

Jewish Studies

Forbidden Love: Negotiating Social Boundaries on Film

Smith College (Fall 2014)

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Course Description

This course studies negotiations of social boundaries and cultural politics as mediated and narrated on film and television through narratives of forbidden love and intercultural [ethnic-racial-national] bonds. Such stories juxtapose cultural worlds visually and ideologically, yet challenge the very social boundaries and restrictions they recreate on the screen. We shall focus on the American and Israeli cultural contexts comparatively. Our point of departure is identifying a narrative and generic paradigm, from the classic Shakespearean Romeo and Juliette to American and Israeli tales of “unlikely couples”. We shall examine how these films represent and re-vision the contradictions associated with class, ethnic, racial, religious divisions, and the social yearning to contain them as well as preserve them. We’ll study American cinematic versions of the Jewish problematic of gender and sexual constraints on women, and Israeli versions thereof. We’ll study stories of interethnic and interracial love in the context of multicultural immigrant societies –focusing on Israeli and American examples; we’ll examine the cinematic inter-ethnic forbidden love in a national context as well, through the vantage point of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its negotiation in cinematic stories of forbidden love. Through narratives and fictional worlds on screen in which national, social, sexual, patriarchal, ethnic, and religious boundaries are transgressed- we’ll explore the very meaning of such boundaries in their sociocultural, national and historic contexts. Our aim is to explore these fictional intercultural clashes and bonds and their transforming meanings through changing times and contexts, as liminal and contradictory locations which open to re-evaluation taken for granted constraints, divisions, conflicts and power relations.

Course Requirements

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes and screenings, which are incorporated into classes. Active participation and a vibrant interlocution are an important aspect of this course. Attendance and active participation comprises 10% of the course grade.

Weekly film review

This course offers a rich repertory of films as resources for our research and discussion. The films are streamed and posted online for you on the course website on Moodle-for viewing before and after class, for preparation and research. You are required to prepare to each class by viewing at least one of the films included in the weekly learning unit. You are required to submit one review of a film you reviewed per week. Submission is due every Wednesday, by 4 PM, weekly.

Throughout the course you are required to submit a total of 10 weekly film reviews, comprising 50 % of your final grade for the course.

Final Paper

The final paper is a comparative discussion of one topic, to be chosen from the course syllabus. This final written assignment requires a comparative analysis of two feature films, both Israeli, or American, or one from each cultural context respectively- Israeli and American. Please discuss how the films construct and represent sociocultural boundaries, and how they challenge them through the story of forbidden love and unlikely couples. Please discuss how the genre, narrative resolution and ending of the films articulate ideologies, lay bare cultural contradictions regarding gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion and politics, as well as contain and naturalize them.

In addition to your discussion and textual-critical analysis of the films as cultural texts, you should incorporate a critical reference to at least one relevant source from the course bibliography.

The final paper should be submitted no later than May 5 2014.

This final paper should be 6-8 pages long. It comprises 40% of your final grade.

Course Grade:

1. 10 weekly film reviews: 50%.(1 page each)
2. One written final Paper: 40% (to be submitted by May 5, 6-8 pages).
3. Attendance and active participation: 10%

Class Syllabus and Viewing Schedule

Introduction: Forbidden Love, unlikely couples and Social Boundaries.

Film: **Shuli's Fiance** (Doron Tzabari, 1997)

Unit 1: The Israeli "Bourekas" genre: Comedy, Melodrama, class and ethnicity, gender

Fortuna (Menahem Golan, 1966)

Sallah (Ephraim Kishon, 1964)

Unit 2: The American context: ethnicity, race, social class, gender

West Side Story (Jerome Robbins, Robert Wise, 1961)

Guess who's Coming to Dinner (Stanley Kramer, 1967)

Guess Who? (Kevin Rodney Sullivan, 2005)

Mississippi Masala (Mira Nair, 1991)

Unit 3: Bound to Bond: Ethnicities and the Integrative Utopia

-The "Melting Pot" utopia and the "Bourekas" popular genre in the 1970s.

Films: **Katz and Karasso** (Menachem Golan, 1971)

Charly and a Half (Boaz Davidson, 1974)

-The 1990s: novel versions of the integrative utopia

Film: **Yana's Friends** (Erik Kaploon, 1998)

-The new Millennium- Postmodern versions of immigration and the discourse of authenticity.

Film: **Late Marriage** [Dover Kososhvili, 2001]

Unit 4: Boundaries set by religion- a Jewish take made in Hollywood

Fiddler on the Roof [Norman Jewison, 1971]

Yentl [Barbara Streisand, 1983]

Unit 5. Further negotiations of religious Jewish constraints, in relation to gender and sexuality-the Israeli context

Say Amen [David Deri, 2005]

The Secrets, [Avi Neshser, 2007].

Unit 6. Boundaries set by religion and ethnicity in a globalized, postcolonial world

A Touch Away [Ronit Weiss-Berkovitch, Ron Ninio, 2007]

East is East [1999, Damien O'donnell]

Bend it Like Beckham [Gurinder Chadha, 2002]

Unit 7. The Israeli Palestinian conflict through the lens of "Forbidden Love" and boundary crossing

Crossfire [Gideon Ganani, 1988]

A Trumpet in the Wadi (Lena and Slava Chaplin, 2002)

Strangers (Guy Nattiv and Erez Tadmor, 2006)

The Bubble [Ethan Fox, 2007]

Jaffa [Keren Yedaya, 2009]

My Pretty Sister [Marko Carmel, 2010]

Unit 8. Challenging militarist masculinist societal norms through forbidden homosexual love:

Gotta Have Heart (Ethan Fox, 1997)

Yossi and Jagger (Ethen Fox, 2002)

Unit 9: Bound to Bond: Utopian Couplings, American ethnicities and the Social Order

The Wedding Planner (Adam Shankman, 2001)

Maid in Manhattan (Wayne Wang, 2002)

My Big Fat Greek Wedding (Joel Zwick, 2002)

Unit 10: New frontiers in Israeli TV series: Israeli-Palestinian [become likely] couples.

TV Drama: **Ananda** [Dana Modan, 2012]

Sitcom: **Arab Labor** (Sayed Keshua, Ron Ninio, 2009)

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