

**University of Calgary**  
**Department of Communication, Media and Film**

**Film Studies FILM 405 L01**  
**Advanced topic in film genre:**  
**PROBLEMS OF MELODRAMA**  
**WINTER 2017**

**Tuesday, Jan 10 – Tuesday, Apr 11 (excluding February 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>)**

**Discussion, Th 3:30 – 5:20**

**Lab (film screening), Tu 3:30 – 6:15**

**Instructor:** Ryan Pierson  
**Office:** SS 214  
**Office Phone:** 220-6720  
**E-Mail:** ryan.pierson@ucalgary.ca  
**Web Page:** D2L  
**Office Hours:** Tu/Th 13:00 – 14:00

### **Course Description**

Melodrama is a mode of filmmaking that has typically been characterized in terms of its excesses: excessive appeals to tender emotions, and excessive uses of film form (overbearing colors and camera movements, heightened acting, intrusive music). This course will explore how these features go together, and what problems they have raised for film scholarship. We will explore such questions as: What, if any, is the political value of melodrama? What is the nature of melodrama's appeal to pathos? Is that appeal useful, or is it dangerous? How have filmmakers used the stylistic excesses characteristic of melodrama to explore film style on its own terms?

### **Objectives of the Course**

This course will focus on developing three major skills. First, observing and analyzing formal elements of film; second, reading high-level historical and theoretical film scholarship; third, writing about film and developing an original argument. These skills will come together in the final research paper; shorter assignments and in-class discussions will develop these skills as well.

### **Textbooks and Readings**

All readings will be posted on D2L.

### **Internet and electronic communication device information**

Laptops and tablets may be used only for taking notes and consulting the readings for discussion; they may not be out during screenings. Other screen devices (cell phones, etc.) may not be used at any time. Violations will affect your participation grade.

## Assignments and Evaluation

### *Participation (ongoing):*

10%

Because participation is a necessary component of the course, students are expected to attend lectures and screenings, as well as participate in classroom discussion. Each day of discussion, you will be marked on the following scale:

10/10: present, makes at least one substantial contribution to discussion, brings course readings on paper

5/10: present, does not contribute to discussion *or* does not bring course readings

2/10: present, *neither* contributes to discussion *nor* brings course readings

Marks will be determined by the quality<sup>1</sup> and quantity of your participation, as well as whether or not you bring the course readings. Students who attend but do not participate can expect no more than a 5/10; students who do not regularly bring the course readings on paper, even if they speak, can expect the same.

You are allowed up to three absences, for any reason. Absences accumulated thereafter will result in deductions from your final participation grade, one point for each missing day (e.g., if you miss one extra day and your participation average is 8/10, it will be dropped to 7/10).

### *Discussion board posts (ongoing):*

15%

Every other week, you will post on the D2L discussion board your reflection on the week's material. Your post must be at least 150 words long, speak about some aspect of the week's film, and quote the reading (or paraphrase in detail some part of it). Each post will be graded on the following scale:

Meets word count, discusses film and reading: 10/10

Meets word count, discusses film: 6/10

Fails to meet word count and/or discuss film/reading and/or is (up to 72 hours) late: 4/10

More than 72 hours late or missing: 0/10

Posts are due Thursday at 9 a.m.

### *Group presentations/discussions (ongoing):*

15%

Each week, a small group will lead discussion on the week's material. This should include a brief (10-15 min) presentation on the major terms and issues from the reading, noting key passages; a film clip (which need not come from the week's feature); and a few questions to frame the discussion. The group will also be responsible for keeping discussion going and on-topic. Students will pick the week of their presentation from a sign-up sheet.

### *Take-Home Midterm (due in class Feb. 28):*

20%

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<sup>1</sup> "Quality" here simply means "a complete subject-predicate thought that is about the course material." "Yes" or "no" responses do not count as "quality" participation. "I liked this" or "I found that confusing" do not yet count as quality participation (as they are statements about you and not the material); but they are excellent starting points for quality participation, since they imply specific points about the material that may be clarified.

A take-home test will ask students to summarize, interpret, and comment on the major issues, readings, and films from the first six weeks of class.

*Paper Proposal (due in class Mar. 28):*

10%

A short document proposing a topic and approach for your final research paper. The proposal should include a brief description of your major research questions or arguments, and roughly how you plan on executing them. It should also have a formatted bibliography.

*Final Research Paper (due Apr. 17):*

30%

An 8-10 page research essay on an approved topic of the student's choice and related to the course themes and materials. Full details will be provided in Week 8.

All assignments and exams must be completed in a timely manner, or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** NO

**Submission of Assignments:** Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

**Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

### **Policy for Late Assignments**

For late assignments not already specified, ten points will be subtracted from the assignment for each 24-hour period.

