

WRITERS ON FILM

The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University
Cross-listed with the Department of Film and Media Studies

SPRING 2018

Instructor Information

Kyle Stine, PhD
Lecturer, The Writing Seminars
Gilman 65, Tuesday, 1–2 p.m.
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Course Information

AS.220.218 Writers on Film
3 credits
Gilman 313
Friday, 1:30–3:50 p.m.

Course Description

An interdisciplinary course focusing on the film writings of poets, novelists, critics, and essayists such as Virginia Woolf, H.D., James Agee, James Baldwin, and Pauline Kael; and films showing the intertitle and screenplay work of writers such as Anita Loos, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Jean Cocteau. Participants will write weekly assignments on film from a critical perspective, with a final paper in the form of either a lyric essay on film or an extended piece of film criticism.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Acquire a deeper understanding of the role that cinema played in the writing and thinking of twentieth-century novelists and poets.
- Develop a critical perspective on the cultural values expressed in cinema—and those forbidden in cinema by various social forces—involving issues of gender, race, and class.
- Cultivate skills in textual analysis with regard to film, literature, and poetry.
- Gain an understanding of intermediality, or how the materials of film and writing affect their forms of expression.
- Identify the different goals and stylistic norms among the genres of literary writing, film criticism, film theory, and screenwriting.
- Develop critical writing skills for engaging with topics from film and literature.

Course Materials

Books

Agee, James. *James Agee: Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, edited by Michael Sragow. New York: Library of America, 2005.

Baldwin, James. *The Devil Finds Work*. New York: Vintage, 2007.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York: Scribner, 1993.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Pat Hobby Stories*. New York: Scribner, 2004.

Loos, Anita. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. New York: Liveright, 2014.

Films

A number of films for the class can be found on the streaming site Kanopy, available through the JHU Libraries at <https://jhu.kanopystreaming.com/>. Additional films on DVD are on reserve at the library and can be checked out for four hours at the Service Desk. Please note that we do not have a screening time for this class, a choice that I made because our dual focus on writing and film limits our need for a full run of screenings. However, what that will mean is that you will periodically need to watch films outside of class.

Evaluation

Grades will be based on completion of all assignments, active and constructive participation in class discussions, and high-level creative and academic thought.

A (93–100): Exemplary
A- (90–92): Excellent
B+ (87–89): Strong
B (83–86): Good
B- (80–82): Satisfactory

C+ (77–79): Adequate
C (73–76): Acceptable
C- (70–72): Minimally Acceptable
D (60–69): Unsatisfactory
F (59–0): Failure

Assignments

Attendance and Participation (20 points)

Attendance is required for all discussions and in-class screenings, and students earn participation points for attending class and engaging in discussions. The Writing Seminars policy is to fail a student who misses more than two weeks of a course due to unexcused absences. Two unexcused tardy arrivals to class will result in the recording of an unexcused absence. Students who have flu symptoms should not attend class and should isolate themselves to the extent possible until they have been fever-free for twenty-four hours. Religious holidays are valid reasons to be excused from class. Students who must miss a class because of a religious holiday must inform the instructor as early in the semester as possible to be excused from class or to make up any work that is missed. Students who must miss class should contact a classmate for lecture notes and information before contacting the instructor with any questions.

Weekly Writings (50 points)

Throughout the semester students will be expected to complete ten writing assignments worth 5 points each. These short writing assignments should be 1–2 pages and engage with the readings assigned on the same day they are due; however, you are also encouraged to make comparisons between these readings and related materials from class. Response papers should be treated as formal writing exercises and should be typed and have double spacing, 12-point font, and 1-inch margins. All papers should be submitted via Blackboard as a Word or text file. It is up to you what weeks you choose, but three weeks are required: February 9, March 2, and April 20.

Final Essay (30 points)

Students will propose a paper topic by April 13 in consultation with the instructor. Papers will take the form of either an extended piece of film criticism or a creative essay on film dealing with the topics and readings from the semester. Outside research is encouraged but not required. The final paper will be due on Blackboard on the day of the regularly scheduled final exam, May 10, by 5 p.m.

