

UNDERSTANDING FILM

FILM 2332.551.16U – Summer 1 Session

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CLASS LOCATION AND TIMES

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:30 PM – 9:45 PM

May 24 – June 25, 2016

HH Building – Floor 2 - Room 2.502

Direct link to class: <http://go.utdallas.edu/film2332.551.16u>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to introduce you to the field of film studies in a way that will allow you to more actively engage with, and appreciate, the films that you watch. During the course of this class, we will examine the technical aspects of filmmaking (cinematography, lighting, editing, sound, etc.), the theoretical perspectives by which we can “unpack” film (auteur theory, genre theory, feminist theory, etc.), and the historical and cultural contexts in which films have been made. By the end of this course, you should be able to look at a film as more than a simple piece of entertainment, and begin to take it apart to understand how it has been constructed and what meanings it communicates.

TEXTBOOK (Required)

Film Art: An Introduction (11th edition), David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith (McGraw-Hill, 2017).

The textbook is widely available from the campus bookstore, Off Campus Books, Amazon.com, and many textbook resellers. Although the 11th edition is specified (and the syllabus is based on this edition), 10th edition is also acceptable (page numbers for the 10th edition are included in parentheses). Should you have any questions about the required readings, please see me.

Additional readings, if any, will be distributed in class.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

There are three levels of learning objectives specific to this course

- **"Student Learning Objectives"** are what I expect you to take away from this course. These objectives are specific to this particular class, and reflect my goals in teaching this material.
- **"General Education Core Objectives"** are those overall skills that the State of Texas expects you to gain from this course. These are not subject specific, but should transfer to other areas of study.
- **"FILM 2332.55A.15U Course Objectives"** are where the above objectives meet. These are the State objectives viewed through the lens of the material we will cover in this class. This section also details the way in which the achievement of those objectives will be assessed.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Develop a critical film "language" regarding analytical terminology and concepts, and to be able to discuss film and the way in which meaning is conveyed through cinematography, editing, sound, narrative, genre conventions, etc.
- Become an "active" viewer who can look beyond the simple entertainment value of film and unpack its deeper messages in a culturally-appropriate manner.
- Gain an understanding of the historical context in which film exists, and the manner in which history and popular culture intersect and influence each other.

GENERAL EDUCATION CORE OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will demonstrate competency in the following core objectives:

- **Critical thinking skills** – Students will engage in creative and/or innovative thinking, and/or inquiry, analysis, evaluation, synthesis of information, organizing concepts, and constructing solutions.
- **Communication skills** – Students will demonstrate effective written, oral, and visual communication.
- **Teamwork** – Students will demonstrate the ability to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal, and consider different points of view.
- **Social responsibility** – Students will demonstrate intercultural competency and civic knowledge by engaging effectively in local, regional, national, and global communities.

FILM 2332.55A.15U COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- **Critical thinking skills** – Analyze the artistic, industrial, and social-cultural dynamics of cinema (assessed via the reaction papers, the final writing project, and the final exam).
- **Communication skills** – Create short film evaluations that demonstrate mastery of critical concepts and approaches that deepen engagement with cinema (assessed via the reaction papers and the final writing project).
- **Teamwork** – Evaluate and critique the work of others in order to sharpen analytical skills and to explore different points of view (assessed via the final writing project).
- **Social responsibility** – Demonstrate knowledge of how society and culture shape film aesthetics and reception (assessed via the reaction papers, the final writing project, and the final exam).

GRADING

Your final grade will be calculated based on the following factors:

Class participation and attendance: 30%
Reaction papers: 20%
Final writing project: 25%
Final exam: 25%

My grading scale is as follows:

95-100 = A+
90-94 = A
85-89 = B+
80-84 = B
75-79 = C+
70-74 = C
65-69 = D
64 and below = F

ATTENDANCE

Since we only have ten class sessions and a great deal of material to cover, your attendance at each class session is critical. If you must miss a class, please let me know as far in advance as possible. Regardless of your presence in class, however, you are still responsible for the reading assignments, the film screenings, and the content of the in-class lectures. Please make arrangements to get lecture notes from one of your classmates in the event of an absence.

