CLASS 350: CLASSICS AND CINEMA
San Diego State University  Fall 2009  Schedule no. 20771
M 1600-1840  AH-4131

Dr. Kerri J. Hame
Office: AL 632
Office Hours: M 2:30-3:30pm;
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SDSU Catalog Course Description: Ancient Greece and Rome as represented in major cinematic productions. Screenplays compared with Greek and Latin sources in English translation. Prerequisites: Completion of the General Education requirement in Foundations II.C., Humanities required for non-majors.

Course Scope and Purpose:
This course examines the representation of selected aspects of ancient Greek and Roman myth, literature, history, and culture in cinematic productions from the silent film era to the modern age. It starts first with a (select) history of the Greco-Roman world in early film and then discusses the development of the “ancient” film through the 1950s. The course then focuses on later cinematic representations of ancient Rome, the Romans, social institutions (e.g., government, slavery, military, religion, public entertainment) and historical events. Next the course examines cinematic representations of dramatic texts from both Roman and Greek literature, particularly Plautus’ comedies and Sophocles’ plays on the life of Oedipus. We then look at the modern revival of the “ancient” film and in particular the cinematic representation of Greek myth and legend, especially the cause, characters, and events of the Trojan War in Bronze Age Greece and in Homer’s Iliad. Finally we focus on cinematic representations of the historical battle of Thermopylae and the ancient Greek historian Herodotus’ description of the fight between the Spartans and the Persians.

Students will examine and discuss primary sources, such as ancient poems, plays, and historical narratives, archaeological evidence, and other sources to gain knowledge of Greco-Roman culture. We will then view films that dramatize the myths, historical events and/or literary works of the ancient world and students will analyze the choices made by the film’s creator in presenting his/her cinematic vision. We will question why the filmmaker has chosen an “ancient” subject matter to film: is it to convey a particular “message” most effectively or does it simply have good entertainment value? We will continually debate whether the filmmaker has a responsibility to produce a historically authentic film or should feel free to adapt, alter, or augment the original material for dramatic effectiveness without excessive criticism from people who know the “facts.” We will also work towards gaining an understanding of why films with Greco-Roman subject matter continue to be popular in modern cinema.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Students will be able to 1) describe and explain Greco-Roman myths, historical events, persons, and social institutions according to ancient literature, secondary sources, and archaeological evidence; 2) identify and describe Greco-Roman myths, historical events, persons, and social institutions in cinematic representations; 3) compare and contrast cinematic representations with the literary and historical evidence; 4) analyze and critique the choices made by a filmmaker in creating his/her view of an ancient subject; 5) identify and describe the filmmaker’s message and its relevance to the film’s intended audience; 6) clarify the importance of dramatic effectiveness and historical authenticity in producing an “ancient” movie; 7) construct a working definition of a successful “ancient” movie; 8) theorize on the renewed popularity of movies with ancient subject matter and their relevance to American culture and values.

Required Course Materials:
Herodotus, Xerxes Invades Greece (Penguin Classic, 2006)  = Herodotus
S. Lombardo (Trans. and ed.), The Essential Homer (Hackett, 2000)  = Homer
Additional course materials and resources will be available via Blackboard (Bb).

Course Requirements and Grading:
Participation & Worksheets (20% of course grade)
(2) Response Writing Projects (2 @ 15% = 30% of course grade)
Mid-term Examination (25% of course grade)
Final Examination (25% of course grade)

Participation & Worksheets: Students’ participation will be assessed in the following areas: active engagement in classroom discussion of course materials and films, active viewing of the course’s films, and active involvement in and completion of worksheets or other assignments (in and out of class). Consistent active attendance is thus highly important as these activities enrich the learning experience for both instructor and student and they cannot be made up if you choose not to attend the course or engage with your fellow students or instructor.
Week 4 - M Sept. 21

Lecture: Republican Rome and Spartacus' Slave Revolt
Required Reading: Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* 8-11 (on Bd); *Empire* p.78-84, 95-113.

Week 5 - M Sept. 28

Required On-Your-Own-Viewing *before class* & Worksheet no.1: Watch *Spartacus* (1960), with Kirk Douglas) and complete Worksheet no. 1 (available on Bb; due in class); two copies are on reserve in Love Library Media Center or rent it yourself. (N.B. the running time for this film is 3 hours, 16 minutes, so plan accordingly.)
Discussion: *Spartacus* (1960)
Lecture & Film Clips: After *Spartacus* & From Play to Film

Week 6 - M Oct. 5

*Response Writing Project No.1 due in class (details on Bd)*
Film & Discussion: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966; 99 mins)
Required Reading: Plautus (on Bb)

Week 7 - W Oct. 12

Film, In-Class Worksheet no.2 & Discussion: Pasolini’s *Oedipus Rex* (1967; 110 mins)
Required Reading: *Sophocles Oedipus the King*

Week 8 - M Oct. 19

Discussion & Review
*EXAM*
Lecture: The Modern Revival of the Ancient Film

Week 9 - M Oct. 26

Lecture: The Trojan War, Homer's *Iliad*, and the Bronze Age

Week 10 - M Nov. 2

Film & In-Class Worksheet no.3: *Troy* (2004; 163 mins)
Required Reading: Fall of Troy summary (on Bb)

Week 11 - M Nov. 9

*Response Writing Project No.2 due in class (details on Blackboard)*
Lecture: Introduction to Sparta & Spartan Life

Week 12 - M Nov. 16

Lecture: The Persian Wars & the Battle of Thermopylae

Week 13 - M Nov. 23

*No Class* - Instructor Furlough Day

Week 14 - M Nov. 30

Film & In-Class Worksheet no.4: 300 (2007, 116 mins)
Required Reading: Horace, *Odes* 3.2 and Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" (on Bb)

Week 15 - M Dec. 7

Discussion: 300 (2007)
Required Reading: Reactions to 300 (on Bb)
Course Conclusion

Final Exam: Monday, Dec. 14 1600-1800