

MCS 360: B-movies – Summer I, 2016

Prof. Blair Davis

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Office Hours: By scheduled appointment (*Email me to set up an appointment by phone or Skype*)

Course Description:

This course will explore the role of the B-movie in film history: from its origins in the 1930s, through its evolution in the 1950s and all the way up to the modern critical application of the ‘B’ label to a variety of different film genres, styles and budgets. Students will examine the place of the B’s within the overall contexts of both mainstream Hollywood cinema and low-budget filmmaking in general. Specific focus will be placed on issues of economic mode of production and how this impacts a film’s aesthetics, as well as theories of cultural distinction regarding the notion of ‘film trash,’ such as camp theory and cultism. We will be watching a variety of films, but please take into consideration when choosing this course that we will screen films that may at times contain highly lurid, violent, gory and/or sexual imagery.

Required Texts:

Blair Davis, *The Battle for the Bs: 1950s Hollywood and the Rebirth of Low-budget Cinema*, Rutgers University Press, 2012

Various other readings will be available on D2L

Learning Objectives:

Analyze how a film’s budget affects its aesthetic elements

Debate the cultural and critical frameworks surrounding B-films

Situate B-movies within various historical and industrial contexts of filmmaking

Conduct research into the production, exhibition and/or reception of particular films

Assignments:

Online Participation: 15% - *includes such things as the quality and quantity of contributions to online discussions, engagement with class activities, etc.(includes 4 discussion board exercises)*

Journal entries:10% - *Students will write short critical reflections about specific films in certain weeks*

Research assignment: 20% - *students will comparatively analyze the careers of two B-movie directors using a wide range of historical sources*

Creative assignment: 25% - *students will take a modern Hollywood blockbuster film and reimagining it as an older B-film from the 1930s through 1970s, creating a press kit with posters and fake reviews.*

Critical assignment: 30 % - *students will write a short paper arguing what the worst film shown in class was during the quarter.*

Grade Scale

93-100 A, 90-92 A-, 88-89 B+, 83-87 B, 80-82 B-, 78-79 C+, 73-77 C, 70-72 C-, 60-69 D, 0-59 F

SYLLABUS POLICY

PREPARATION & READING STRATEGIES

Please complete all readings assigned for a given week so that you will have a context for understanding the course material. I recommend taking notes while you read, such as key ideas and concepts, as well as making a list of questions regarding aspects of the material that are unclear to you or that you find interesting, challenging or enlightening.

ATTENDANCE

Regular class participation in online discussions is required in the particular weeks in which they are assigned. Students will not be able to participate in any given discussion forum once the deadline for posts has passed - you will not receive any marks if you have not already posted.

Makeup tests, assignments, quizzes, etc.: there will be NO makeup tests, exams or quizzes. If you miss a test, assignment deadline or quiz you will receive zero marks. Exceptions may be

made at the instructor's discretion for legitimate and unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family. In such a case, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor immediately and make arrangements to provide any required documentation (I.e. a doctor's note, death certificate, etc.). Exceptions cannot be made if the student does not submit such documentation within a reasonable time frame.

ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES

Assignments must be handed in on time, before the deadline for which they are due.

Given the accelerated nature of this course, LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED and you will receive a zero.

Please allow yourself sufficient time to complete the last-minute details: late assignments due to computer/internet problems and transportation troubles will unfortunately not be accepted. Be sure to allow yourself enough time for the server to upload your files – do not submit at the last minute. Please manage your time accordingly and do not leave things to the last minute so that you have enough time to troubleshoot any problems that may arise. You must double check receipt of any files uploaded to D2L to ensure that the system has received them. If you do not confirm receipt of your file having been uploaded I am unable to provide exemptions. Do not email me your assignments after the deadline has passed and the dropbox has closed, as late papers will not be accepted.

If you experience technical problems using D2L, please contact the DePaul Department of Information Services Help Desk (<http://offices.depaul.edu/is/Pages/default.aspx>). You must get a case number regarding your incident for any possible accommodation from the instructor to be considered due to technical issues.

Exceptions may be made at the instructor's discretion for legitimate and unforeseen *documented* medical reasons or extenuating circumstances such as a death in the family. In such a case, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor immediately and make arrangements to provide any required documentation (I.e. a doctor's note, death certificate, etc.). Exceptions cannot be made if the student does not submit such documentation within a reasonable time frame.

ACCOMODATION FOR DISABILITIES

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussion will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as

early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week or two of the course – note that accommodations cannot be made retroactively once assignments, exams etc. have already been completed) and be sure to contact the following office for support and additional services:

Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) #370, Student Center, LPC, [773.325.1677](tel:773.325.1677)

RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR

Please respect the contributions of others in our online classroom by not using insulting/inflammatory or discriminatory rhetoric. Class space (both in person and online) is intended to be a safe space for personal reflection and growth, so it is essential that the opinions of others be treated respectfully even if you do not agree with them. Students must therefore engage in respectful and professional online conduct (which also includes the use of proper grammar when replying online - I.e. please avoid excessive use of abbreviations, emoticons, etc. – full sentences should be used.)