You may miss one class without penalty, but any absence in excess of that will negatively affect your grade. Your second absence will lower your final grade by five points. **If you miss three (3) or more class sessions, you will fail the course.**

IN-CLASS ELECTRONICS

This class has a no laptop, no tablet, and no phone policy. Please **do not bring laptops or tablets to class** unless prior arrangements have been made. Please keep your phones on silent and out of sight. Electronics are great, but they are distracting to you and everyone around you, including your professor.

PARTICIPATION

I expect each one of you to actively participate in each class. I realize that this may be difficult for some of you, but this class should be as much discussion as lecture, with you coming to each session prepared not only to discuss the film in question, but also the assigned reading. I value your participation, as the grading structure above reflects. Feel free to share your thoughts on the films, on the readings, or on my lectures, albeit in a polite and respectful way. Since this class is all about actively engaging with film, it's appropriate that you actively engage with the class. When you do, I promise you'll find the entire experience far more enjoyable and much more fulfilling.

SCREENINGS

Film screenings, held as the final part of each class, are mandatory. If you skip out on a film screening, you will be charged with an absence for that class (Film screenings may run up to 15 minutes past the scheduled class ending time. Please see me privately if this is problematic).

PROMPTNESS

I expect you to arrive promptly for class, and to be ready to start the lecture/discussion promptly at 5:30 PM. We have a lot to cover in a relatively short amount of time, so please plan to arrive on time. As well, I expect that you will stay through the entire class, and not attempt to leave early.

REACTION PAPERS

In order to encourage your engagement with each film, I'm asking you to write a short essay about the screenings, and how the film you've watched reflects the topics we've discussed to that point in class. In other words, I'm expecting some thoughtful – albeit brief – analysis of the film in question. We'll watch ten films throughout the course of the class; you'll be responsible for writing on at least eight of them. Reaction Papers will be due at the beginning of the class following the screening. Late papers – papers turned in after class has begun – will not be accepted. Your final Reaction Paper grade will be based on eight papers, even if some of those grades are zeroes.

You are free to write on any topic you wish, as long as it is relevant to the film in question and presents a well thought out and well supported argument. In the past, students have written about the use of music or cinematography in a particular film, an especially interesting use of color, portrayals of gender roles, and much more. I want you to write about something you find personally interesting, so I'm leaving the choice of subject matter up to you. The papers that have done the best in the past have been those that were both creative and properly constructed (and yes, even though this is not an English class, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall organization definitely count. As college students, I expect you to be able to right correctly and coherently). Papers should be typed in 12 point Times New Roman or Calibri font, with 1" margins all around the page. Word count should be noted at the top of the paper.

A note about content: I do not expect you to necessarily agree with everything I say. You are all adults, and entitled to your own critical views of the films we watch. Therefore, I am not looking for you to write what you think I'll "like." I am looking for a well-constructed argument, one supported by facts and examples. You will not be downgraded for presenting a point of view with which I personally disagree. You will, however, be downgraded for presenting an argument that is either based on inaccurate, poorly-researched facts, or one that you can't defend. Please keep this in mind while writing your papers.

Reaction Papers should be 300-500 words, and should NOT be a plot summary or a "review" of the film. I'm not concerned with your opinion regarding whether or not you "liked" the film, but with the way in which you're able to apply the concepts we've discussed to the film you're writing about. Also, please be aware that "300-500 words" does not mean 200 words or 250 words. Word count does not include "top matter" (i.e.: name, class section, date, title, etc.). It means a minimum of 300 actual, relevant, well-chosen words. Reaction Papers submitted with fewer than 300 words (meaningful words, not simple filler) will not be accepted or graded. Reaction papers will be graded on a 10-point scale, with 1 being "abysmal" and 10 being "outstanding." If you use outside research sources – and I encourage you to do so – they must be properly noted in a bibliography.

I will award extra credit for those students who write about all ten films. Specifically, I will add five points to your final reaction paper grade for each paper written beyond the eight required. However, should those extra papers be poorly written, nothing but plot synopsis, etc., I reserve the right to withhold such extra credit. The same standards will apply for those extra papers as they will for the required papers.

