INTOUCHABLES? MISFITS AND OUTSIDERS IN FRENCH CINEMA

Still from Louis Feuillade’s Les Vampires, episode 2, 1916.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will focus on the representations of outcasts and dissident social groups in French cinema from the 1910s to today. We will watch and discuss both classic French films (Renoir, Carné, Cocteau, Godard) and popular national blockbusters (Besson, popular comedies) in order to examine the role that cinema has given to misfits and outsiders.

Marginal characters can be the villains of the story, but they can also be the ill-fated heroes of classic genres (Poetic Realism in particular) and gangster movies (as incarnated by actor Alain Delon in the 1960s). For some, isolation proceeds from a dubious humanity (La Belle et la bête), while for others it is simply their goofiness and incapacity to adapt to social life that separate them from society. Segregation can also be gender-related (Nikita) or socially/racially caused (La Haine, Intouchables).

Isolation has many shapes, causes, and outcomes; consequently, we will discuss the cinematographic representations of exclusion, isolation, and marginality through a variety of critical perspectives and approaches – including psychoanalysis, historical/sociological studies and structuralist theories.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This class has three main objectives:

- To train you to recognize and analyze film techniques and forms (the composition of shots, editing, movements of camera, etc...).

- To introduce and familiarize you with French cinema via its representation of outcasts. The range of films selected cover a period of almost a hundred years, which will give you a broad approach to both French cinema and the evolving representation of outsiders and social margins in French films.

- To expose you to the ways in which the question of the "other" has been theorized and discussed in relation to cinema in France. You will be encouraged to think critically about the representations of outcasts in films and about the theoretical texts that we will read on the subject.
**Requirements**


Viewing: films are on reserve at the Library. It is highly recommended that you see each film at least twice. Projections will be organized ASAP, time and place TBA.

Attendance at every meeting and completion in due time of the assigned readings are mandatory. Work in this class will consist of active class participation, one 10- to 15-minutes presentation, two short response papers (1-2 pages), a midterm paper (5-7 pages) and a final paper (10-12 pages) due on December 15th.

The grade will be calculated as follows:

Class participation: 10%
Presentation: 15%
Short response papers: 20%
Midterm paper: 20%
Final paper: 35%

**Grading scale**

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<th>Grade</th>
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**Class participation:** participation is essential to our class. You are expected to come prepared to discuss the films and the assigned readings. Be engaged and active in the general discussion. You should take notes while (re-)viewing the films, so that you can contribute to our discussion with precise points/questions.

**Presentation:** you will prepare a 10 to 15 minutes presentation on either one of the films that we will watch together. You can organize your presentation as you wish, but it should be articulated around one specific idea. For instance you could pick a theme (ex: love, death), a motif (ex: disguises and characters’ transformations), a technique (traveling shots, jump cuts), a narrative aspect (repetition), an aspect of the mise-en-scène (costumes, decors) or of the soundtrack (music, sound perspective). You could also pick a sequence and present a shot-by-shot analysis to the class.

**2 Short response papers:** you will write two short response papers (1-2 pages) during the semester. These papers will each discuss a film from the “Recommended” sections in the calendar. You should hand them in to me either at the end of the class for which they were listed, or the following week. Trailers for these films will be posted on Moodle.

**Midterm paper:** short research paper (5-7 pages) on the subject and film(s) of your choice. You should document your argument by including critical sources and a short bibliography.

**Final paper:** 10 to 12 pages research paper on the subject and film(s) of your choice. You will be graded according to the coherence and originality of your paper, the quality of your research (you document your argument with critical sources), and the precision of your text (you give examples, you analyze specific aspects of the film(s)’ cinematography).

**Absence policy:**

Attendance in class is mandatory and students missing more than a week of class will see their grade reduced as a result. If you miss more than one class, your final grade will be lowered (an A would become
an A-, an A- a B+, a B+ a B, etc...). French majors are also expected to attend the supplementary discussion group, and the same absence policy applies to that discussion group. Please keep in touch via email if you have to miss a class; homework should be turned in in due time even if you are absent.

**Honor Code:**

For questions related to the honor code, feel free to consult the College website at:

http://www.brynmawr.edu/honorcode/

You are encouraged to do research and to document your arguments with external sources; but remember to quote them properly. When you cite somebody else’s work, you should acknowledge your source and cite them accordingly (see MLA manual of style).

