ENGL 124: Thinking about Genre through Film

The objectives of this course are:

- To allow students to work in depth with a single approach to texts;
- To explore the concept of genre in film and theoretical approaches to it;
- To develop skills for reading film texts using genre concepts to inform your reading;
- To understand how genre carries cultural, political, and ideological meanings into film and thus links the text to its cultural context.

Texts:
Course pack of articles.
All films will be screened in class.

Schedule:
(Proposed – students will have the opportunity to select last two genres in course)

Class Meetings

Class 1
Introduction to the course: Film terms, beginning to think about genre
Daniel Chandler, “An Introduction to Genre Theory”
http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/documents/intgenre/intgenre.html [March 16, 2007]

Class 2 & 3
The Western – Shane & Brokeback Mountain

Final panel film proposal due by midnight by e-mail

Class 4 & 5
Melodrama – Now Voyager & Far from Heaven
Class 6 & 7  
**Film Noir – Sunset Boulevard & Mulholland Drive**  

Class 8 & 9  
**Horror – Psycho & The Shining**  

Class 10 & 11  
**Screwball Comedy – Bringing Up Baby & Desperately Seeking Susan**  

Class 12  
**Assignments:**  

1) Short Weekly Papers: Each week (except the one on which you are presenting), you'll write a 2-page paper on one of the two films we’re discussing. The point of the paper is to apply the genre questions we’ve generated to the film and to analyze it specifically in terms of those questions. Each week your paper should look at a different element in the film from among the following: mise en scene (everything in front of the camera and within the shot: lighting, set décor, sound, placement, and movement of actors, camera work etc.), montage (how the film is put together, editing, juxtaposition of scenes, suture), narrative (plot/story, character development, etc), and context (how genre is doing ideological, cultural, political work in the film). Say clearly at the beginning of the paper what approach you are taking in that paper. Everyone should look at some of the papers before they come to class on Monday evening. Presenters are responsible for reading the papers and using the points they make as part of their discussion materials in class.

2) Panel presentations: For each film we discuss, a panel will introduce the film and initiate the discussion. The panel should:

1) Before we watch the film:  
Distribute (and post on Blackboard) a handout of basic information about the film which includes questions we should think about as we watch and the following (Use IMDB for this information, but DO NOT just print out a page from the web site. Cross check the information with another source):  
- Date  
- Director  
- Cinematography  
- Key Cast members  
- Any additional information you think is important (location, producers, music etc.)

2) In class the evening we discuss the film, be prepared to:  
- Show key clips (2 or 3) from the film (up to 5 minutes) that you think illustrate the points you want to make about genre in the film.  
- Lead a discussion based on the clips, your questions, and the points people have made in their papers.  
- Make connections to specific points raised in the theoretical articles we have been reading.

3) Final Presentation and Paper  
For the last class, you will work with several other people to prepare a film for presentation. The purpose of your presentation will be to make an argument about how you can use genre theory to read the film you have chosen. The argument might be that the film fits clearly within the conventions of a genre or that it plays with and subverts those
conventions or that it mixes genre conventions. You will have 15-20 minutes for the presentation in the final class. Each member of the panel will write a separate paper on the film making her/his own particular argument about the film.

Process for the panel/paper:

- **Proposal for the film you plan to work on (Due on Friday, March 30 by midnight)**
  Proposal should include: the title, date and director of the film you’ve chosen; a paragraph outlining your preliminary ideas about how you will look at the film in terms of genre; references to 3-5 sources you think will help you in your work on the film, at least one or two should be articles specifically on the film which address it in terms of genre issues (not newspaper movie reviews). Others might be theoretical essays or essays on the genre(s) you think you’ll be discussing in relation to the film.

- **Panel Presentation on April 30 which should include:**
  - Handout of cast list, references for any sources you’ve used;
  - Presentation of key clip or two (2-3 minutes each)
  - Discussion of your arguments about how you see genre working in the film.

- **Paper (6-8 pages), due on Wednesday, May 9**
  In the paper, each panel member should explore his/her own argument about genre in the films. Each individual’s paper may take a different approach from the panel or may develop one of several ideas presented by the panel. If you use ideas contributed by other panel members, be sure to cite them along with your other sources. Papers should make use of the readings we have done for the class and of resources the panel identified as well.

**Grading**

- Short weekly papers (4): 30%
- Genre presentation: 20%
- Final paper and presentation: 30%
- Participation and attendance: 20%

**Possible Films for Choice Weeks**

- **Horror**
  Early: Dracula (1931); Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956); Psycho (1960)
  Later: Dressed to Kill (1980); The Shining (1980); Silence of the Lambs (1991); The Blair Witch Project (1999); Crash (1995)

- **Musical**
  Early: 42nd Street (1932/33); Top Hat (1932); Singing in the Rain (1952); Gentleman Prefer Blonds (1953)
  Later: Victor Victoria (1982); Fame (1980); Strictly Ballroom (1992); West Side Story (1961); Moulin Rouge (2001)

- **War**
  Early: All Quiet on the Western Front (1930); Casablanca (1942); Bridge on the River Kwai (1957); Mrs. Miniver (1942)
  Later: M*A*S*H (1970); Apocalypse Now (1979); Full Metal Jacket (1987); Platoon (1986); Glory (1989); Three Kings (1999); Jar Head (2005); Coming Home (1978)

- **Romantic/Screwball Comedy**
  Early: Bringing Up Baby (1938); It Happened One Night (1934); His Girl Friday (1940), Adam's Rib (1949) Some Like It Hot (1959)
  Later: Annie Hall (1977); Tootsie (1982); Four Weddings and a Funeral (1993); Clueless (1995); Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)