

Fall 2024

HSS 404-069-071: The Art of Film: Love, War, and Comic Relief

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L. Castronova HSS 404 Section 107 Fall, 2023 Senior Seminar

THE ART OF FILM: LOVE, WAR & COMIC RELIEF

Office Location: 414 Cullimore Office Phone: (973) 596-6484 castrono@njit.edu

Seminar Location: KUPFRIAN 118 Seminar Day: THURSDAY 6-8:50 p.m.

Office Hours: TUES. 1:00-2:00 p.m. & 4-5 p.m.

WED. 1:00-2:00 p.m. BY APPT.

THURS. 4:30-5:30p.m.

COURSE SYLLABUS - Welcome to our cinema seminar!

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK: Bergan, Ronald. THE FILM BOOK - A Complete Guide to the World of Cinema. New York: DK Publishing, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-7566-8676-5
(Readings are available on our seminar Canvas page)

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS: Subscriptions to NETFLIX and KANOPY (free streaming service available through the Newark Public Library) for additional movie viewing and reviewing.

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION: In this senior seminar, the instructor and the students will present films for discussion and analysis. To begin, the instructor will present a series of films. Later in the semester, seminar members, now divided into groups, will select a film to present in the seminar. We will then focus on the film chosen by each group of students. (Of course, the channels of communication need to be open, and students need to interact with their respective group members in order to prepare their presentations.)

In this seminar, we are aiming for art house, “indie,” international or classic works that have made a mark in the vast and intriguing world of cinema. Perhaps the subjects of the films shown will be very diverse, but the common connection should be that these are all windows on the human spectrum of how we live, our longings, our mistakes, our failures, our triumphs and our willingness to find humor to cushion the struggles as we move along through life experiences. Our mission in this seminar is to share interesting films. We want to view all of these with open minds. Moreover, we should try and share each director’s artistic vision of how a tale might be told on screen. We will aim to see each director’s angle and can freely comment on the success or failure of what we believe to be his or her intentions. Does the film in question succeed or fail, in whole or in part? Does the director engage us? Stir our emotions? Lose us somewhere along the story path? Might the director use casting to illuminate the tale being told on screen or miss his or her mark with what we might feel is miscasting? Does the filmmaker give us a dose of reality? Might a particular movie be a temporary escape from life’s woes? We have heard it so often: “escape to the movies!”

Critiquing is a vital part of this seminar. Sometimes viewers think that reviewing films needs to be a negative response. Quite the contrary! It depends on each viewer's "take." Students are free to celebrate their viewing experiences, or they can trash a particular film for whatever valid reasons they might find. Of course, there might also be a middle ground, including a combination of good and bad points. The key, however, is to explain the reasons for negative or positive comments. Thinking critically as we analyze what works in the art form of film is something that we want to share with one another.

SEMINAR GOAL: All in attendance should gain new perspectives in cinema. Critiquing and analyzing the movies in question should be both interesting and challenging to all seminar members.

Students are asked to be open minded about all films. Many times, we, ourselves, cannot identify with the action and/or the characters. Sometimes these do not mirror our own lives. However, an open-minded viewer knows that lots of stories, novels, poems or movies are simply NOT about us. This does not make these artistic works invalid or worthless.

Sometimes, we are simply nowhere in the picture, but other human beings are vividly being portrayed up there on the screen. An open-minded viewer is AWARE of that, absorbs the story seen on film and then decides what it might indicate about life, love, loss, anger, joy and any and all other aspects that make us human. Lives outside of our own, stories from other lands, these are all part of the larger picture of movies: CINEMA ABOUT THE WORLD. As we know, venturing beyond the familiar can make life a unique and intriguing journey.

SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS: ATTEND! All seminar members are asked to be PRESENT in involved in seminar discussions. Plan to be a part of the conversation/discussion between students and the instructor, and share your impressions!

TUNE IN!! These days, listening skills have fallen by the wayside. LISTENING and PAYING ATTENTION ARE VITAL SKILLS in OR out of this seminar. So be aware of these!

Some of the films may be subtitled so that we can hear the richness of the dialogue in its original language. (NO DUBBING allowed in our seminar!) Of course, INTERNATIONAL FILMS shown must have English subtitles. Every language has its own unique sounds or musicality. For subtitled films, students will need to READ those subtitles and stay focused. If a student group selects a film from a country with a language other than English, SUBTITLES will be necessary for their presentation. In fact, SUBTITLES are a wise choice even for films in ENGLISH, especially if there are accents that might not be easily understood. With our international student population in this seminar, using English subtitles works well for ALL films.

READINGS:

Students will need to complete the textbook readings (and any additional online readings which may be assigned). The textbook offers a huge and interesting picture of world

cinema in informative chapters. All readings are intended to enhance our grasps of the subject of movies. Therefore, please read the text with an inquiring mind. Consider the author of the textbook, Ron Bergan, a film scholar, as he shares insights into great movies and accomplished directors. Read about the initial inventions that have helped to move the film process along while expanding the scope of film as a global art form.