### **Student Accommodations**

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit [www.ucalgary.ca/access/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/). Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a

protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.

The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at [http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy\\_0.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf).

Please note:

1. Students seeking accommodations for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors directly. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
2. When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
3. For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

### Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. However, assignments, exams, and other work in this course will be graded using letter grades.

The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Department. If letter grades are used for an assignment or other course component, the percentage equivalent in the final column will be used for calculating the final grade:

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department grade scale equivalents	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%

<b>3.70</b>		<b>A -</b>	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
<b>3.30</b>		<b>B+</b>	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
<b>3.00</b>	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	<b>B</b>	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
<b>2.70</b>		<b>B-</b>	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
<b>2.30</b>		<b>C+</b>	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
<b>2.00</b>	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	<b>C</b>	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
<b>1.70</b>		<b>C-</b>	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
<b>1.30</b>	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	<b>D+</b>	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
<b>1.00</b>		<b>D</b>	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
<b>0.00</b>	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	<b>F</b>	00 - 49.99%	0%

### **Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

### Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

### Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

### Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca">artsads@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Calgary Police Service</li><li>• Emergency Text Messaging</li><li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li><li>• Safewalk Program</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> <b>403-220-5333</b> <b>403-266-1234</b> <b>Emergency: call 911</b> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a> If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort ( <b>220-5333</b> ). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IT help line</li></ul>	<a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a> 403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Writing Support Services</li><li>• Student Services Mobile App</li></ul>	<a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a>
<b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Faculty of Arts Reps</li><li>• Student Ombudsman</li></ul>	<a href="https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/">https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>

<p><b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Counselling Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Health Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</b></li> <li>• <b>Online resources and tips</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a></p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a></p> <p><b>403-266-HELP (4357)</b></p> <p><a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a></p> <p>If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.</p>
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### Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

1/10-1/12

Week one: the puzzle of tears

Leslie Jamison, “Short Term Feelings: What Hurts about *Short Term 12*”

Screen: *Short Term 12* (Dustin Cretton, 2013)

#### Political functions of melodrama

1/17-1/19

Week two: the bourgeois prison

Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama”

Screen: *Bigger Than Life* (Nicholas Ray, 1956)

1/24-1/26

Week three: gender and complicity—the *Stella Dallas* debate (1)

E. Ann Kaplan, “The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor’s *Stella Dallas*”

Screen: *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937)

1/31-2/2

Week four: gender and complicity—the *Stella Dallas* debate (2)

Linda Williams, “Something Else besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama”

E. Ann Kaplan, “Ann Kaplan Replies to Linda Williams’s ‘Something Else besides a Mother’”

Screen: *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1943)

2/7-2/9

Week five: melodrama for males

Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised”

Screen: *Snitch* (Ric Roman Waugh, 2013)

## **Kitsch and the ethics of sentimentality**

2/14-2/16

Week six: the case against sentiment

Clement Greenberg, "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch"

Manny Farber, "Saccharine Symphony"

Screen: *Bambi* (Disney, 1942)

**\*\*TAKE-HOME MIDTERM HANDED OUT**

2/19-2/26: MID-TERM BREAK, NO CLASSES

2/28-3/2

Week seven: the case for sentiment

Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality"

Leslie Jamison, "In Defense of Saccharin(e)"

Screen: *The Fault in Our Stars* (Josh Boone, 2014)

**\*\*TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE IN CLASS\*\***

3/7-3/9

Week eight: digital kitsch, or the new cinema of manipulation

Dudley Andrew, "The Camera Searching in the World"

Ryan Pierson, "Don Hertzfeldt, Digital Kitsch, the Apocalypse"

Screen: *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), *World of Tomorrow* (Don Hertzfeldt, 2015)

## **Issues of style: melodrama and reflexivity**

3/14-3/16

Week eight: Sirk's irony

Paul Willemsen, "Toward an Analysis of the Sirkian System"

Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Douglas Sirk"

Screen: *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955)

\*Screen; fetishism and curiosity

3/21-3/23

Week ten: NO CLASS

3/28-3/30

Week eleven: Fassbinder's irony of Sirk's irony

Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Six Films by Douglas Sirk"

Katherine S. Woodward, "European Anti-Melodrama: Godard, Truffaut, and Fassbinder"

Screen: *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974)

**\*\*PAPER PROPOSALS DUE**

4/4-4/6

Week twelve: Haynes's irony of &c. Salome Skvirsky, "The Price of Heaven: Remaking Politics in *All That Heaven Allows*, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, and *Far from Heaven*"

Screen: *Far from Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002)

4/11

Week thirteen: a good last cry

Screen: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2015)

**\*\*FINAL PAPERS DUE 4/17\*\***