ENG 3504-001: Film and Literature: Spectacle and the Spectacular

Robin Murray
Eastern Illinois University

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English 3504, Film and Literature: Spectacle and The Spectacular
(Capturing the Eye, Silencing the Message in Film and Literature)

Dr. Robin L. Murray
Office: CH 3351
Phone: 581-6985 or 345-7983 before 10 p.m.
Office Hours: TR, 11-12:30 and 4-5 or by appnt.
Email: cfrlm@eiu.edu

Course Description:

Geoff King argues that the spectacular features of a film do not necessarily erase "the kinds of underlying thematic oppositions and reconciliations associated with a broadly 'structuralist' analysis of narrative" (25). King's argument suggests that by making the workings of spectacle transparent, the underlying issues on display can gain more force. Yet the conflict between the spectacular and the environmental degradation on display is not resolved, even from King's perspective; it is merely revealed. This course will explore the effects of spectacle and the spectacular in selected films and literary texts.
(Old curriculum Group 6; new curriculum Group 5)

Texts:
Alexie, Sherman. Reservation Blues.
Bordwell and Thompson. Film Art.
Dickens, Charles. Hard Times.
Murray/Heumann. Ecology and Popular Film.
Robinson, Marilyn. Housekeeping.
Tepper, Sheri. Gate to Woman's Country

Course Requirements:
1. Weekly Responses and Participation: Responses are about two pages typed and reflect careful reading and synthesis of course materials and/or films. Your responses will serve as a source for discussion in class as a whole or in small groups so are part of your participation grade. Responses should analyze, critique, argue for or against, or evaluate—they should not summarize except to make the writer's point(s). You must be in class to receive credit for your response or for any in-class work.

2. Midterm Exam: This exam will provide an opportunity to internalize material all students read for class and to carefully read the first four films in the class.

3. Group Novel Teaching and Presentation: Because so few Western novels are available in textbook rental, members of four different groups will each read a Western and be responsible for teaching it to the rest of the class (with my help).

4. Final Exam: This exam will not be cumulative. It will provide an opportunity to internalize material read for class as a group and as a class from Midterm forward and carefully to read the last three films in the class.

5. Final Paper and Mini-Presentation: This paper will expand on the best thoughts of your best response, either to one of the films or to your group's novel. I will provide a handout to clarify requirements for this paper and comments on your
response to help stimulate best idea development. Presentations will give you the opportunity to share your thoughts with your classmates.

**Grades:** Grades will be determined as follows for a total of 100%:

- **Weekly Responses and Participation** - 20%
- **Midterm** - 20%
- **Group Teaching/Presentation** - 20%
- **Final Exam** - 20%
- **Final Paper** - 20%

**Grading of Responses, Presentation, and Paper:**

Response grades will be based on analytical complexity. Each will be worth twenty points. If a response only summarizes a film or novel, the response gets only half credit. Adequate analysis (or argument or critique) will result in 14 points (C level). Good analysis, etc., in 16 points (B level). Great analysis, etc., from 18-20 points, depending on clarity, precision, and sense of voice.

Paper grades will be based on the following areas: Audience awareness, organization, development, sentence structure, word choice, grammar/usage/mechanics. The first three areas will be weighted more heavily than the second three (60% vs. 40%). I will also distribute the English Department's grade analysis in class.

Presentations will be evaluated according to a rubric I will distribute in class. Groups should also turn in any class handouts or visuals with novel responses.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

**Plagiarism:** The English Department states, "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism -- 'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' -- has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of "F" in the course."

**Electronic Writing Portfolio:** This class is a writing intensive class, so you may submit your paper as a writing portfolio sample, following the instructions on the CASL Website. Submissions must be made during the course of the class to receive my approval. Please note that the Writing Center is available for help with all writing assignments, as well. Take advantage of this free service.
Tentative Film and Literature Spring 2009 Calendar, Subject to Change

January

15 Introduction to the course, to reading film, and to the spectacular. Handout on form and narrative. In-Class exercise (reading film). View Oil Wells of Baku (Lumiere Brothers) and Fires of Kuwait (David Douglas). Read chapter 1 EP (Ecology and Spectacle) and chapter 2 EP (Environmental Politics) and write a response—divide by group.

22 **Response Due.** Discuss articles. View The River (Lorentz). Discuss Group Projects—Groups will connect a novel to another film. Introduce Devil in a Blue Dress. Read Devil in a Blue Dress for next week and write a response. I will lead a discussion of the novel as a model for your group’s discussion.

29 **Response to Devil due.** Discuss Devil. Read FA chapters 6 and 7 for next week and write a response.

February

5 **Response Due.** Discuss Film Art chapters. View Boyz in the Hood (Singleton), Menace II Society (Hughes), or Clockers (Spike Lee). Read Housekeeping for next week—Group I will lead the novel discussion and compare the work to a film. Everyone should write a response to the film.

12 **Response to film Due.** Group I presents Housekeeping discussion (perhaps in conjunction with the film adaptation). View Dark Days (Marc Singer) and write a response to Housekeeping in relation to Dark Days or the group’s film. Read chapter 3 EP (Reconstructing Underground Urban Space) for next week.

19 **Response to Housekeeping Due.** Discuss Dark Days and chapter 3 EP and view Daughters of the Dust (Julie Dash). Discuss how the films connect with themes in Housekeeping (will be on midterm). Read Hard Times for next week—Group II will lead the novel discussion and compare the work to a film. Everyone should write a response to the novel.

26 **Response to Hard Times due.** Group II presents Hard Times discussion (in conjunction with their chosen film). Discuss Midterm and view group’s chosen film, if possible. Read Reservation Blues for March 12.

March

5 **Midterm.** View Smoke Signals (Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie). Finish Reservation Blues for next week. Group III will lead the discussion and compare the work to a film. Everyone should write a response to the novel.