MOVIE BLOGS: MOVIE BLOGS 1 will be due along with the mid term exam.

So...what are Movie Blogs??

All students will need to offer a written response to all films shared in the seminar (whether these are in-seminar viewing or assigned as films for homework). This personalized movie blog should offer feedback in the form of a blog (journal entry/essay) that reveals a student's "take" on each film. How long should the written response (blog) be? At least ONE page. However, sometimes students in the past have really taken off like a rocket on what a film means from their perspective. They have shared some beautiful observations and insightful interpretations of characters, situations that unfold in the plot, and a director's success or failure. They have also considered performances. Sometimes an actor triumphs in a performance despite a weak script, etc. There are definitely no right or wrong responses—only interesting, supported observations and opinions to be shared. FYI—YOU WILL USE THIS BLOG or JOURNAL for your own reference during the mid-term and final exams. So---please make the writing a vital source of recorded impressions. NO CREDIT FOR SIMPLY OFFERING A PLOT SUMMARY. OFFER YOUR OPINION! HOW does it all play out for every film related to the seminar?

RESEARCH PAPER REQUIREMENT:

STUDENTS will be required to complete the written RESEARCH PAPER assignment. Details will be given in the future. This assignment is mandatory and will relate to world cinema. FYI..... RESEARCH PAPER DEADLINE DATE is WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22nd.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS (Mandatory assignment)

BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT in your group when it presents the movie selected by all group members. This is an IN-PERSON IN CLASS group presentation. Students in each respective group will be a part of a panel discussion BEFORE showing their film selection and AFTER the viewing experience has been shared.

There are guidelines and time boundaries. I will cover these in the seminar, and they are also detailed here in this course outline. Believe me. There will be plenty of room for creativity!

EXAMS: A MID TERM EXAM and a LAST WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Successful completion of a mid-term exam and last writing assignment are seminar requirements. (Details on both will be given in class). Student film choices and presentations will be a part of the LAST WRITING ASSIGNMENT. The MID TERM EXAM will

be based on films shown by the instructor. In short, be present and participate. Be attentive to what the instructor and all of your classmates have to share.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

These may involve additional movie viewing (using NETFLIX and/or KANOPY). Students are responsible for seeing these films, and these additional selections will also be a part of the mid-term or final exam.

FYI...as your instructor, I will sometimes send emails and/or post assignments. Therefore, it is essential for you to CHECK for messages/details on an assignment on a regular basis. THANKS!

TEXTBOOK READINGS: TAKE THE TIME TO READ ALL OF RON BERGAN's great movie insights! This author and film scholar offers a truly worthwhile look at world cinema!

Readings are the following:

The Story of Cinema	pages 12-59	(These two chapters are on the beginnings of
How Movies are Made	pages 63-75	movie making.)
Movie Genres	pages 79-125	(classifications of films)
World Cinema	pages 129-177	(a global perspective of movies)
A – Z of Directors	pages 180-251	(important directors who have made strides in Cinema)
Top 100 Movies	pages 257-343	(a look at influential films)

GRADE MAKE UP: ATTENDANCE. PUNCTUALITY & PARTICIPATON IN DISCUSSIONS

=40%

STUDENT PRESENTATION GRADE

=30%

ALL OTHER WRITTEN WORK

=30%

THIS WRITTEN WORK INCLUDES:

MID TERM EXAM and MOVIE BLOGS 1 & 2

RESEARCH PAPER

LAST WRITING ASSIGNMENT

PLEASE NOTE: This calendar is not written in stone. Just as in real life, changes are sometimes necessary. Therefore, the listings below may change, but, hopefully, they will remain on schedule. I am planning for each of these weekly entries to work out as planned. Any changes? Students will be notified in advance.

WEEK 1- Introduction to the seminar and the seminar requirements given above. Student introductions. Discussion and exchange of ideas on cinema, past, present, future, etc. Students should be ready to TALK! I look forward to hearing your ideas. Groups will be formed for presentations at a future date. If time permits, a film will be shown during this session.

WEEKS 2 ,3, 4, 5 and 6 - Instructor's selection of films for discussion/evaluation will be shown. POP- UP QUIZZES may be given--especially if there is a lack of participation. I don't want to "threaten" graduating seniors with quizzes. Instead I want all of you to participate and share your points of view! Sharing insights into the world of film is what the seminar is about. A quiz (whether announced or in the pop up category) will give you a chance to share your POINT OF VIEW in regard to the film in question.

REMINDER- For every film shown, students are asked to write feedback in which they evaluate the highlights (and/or low points) of each selection. THINK: entries into your film blog/journal. (THE COLLECTION WILL BE REQUESTED as MOVIE BLOGS 1 at the mid term point and then again, as MOVIE BLOGS 2 at the time of the last writing assignment submission.)

Week 7- MID TERM EXAM will be given and MOVIE BLOGS 1 will be due at the same time. Date of this mid-term exam will be on THURS. OCT. 19th.

