

Instructor: Matt Teichman

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***Required texts:***

Teichman, ed. *Course Reader, Intro to Film Genres*. Available at the bookstore.

***Course Description:***

This course is a survey of six film genres: comedy, the western, the musical, film noir, melodrama, and wuxia pien. For the majority of the term we will be looking at Classical Hollywood genres, as it is during this period (roughly 1917 to 1960) that the dominant notion of industrial film genre was consolidated. During the final week we will turn to a genre which emerged out of rather different studio system: the Hong Kong swordplay/fantasy film. Over the semester there will be particular interest in considering the philosophical issues raised by the attempt to define genre, the history of auteurism and genre theory, and the cultural function both of genre in general and of specific genres. Of what use to us are film genres, either as scholars, as viewers, or as consumers? Do genre terms designate classes in the same way as other predicates, or is there something more slippery about the way they work? Does genre have an ontological basis, or is it a function of social and political caprices?

Although we will concern ourselves to some extent with the problems of genre theory, our primary focus will be on the role of film style in the articulation of genres. This role may turn out to be negligible, or it may turn out to be pivotal. But it is an issue to which the study of studio era Hollywood film has devoted a good deal of attention, and is symptomatic of a debate that coincides with the formation of Film Studies: to whom should we attribute style, and what of it? How does the significance of a style endure or vary as it passes into different institutional circuits?

Each class will consist of a screening, discussion of the film, and discussions of a set of readings (all of which are included in the course reader); at the beginning of most class sessions there will be a quiz on the readings assigned for that day. Work for the course will consist of class discussions, daily readings, in-class quizzes, a midterm paper, and a final paper. You will be expected to participate regularly in class discussions, and to take notes on the films screened in class. Please take care neither to leave the room nor to enter it once a film has begun screening. While on certain assignments you may be asked to view films that we haven't watched in class, you will never be expected to perform outside research for a paper; you should be able to accomplish all you need to on the written assignments using the articles from the course reader.

If you should come across any materials that you would like to share with the rest of the class, you are more than welcome to do so.

***We will be viewing the following films in class:***

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • <i>The Great Dictator</i>   | (Charlie Chaplin, 1940)   | • <i>The Lady From Shanghai</i>    | (Orson Welles, 1948)      |
| • <i>Cluny Brown</i>          | (Ernst Lubitsch, 1946)    | • <i>Secret Beyond the Door</i>    | (Fritz Lang, 1948)        |
| • <i>Johnny Guitar</i>        | (Nicholas Ray, 1954)      | • <i>Some Came Running</i>         | (Vincente Minnelli, 1958) |
| • <i>Rio Bravo</i>            | (Howard Hawks, 1958)      | • <i>Imitation of Life</i>         | (Douglas Sirk, 1959)      |
| • <i>Gold Diggers of 1933</i> | (Mervyn LeRoy, 1933)      | • <i>Come Drink With Me</i>        | (King Hu, 1966)           |
| • <i>The Band Wagon</i>       | (Vincente Minnelli, 1953) | • <i>The Sentimental Swordsman</i> | (Chor Yuen, 1977)         |

# ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

## Monday

**Week of 5/9**  
**COMEDY** INTRODUCTION  
View: *The Great Dictator*

**Week of 5/16**  
**THE WESTERN** View: *Johnny Guitar*  
Read: Ed Buscombe, "The Western: A Short History"  
Nicolas Voisin, "Johnny Guitar, Journey  
to the Center of the Earth"

**Week of 5/23**  
**THE MUSICAL** View: *Gold Diggers of 1933*  
Read: Graham Wood, "Distant cousin or fraternal  
twin? Analytical approaches  
to the film musical"  
Arlene Croce, "Dance in Film"  
Pamela Robertson, "Feminist Camp in  
*Gold Diggers of 1933*"

**Week of 5/30**  
**FILM NOIR** View: *The Lady From Shanghai*  
Read: James Naremore, "The History of an Idea"  
Yann Tobin, "Near the eyes, near the heart:  
the Close-up in *The Lady  
From Shanghai*"

**Week of 6/6**  
**MELODRAMA** View: *Some Came Running*  
Read: Thomas Schatz, "The Family Melodrama"  
Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury:  
Observations on the  
Family Melodrama"

**Week of 6/13**  
**WUXIA PIEN** View: *Come Drink With Me*  
Read: Tony Rayns, "The Sword as Obstacle"  
David Bordwell, "Richness Through  
Imperfection: King Hu  
and the Glimpse"  
Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture"

## Wednesday

View: *Cluny Brown*  
Read: Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur  
Theory in 1962"  
Robert Stam, "The Antecedents of Film Theory"  
David Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*,  
chaps. 1-3.

View: *Rio Bravo*  
Read: André Bazin, "The Western, or the American  
Film par excellence"  
André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Western"  
Robin Wood, *Rio Bravo*, chaps. 1-2  
Tzvetan Todorov, "The Origin of Genres"

View: *The Band Wagon*  
Read: Jane Feuer, "The History of the  
Hollywood Musical:  
Innovation as Conservation"  
Richard Dyer, Introduction to *Heavenly Bodies*  
Thomas Elsaesser, "Vincente Minnelli"  
Turn in: Midterm paper

View: *Secret Beyond the Door*  
Read: Raymond Durgnat, "Paint it Black: The Family  
Tree of the Film Noir"  
Tom Gunning, "Secret Beyond the Door:  
Broken Frames and  
Piercing Gazes"

View: *Imitation of Life*  
Read: Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk* (excerpt)  
Fred Camper, "The Films of Douglas Sirk"  
Paul Willemen, "Distanciation and Douglas Sirk"  
Laura Mulvey, "Melodrama in and out  
of the Home"

View: *The Sentimental Swordsman*  
Read: Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"  
Roger Garcia, "The Arbitrary—A Written Lecture"  
Nelson Goodman, "Seven Strictures on Similarity"  
Turn in: Final paper