

FMST 645 Topics in Film Genres: Global Melodrama

Fall 2023

FB 250 Thursdays 13:15 to 17:15

Instructor: Catherine Russell

Katie.russell@concordia.ca

www.catherinerussell.ca

Office hours Wednesdays 14:00 to

16:00 FB 315-7. Please make an appointment beforehand, and if you have a class at that time, we can find another time to meet.



Course Description

Melodrama is a much used concept that has been defined in many ways and has many uses in film studies scholarship. In this course we will evaluate and discuss the value of this unwieldy and often contradictory critical term for the analysis of global cinema. Although the term and the theory entered into Film Studies scholarship as a genre grounded in European culture and American cinema, melodrama is clearly evident in many international film traditions. In this course we will look at the ways that the term has traveled and how melodrama has manifested in different cultures as an expression of social injustice, gender inequity, and an affective bridge between private and public desires and repressions. The syllabus covers a number of critical moments in international film history where melodrama has been defined and deployed, and at the same time, we will examine the many ways that melodrama has been theorized by international film scholarship. Students are asked to expand and build on these particular histories in original research projects.

Course Objectives

- Students will learn how to use the concept of melodrama in discussions of film analysis and international film history.
- Students will learn how to integrate critical theory and film analysis in their work.
- Students will learn the history of the term melodrama in several different cultures and media.
- Students will improve their critical thinking skills, reading and writing skills, research skills and presentation abilities.

Territorial Acknowledgement

Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Screenings

All in-class screenings are films held by Concordia's Visual Collections Repository. If for any reason you have to miss a class, you can view the films either on-line, through the Concordia Library, or you can arrange to borrow them (after the scheduled class screening) from the VCR. For content warnings about the screenings, students are strongly encouraged to consult the Parental Warnings for the films listed on IMDb. Because this is a film history course, some films will definitely include difficult material, and students are encouraged to speak to the instructor before class if you feel uncomfortable watching a given film. Students are also welcome and encouraged to discuss difficult material in class discussion.

Readings

All the assigned readings are available on the library course reserves, which are linked to the class moodle page. In addition to the required readings, you will also need to consult Abah, Adedayo, Elisabeth Anker, Jana Aresin, Mita Banerjee, Werner C Barg, Louis Bayman, Maria Belodubrovskaya, et al. *Lexicon of Global Melodrama*. Global Sentimentality, 1. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022. A list of additional important books on film melodrama is appended to the end of the syllabus.

Course expectations

Students are expected to attend every class, except when medical reasons prevent safe attendance. Please respect each other and the professor, and to engage in dialogue and friendly debate. Assignments should be completed by the stated deadlines, and late work will be penalized.

Syllabus

1. Sept. 7: Introduction

When A Woman Ascends the Stairs (Onna ga kaidan o agaru toki, Naruse 1960) 1 hour 51 mins

Excerpt: *Every Night Dreams (Yogoto no yume*, Naruse 1933)

- Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama,"(1975) in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and television Melodrama*, 68-92
- Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," chapter one of *The*

Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess: With a New Preface. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 1-23.

2. Sept. 14: Sensational Melodrama

Body and Soul, (Oscar Micheaux, 1925) 1 hour 43 mins

Excerpt: *The Planter's Wife* (D.W. Griffith, 1908)12 mins

- Pearl Bowser, and Louise Spence. "Oscar Micheaux's 'Body and Soul' and the Burden of Representation." *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 3 (2000): 3-29.
- Ben Singer, "Meanings of Melodrama," *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 37-59.

3. Sept. 21: Melodrama and Realism

Voyage to Italy (*Viaggi in Italia*, Rossellini, 1954) 1 hour 25 mins.

Excerpt: *Ossessione* (Lucino Visconti, 1943)

- Louis Bayman, "The Sorrow and the Piety," Melodrama Rethought in Postwar Italian Cinema," in *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 273-288.
- Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," In *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42-88.

4. Sept 28: Melodrama and Excess

Aventurera (Alberto Gout, 1950) 1 hour 41 mins.

Excerpt: *Woman of the port* (*La Mujer del Puerto*, Antony Boytler, 1934)

- Carlos Monsivais, "One Suffers but One Learns: Melodrama and the Rules of Lack of Limits," in *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and national cultures*, New York: Columbia University Press. 151-168.
- Ana M. Lopez, "Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the "Old" Mexican Cinema," *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, eds. Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 441-458.

