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## **FLM 365: Mafia, Murder, and Mystery: Crime in Italian and American Cinema**

### **Course Syllabus**

**Summer Semester 2019**

**Instructor:** Elgin K. Eckert, Ph.D.

**Credits:** 3

**Contact Hours:** 45

**Prerequisites:** None

**Class Hours:** TBA

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Course Type:** Standard Course

**Lab Fee:** TBA

#### **Course Description**

This course will study how mafia and organized crime are presented in Italian and American cinematic texts. The course will examine the different expressions of the crime film genre, which dates back to the beginnings of filmmaking, focusing on the technical, visual, and aesthetic aspects of crime films. Through a systematic study of canonical Italian and American films, students will become familiar with the narrative codes and conventions of the genre and analyze how various writers and filmmakers adhere, diverge, or evolve from the established codes. The latter part of the course will be dedicated to new expressions of the genre, the made-for-small screen series (TV, Netflix) and theoretical discussion will consider the shift in audience preference from feature films toward series that has taken place over the last two decades.

This course will provide students with the tools necessary to analyze films: basic cinematic techniques (shot, camera movement, cinematography, editing, sound) will be reviewed, and more advanced issues in cinema analysis (narrative, performance) as well as core critical concepts (especially genre vs. auteur theory) will be introduced and applied when analyzing specific films.

#### **Course Objectives**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- become familiar with numerous canonical works of Italian and American cinema;
- explore typical narrative dynamics behind Italian and American films and series dealing with the mafia and other organized crime;
- become familiar with basic and more advanced cinematic techniques in order to view films in an active and critical manner;
- use core critical concepts in film studies to analyze films;
- become versed in special techniques of film analysis; and
- acquire a sufficient appreciation of the representation of the phenomena of organized crime in Italian and American cinematic popular culture.

#### **Course Materials**

##### Readings

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies: An Introduction*. NY: Columbia UP, 2010.

Corrigan, Timothy, and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004, pp. 222-252. (on reserve in the Umbra Institute Library).

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Barker, Cory, and Myc Wiatrowski. *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017. (on reserve in the Umbra Institute Library).

### Films

Francis Ford Coppola *The Godfather* – 1970  
Gabriele Salvatores *Io Non Ho Paura (I'm Not Scared)* – 2003  
Marco Tullio Giordana *I Cento Passi (One Hundred Steps)* – 2000  
Martin Scorsese *Goodfellas* – 1990  
Martin Scorsese *The Departed* – 2006

### **Assessment**

Preparation and Participation	10%
Six Film Studies Assignments	60% (10% each)
Paper	15%
Final Exam	15%

### **Grading**

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

<b>Letter Grade Range</b>	<b>Numerical Score Equivalent</b>	<b>Student Performance</b>
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional Excellent
A-	90% - 92%	
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

### **Course Requirements**

Grades are based on the following:

#### *Preparation and Participation (10%)*

Students are expected to do all reading assignments before the assigned date in order to contribute to classroom discussions. Film screenings are an integral part of this course and must be treated as such (please see [An Important Note on Film Screenings](#) below)

#### *Six Film Studies Assignments (60%)*

These important assignments are based on readings in the textbook and designed to give students the necessary tools to analyze films in a sophisticated manner. They vary from two to four pages each.

#### *Paper (15%)*

Students will write a six-page research paper on Martin Scorsese as *auteur*.

#### *Final Exam (15%)*

Students will take one written final exam, which will include material studied during the course. The final exam will comprise of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

### Course Content Disclaimer

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Because of the material covered in this course, the class will be discussing subjects that may be disturbing to some students. Some of the films screened in this course contain scenes of graphic violence and/or murder, both in fictitious and in historical contexts.

Students who anticipate discomfort while screening these films should familiarize themselves with the plot before class, and then sit near an exit so that, when necessary, they may step out of the room for a few minutes. Removing oneself for a moment or two is perfectly fine and students may always do so without academic penalty. The student will, however, be responsible for any material missed. If a student does leave the room for a significant time, it is important that the student make arrangements to get notes from another student or see the professor individually to discuss the situation.

