

Understanding British/American Culture through Film, Fall 2010

Instructor: Gord Sellar

Course Overview:

This course provides students with a chance to become more familiar with British and American cultures through the study and discussion of films. We will look at a broad variety of films from (and dealing with) different periods in British and American history, with the goal of understanding how culture is embedded in film, and film is embedded in culture.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will familiarize themselves with selected films from the English speaking world, primarily British and American but possibly also Canadian or Australian.
2. Students will develop competency in the area of critically discussing films in terms of their historical, cultural, linguistic, artistic, and commercial contexts.
3. Students will develop critical and "contrapuntal" reading skills, and a repertory of critical terms, concepts, and approaches for approaching and understanding film.
4. Students will develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the cultures within which these films were produced.
5. Students will be invited to reflect on what they have learned within a Korean context.

Teaching method:

Classes will involve the viewing of films, large-group discussions, academic presentations or discussion panels (depending on class size), and readings pertinent to the films and/or their social, historical, and cultural context. In lieu of exams and essays, students will be expected to produce "critiques" of films. (I will discuss these "critiques" when the due dates are assigned.) However, preparation, completing readings, and participation in weekly class discussions are *absolutely crucial*, whether presenting or leading a discussion, or merely participating, your contribution will determine a *significant* part of your grade.

Homework

Homework for this class falls under several different categories.

- Preparation for Discussions, Panel Discussions or Presentations (depending on class size)
- A Film Journal (in the form of a blog with a minimum of one post per film we watch, plus several other films I will be asking you to discuss after viewing independently.)
- Two Critiques -- one midterm and one final critique will be assigned
- The completion of regular, short online peer evaluations and other polls, which will be posted to the class website.
- Other minor homework assignments

Textbook

As this course has been assigned to me with only short notice, I have not assembled a readings package for you. However, I will be providing you with articles (either as photocopies, or via links for online articles) that you will be expected to read in preparation for our weekly

discussions.

Should you wish to explore literature not encompassed in this course, please feel free to ask me for recommendations. I will be more than happy to help you find materials -- films, critical discussions, or whatever -- that are suited to your needs and worth exploring.

Assessment

As you can see below, course assessment is not heavily focused on projects but rather on in-class participation and other work.

Class Participation & Attitude, Presentations – 35%

Online Poll/Peer Evaluation Completion – 10%

Film Blog – 20%

Homework/Pop Quizzes – 10%

Midterm Critique – 10%

Final Project – 10%

Department Events Attendance – 5%

However, a 0% in any of the above marks will result in an incomplete grade. Students must at least attempt all homework assignments in order to complete the course.

My contact information:

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Email: mistergord@gmail.com

Class Website: <http://gordsclass.com>

Course Outline:

The following is extremely tentative and subject to change at any time, but it should give you an idea of what's planned.

Week 1: Introductions, Paperwork, etc.

Week 2: Reading a Film -- a reading of *The Host* / viewing *The Great Dictator*

Week 3: *The Muppet Movie* (plus a few episodes of *The Muppet Show** and clips from *The Dark Crystal**) -- Jim Henson and "Family Entertainment"

Week 4: *You Only Live Twice* (*James Bond 007*) and *The Manchurian Candidate** (1962 version, not 2004) -- Asia, the Cold War, and the British-American Imagination

Week 5: **TBA** -- The Western: History, Manhood, and other fantasies

Week 6: *The Godfather** and *Brighton Rock*-- Does Crime Pay?

Week 7: *Jungle Fever* -- And When the Twain Shall Meet?

Week 8: **Midterm Week**

Week 9: TBA -- "Counter-Culture, Dude" OR Of Documentaries and Politics

Week 10: *The Stepford Wives* -- 70s Feminism: Critique, Backlash, Culture War

Week 11: *His Girl Friday* and *Jackie Brown** -- A Certain Kind of Woman

Week 12: *Brazil* -- Society, Bureacracy, System, and Freedom

Week 13: *Monty Python and the Quest for the Holy Grail* -- What is this Thing Called History?

Week 14: *Brassed Off* -- Culture and Economics: Britain's "IMF Crisis"

Week 15: *The Lady Vanishes* and *The Birds** -- Doing the Twist: Hitchcock and the Language of Film

Week 16: Exam Week (No Exam)

Films marked with an asterisk (*) will be watched independently by students outside of class prior to the discussion in class.

References for this course:

Individual articles will be used for readings. Since I was assigned this class late, a list will be compiled as the class progresses.