Please see the separate handout for more information on writing assignments for this class, and the sample reaction paper included at the end of this syllabus for a better idea of the kind of content I am seeking.

FINAL WRITING PROJECT

Your final project will be a longer paper on a particular film, one NOT previously screened or discussed in class, applying the concepts we've studied. You might choose to do a queer theory analysis, or research the socio-political background of the film, or look at the way that music is used to add to the on-screen narrative, for example. The final product will be a 10-12 page paper. I expect a strong thesis statement, followed by a solid development section that uses your research to support your argument, and closing with a strong conclusion in which you tie everything together.

You must consult at least three academically acceptable sources (Wikipedia is not one of them) for your paper, and those sources must be properly noted and cited. If you're not sure how to cite a source in an academic paper, this is a good place to look for answers: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>. To be honest, I don't care which style guide you use, as long as you are consistent throughout your paper.

As with the Reaction Papers, plot synopses should be avoided. Provide just enough to set up your argument, but do not recap whole scenes. A line like, "During the scene in which Dorothy first meets Glinda....," is sufficient. If you need to mention further details to make your point, by all means do so, but only include as much plot as is absolutely necessary. I'm interested in your analysis of the film, not your ability to recap it.

Prior to handing in your paper, you will exchange documents with another student in the class. Each of you will read the other's paper and provide a written critique of the material presented. You will then make necessary changes to your own paper prior to submitting it. In addition to your own paper, you will also submit your classmate's written critique, with that person's name clearly stated on the paper. Critiques will also be graded for thoroughness, insight, helpfulness, etc., with such grade factoring into your final paper grade.

We'll talk more about your final paper as we get into the class, but I'd recommend you start thinking about it now and choosing a critique partner. You must have a partner for this assignment. If this is a problem, please see me as early as possible.

Although I'm not going to officially assign it, I highly recommend you read Chapter 11 in your textbook, *Film Art*, on "Film Criticism Sample Analyses," beginning on page 400. This is an excellent resource and will give you examples of the kind of work I expect. It should go without saying, but please do not choose one of the examples Bordwell and Thompson analyze for your paper. The Appendix to this section, "Writing a Critical Analysis of a Film" (available at <http://create.mheducation.com>; you'll need to register first), is particularly helpful, as it discusses specific techniques and strategies for organizing and writing a Critical Analysis. Although Bordwell and Thompson specifically address longer papers in this section, the outline they provide can easily be applied to both your Final Paper and your Reaction Papers.

Your Final Writing Project will be due at the beginning of the class on June 21st, our next-to-last class session. Like the Reaction Papers, it is due at the beginning of class. Also like the Reaction Papers, no late submissions – papers handed in after class has begun – will be accepted. In the case that a paper is not submitted in a timely fashion, you will receive a zero for that assignment. Please don't tell me that your dog ate it, your car wouldn't start, or that you spent the week in an iron lung or exploring the bottom of the Marianas Trench and couldn't finish it on time. If you are in a coma on the date the paper is due, and can produce a note from your doctor to that effect, we can discuss a brief extension. Otherwise, please plan to hand your paper in before class begins on June 23rd.

If you have any questions regarding what is expected in terms of written assignments, please see me either before or after class.

PLEASE NOTE: Regarding both the Reaction Papers and the Final Paper, I DO NOT accept assignments via email. Your assignments MUST be handed in at the beginning of the class during which they are due, not submitted electronically. Please do not ask for exceptions to this rule, except in the case of a dire emergency.

FINAL EXAM

FINAL EXAM DATE, TIME, AND PLACE TO BE ANNOUNCED

Please do not be late for the Final Exam. Once the exam has begun, no latecomers will be seated.

The Final Exam will be 100 questions, multiple choice. Material on the final will come from the assigned readings, our in-class discussions, film screenings, and any supplemental material supplied during class. In other words, anything is fair game. I don't believe in "trick" questions, but I will ask questions designed to probe your knowledge and assimilation of the material covered.