ONLINE EVALUATIONS

One of your responsibilities in this course is to complete an online teaching evaluation for this class. This course will be available for you to review during the 9th and 10th week of the quarter. Close to that time, you will receive a notification to this effect via email.

As instructors, we really appreciate learning what we are doing well in the classroom and where we can continue to improve. Your feedback really makes a difference.

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html> for further details.

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else’s. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one’s own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another’s work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.” Plagiarism will result in severe penalty, including failure of the assignment and/or failure of the course at the instructor’s discretion. If you are unsure of how to cite a source, please ask in advance! Academic Integrity violations will be promptly reported to the Academic Integrity Board.

POLICY ON INCOMPLETE (IN) GRADES

Undergraduate and graduate students have two quarters to complete an incomplete. At the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) following the term in which the incomplete grade was assigned, remaining incompletes will automatically convert to "F" grades. In the case of the Law School incompletes must be completed by the end of the semester following the one in which the incomplete was assigned. Ordinarily no incomplete grade may be completed after the grace period has expired. Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four-week grace period before final degree certification.

ASSISTANCE WITH WRITING

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, and avoiding plagiarism, I encourage you to consult DePaul’s Center for Writing-Based Learning. The center offers both on-campus and online tutoring. See <http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>.

EMAIL

I will ordinarily respond to email messages within twelve hours, Monday to Friday. Please note that I will not always be able to respond to email messages on the weekend, as this time is

reserved for my family first and foremost. There are no guarantees that last minute emails before assignment deadlines will be answered in time.

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours are by scheduled appointment, either by phone or by Skype. Please email me to arrange a mutually convenient time. Please be responsible with your time and schedule your appointments with me as far in advance as possible so as to ensure that you have left adequate time before assignment deadlines. Meetings must be scheduled at least a day in advance – last minute meetings are not guaranteed.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Defining the B-film

Readings: Andrew Sarris, “Beatitudes of B Pictures”;

Screening: *Maniac* (1934)

Discussion Post #1: initial post due Thursday June 16th, 11:59 / Response post due Saturday June 18th, 11:59 pm

Week 2: Camp and Cultism - Theoretical Perspectives and Reading Strategies

Readings: Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp”; Andrew Ross, “Uses of Camp”

Screening: *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959)

Discussion Post #2: initial post due Sunday June 19th, 11:59 / Response post due Tuesday June 21st, 11:59 pm

Week 3: The 1930s - Majors, Minors and the Double Bill

Readings: Battle for the Bs, Introduction

Screening: *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932)

Clips from: *Flash Gordon* (1936)

Journal #1 due: Thursday June 23rd, 11:59 pm

Week 4: The 1940s B-movie - War Years and Antitrust Decrees

Readings: Battle for the Bs, Ch. 1, 2

Screening: *Cat People* (1942)

Clips from: *Detour* (1945)

Research Assignment Due: Sunday June 26th, 11:59 pm

Week 5: The 1950s B-movie - From the Majors to the Indies

Readings: Battle for the Bs, Chapter 3

Screening: *Robot Monster* (1953)

Clips from: *Destination Moon* (1950); *Rocketship X-M* (1950);

Discussion Post #3: *initial post due Thursday June 30th, 11:59 / Response post due Saturday July 2nd, 11:59 pm*

Week 6: American International Pictures

Readings: Battle for the Bs, Chapters 4 & 5

Screening: *How to Make a Monster* (1958)

Clips from: *The Fast and the Furious* (1954); *It Conquered the World* (1956); *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957)

Journal #2: due Sunday June 3rd, 11:59 pm

Week 7: The 1960s/70s - From the Underbelly to the Underground

Readings: Battle for the Bs, Ch. 7

Clips from: *Blood Feast*; *The Big Doll House*; *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the S.S.*; *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*; *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*

Screening: *Midnight Movies: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (2007)

Creative Assignment Due: Thursday July 7th, 11:59 pm

Week 8: International Contexts of B-filmmaking

Readings: Andrew Syder & Dolores Tierney, “Importation/Mexploitation”; Needham, “Playing With Genre: An Introduction to the Italian Giallo”

Screening: *La Momia Azteca* (1957) OR *The House By the Cemetary* (1982)

Clips from: *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971), *Zombi 2*, *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, *La Momia Azteca Contra El Robot Humano*

Discussion Post #4: *initial post due Sunday July 10th, 11:59 / Response post due Tuesday July 12th, 11:59 pm*

Week 9: Genre-Benders and Other B-Phenomena

Readings: Blair Davis, “Singing Sci-Fi Cowboys”; Barry K. Grant, “Science Fiction Double Feature: Ideology in the Cult Film”

Screening: *The Monster and the Girl* (1941)

Clips from: *The Phantom Empire* (1935); *Black Friday* (1940)

Journal #3: due Thursday July 14th, 11:59 pm

Week 10: ‘Bad Objects,’ ‘Video Nasties’ and the Modern B-film

Reading: Matt Hills, “Para-Paracinema: The Friday the 13th Film Series as Other to Trash and legitimate Film Cultures”;

Clips from: various *Friday the 13th* films; various direct-to-video films

Final Assignment Due: Sunday July 17th, 11:59 pm