B Movies

FLMM 247.01
Thursdays 1:00 - 3:45 pm
Brown 320
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The term “B movie” has numerous definitions – some equate the phrase with “camp,” some with “cult,” others with “inexpensive,” and others with “bad.” This course explores the evolution of the B movie as a film category characterized by a shifting set of historical, theoretical, and aesthetic criteria. Close study will be given to films directed by Roger Corman, Ida Lupino, John Cassavetes, Edgar G. Ulmer, Samuel Fuller, William Castle, and others.

Required books:
Garry Keith Grant, Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
Ben Hervey, Night of the Living Dead (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
Noah Isenberg, Detour (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
David Sterritt and John Anderson, eds., The B List: The National Society of Film Critics on the Low-Budget Beauties, Genre-Bending Mavericks, and Cult Classics We Love (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008)

Books are available at the MICA bookstore – except The B List, which is available directly from coeditor Sterritt in class, free of charge.

Course schedule:

Class One - January 19
Topics: Introduction to B movies – what they are and why they matter.
Genre: horror film.
Screening: The Leopard Man – Jacques Tourneur, USA, 1943 (66 min)
Reading: Erich Kuersten, “‘What It Takes to Make a Softie’: Breaking Noir Tradition in The Leopard Man.” Bright Lights Film Journal 50 (November 2005). (URL below)

Class Two - January 26
Topics: The 1930s and 1940s. Val Lewton and the RKO horror-film unit.
Subtlety and suggestion = fright and menace.
Screening: The Black Cat – Edgar G. Ulmer, USA, 1934 (65 min) Cat People – Jacques Tourneur, USA, 1942 (73 min)
Reading: Newman, *Cat People*
   Erik Ulman, “Edgar G. Ulmer.” *Senses of Cinema* 24. (URL below)

**Class Three - February 2**
Screening: *Detour* – Edgar G. Ulmer, USA, 1945 (67 min)
Reading: Isenberg, *Detour*
   J. Hoberman, “*Detour,*” in Sterritt and Anderson, *The B List*, pp. 3-6

**Class Four - February 9**
Screening: *Gun Crazy* – Joseph H. Lewis, USA, 1950 (86 min)
Reading: Kitses, *Gun Crazy*

**Class Five - February 16**
Screening: *The Bigamist* – Ida Lupino, USA, 1953 (80 min)
   *The Hitch-Hiker* – Ida Lupino, USA, 1953 (71 min)

**Class Six - February 23**
Screening: *Pickup on South Street* -- Samuel Fuller, USA, 1953 (80 min)
Reading: Ty Burr, “*Pickup on South Street,*” in Sterritt and Anderson, *The B List*, pp. 14-16
   Tag Gallagher, “Why Samuel Fuller?” *Senses of Cinema* 50 (URL below)
   Luc Sante, “*Pickup on South Street*: Extra! Pickpocket Foils Doom Plot!” *The Criterion Collection* (16 February 2004) (URL below)

**Class Seven - March 1**
Topics: Conformity, consensus, and conservatism in the post-World War II era. Who is the enemy – them or us? Genre: science fiction. Style: mise-en-scène, production design, expressionism.
Screening: *Invaders from Mars* – William Cameron Menzies, USA, 1953 (78 min)
Richard Scheib, “*Invaders from Mars.*” *Moria.* (URL below)

**Class 8 - March 8**
Screening: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* – Don Siegel, USA, 1956 (80 min)
Reading: Grant, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*  

(March 15 – Spring Break)

**Class Nine - March 22**
Screening: *Shadows* – John Cassavetes, USA, 1959 (81 min)
Reading: Carney, *Shadows*

**Class Ten - March 29**
Topics: The 1960s. Castle the consummate showman. Gimmicks galore! The Punishment Poll!
Screening: *Mr. Sardonicus* – William Castle, USA, 1961 (89 min)
Reading: Richard Harland Smith, “Directed by William Castle.” *TCM.*  
Lisa Mateas, “*Mr. Sardonicus.*” *TCM.* (URL below)

**Class Eleven - April 5**
Screening: *The Trip* – Roger Corman, USA, 1967 (85 min)
Reading: Roger Corman, “My Nine Most Memorable Films, from *The Trip* to *Battle Beyond the Stars.*” *The Daily Beast* (16 December 2011) (URL below)  
Wheeler Winston Dixon, “Roger Corman.” *Senses of Cinema* 38. (URL below)

