FILM NOIR AND NEO-NOIR
Spring 2009

Instructor: Molly LeClair  WRTG 3020-058
Office: Temporary Building 1, Office 3  TR 8:00-9:15a
Office hours: TR 2:00-3:30p or by appointment  EATON HUMANITIES 190
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Course Description
WRTG 3020, Film Noir and Neo-Noir, is a rhetorically informed course in critical writing designed to extend and sharpen communication skills in the context of film. The course focuses on writing analyses and arguments about film noir, a style of filmmaking whose classic period extends from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, primarily in America. We will consider film noir collaboratively and critically—its aesthetic and literary origins in German expressionism, French existentialism, and American detective and crime fiction. We will examine significant themes, characterizations, visual elements, and recurring icons that create the style’s distinctive identity, and chart film noir’s incursion into, and influence on, contemporary cinema. We also will look at the way in which ethnic and gender issues are reflected in noir narratives. The course is conducted as a writing seminar that depends on your lively participation.

Course Objectives
Extend rhetorical knowledge.
- Explore rhetorical perspectives and theoretical dimensions as you write about film.
- Become a more astute observer and interpreter of film through critical writing.
- Study course texts and supplementary readings to guide class discussions, and to generate and fuel ideas.

Extend experience in writing processes.
- Engage in peer review of works in progress to evaluate writing from the readers’ perspective.
- Organize writing critical essays into manageable stages: researching, pre-writing, outlining, drafting, revising, editing, documenting sources, proofreading.
- Appreciate that revision is central to writing essays of high quality.
- Further develop information literacy skills to facilitate research.
- Integrate digital (or analog) technologies into writing projects and final oral presentation.

Extend mastery of writing conventions.
- Practice various approaches to analysis and argument including interpretation, evaluation, speculation about causes and effects, and refutation.
- Refine style: syntax, diction, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.
- Review research and documentation guidelines by referring to credible websites such as The Purdue University OWL, and excerpts from The Student’s Guide to Writing Research Papers by Richard Veit.

Express comprehension of content knowledge.
- Draw on film—and noir—vocabulary even as you make your work accessible to secondary audiences in other disciplines.
- Practice writing in a special rhetorical situation remembering that all course assignments are geared to a real-world and wide-ranging audience.

Textbooks
- Thinking and Writing in the Humanities, Suzanne Hudson and Molly LeClair, focuses on analysis and argument, and offers steps for producing a range of critical essays, reviews, and research papers.
- Film Noir Reader, edited by Alain Silver and James Ursini, is an anthology of seminal essays on film noir written between the mid-1950s and mid-1990s by a diverse group of film theorists.
- You may own a good writer’s reference guide for grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and documentation style; if not, buy a used or new one. Other readings and resources will be made available to you as handouts or online.
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Requirements

SEMINAR PARTICIPATION
Your participation entails lively discussion of assigned readings and involvement in class activities. Plan on attending regularly and arriving on time. Refer to the text when needed during discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory; you are aiming at understanding ideas, issues, and values. Stick to the point, and make notes about ideas to which you want to come back. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions; a seminar should not be a bull session. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification. Take turns, and talk to each other, not just to the teacher. Listen carefully. The life and integrity of the course depends finally on your questions, comments, challenges, and defenses.

ATTENDANCE
Any more than three absences will result in the lowering of your final grade, so use absences wisely. Tardiness and early departures are disruptive and also will result in the lowering of your final grade. Two late arrivals equal one absence, and two early departures equal one absence.

PEER REVIEW
Your participation in peer review calls for timely distribution of drafts, notable revision efforts, and constructive comments on your classmates’ papers. Preparedness is the key to its success.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DEBATE
You will be responsible for completing in-class and homework exercises, discussion sheets, and short written responses that generate class discussion. The debates will focus on elements of style as well as the rhetorical soundness and strategy of your arguments.

