
FILM GENRE: MELODRAMA in Spring 2021 (FM2089)

Course Code	FM2089	Professor(s)	Valerio Coladonato
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	G-L20
Class Schedule	M: 16:55-18:15 in Q-A101 R: 12:10-13:30 in Q-A101	Office Hours	Monday 15:15-16:40 (by email appointment)
Credits	4	Email	vcoladonato@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2021	Office Tel. Ext.	621

Course Description

Is melodrama a genre, a way of imagining the world, or the predominant aesthetic mode to represent intense emotions? Throughout the history of film, it has been all these things and many more: in this seminar we explore theories and concepts that can help us make sense of melodrama, and apply them to a number of key films from different cultural contexts. We question why these films move us, and how their narrative and mise-en-scene create stark moral conflicts and “excessive” pathos. Through collective discussion and independent research work, we also explore the ways in which melodrama affects our current understanding of history, politics, and society. The first part of our course focuses on melodrama from early cinema to the post-WWII period, whereas the second part addresses a number of international films spanning from the early 1990s to the 21st century.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will engage with theories related to film genre, spectator-ship and affect.

Students will deepen their understanding of how genres develop through history and across different national contexts.

Students will recognize and identify elements of narrative and mise-en-scene that characterize a specific film genre.

Students will develop a strong understanding of the social and political issues addressed by melodrama.

Students will strengthen their critical analysis and written expression through an individual research project and a peer-reviewed paper.

General Education

The course also supports these Film Studies Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze and differentiate filmic discourses on subjects in terms of narrative structure, cinematic techniques, and cultural contexts
- Trace the rise and development of cinema as an art form, industry and cultural product.
- Distinguish styles and techniques of selected directors in context with cinema history and aesthetics.

Course Outline

January

Week I – 18th – 21st

Topics: Introduction: Melodrama and Modernity

Screenings: *The Perils of Pauline* (U.S., L. Gasnier, 1914), *The Hazards of Helen* (U.S., J.P. McGowan, 1915)

Readings: Brooks (1976), *The Melodramatic Imagination* (excerpts); Singer (2001), “Power and Peril in the Serial Queen Melodrama”.

Assignment: Prepare a concept map based on the 5 features of melodrama described by Brooks.

Week II – 25th – 28th

January 24th – last day to drop/add courses online

Topic: Melodramas in Black and White

Screenings: excerpts of *A Corner in Wheat* (U.S., D.W. Griffith, 1909); *Within Our Gates* (U.S., O. Micheaux, 1920)

Readings: Green (2000), "Micheaux v. Griffith"; Gaines (2000), "*Within Our Gates*: From Race Melodrama to Opportunity Narrative".

February

Week III – 1st – 4th

Topic: From Classic Hollywood to Chinese Cinema

Screening: "The Goddess" (China, Wu Yonggang, 1934)

Readings: Rothman (1993), "*The Goddess*: Reflections on Melodrama East and West"; P. Yang (2018), "Repositioning Excess: Romantic Melodrama's Journey from Hollywood to China"

Week IV – 11th

REVIEW + PRESENTATIONS

February 8th – 10th, Mini break 1, (no classes)

Week V – 15th – 18th

Topic: Inside/Outside the Family Melodrama

Screening: Vidor, *Stella Dallas* (U.S., K. Vidor 1937)

Readings: Doane (1987), "The Moving Image: Pathos and the Maternal" (from *The Desire to Desire*); Williams (1984) "Something Else besides a Mother"

Assignment: Short response paper exploring the gender politics of one of the last two films.

Week VI – 22nd

February 24th – 28th, Mini break 2, (no classes)

March

Week VII – 1st – 5th

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Topic: Ideology and Style

Screening: *All That Heaven Allows* (U.S., D. Sirk, 1955)

Readings: L. Mulvey (1989), "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama"; Pravadelli (2014), "Excess, Spectacle, Sensation: Family Melodramas of the 1950s"

Assignment: Prepare a concept map on the readings about Hollywood melodrama.

Week VIII – 8th –12th

MIDTERM EXAM

Week IX – 15th – 19th

Topic: Theatricality and Pathos

Screening: excerpts of Matarazzo, *Chains* (Italy, R. Matarazzo, 1949) and *Rocco and His Brothers* (Italy, L. Visconti, 1960)

Readings: Bayman (2014), *The Operatic and the Everyday in Post-war Italian Film Melodrama* (excerpts); Pravadelli (2006), “*Rocco and His Brothers: Identity, Melodrama and the National-Popular*”

Assignment: Revise for midterm exam

March 17th, Mid-semester

March 19th, Mid-semester grades due

Week X – 22nd – 25th

Screening: Excerpts from selected films (see list below)

Assignment: Initial discussion of individual research projects: comparative analysis of two films from different periods and/or cultural contexts, based on melodramatic elements in narrative and mise-en-scene.

Week XI–29th – 2nd

Topic: Haptic Vision in Melodrama

Screening: *The Piano* (New Zealand-Australia, J. Campion, 1993)

Readings: Sobchack (2000), "What My Fingers Knew"; Zarzosa (2010), "Jane Campion's *The Piano*: Melodrama as Mode of Exchange"

April 2nd, last day to withdraw from a course.

Last day to choose the CR/NC grading option.

April

Week XII – 5th – 8th

Topic: Introducing Almodrama

Screening: Excerpts of *Talk to Her* (Spain, P. Almodóvar, 2002)

Readings: Allinson, "Mimesis and Diegesis. Almodóvar and the Limits of Melodrama"; Eggert, "Authentic Monsters and Artificial Mothers: Maternal Frustration in Pedro Almodóvar's *All About My Mother*"

April 5th, Easter Monday (no classes)

April 6th, Faculty retreat (no classes)

Week XIII – 12th – 16th

- Presentations

- In-class quiz

Week XIV – 19th – 23rd

Topic: Melodrama, Home and Identity

Screening: Akin, *Edge of Heaven* (Germany-Turkey, 2007)

Readings: Stewart “Anticipating Home: The Edge of Heaven as Melodrama”

Assignment: Submit first draft of research project.

Week XV – 26th – 30th

Topic: Post-modern Melodrama?

Screening: *Carol* (UK-USA, T. Haynes, 2015)

Readings: Belay and Cameron, “Melodrama, Sickness, and Paranoia: Todd Haynes and the Woman's Film”; Merck (2017), “Negative Oedipus: *Carol* as Lesbian Romance and Maternal Melodrama”

Assignment: Peer-review of research project's first draft.

April 28th, Last day of classes,

April 29th, – May 2nd, Reading days (May 1st, holiday)

May 3rd – 12th, Final Exam_____

May 26th, all grades due

Textbooks

This course doesn't have any textbook.

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

1. Attendance, participation, presentations: 10%
2. Midterm: 30%
3. Final paper: 30%
4. Final exam: 30%

Other