In addition to this, students will be expected to write their papers without any exterior help. Getting help from another party will be considered as an infringement of the Bryn Mawr Honor Code, and will entail the corresponding consequences.

**Calendar**

All the readings will be available on our Moodle site, except for the chapters from *French Films, Texts and Contexts* (marked as FFTC below), which is available at the Bryn Mawr Bookstore. This calendar is subject to change, in which case you would be notified either in class or via email at least a week in advance.

**Week 1 (Sept 4th): Introduction**

- General introduction of the course and its objectives.
- Introduction to early French cinema

**Week 2 (Sept 11th): Crime Serials and Cinematic Paranoïa**


**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

- French discussion group: sequence analysis.

**Week 3 (Sept 18th): Isolated Spaces**

Jean Vigo, *L’Atalante* (1934)

**Readings:**

- *Republic of Images*, 213-220 (pdf on Moodle)

**Recommended:**


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**WEEK 4 (SEPT 25<sup>TH</sup>): THE SAVAGE AND THE CIVILIZED**

Jean Renoir, *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (1932)

**READINGS:**

**RECOMMENDED:**

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**WEEK 5 (OCTOBER 2<sup>ND</sup>): THE CRIMINAL AND THE POLITICAL**


**READINGS:**

**RECOMMENDED:**
- French discussion group: sequence analysis/Bazin on Jean Renoir.

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**WEEK 6 (OCTOBER 9<sup>TH</sup>): DOOMED HEROES (POETIC REALISM)**

Marcel Carné, *Le Quai des Brumes* (1938)

**READINGS:**

**RECOMMENDED:**
- French discussion group: Deleuze on close shots/sequence analysis.

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**MIDTERM PAPER DUE IN CLASS ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9<sup>TH</sup>.**

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**FALL BREAK**
WEEK 7 (OCT 23rd): BEASTS AND ATVISM

Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et la bête* (1946)

**READINGS:**
- Susan Hayward: “Gender politics: Cocteau’s belle is not that bête.” *FFTC.*

**RECOMMENDED:**
- Renoir, *La Bête humaine/The Human Beast* (1938)
- French discussion group: extended comparison between the fairy tale and the film.

WEEK 8 (OCT 30th): MISFITS AND SOCIAL PEACE: MURDERERS AND BLACKMAILERS


**READINGS:**
- Susan Hayward, “Texts and Intertexts: What kind of Film is this: Noir, Queer, Political?” *Les Diaboliques*, pp. 41-62.

**RECOMMENDED:**
- French discussion group: sequence analysis

WEEK 9 (NOV 6th): THE RUNAWAYS (NEW WAVE)

François Truffaut, *Les 400 coups* (1959)

**READINGS:**

**RECOMMENDED:**
WEEK 10 (NOV 13TH): THE RUNAWAYS (2) (NEW WAVE)
Jean-Luc Godard, A bout de souffle (1959)

READINGS:

RECOMMENDED:

WEEK 11 (NOV 20TH): LONERS AND STAR SYSTEM: BELMONDO/DELON
Melville, Le Samouraï (1967)

READINGS:
- Ginette Vincendeau. “Jean-Paul Belmondo and Alain Delon: One Smiles, the Other Doesn’t.” Stars and Stardom in French Cinema, 158-195.

RECOMMENDED:
- Godard, Pierrot le fou (1965)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 12 (NOV 27TH): CLUMSIES, LOOSERS AND EMMERDEURS (POPULAR COMEDIES)
Francis Veber, La chèvre (1981)

READINGS:
- TBA

RECOMMENDED:
WEEK 13 (DEC 4TH): FEMALE MARGINALITIES (CINÉMA DU LOOK)
Luc Besson, Nikita (1990)

READINGS:

RECOMMENDED:
- Beineix, 37°2 le matin/ Betty blue (1986).

WEEK 14 (DEC 11TH): SUBURBS AND EXCLUSION (CINÉMA DE BANLIEUE)
Mathieu Kassovitz, La Haine (1995)

READINGS (OPTIONAL):

RECOMMENDED:
- Laurent Cantet, Entre les murs/ The Class (2008), Palme d’or at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival.
- Jacques Audiard, Un prophète (2009)

FINAL PAPER DUE ON DEC. 17TH BY 5 PM (EMAIL IT TO ME IN A WORD .DOC FORMAT, NO DOCX PLEASE)