PAPERS
An analytical essay, critical review, and argument essay, written expressly for this class, must be printed on a word processor, double-spaced, and proofread. Pay attention to deadlines and page requirements indicated on your class calendar. I will not accept a paper that has not been reviewed by peers over the course of the assignment.

Grading Standards for Participation
You will earn points toward a final grade for attendance, punctuality, and participation. The evaluation policy is constructed to accommodate the occasional, and sometimes unavoidable, absence. You are not required to call me or to present me with an excuse; I will assume that you have a legitimate reason for missing class. Be aware, though, that absences will negatively affect your grade.

Grading Standards for Peer Review
You will earn points as an active critic in our peer reviews. You will be expected to have copies of your draft turned in on time for critiquing by your classmates, make significant improvements on your draft, and discuss and offer sound commentary on your classmates’ drafts. Personal computer problems do not excuse the failure to prepare. Computer labs are available to you on campus for working on assignments, printing drafts, and accessing the instructor for help.

Grading Standards for Assignments and Debate
You will earn points for in-class and homework assignments, discussion sheets, and short written responses. I accept late work; however, any assignment that is not completed and turned in by the due date will earn no more than half credit. The debate, a component of our argument unit, is mandatory.

Points, ranging from three to zero, are earned based on participation, comprehension, completeness of assignments, and active involvement in peer reviews. At the end of the semester, points will be averaged and a grade assigned accordingly:

A 3—2.5 points  B 2.4—2 points  C 1.9—1.5 points  D 1.4—1 points  F .9—0 points
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Grading Standards for Papers
You will earn a letter grade for your three critical papers. Late submissions will be accepted, but your grade will be lowered by a full grade (for example, B to C) if your essay is not submitted at class time on the due date, then a grade after that for each class day it is late.

A  Paper is exceptional in form and content: original, substantive, insightful, well-organized, clear, graceful, and error-free.
B  Paper is clearly written, well-developed, and interesting, showing above average thought and writing craft, with no major flaws.
C  Paper is readable and reasonably organized, supporting a focused thesis. It may have unresolved problems in presentation and distracting grammatical errors and stylistic flaws—a mixture of strengths and weaknesses—fulfilling basic requirements of the assignment.
D  Paper is seriously deficient in content, form, style, or mechanics. It may be disorganized, illogical, confusing, unfocused, with pervasive and distracting errors.
F  Paper is incoherent, inappropriate, or has not undergone peer reviews.
0  Paper is plagiarized.

Calculation of Grades
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<td>Participation</td>
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Classroom Decorum
Aside from honoring the tardy/early departure policy, please make every effort to be kind to and respect one another. Before class, remove your headphones, turn off your cell phone, and close your laptop. While there is little doubt that laptops are significant learning tools, they nonetheless siphon other cognitive powers, pose a distraction to both users and fellow students, and, most importantly, detract from classroom culture. For 75 minutes, tune in to the instructor and to the insights of your esteemed classmates.

Honor Code
Plagiarism is pilfering someone else’s words or ideas. At the very least, plagiarizing will result in an F for the assignment. For more information about plagiarism and its dire consequences, visit the CU Honor Code site at http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.

Accommodations for Special Needs Students
For information about special needs, contact the Counselor for Students with Disabilities, Disability Services Office, Willard 322, http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices. If you qualify for accommodations, submit a letter to me from Disability Services within the first three days of class so that your needs can be addressed.

Religious Observances
I will make every effort to deal fairly with students who, because of religious obligation, have conflicts with scheduled assignments and exams. Notify me at least two weeks in advance and I will provide an opportunity for makeup assignments. Visit http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html for further information.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment
Any student, staff, or faculty who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination and harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment. Visit http://www.colorado.edu/odh for details.
Welcome, course overview and policies, texts, syllabus, class introductions

For next class: Read *Thinking and Writing in the Humanities (TWH)* “Introduction” xi-xii, Ch 1 “Types of Essays,” “Elements,” “Planning” 1-15; Ch 2 “Writing the Short Response” 27-41.

√ Chapters 1 and 2 in *TWH* introduce rhetorical perspectives and writing processes.