5. October 5 : Melodrama and the Western

Johnny Guitar (Nicholas Ray, 1955) 1 hour 50 mins.

Cattle Queen of Montana (Allan Dwan, 1954)

- Elisabeth R. Anker, "Introduction: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom," in *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2014) 1 -30.
- Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams eds., (London: Arnold, 2000), 221-243.

6. October 19 : Melodrama and the avant-garde

The Cloud-Capped Star (Meghe Dhka Tara, Riwik Ghatak, 1960), 122 mins.

- Anapuma Kapse, "Melodrama as Method," *Framework* 54: 2 (Fall 2013): 146-151.
- Ira Bhaskar, "Expressionist Aurality: The Stylized Aesthetic of Bhava in Indian Melodrama," *Melodrama Unbound*, 237-252.

7. October 26 : Melodrama and Sexuality

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul, (Angst essen Seele auf, R.W. Fassbinder 1973), 94 mins

Excerpt: *All that Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk,

- Jonathan Goldberg, "Identity and Identification: Sirk-Fassbinder-Haynes," in *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 23-79.
- Lauren Berlant, "Introduction: Intimacy, Publicity, Femininity," in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 1-32.

8. November 2: Melodrama and History

Camila (Maria Luisa Bemberg, 1994), 1 hour 47 mins

- E. Deidre Pribram, "Melodrama and the Aesthetics of Emotion," in *Melodrama Unbound*, 235-251.
- Zarzosa, Agustin. 2010. "Melodrama and the Modes of the World." *Discourse* 32 (2): 236-55

9. November 9: Melodrama and Iran

A Separation (Jodaeiye Nader Az Simin, Asghar Farhadi 2011), 2 hours 3 mins.

- Niklaus Reichle, "Melodrama and Censorship in Iranian Cinema," *Film International* 12:3 (69): 64-76.
- Negar Mottahedeh, "Iranian Cinema in the Twentieth Century: A Sensory History," *Iranian Studies* Sept. 2009 vol 42 no. 4 pp. 529-548.

10. November 16: Melodrama and the Diva

All About my Mother (Todo sobre mi madre, Almodovar, 1999) 1 hour 41 mins.

- Mark Allison, "Mimesis and Diegesis: Almodovar and the Limits of Melodrama," in *All About Almodovar: A Passion for Cinema*, Brad Epps ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 141-165.
- Leslie Stern, "Putting on a Show, or the Ghostliness of Gesture," *Lolajournal* (July 2022) http://www.lolajournal.com/5/putting_show.html

11. November 23 : Melodrama and Cinematic Language

In the Mood for Love (Hua yang nian hua, Wong Kar Wai, 2000) 1 hour 38 mins.

- Hansen, Miriam. "Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism." *Film Quarterly* 54:1 (2000): 10-22.
- Lesley Stern, "Paths that Wind through the thicket of Things," *Critical Inquiry*, (Autumn 2001) Vol. 28 no. 1, 317-354.

12. Nov 30 Student Presentations

Assessment

Attendance and Participation	10%
Moodle Posts	20%
Presentation of reading	20%
Research Proposal	10%
Research Presentation	10%
Final Project	30%

Writing Assignments

Written assignments must be submitted in word format, with 12 point font, double spaced, via moodle. Students are welcome to write in English or French.

Students may choose to use generative artificial intelligence tools to facilitate their writing. However, **EVERY time generative AI is used for a graded assignment, it must be cited (MLA: <https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/>) and documented in a submitted appendix.** The documentation must identify tool(s) used, the prompts that were supplied, the text the AI generated and how the student used those results. Note that all final submissions must be written by the student alone, with proper citations for all quotes and paraphrased text.

Evaluation

All work will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- 25% Clarity – including writing, presentation and overall argument/thesis
- 25% Research evidence and documentation – including citation style, credit information, and range of research sources
- 50% Originality – including choice of object of study, freshness of approach, and significance of argument/thesis

Attendance and Participation

This mark is based on a combination of regular attendance and quality participation. If you need to be away from class due to illness, please let me know beforehand. Good participation includes being prepared to discuss the assigned readings, responding to other students' comments, asking questions, and offering opinions about the screenings.

