, “Musicals of the Studio Era” *
 Rubin, “Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical” *
- M July 13 Wright, “Genre Films and the Status Quo” (FGR)
 Bourget, “Social Implications in the Hollywood Genres” (FGR)
Murder, My Sweet (1944, Edward Dmytryk)
- T July 14 Schatz, from Hollywood Genres *
Swing Time (1936, George Stevens)
- W July 15 Altman, from The American Film Musical *
 Cohan, “‘Feminizing’ the Song-and-Dance Man” *
- M July 20 De Cordova, “Genre and Performance: An Overview” (FGR)
Double Indemnity (1944, Billy Wilder)
- T July 21 Harvey, “Woman’s Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir” *
- W July 22 Meet Me in St. Louis (1944, Vincente Minnelli)
- M July 27 Exam due
- T July 28 Neale, from Genre and Hollywood *
The Big Heat (1953, Fritz Lang)
- W July 29 Feuer, “The Self-Reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment” (FGR)
Singin’ in the Rain (1952, Stanley Donen/Gene Kelly)
- M Aug 3 Clover, “Dancin’ in the Rain” *
- T Aug 4 Staiger, “Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History” (FGR)
Devil in a Blue Dress (1995, Carl Franklin)
- W Aug 5 Paper due

RIC Policies

- Please note: Any student with a documented disability is welcome to contact me as early in the semester as possible so that we may arrange reasonable accommodations. As part of this process, please be in touch with the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, Disability Related Services for Students office at Craig-Lee 127, 456-8061.
- Pursuant to the RIBGHE Rhode Island College does not discriminate based on race, color, creed, national or ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, marital/citizenship status, or status as a special disabled veteran, Vietnam veteran, or any other veteran who served active duty during war or campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized.
- This classroom is a safe classroom for all students. Negative discrimination toward any one, through words of actions, will not be tolerated, based on but not limited to, race, color, creed, national or ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, marital/citizenship status, or status as a special disabled veteran, Vietnam veteran, or any other veteran who served active duty during war or campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized.
- RIC's Academic Dishonesty Policy can be found in the Rhode Island College Handbook of Policies, Practices, and Regulations (Chapter 3: *Academic policies and procedures*, pp. 32-34, section 3.9.1), and will be followed in this class.