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be

honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct (or designee) by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or via email at integrity@jhu.edu. For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics: (<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates>) or the e-catalog entry on the undergraduate academic ethics board: (<http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB>).

Disability Services

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, 410-516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

The Counseling Center

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>.

Schedule

Introduction

Feb. 2 What Cinema Writes
Readings on Blackboard: McSweeney's Convergence Contest Winner #36, Walter Murch and Maxim Gorky, "In the Kingdom of Shadows" (1896/2007); Brander Matthews, "The Kinetoscope of Time" (1895); Alexander Kluge, *Cinema Stories* (2007), 1–20, 91–93

Silent Cinema

Feb. 9 Modernism and Early Film Criticism
Readings on Blackboard: Essays by Virginia Woolf and Germaine Dulac; Articles from the journal *Close Up* (1927–1933) by Bryher, Geraldyn Dismond, H.D., and Dorothy Richardson. All groups will read the main PDF of selections from *Close Up: Cinema and Modernism* as well as a shorter PDF specific to the following films:

- Group 1. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, Germany, 1920, 75m) and Dulac and Woolf on Caligari
- Group 2. *Body and Soul* (Oscar Micheaux, USA, 1925, 94m) and Dismond and Richardson on Black Cinema
- Group 3. *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, USSR, 1925, 72m) and HD on Eisenstein (PDF)
- Group 4. *Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, France, 1928, 83m) and HD and Balazs on Dreyer
- Group 5. *Pandora's Box* (G. W. Pabst, Germany, 1929, 132m) and HD on Pabst

All films available at <https://jhu.kanopystreaming.com/playlist/2078226>

Feb. 16 Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), 1–74; Reading on Blackboard: Bryher, "An Interview with Anita Loos"

Feb. 23 Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), 75–131; *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, USA, 1953, 91m)

Classical Hollywood Cinema

Mar. 2 A Year In Hollywood, 1944: James Agee, complete run of film criticism for the year 1944 from Agee: *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 85–159; *To Have and Have Not* screenplay excerpts

- Group 1. *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, USA, 1944, 100m)
- Group 2. *Murder, My Sweet* (Edward Dmytryk, USA, 1944, 95m)
- Group 3. *The Curse of the Cat People* (Gunther von Fritsch and Robert Wise, USA, 1944, 70m)
- Group 4. *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, USA, 1944, 107m)
- Group 5. *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1944, 113m)

Mar. 9 James Agee, "The Night of the Hunter" (1954) screenplay, from Agee: *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, 535–628

Mar. 16 In-class screening: *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, USA, 1955, 93m)

Mar. 23: SPRING BREAK

Portraits of an Industry

Mar. 30 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, 3–129

Apr. 6 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Pat Hobby Stories*, 1–80; Recommended reading on Blackboard: Larry Ceplair, "The Screenwriter in Hollywood" and Raymond Chandler, "Writers in Hollywood"

Apr. 13 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Pat Hobby Stories*, 81–158; Recommended reading on Blackboard: Dalton Trumbo, *The Time of the Toad*

Critical Writings

Apr. 20 James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*, 1–35; groups will also focus on a section of the book specifically relevant to their film.

- Group 1. *The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, USA, 1958, 96m); Baldwin, 39–60
- Group 2. *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, USA, 1967, 109m) and Baldwin, 45–71
- Group 3. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, USA, 1967, 108m); Baldwin, 71–95
- Group 4. *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, USA, 1971, 97m); Baldwin, 99–127
- Group 5. *Superfly* (Gordon Parks Jr., USA, 1972, 93m); Baldwin, 99–127

Apr. 27 Selected film criticism from the 1960s on Blackboard: Andrew Sarris, "The Auteur Theory"; Pauline Kael, "Circles and Squares"

Cinema and Poetry

May 4 Readings on Blackboard: Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Cinema of Poetry"; Jean Cocteau, *The Art of Cinema*, 25–46; in-class screening: *The Blood of a Poet* (Jean Cocteau, France, 1932, 55 min.)

FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY, MAY 10, BY 5:00 P.M., ON BLACKBOARD