Moodle Posts

Students are expected to do a minimum of six moodle posts over the course of the semester, responding to prompts that will be posted each week. Posts should be between 200 and 300 words, and can include questions as well as answers. Each week the forum will close on the Wednesday before class at 12 noon. Please try to engage with the readings, with each other, and offer original interventions.

Presentation of Assigned Readings

Each week one student will present one of the assigned readings to the class. You have 20 minutes to discuss **IN YOUR OWN WORDS** the author's main points, their sources and evidence for their arguments, and your opinion/evaluation of the article and its contribution to Global Melodrama studies. If you use power point to illustrate your

presentation, please DO NOT use extensive quotations. DO PROVIDE some background on the author and IMAGES that help to illustrate the argument. Students are encouraged to do additional research and bring in SHORT clips from any relevant films. You may arrange to borrow DVDs from the VCR, or you can cue up clips. It is highly recommended that you arrange to project clips from the projection booth and not from your own computer. Each presentation will be 20 minutes, with 10 minutes for questions from the class. The allocation of articles for presentation will happen in the first week of class, so please come prepared with a ranked list of articles you would like to present.

Final Project

For final projects, students may choose to write an essay of 3,000 to 4,000 words on one of the films listed in *Lexicon of Global Melodrama*, with the exception of any titles that were screened in class. You should provide an analysis of the film, taking into account its historical context and its use of a melodramatic modality. Please use the headings of weekly topics in the syllabus as well as the assigned readings. This assignment is broken down into three submissions:

1. The research proposal, is due Week 7 (Oct 26) at the latest (feel free to hand it in earlier). The proposal should be 300 words, including your interest in the film, the readings you will draw on, and the questions that the film raises for you.
2. Research presentations will all be on the last day of class, November 30. Each student will have the opportunity to present their research to the class. Everyone will have 10 minutes to do so. *That is not a lot of time so it is important to be succinct.* The presentation should include:
 - a. slides with frame enlargements of the film you are discussing, and any other films that are part of your paper-in-progress
 - b. a bibliography of your research
- c. your thesis statement for the essay
 - d. a discussion of how you have used melodrama theory
 - e. points where you need feedback or help from the group
3. The final paper. This will be due December 7 *at the latest*. Papers should be 3,000 to 4,000 words in length, double spaced, 12 pt font, with page numbers. You may include frame enlargements in the paper if you need them to illustrate your argument.

Students who would prefer to submit a video essay should discuss it with me before submitting the proposal. This option is only for those who have experience with video editing. It should follow all the same guidelines for content as written essays, and it should be a maximum 15 minutes in length.

Additional Recommended Readings

- Petro, Patrice. *Joyless Streets: Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Vasudevan, Ravi. *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.
- Williams, Linda. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Klinger, Barbara. *Melodrama and Meaning : History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Abah, Adedayo, Elisabeth Anker, Jana Aresin, Mita Banerjee, Werner C Barg, Louis Bayman, Maria Belodubrovskaya, et al. *Lexicon of Global Melodrama*. Global Sentimentality, 1. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022.

List of Concordia Student Resources:

Access Centre for Students with Disabilities: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/accessibility.html>

Black Perspectives Initiative: <https://www.concordia.ca/artsci/black-perspectives-initiative.html>

Centre for Gender Advocacy: <https://genderadvocacy.org>

Concordia Sexual Assault Resource Centre: www.concordia.ca/conduct/sexual-assault

Counselling & Psychological Services: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/counselling.html>

Indigenous Student Resource Centre: www.concordia.ca/students/aboriginal

International Student Services: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/international.html>

Learning Support: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/success/learning-support.html>

Multi-faith and Spirituality Centre: <https://www.concordia.ca/students/spirituality.html>

Office of Rights & Responsibilities: http://www.concordia.ca/conduct/behavioural-integrity/rights-responsibilities.html?utm_source=redirect&utm_campaign=rights.html

Otsenhákta Student Centre: <https://www.concordia.ca/students/otsenhakta.html>

Policy for Students on the Accommodation of Religious Observances:

<https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/common/docs/policies/official-policies/PRVPA-1.pdf>

Student Success Centre <https://www.concordia.ca/students/success/events.html>