ENGLISH 4355 -- FILM CRITICISM
Fall 2020

None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew (or thought one knew) what it did. From now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art. We can only quarrel with one or another means of defense.

Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”

It’s the job of art to free our minds, and the task of criticism to figure out what to do with that freedom. That everyone is a critic means, or should mean, that we are each of us capable of thinking against our own prejudices, of balancing skepticism with open-mindedness, of sharpening our dulled and glutted senses and battling the intellectual inertia that surrounds us. We need to put our remarkable minds to use and to pay our own experience the honor of taking it seriously.

A.O. Scott, Better Living through Criticism

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Catalog Description

A study of the cinema as an art form and an index to popular culture.

Student Learning Outcomes

The most important learning outcome of the class is that you learn to read and respond to movies with pleasure and insight, practicing critical techniques and approaches that will enable you to find meaning in films and communicate it to other readers. More specifically, you should

- acquire sufficient knowledge of the elements of film to “read” movies;
- understand the relationship between film and its social/cultural context;
- be able to apply various critical approaches (formalism, structuralism, historicism, psychological criticism, Marxism, gender criticism, and ethnic and post-colonial criticism) to analyze, interpret, and evaluate movies; and
- gain foundational understanding of the relationship between theory and criticism.

Texts

In addition to these books, each of the featured movies shown for class is a required text:


**Selected Online Resources**
- Internet Movie Database: [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)
- Internet Move Script Database: [www.IMSDb.com](http://www.IMSDb.com)
- American Film Institute [www.AFI.com](http://www.AFI.com)
- AMC Filmsite [www.filmsite.org](http://www.filmsite.org)
Grading

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- **Daily work** includes frequent reading quizzes, class activities, conference paper proposal, and miscellaneous assignments.
- Students will submit a 1-2-page focused **screening report** on each of the required films.
- **The exams** will be a mix of objective and short essay questions covering issues, concepts, terms, and films.
- The **conference paper** will be a 7-8-page research essay suitable for submission to a session of the 2021 Annual Conference of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association ([http://pcaaca.org/](http://pcaaca.org/)).

Attendance and Make-up Policy

The following policy is consistent with ASU OP 10.04 (“Academic Regulations Concerning Student Performance”).

- **Regular attendance** (remotely or in person) is essential for success in the class. Roll will be taken at the beginning of every class period. Students who arrive late or do not answer the roll should inform the instructor after class to be sure they are counted present. Students who enter during a quiz or activity cannot be given extra time to complete it.
- **Stay home if you are ill**, especially if you are or might be infectious.
- **Be prepared for class each day.** An absence does not excuse the student from being prepared for the next class.
- **All assignments are due on Blackboard at the posted deadline.** Being permitted to submit work after the deadline gives students an advantage over those who turn work in on time; thus late work will be accepted only if approved by the instructor.
- **Reading quizzes submitted after the deadline will receive a zero unless excused by the instructor.** Two quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the term.
- **Contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss the reason for a late submission of any assignment and to request a waiver of the penalty for late work.** The penalty for an unexcused late assignment is one-half letter grade for each day late.

Personal Conduct and Responsibilities

In this and all college courses, you should conduct yourself with professionalism and collegiality, and you should take responsibility for your own learning and performance. Excellent students are motivated, dedicated, and self-reliant; they have a positive attitude and a good work ethic. You will improve your chances of succeeding in this class by following these rules:

- **Stay focused.** Attend class and be actively involved as often and as much as possible. Pay attention and participate in discussions. Ask questions when you have them and consult
your professor when you have concerns.

- **Commit to learning.** Keep up with your work. Critically read all assigned readings. Conscientiously complete written assignments. Review and study daily.
- Follow instructions carefully, especially those on assignment prompts, and prepare assignments according to the guidelines provided.
- **Encourage learning and collaborate** with classmates and support the instructor in the goal of learning.
- **Be courteous.** To avoid distracting others, arrive on time. Avoid talking in class except when appropriate. While it is sometimes acceptable and even desirable to question opinions and even facts offered by others (including the teacher), you should do so respectfully and thoughtfully, with learning goals in mind.
- **Use cell phones and other personal electronic devices only for class purposes.**
- **Take good care of your body and mind.** Keep yourself nourished and rested.

**Course Syllabus Statement on Required Use of Masks/Facial Coverings by Students in Class At Angelo State University**

As a member of the Texas Tech University System, Angelo State University has adopted the mandatory **Facial Covering Policy** to ensure a safe and healthy classroom experience. Current research on the COVID-19 virus suggests there is a significant reduction in the potential for transmission of the virus from person to person by wearing a mask/facial covering that covers the nose and mouth areas. Therefore, in compliance with the university policy students in this class are required to wear a mask/facial covering before, during, and after class. Faculty members may also ask you to display your daily screening badge as a prerequisite to enter the classroom. You are also asked to maintain safe distancing practices to the best of your ability. For the safety of everyone, any student not appropriately wearing a mask/facial covering will be asked to leave the classroom immediately. The student will be responsible to make up any missed class content or work. Continued non-compliance with the Texas Tech University System Policy may result in disciplinary action through the Office of Student Conduct.