#### Attendance Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed one “free” absence during the summer semester, which they do not need to justify. Each additional absence, unless it is for a very serious reason, will lower your final grade by one grade level (e.g., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B). It also the policy of the Institute that any student who has three or more absences automatically fails the class.

If students miss a class, it is their responsibility to find out what they missed or what work they must catch up on from the professor or from colleagues.

Absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students’ final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

#### Academic Integrity

All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

#### Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

#### An Important Note on Film Screenings

You must treat each film screening as you would a reading. You are expected to be an active viewer, looking for historical, political, economic, social, cultural, narrative, and aesthetic meaning. You must take notes on every film you see. For each film, you are expected to be able to analyze the characters, themes, film techniques, narrative organization, historical significance, relation to history/film history, etc.

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### Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

NOTE: This is a preliminary schedule that is subject to change.

#### WEEK 1

- Introduction to the course
- Basic concepts of *mise-en-scène*: the shot and camera movement
- The beginnings of the crime film genre: gangster films of the 1930's

#### Readings and Assignments

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 5-23.

Handout Assignment 1: Analyzing the Shot

- Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece *The Godfather*
- Screening of *The Godfather*

#### Readings

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 23-37.

Handout Assignment 2: Analyzing Camera Movement

#### WEEK 2

- Discussion of *The Godfather* (cont.)
- Italian films about organized crime
- Narrative structure in film
- Gabriele Salvatores' *Io non ho paura* (*I'm not scared*)

#### Readings and Assignments

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 74-83, 89-100.

Handout Assignment 3: Analyzing Narrative and Narrative Structure

- The difference between Italian and Hollywood films about the mafia
- Peppino Impastato and the Antimafia movement in Italy
- Marco Tullio Giordano's *I cento passi* (*The Hundred Steps*)
- Intercinematic citations
- Discussion of Marco Tullio Giordano's *I cento passi* (*The Hundred Steps*)

#### Readings

Small, Pauline. "Giordano's *I cento passi*: renegotiating the Mafia codes" in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* vol. 3(1), pp. 41-54 (marked selections).

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 128-142.

Handout Assignment 4: Analyzing Acting

#### WEEK 3

- Martin Scorsese and his films
- Authorship, the producer's role, teamwork
- Editing and editing techniques: transitions, montage, etc.

#### Readings:

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 74-88.

Handout Assignment 5: Analyzing Sound

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- Critical concepts in film studies: *auteur* theory
- Martin Scorsese *Goodfellas*

#### Readings

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 116-128.

#### WEEK 4

- Discussion of Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas*
- Martin Scorsese: *The Departed*

#### Readings

Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies*. pp. 55-74.

#### Handout Assignment 6: Editing

- Documentaries: social, political, and historical
- Documentaries: historical authenticity, human interest, and creation of tension/suspense
- Crime documentaries

#### Readings

TBD for Director Paper

#### WEEK 5

- Netflix and TV on demand and changes in audience viewing behavior
- Netflix and TV on demand and changes in productions/marketing
- Crime films in the Age of Netflix

#### Readings

“Introduction” in Barker, Cory, and Myc Wiatrowski. *The age of Netflix: critical essays on streaming media, digital delivery and instant access*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017.

- US and Italian TV series focusing on organized crime: *The Sopranos*, *Suburra*, *Gomorra*

#### Readings

“Terms of Excess” in Barker, Cory, and Myc Wiatrowski. *The age of Netflix: critical essays on streaming media, digital delivery and instant access*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017.

FINAL EXAM

**Director Paper due**

#### **Bibliography**

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Brunetta, Gian Piero. *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from Its Origins to the Twenty-first Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Buss, Robin. *Italian Films*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989.

*Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. eds. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2011.

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- . *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Pickering-Iazzi, Robin. *Mafia and Outlaw Stories from Italian Life and Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.
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- Repetto, Thomas. *American Mafia: A History of its Rise to Power*. New York: Holt, 2004.
- Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Stille, Alexander. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*. New York: Pantheon, 1995.
- Sorlin, Pierre. *Italian National Cinema: 1896-1996*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Wood, Mary P. *Italian Cinema*. Oxford: Berg, 2005.