Jan 15

Discuss modes of discourse, impartial and opinion writing; respond to Chapter 2 exercises.

For next class: Read *Film Noir Reader (FNR)* “Introduction” 3-15; complete discussion sheet;

write a summary of “Americans Also Make Noir Movies” (1946) by Jean-Pierre Chartier.

√ The Chartier essay is not only an early and defining piece on film noir, but it affords an opportunity to practice descriptive writing before transitioning to analytical writing.

Jan 20

Discuss Alain Silver’s “Introduction” and Chartier’s essay on film noir.

**DUE: DISCUSSION SHEET AND SUMMARY**

For next class: Read *TWH* Chapter 3 “Writing the Analytical Essay” 43-89.

√ Chapter 3 takes you step-by-step through writing an analysis, from generating ideas and planning, to drafting, revising, and editing.

Jan 22

Discuss approaches to analysis—posing a question, stating a thesis, formulating points of proof, inferring from facts (*Harper’s Index*); go over the analytical essay assignment.

For next class: Read *FNR* “Towards a Definition of Film Noir” 17-25; complete discussion sheet.

Create an annotated bibliography (at least four periodicals) pertaining to an aspect of film noir.

√ The analytical essay will validate your inference about a noir film or the noir milieu; keep the assignment sheet handy as you move through the planning and writing stages.

√ The discussion sheet will keep you focused on content and facilitate class discussion.

√ The annotated bibliography assignment serves three purposes: to discover what’s out there of interest to you in the noir universe, to advance information literacy skills, and to practice documenting sources in MLA style. Your bibliography does *not* have to be about your final topic. Explore and have fun!

Jan 27

Discuss Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton’s “Towards a Definition”; review introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions; begin *Out of the Past*.

**DUE: DISCUSSION SHEET AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

For next class: Read *TWH* “Quotation Marks” 241-44, complete paraphrasing/punctuating quotations.

√ The assignment will extend your mastery of writing conventions.

Jan 29

Discuss approaching the analysis; finish *Out of the Past*.

**DUE: PARAPHRASING/PUNCTUATING QUOTATIONS**

For next class: Complete short response.

√ With questions to guide you, the short response is an opportunity to write informally about your impressions of specific film elements—acting, directing, editing, cinematography, music, sound, dialogue, costumes, special effects, style. Rather than summarizing the plot (what you saw), write what you *think about* what you saw. Your short response may have elements of description, analysis, and argument.

Feb 3

Discuss *Out of the Past*, MLA style, peer review guidelines.

**DUE: SHORT RESPONSE**


√ The upcoming practice peer review will prepare you for responding to your colleagues’ works in progress and to their responses to your work in progress.
Feb 5  
PRACTICE PEER REVIEW  
For next class: Prepare for whole class peer review.  
√ You will make enough copies of your introductory paragraph(s) for everyone in the class, posit your thesis and points of proof, in other words, your claim and how you plan to prove it. Even though you are submitting only an introduction for review, you should be planning and drafting body paragraphs that develop and support your points.

Feb 10  
In-class MLA exercise; review blending reference material, avoiding plagiarism.  
DUE: GROUP 1—INTRODUCTION ANALYTICAL ESSAY (18 COPIES)

Feb 12  
Group 1—INTRODUCTION PEER REVIEW  
DUE: GROUP 2—INTRODUCTION ANALYTICAL ESSAY (18 COPIES)

Feb 17  
Group 2—INTRODUCTION PEER REVIEW  
For next class: All, make sure you have four copies of a half draft with a revised introduction by Feb 19 for small-group peer review.  
√ The small group peer review will give you a sense of your essay from the reader’s point of view. As both a listener and a commentator, you will examine the thesis, points of proof, qualities of unity, adequate development, organization, and coherence.

Feb 19  
SMALL GROUP PEER REVIEW  
DUE: ANALYSIS DRAFT  
For next class: Read FNR “Notes on Noir” 53-63, “Some Visual Motifs” 65-76.