- WEEK 8 - STUDENT GROUP 1 Presentation on Thursday, October 26th
- FIRST THING on 10/26, RESEARCH PAPER DETAILS WILL BE GIVEN IN THE SEMINAR. THEN.....STUDENTS TAKE CHARGE! GROUP 1 of STUDENT PRESENTERS will deliver their presentation and will include the showing of their film choice to all class members. PRESENTATION INSTRUCTIONS ARE HERE.
- INFORMATION ON GROUP PRESENTATIONS: All students will be assigned to groups well in advance of presentations. All members in each group should agree and have some input in regard to the selection made for the group presentation.

Group members need to interact! What aspects of the film will EACH GROUP MEMBER focus on? Give the matter attention and thought.

Possibilities: Will it be a background on the actors? Some insights into the life and body of work by the director? The cinematography of the film? The powerful musical score of the film and the composer? Are there very important scenes that require our undivided attention? What are they? In essence, WHICH STUDENT will discuss WHAT aspect of each film?

This needs to be worked out well in advance of the presentation. Of course, we don't want to lose the energy of a spontaneous and interesting interchange between the presenters (group members), all other seminar members, and the instructor. So how should the student presentations be constructed? Here is a possible format: IMPORTANT! READ CAREFULLY!!

INTRODUCTION- All students in the group need to speak BEFORE the film viewing. (Something needs to be said by each student to set the tone for the viewing experience). Comments should be 4 or 5 minutes from each student in the group. Then, we will watch the film together.

CONCLUSION: ALL STUDENTS IN THE GROUP WILL RETURN.... and take center stage to offer further(and closing) comments. (AGAIN, each student in the group should share additional points of view.) Each student should offer film-related feedback. Questions can be addressed to the seminar members as well. Even give us a (verbal or written!) quiz if you wish to do that!!

WHAT ABOUT THE GRADING? Grades usually vary. Only in special instances does everyone in the group receive the same grade. The presentation needs to be evenly balanced between group members—WITHOUT ANYONE stealing the show and using up all the time and information. Work all of this out BEFORE the presentation. It is NOT a wise choice to wing it! Preparation is a vital key.

The grades for presentations are based on INDIVIDUAL EFFORT. Did each group member prepare? Is there a gradual transition from ONE speaker to the NEXT? Have TWO speakers in the group talked about the same thing? With good communication, this should NOT be the case.

The key is to COMMUNICATE with group members and create a well-organized presentation.

REMINDER: The focus in our seminar is on ART HOUSE, INTERNATIONAL or CLASSIC movies. The goal is to select SOMETHING INTERESTING and perhaps UNFAMILIAR to members of the seminar.

INTRIGUE US! SURPRISE and ENLIGHTEN us! Of course, I will be available to assist each group in making a film choice that is appropriate for the seminar. STUDENT FILM CHOICES should be no more THAN TWO HOURS IN LENGTH, please.

WEEK 9 THURSDAY, NOV. 2nd - STUDENT GROUP 2 will present a film.

WEEK 10 STUDENT GROUP 3 will present a film Nov. 9th

WEEK 11 STUDENT GROUP 4 will present a film. Nov. 16th

PLEASE NOTE THAT RESEARCH PAPERS ARE DUE ON WED. 11/22, so.....
please keep that due date in mind!

WEEK 12 NJIT will follow a TUES = THURS. schedule, so I will see you on Tuesday evening, Nov. 21st. STUDENT GROUP 5 will present a film. (TO REPEAT: TUES NOV. 21st will follow a THURS. SCHEDULE that night. FYI- DURING THANKSGIVING week, Mon=Mon, Tues=Thurs. Wed=Fri. (Thursday and Friday are part of the holiday weekend. So.....Happy Thanksgiving to all who are celebrating.)

WEEK 13 - Nov. 30th - TBA

WEEK 14 Last Session on THURSDAY, DEC. 7th. Group Discussion. LAST WRITING ASSIGNMENT and MOVIE BLOGS 2 will also be due.

PLEASE NOTE: MOVIE BLOGS 2 will need to be submitted as part of the

LAST ESSAY submission.

FYI.....The LAST DAY OF CLASSES FOR THE FALL, 2023 semester is

WED. DEC. 13th.

HAVE AN ENJOYABLE SEMESTER! BE SURE TO READ THE FOLLOWING:

Please be sure to review information on the NJIT Academic Integrity Code below:

The New Jersey Institute of Technology is an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge through teaching and research. We expect our graduates to assume positions of leadership with their professions and communities. Honesty in your academic work will develop into professional integrity.

The NJIT Code of Academic Integrity embodies a spirit of mutual trust and intellectual honesty that is central to the very nature of the university and represents the highest possible expression of shared values among the members of the university community.

All assignments submitted shall be considered “graded work” and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Code on Academic Integrity. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

The full text of the NJIT university Code on Academic Integrity can be found at www.njit.edu/education/pdf/academic-integrity-code-pdf.

