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Fall 2009

Hollywood Auteur Paper

Patrick Keating

Trinity University, pkeating@trinity.edu

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Paper #2: Hollywood Auteur Paper

Pick one of the following films:

The Shop around the Corner (Lubitsch, 1940)

His Girl Friday (Hawks, 1940)

The Lady from Shanghai (Welles, 1948)

North by Northwest (Hitchcock, 1959)

Your assignment is to write a 7-9 page essay about the film, using the approach of "auteur criticism." The basic premise of auteur criticism is that a director develops an ongoing set of ideas through the use of directorial style. Your argument will explain how the director develops a particular concern in the chosen film. Do not try to explain everything about the film. Instead, focus on one aspect of the film that seems particularly salient. Your analysis should be informed by an understanding of the director's other films. Think of the director's career as a developing process, and look for nuances and subtleties that make this a distinctive treatment of an ongoing concern.

There are two due dates for this assignment. First, you will hand in a research question (with a preliminary list of works cited) on M, Nov. 16. Second, you will hand in the final paper on F, Dec. 4.

1. Research Question, with an Annotated List of Works Cited

On M, Nov. 16, you should submit a short document containing: your tentative research question, and a preliminary list of works cited. For instance, suppose you watch *North by Northwest*, and you notice that the film uses several point-of-view shots. Your research question might be, "What is the significance of the point-of-view shot in *North by Northwest*, in the context of Hitchcock's career-long use of this technique?" This question will guide your research, leading you to find other examples in Hitchcock's films, and to look for scholarly articles that discuss this topic.

After writing your research question (be sure it is in the form of a question), you should provide an Annotated List of Works Cited. This list should contain eight sources that you have consulted in your preliminary research. The nature of the sources will vary, depending on your research question, but it should include some combination of films and scholarly sources. For instance, if you are writing about *His Girl Friday*, you might cite three films by Howard Hawks, four scholarly articles about Hawks, and a book on screwball comedy. Some questions will require you to watch a lot of films; some questions will require you to read a lot of scholarly sources. Let the question guide your research. After each citation, write two or three sentences explaining how the work relates to your research question. Sample citations:

Brill, Lesley. *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988. Print. Brill argues that *North by Northwest* is one of Hitchcock's most typical works, revealing a trend toward romanticism that most critics ignore. This will help me answer my question about the role of irony in *North by Northwest*, because Brill argues that romanticism is often opposed to irony.

Rebecca. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. 1940. Criterion, 2001. DVD. The film is about a woman who is trying to understand her mysterious husband. I probably will not cite this film in the final paper because it never adopts the comic, ironic tone found in *North by Northwest*.

2. Final Paper

Your final paper should be 7-9 pages, and you should incorporate some of your research in making your argument. It is not necessary to use all of the sources you found in the preliminary stage. Research is supposed to involve some searching – I expect you to find some sources that you do not need. Also, it is not necessary to use only the sources you found in the preliminary stage. Feel free to continue your research beyond those initial eight sources. For the final paper, the crucial criterion is relevance. Cite the sources that help you to develop your argument.

Your topic may change over the course of your research. That is a natural part of the research process. One warning: do not let your topic grow too large. You are writing about ONE aspect of ONE film – but that aspect becomes more meaningful when studied in the context of the director's larger career. Keep the focus on the primary film, and refer to other films and sources when these references enrich our understanding of the topic under discussion.

Do not just summarize the story. Explain how the director shapes our experience of the story through stylistic techniques such as composition, editing, pacing, and handling of performance. The tone of the paper should be analytical, rather than evaluative. The point of the paper is not to celebrate the film as a masterpiece (or criticize it as a failure). Instead, use this as an opportunity to see the film as a complex form of cultural expression, with layers of meaning that are not obvious at first glance.

Additional information:

I have placed some books about each director on reserve. The library has some additional books about each director, as well as many other sources with information on these films. You should be able to find plenty of good material, even if you cannot find a book about the director. For instance, *The Shop around the Corner* is a classic romantic comedy, so you might find some research on it by looking for books on the romantic comedy. One of the purposes of this assignment is to encourage you to practice your skills at finding scholarly resources on film.

You must write about one of these four directors. However, you have the option of proposing another film, as long as it is from one of these directors. Please do not use a film from the class screening room as your primary film, though you may refer to it as one of your additional films.

RESEARCH QUESTION DUE DATE: M, Nov 16, at the beginning of class. Tell me your research question (make sure it is a question), and give me a list of eight sources, listed in the MLA style. For each source, write two or three sentences explaining how it relates to the research question.

FINAL PAPER DUE DATE: F, Dec. 4, at the beginning of class. 7-9 page research paper, with an introduction, body, and conclusion. MLA style: parenthetical citations, with a works cited page.

FORMAT: Times New Roman font, double-spaced, one-inch margins

See attached rubric for more details on grading.