Feb 24  
With Paul Schrader’s “Notes” and Janey Place’s “Visual Motifs” in mind, view Detour.  
For next class: Complete short response; bring in one copy of a revised draft for partner peer review.

Feb 26  
Discuss Detour: partner peer review  
DUE: SHORT RESPONSE AND REVISED ANALYSIS DRAFT  
For next class: Read TWH Ch 3 “Revision and Editing Checklist” 89; complete analytical essay.

Mar 3  
Go over critical review assignment; begin Night and the City.  
DUE: 5-6-PAGE ANALYSIS  
For next class: Read TWH Ch 6 “Writing the Review” 143-161; read FNR “No Way Out” 77-93.  
√ Chapter 6 takes you step-by-step through writing a critical review, from viewing the film with an eye on its elements (e.g. direction, mise-en-scène, sound, theme) to drafting, revising, and editing. In the critical review, you will make an evaluative statement about the event as a whole, which your body paragraphs will then validate.

Mar 5  
Discuss Robert Porfirio’s “No Way Out”; finish Night and the City.  
For next class: Read FNR “Expressionist Doom” 203-207; complete short response.

Mar 10  
Discuss Night and the City.  
DUE: SHORT RESPONSE  
For next class: Read FNR “Film Noir, Voice Over and the Femme Fatale” 243-259; complete discussion sheet.

Mar 12  
Discuss Karen Hollinger’s “Film Noir, Voice Over.”  
DUE: DISCUSSION SHEET  
For next class: All, make sure you have four copies of a full draft by Mar 17.

Mar 17  
SMALL GROUP PEER REVIEW  
DUE: CRITICAL REVIEW DRAFT  
For next class: Read TWH “Revising and Editing Your Review” 161.

Mar 19  
Go over argument essay; review thesis, refutation, points of proof; introduce debate topics.  
DUE: 3-4-PAGE CRITICAL REVIEW
For next class: Read TWH Ch 4 “Writing the Argument Essay” 91-129; go over debate format, form teams (exchange email addresses), choose resolutions.

Chapter 4 takes you step-by-step through writing an argument essay, in which you will identify the issue in contention, state a counterthesis that opposes your original thesis, and develop points of proof—refutations and constructive arguments.

The debate offers an opportunity to develop and fortify rhetorical strategies that can then be applied directly to your written argument.

Mar 23-27 SPRING BREAK • HAVE FUN!

Mar 31 Discuss logical fallacies and model essays; meet with debate team.
For next class: Read FNR “Kill Me Again” 307-329, “Son of Noir” 331-338; complete discussion sheet.

You will increase your awareness of logical fallacies—errors in reasoning that undermine the logic of arguments. As a result, you will eschew such errors in your own rhetorical appeals and persuasive strategies to support claims and respond to opposing arguments.

Apr 2 Discuss Todd Erickson’s “Kill Me Again” and Alain Silver’s “Son of Noir.”
DUE: DISCUSSION SHEET
For next class: Research debate topic.

Apr 7 Meet with debate team; begin neo-noir TBA.
For next class: Research debate topic.

Apr 9 Meet with debate team; finish neo-noir TBA.
For next class: Prepare for upcoming debates; complete short response for Dec 2 discussion.

Apr 14 DEBATE NOIR
Apr 16 DEBATE NOIR
Apr 21 Discuss film, progress of argument essays; go over argument rubric for final peer reviews.
DUE: SHORT RESPONSE
For next class: Bring in four copies of your draft.

Apr 23 Peer review
DUE: ARGUMENT DRAFT
For next class: Bring in four copies of a revised draft.

Apr 28 Peer review
DUE: REVISED ARGUMENT DRAFT

Apr 30 CLASS CELEBRATION • CONGRATULATIONS!
DUE: 5-6-PAGE ARGUMENT

* Ability is what you're capable of doing.
* Motivation determines what you do.
* Attitude determines how well you do it.

Raymond Chandler
The Big Sleep
Farewell, My Lovely
The Long Goodbye