**Student Disability Services**

ASU is committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of the university, or be subjected to discrimination by the university, as provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 (ADAAA) and subsequent legislation.
Student Disability Services is located in the Office of Student Affairs, and is the designated campus department charged with the responsibility of reviewing and authorizing requests for reasonable accommodations based on a disability. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate such a request by contacting an employee of the Office of Student Affairs, in the Houston Harte University Center, Room 112, or contacting the department via email at ADA@angelo.edu. For more information about the application process and requirements, visit the Student Disability Services website at www.angelo.edu/ADA. The employee charged with the responsibility of reviewing and authorizing accommodation requests is:

Ms. Dallas Swafford
Director of Student Disability Services
325-942-2047
dallas.swafford@angelo.edu
Houston Harte University Center 112

Title IX Statement

Angelo State University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from sex discrimination of any kind. In accordance with Title VII, Title IX, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE), and other federal and state laws, the University prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy, and other types of Sexual Misconduct. Sexual Misconduct is a broad term encompassing all forms of gender-based harassment or discrimination and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature. The term includes sexual harassment, nonconsensual sexual contact, nonconsensual sexual intercourse, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, public indecency, interpersonal violence (domestic violence or dating violence), sexual violence, and any other misconduct based on sex.

You are encouraged to report any incidents involving sexual misconduct to the Office of Title IX Compliance and the Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator, Michelle Boone, J.D. You may submit reports in the following manner:

Online: www.angelo.edu/incident-form
Face to Face: Mayer Administration Building, Room 210
Phone: 325-942-2022
Email: michelle.boone@angelo.edu

Note, as a faculty member at Angelo State, I am a mandatory reporter and must report incidents involving sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator. Should you wish to speak to someone in confidence about an issue, you may contact the University Counseling Center (325-942-2371), the 24-Hour Crisis Helpline (325-486-6345), or the University Health Clinic (325-942-2171).

For more information about resources related to sexual misconduct, Title IX, or Angelo State’s policy please visit: www.angelo.edu/title-ix.
**Student Absence for Observance of Religious Holy Days**

A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. See ASU Operating Policy 10.19 Student Absence for Observance of Religious Holy Day for more information.

**Incomplete Grade Policy**

It is policy that incomplete grades be reserved for student illness or personal misfortune. Please contact faculty if you have serious illness or a personal misfortune that would keep you from completing course work. Documentation may be required. See ASU Operating Policy 10.11 Grading Procedures for more information.

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in all work. Any student found guilty of any form of dishonesty in academic work is subject of disciplinary action and possible expulsion from ASU.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a serious topic covered in ASU’s Academic Integrity policy in the Student Handbook. Plagiarism is the action or practice of taking someone else’s work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one’s own. Plagiarism is literary theft.

In your discussions and/or your papers, it is unacceptable to copy word-for-word without quotation marks and the source of the quotation. It is expected that you will summarize or paraphrase ideas giving appropriate credit to the source both in the body of your paper and the reference list.

Papers are subject to be evaluated for originality via Turnitin. Resources to help you understand this policy better are available at the ASU Writing Center.

**Copyright Policy**

Students officially enrolled in this course should make only one printed copy of the given articles and/or chapters. You are expressly prohibited from distributing or reproducing any portion of course readings in printed or electronic form without written permission from the copyright holders or publishers.
Tentative Schedule
If you miss class, check with a classmate or the instructor to verify the assignment. [Guide=Short Guide to Writing about Film; Intro=Introduction to Criticism; FILM=Film for Study.]

Week 1
T 8/18 Course Policies and Procedures
R 8/20 Guide Ch. 1 (Why Write about Film)

Week 2
FILM: Citizen Kane (1941)
T 8/25 Guide Ch. 2 (Meaning in Movies)
R 8/27 Guide Ch. 3, pp. 31-51 (Film as Narrative)
Screening Report: Citizen Kane

Week 3
FILM: The Piano (1993)
T 9/1 Guide Ch. 3, pp. 51-74 (Mise-en-Scène, Cinematography, and Editing)
R 9/3 Guide Ch. 3, pp. 74-85 (Sound as Signifier)
Screening Report: The Piano

Week 4
FILM: Adaptation (2002)
T 9/8 Guide Ch. 4 (Overview of Critical Approaches)
R 9/10 Guide Ch. 6 (Researching the Movies)
Screening Report: Adaptation

Week 5
FILM: Do the Right Thing (1989)
T 9/15 Conference Paper Pre-Proposal due
Intro Ch. 1 (Formalism)
R 9/17 Screening Report: Do the Right Thing
Practice in Formalism
**Week 6**
FILM: *Rashomon* (1950)

T 9/22     Intro Ch. 2 (Structuralism)
R 9/24     **Screening Report: Rashomon**
            Practice in Structuralism

**Week 7**

T 9/29     Review
R 10/1     **Midterm Exam**

**Week 8**

T 10/6     *Intro Ch. 7 (Gender Criticism)*
R 10/8     **Screening Report: Lost in Translation**
            Practice in Gender Criticism

**Week 9**

T 10/13    **Conference Paper Proposal Due**
            *Intro Ch. 3 (Historical Criticism)*
R 10/15    **Screening Report: Modern Times**
            Practice in Historical Criticism

**Week 10**

T 10/20    *Intro Ch. 4 (Psychological Criticism)*
R 10/22    **Screening Report: Hurt Locker**
            Practice in Psychological Criticism

**Week 11**

T 10/27    *Intro Ch. 5 (Marxist and Political Criticism)*
Week 12
FILM: Get Out (2019)

T 11/3  Intro Ch. 8 (Ethnic, Post-Colonial, and Transnational Criticism)

R 11/5  Screening Report: Get Out
Practice in Ethnic, Post-Colonial, and Transnational Criticism

Week 13

T 11/10 Conference Paper First Draft due

R 11/12 Workshop

Week 14

T 11/17 Conference Paper Due

R 11/19 Review

Week 15

S 11/21 Final Exam (10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.)