CELL PHONES AND OTHER MATTERS OF COMMON COURTESY

As mentioned above, cell phones MUST be turned off or set to vibrate during class time. No exceptions. This is not the time for talking to your friends, texting your parents, sharing photos, or playing games on your phone. It is disrespectful both to me and to your fellow students. If you insist on using your phone during class time, you will be asked to leave, and your absence will be counted against your grade.

As well, please bear in mind that screening time is not the time catch up on the day's events with your friends. Nor is it the time to make sarcastic comments. You are not here to audition for *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. The films are being shown so that you can watch – and hopefully enjoy – them, but also so that you can look at them in relation to the topics we have discussed. Watching in this way requires your full attention, so please don't allow yourself to become distracted, and don't provide distractions for others in the room.

I personally don't mind if you bring drinks to class. Four and a half hours is a long time to go thirsty. But please be mindful that others use the room we're in, so make sure you clean up after yourself, dispose of

trash properly, and leave the room as clean and neat as you found it. I do not intend to clean up after you – as an adult that is your responsibility.

A NOTE ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

I have every expectation that any written material you turn in will be your original work. Plagiarism – which includes buying or otherwise obtaining material from others and passing it off as your own, as well as copying or paraphrasing the work of another without proper attribution – will not be tolerated. As a writer myself, I take this matter very seriously. Any paper or assignment turned into me and found to contain plagiarized material – in whole or in part – will receive a grade of zero and could lead to further action on the part of the University. End of discussion. Please familiarize yourself with UTD's policy on plagiarism (<http://www.utdallas.edu/library/help/PlagiarismTutorial/Textonlytutorial.htm>) and take it to heart. There is no excuse for plagiarism, or for any form of academic dishonesty.

Consider this your first and final warning on the subject.

For a detailed discussion of UTD's policy on academic integrity, plagiarism, and other subjects, please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

COMET CREED

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

"As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do."

UT DALLAS SYLLABUS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

SCHEDULE

MAY 24	<p>Introduction to Class</p> <p>Review of Syllabus</p> <p>Outline of Expectations</p> <p>What is Film?</p> <p>Why should we study it?</p> <p>Why does film matter?</p> <p>What is the difference between Film Analysis and Film Theory?</p> <p>Why are they Useful?</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>Casablanca</i> (Warner Brothers, 1942; 102 minutes)</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: <i>Film Art</i> pp. 458-469, 480-483, 488-494</p>
MAY 26	<p>An Overview of Film History</p> <p>How did we get here, and where are we going?</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>Citizen Kane</i> (RKO Radio Pictures, 1941; 119 minutes)</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: <i>Film Art</i> pp. 99-109, 316-326</p>
MAY 31	<p>Cinematography, Editing, Mise-en-Scene</p> <p>The "How" of Film</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>Battleship Potemkin</i> (Goskino, 1925; 66 minutes)</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: <i>Film Art</i> pp. 112-133, 143-149, 160-179, 186-191, 218-242</p>
JUNE 2	<p>Text and Narrative</p> <p>The building blocks of story</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>Rashomon</i> (Daiei Motion Picture Company, 1950; 88 minutes)</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: <i>Film Art</i> 72-110</p>
JUNE 7	<p>Film and Culture</p> <p>How who we are influences what we produce</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>Red Nightmare</i> (Warner Bros., 1962; 28 minutes)</p> <p><i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (Allied Artists, 1956; 80 minutes)</p> <p>NOTE: For your reaction paper, you may write about either of the films screened tonight. You are not required to write about both.</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: TBD</p>
JUNE 9	<p>World Film</p> <p>The world of film doesn't begin and end with Hollywood</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>The 400 Blows</i> ("Les quatre cents coups," Les Films du Carrosse/Sedif Productions, 1959; 99 minutes)</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: <i>Film Art</i> 469-479, 483-488, 494-498</p>
JUNE 14	<p>Genre</p> <p>What makes a Western a Western?</p> <p>FILM SCREENING: <i>Little Caesar</i> (Warner Brothers, 1931; 79 minutes)</p> <p>REQUIRED READING: <i>Film Art</i> 328-348</p>