**Class Twelve - April 12**
Screening: *Night of the Living Dead* – George A. Romero, USA, 1968 (96 min)
Reading: Hervey, *Night of the Living Dead*

**Class Thirteen - April 19**
Screening: *Dead Man* – Jim Jarmusch, USA, 1995 (121 min)
Reading: Rosenbaum, *Dead Man*

**Class Fourteen - April 26**
Screening: *Glen or Glenda* – Edward D. Wood, Jr., USA, 1953 (65 min)
   *Plan 9 from Outer Space* Edward D. Wood, Jr., USA, 1959 (79 min)
Reading: William D. Routt, “Bad for Good.” *Shameless Self-Promotion.*

**Week Fifteen - May 3**
Screening: *Ed Wood* – Tim Burton, USA, 1994 (127 min)
Reading: Susan MacDonald, “The Dreamscapes of Edward D. Wood Jr.” *The Virtuous Medlar Circle* (URL below)

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**URLs for reading assignments on the Web**

Class One – Kuersten
http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/50/leopard.php

Class Two – Ulman

Class Five - Dixon

Class Five - Armstrong
http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/37/lupino.html

Class Six - Gallagher

Class Six - Sante

Class Seven - Kutner
Course requirements:
Students must attend all class sessions, complete all reading assignments in a timely way, and participate in class discussions. In addition, each student must keep a journal during the course, comprising two to three pages per week. This is the equivalent of a short paper each week, in which you respond to that week's course material: the reading, the film, the lecture, and the class discussion. Journals must be printed by computer, not written by hand. Additional rules and guidelines for the journal are given below.

Schedule for written work: Journals are due in two installments. Entries for Class One through Class Eight must be submitted on March 8. They will be returned to you on March 22 with a midterm grade. Entries for all weeks from Class Nine through Class Fourteen are due on May 3. No journal entry is required for our last class on May 3, since journals are due on that day.

Attendance and Participation:
Attendance will be taken. It is your responsibility to get to class on time. Unexcused absences or excessive lateness will result in a lower final grade. If you know you will be absent on a future date, let me know in advance. Absences will be excused only if you provide verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the class was missed. You must catch up with work missed due to absences, excused or otherwise. This includes all films that have been screened in class; if you miss a film, you must watch it on your own. (Get in touch with me if you aren’t certain how to
obtain a film you need to see.) You should contribute to class discussions, since part of your final grade will reflect class participation.

Journals must be submitted on the dates given above unless a later date is arranged because of special circumstances. Handing in a journal late due to unforeseen circumstances requires verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the due date was missed.

**Journal rules and guidelines:**

The journal must contain two to three pages on each week’s subject matter, demonstrating knowledge of the pertinent films and filmmakers, material covered in class discussions, and material covered in the reading assignments. You are encouraged to view additional relevant films outside class and include references to them in your journal entries. This is not a diary – it is an academic journal, meant to record what you are learning and thinking with regard to the course on a weekly basis. You are welcome to include material suggested by reading and film viewing outside class, but such material must be relevant to this course.

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**Additional information**

**Academic integrity:**

Academic integrity -- the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception -- is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or submitting work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students.

A student charged with academic dishonesty will be given oral or written notice of the charge by the instructor. If students believe they have been falsely accused, they should seek redress through informal discussions with the instructor, department head, dean, or campus executive officer. If the instructor believes the infraction is sufficiently serious to warrant the referral of the case to the Office of Conduct Standards, or if the instructor decides to give a final grade of F in the course because of the infraction, the student and faculty will be afforded formal due-process procedures.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas without acknowledgment. Submitting work containing plagiarism is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be brought to the attention of the department chair. To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation like:

*** I read in yesterday’s New York Times that…
*** As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 34).
*** My roommate Pete noticed that…
If it’s common knowledge and your own idea, you do not need quotations. The yellow of the Lance Armstrong bracelet suggests bravery.

Document your citations in a bibliography or “works cited” page at the end of your paper and follow standard guidelines such as MLA or Chicago manual style. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines in Diana Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual, and always check with your instructor before turning in questionable work. You may also check on these and other language-related issues with one of the helpful tutors in the Writing Center, (410) 225-2418. The Writing Center has copies of the Hacker manual as well.

**ADA Compliance Statement**

**Classroom: Health and Safety Guidelines**

**Health and Safety**
It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA’s Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member’s responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.

**Classroom: ADA Compliance**

**Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement**
Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://www.mica.edu/LRC

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