

Code: BMA-FLMD-322.68, BMI-FLMD-322E.25

Course title: Domestic Melodramas in American Cinema

Course convenor: László Strausz

Class time and place: Biweekly Tuesdays 12:30-16 on Sep17, Oct1, Oct15, Nov5, Nov19, Dec3
Room: -137

Course type: Seminar

Course content: This seminar works with the assumption that in a large majority of American domestic melodramas the middle-class family represents a miniature model of society. Through an investigation of the development of the genre, we will interrogate issues of sexuality, gender and ethnic- and class identities in American society across the 20th-century. The first part of the class focuses mainly on theoretical questions, which will be followed by a historically motivated study of the various transformations of domestic melodrama, from its beginnings towards the contemporary remakes. In last section of the course, we will examine conceptual issues related to genre theory, and attempt to locate the position of melodramas amongst other traditional genres within American cinema.

Session 1: Introduction, course overview definitions and types of melodrama
Session 2: Silent film melodrama as morality tale and the social turn
Session 3: Classical American domestic melodrama
Session 4: The baroque phase: Douglas Sirk
Session 5: Melodrama and the remake, contemporary versions
Session 6: Melodrama as identity politics

Required films:

- Broken Blossoms (DW Griffith, 1919)
- The Crowd (King Vidor, 1928)
- Stella Dallas (King Vidor, 1937)
- Mildred Pierce (Michael Curtiz, 1945)
- On the Waterfront (Elia Kazan, 1954)
- Rebel without a Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955)
- All that Heaven Allows (Douglas Sirk, 1955)
- Written on the Wind (Douglas Sirk, 1956)
- Far from Heaven (Todd Haynes, 2002)
- Punch-Drunk Love (PT Anderson, 2002)
- Jungle Fever (Spike Lee, 1991)
- Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005)
- Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Sciamma, 2019)

Requirements: Attendance is required, three missed classes result in an incomplete for the course. Course mark will be calculated on the basis of the written assignment and exam conversation. Student who excel through attendance, preparatory work and in-class discussions will be offered a grade automatically.

Learning outcomes: Participants will become familiar with the outlines of the literature on melodrama and films, with special regard to domestic melodramas, conceptualize connection between social history and film culture, practice film analysis skills, and academic writing skills

Indicative readings: Required material (in online course reader):

1. Marcia Landy (ed): Imitations of Life: A reader on film & television melodrama. Wayne State University Press, Detroit: 1991
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2. Christine Gledhill (ed): Home is where the heart is. Studies in melodrama and the woman's film. BFI Publishing, London: 1987

Recommended readings:

1. Altman, Rick: Film/Genre. BFI Publishing, 1999.
 2. Altman, Rick: Újrafelhasználható csomagolás. Műfaji termékek és az újrafeldolgozási folyamat. In: Metropolis 1999/3. pp. 12–33.
 3. Brown, Nick (ed): Refiguring American Film Genres. University of California Press, 1998.
 4. Byers, Jackie: All that Heaven Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s melodrama. Routledge, London: 1991.
 5. Kuhn, Anette: Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema. Routledge: 1982
 6. Lang, Robert: American film melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.
 7. Schatz, Thomas: Hollywood Genres. McGraw and Hill, 1981.
 8. Singer, Brian: Melodrama and Modernity. Columbia University Press, 2001.
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