- JUNE 16 Gender and Race
 Issues of representation and how movies reflect/create reality
FILM SCREENING: *Coffy* (American International Pictures, 1973; 91 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: TBD
- JUNE 21 Ideology
 What is this movie *really* about, anyway?
FILM SCREENING: *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion, 1935; 110 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: Film Art 438-449
FINAL PAPERS DUE!!!!
- JUNE 23 Mediating Reality
 Who decides what “reality” is?
FILM SCREENING: *This is Spinal Tap* (Spinal Tap Prod., 1984; 82 minutes)
REQUIRED READING: TBD

NOTE ABOUT POTENTIALLY OFFENSIVE CONTENT

Some of the content covered in this class, whether in reading, screenings, or discussion, might contain material that could be considered controversial or offensive to some. I understand that some people, for various reasons, are uncomfortable with depictions, or discussions, of violence or sexuality, for example, but I cannot tailor this class for each individual. If you feel that you do not wish to expose yourself to such material, please consider enrolling in another class.

*The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change
at the discretion of the Professor.*

Oswald C. Cobblepot
FILM 2332, Summer 2016
Reaction Paper #1

Word Count: 585

FRANZ WAXMAN'S USE OF MUSIC IN *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935)

When “talking pictures” became widespread in the early 1930s, there were certainly a number of technical problems to overcome in regards to spoken dialogue, such as actor’s proximity to a microphone and how that affected movement, overcoming camera noise, etc. But the bigger issue, one that would take several years to fully answer, was how to use sound, and especially music, effectively. While others would pave the way, Franz Waxman would most fully, and elegantly, answer that difficult question.

From the beginning of motion pictures, music, whether it was provided by a single piano player or a full symphony orchestra, had been a part of the movie-going experience. But now, with synchronized sound, the potential existed for it to be much, much more.

Composer Max Steiner (1888-1971) was the first to realize that potential with his stirring scores for *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) and *King Kong* (1933), introducing the ability of music to support and sustain atmosphere, which greatly enhanced the ability of the motion picture to stir the emotions of the audience.

But if Steiner was the first to see the potential of music for enhancing the movie-going experience, it would be German expatriate composer Franz Waxman (1906-1967) who would fully realize that potential. Waxman began his career in the German film industry, but after a beating by Nazi soldiers – Waxman was a Jew – he and his wife fled Germany, first to Paris and then to Hollywood.

In Hollywood, Waxman met director James Whale, who hired the young composer to create the score for his upcoming film, *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). It was Waxman’s first work in America, and remains a high watermark of early cinema.

Waxman went beyond Steiner’s lush orchestral scoring by writing unique musical figures for three of the main characters - the Monster, the Bride, and Dr. Praetorius - using the musical technique of the leitmotif. Typically heard in operatic compositions, the leitmotif is a short musical phrase designed to represent a character in a musical fashion. By using these phrases, a composer is able to call to mind a particular character, even when that character is not on the screen. Therefore, by using this technique, Waxman was able to introduce music not only as a support for the action on screen, but as a true narrative partner in its own right.

Although the three motifs run throughout the picture, perhaps the Bride’s theme is the most consequential. The simple, three-note figure (eerily doubled by a Theremin in the main titles) has a bizarre, yet romantic quality about it. Interestingly, however, the theme is used to connect both Elizabeth (Valerie Hobson), the literal bride of Dr. Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive), and the female creature (Elsa Lanchester), the “bride” created for Frankenstein’s original creature (Boris Karloff). This connection is made nowhere else in the film, and would be easily overlooked without Waxman’s inspired inclusion. The theme is also inverted at one point in the film, suggesting that the female creature represents the dark side of Elizabeth, just as the male creature can be read as representing the dark side of Frankenstein.

By using leitmotifs in his score, Waxman greatly expanded the role that music could play in motion pictures. His pioneering work in bringing narrative importance to the film score has echoed down through the ages, finding more recent expression in the *Star Wars* scores of John Williams. Without Waxman’s work, music might never have found its ultimate expression in film, and the result would have been a far poorer art form.