ENGLISH 344: Film Theory and Criticism  
Winter 2014

Film Theory Through Romance

Instructor

Dr. Liahna Armstrong  
Office: L & L 403F  
Email: lotus@cwu.edu  
Office phone: X. 3178  
Office hours: Tu 2-3; W 11:30-12:30; and by appointment

Teaching Assistant

Cameron Sedlacek  
Office: L & L 408G  
Email: sedlakekc@cwu.edu  
Office hours: M-W 11:30-1:00

Class Meetings

MW 2-3:40 in L & L 358  
W 3:45-6 in L & L 422 (film screening)

Texts

Required:  
  McDonald, Tamar, Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre  
  Wallflower Press, 2007  
  Blandford, et. al, The Film Studies Dictionary  
  Arnold Publishers, 2001 [Must be ordered online through Amazon, Half.com, or other Vendor]  
Coursepack: Film Theory Through Romance  
Periodic handouts or postings on Canvas (abbreviated “HO”)
Course Films

*It Happened One Night*, dir. Frank Capra, 1934  
*Roman Holiday* (1953), dir. William Wyler  
*The Graduate* (1967), dir. Mike Nichols  
*Annie Hall* (1977), dir. Woody Allen  
*Sleapless in Seattle* (1993), dir. Nora Ephron  
*10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), dir. Gil Junger  
*Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985), dir. Susan Seidelman  
*Lost in Translation* (2003), dir. Sophia Coppola  

Course description

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of the major theoretical concepts in film theory, and practice in writing theoretically informed film criticism. Our objective is to understand how film (specifically Hollywood film) works on viewers, how it imposes ideological values important to American culture on spectators. We will use classic film romance as our test genre through which to examine theory and engage in critical practice.

We will view nine films over the course of the quarter, primarily in screening session. Students will be expected to view every film in a timely manner and be prepared for discussion and written work on each film.

Assignments and projects

- A weekly short paper called a Viewer Response. (Abbreviated “VR”)
- A take-home midterm exam.
- A final oral project, presented in teams on an assigned film, using clips, with an accompanying summary essay of your key findings and a bibliography of sources used.

Learner Outcomes

- Become familiar with film as a textual system, master a critical vocabulary of cinematic theory, and be able to employ it for critical analysis. Be able to explain how films make meaning.
- Develop a comprehension of the genre and historic evolution of film romance and an ability to discuss its chief ideological objectives, stylistic features, and thematic issues.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Attendance/participation/discussion 20%
- Written short papers and Blackboard posts 40%
- Midterm 20%
- Final Project 20%
Expectations:

- Regular attendance is required, at both class meetings and film viewing sessions. Please be on time, with cell phones and electronic devices turned off.

  If for any reason you must miss a film viewing lab, please notify me in advance. You will need to secure a copy of the film and view it on your own by the time we discuss it in class.

- The screenings will be in a small room. Please refrain from blurting out comments or loud laughter during viewing. **Respect spectator silence.**

- Bring syllabus, course notebook, and reading materials to class daily.

- Readings should be prepared carefully and must be completed by the day designated for discussion.

- Thoughtful involvement in class discussions is expected. We want to encourage an open atmosphere where issues can be explored provocatively, without making people feel pressured or silenced.

- Written assignments may be submitted either in hard copy in class or by email. Electronic submissions must be sent before the class in which they are due. E-mail submissions should be with the subject line: Theory

- You will need to consult the Canvas site regularly, as announcements, assignments, and other class materials will be posted there.

**TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Week One** (Jan 7)

Lecture: Introduction to film theory and film romance

Viewing: Wed: *It Happened One Night*

**Week Two** (Jan 12, 14)

Discussion: *It Happened One Night*

Reading: McDonald, 1-37; Coursepack, 21-29; HO on *It Happened One Night*

Writing: VR on *It Happened One Night* due Mon Jan 12

Viewing: Wed: *Roman Holiday*

**Week Three** (Jan 19 [No class—MLK Day], 21)

Discussion: *Roman Holiday*
Reading: McDonald, 38-58; Coursepack, 1-20; HO on Roman Holiday

Writing: VR on Roman Holiday due via email Mon Jan 19

Viewing: Wed: The Graduate

**Week Four**: (Jan 26, 28)

Discussion: The Graduate

Reading: McDonald, 59-84; Coursepack, 31-40; HO on The Graduate

Writing: VR on The Graduate due Mon Jan 26

Viewing: Wed: Annie Hall

**Week Five**: (Feb 2, 4)

Discussion: Annie Hall

Reading: McDonald, 85-105; Coursepack, 41-44; HO on Annie Hall

Writing: VR on Annie Hall due Mon Feb 2

Viewing: Wed: Sleepless in Seattle

**Week Six**: (Feb 9, 11)

Discussion: Sleepless in Seattle

Reading: HO on Sleepless in Seattle

Writing: VR on Sleepless in Seattle due Mon Feb 9; Take-home midterm handed out, due Wed Feb 18

Viewing: Wed: 10 Things I Hate About You

**Week Seven**: (Feb 16 [No class: President’s Day], 18)

Discussion: 10 Things I Hate About You

Reading: HO on 10 Things I Hate About You

Viewing: Wed: Desperately Seeking Susan

**Week Eight**: (Feb 23, 25)

Discussion: Desperately Seeking Susan

Reading: HO on Desperately Seeking Susan
Writing: VR on *Desperately Seeking Susan* due Feb 23

Viewing: Wed: *Lost in Translation*

**Week Nine**: (Mar 2, 4)

Discussion: *Lost in Translation*

Reading: HO on *Lost in Translation*

Writing: VR on *Lost in Translation* due Mon, Mar 2

Viewing: Wed: *The Crying Game*

**Week Ten**: (Mar 9, 11)

Discussion: *The Crying Game*

Presentation: First set of Final Project oral presentations on Wed Mar 12

Writing: VR on *The Crying Game* due Mon, Mar 9

**Week Eleven**: (Mar 17, Tuesday)

12-2 PM: Second set of Final Project oral presentations if needed