

'Married to the Mob'? – Representations of the Mafia in Hollywood and Italian Cinema

Course Code: SMLM 036

This option scrutinises representations of the Mafia in Hollywood and Italian cinema. It traces the origins of the gangster film in Hollywood, and its re-emergence in the postwar period. In the context of Italian national cinema the political cinema of Francesco Rosi is analysed, followed by examples of the representation of the Mafia in contemporary Italian and Hollywood cinema. The course encompasses a range of approaches (historical, and relating to star theory), while at the same time identifying the very different cultural practices that inform Hollywood and European filmmaking. The validity of the generalisation that Hollywood cinema is 'married to the mob' in the sense that it glorifies the gangster will be considered, while the corresponding argument - that Italian cinema depicts a fundamentally more critical role of criminality - is given equal scrutiny.

WEEK 1: **Socio-historical origins of the gangster film. Set film: *Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931)**

Topics considered: representations of ethnicity; the 'Capone' figure; gangster films as a vehicle for creating a particular kind of star (Cagney, Robinson etc); role of the studios (Warner Brothers); survey of critical assessment of the role of the gangster (McArthur, Cook etc)

Other relevant films: *The Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931); *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932);

WEEK 2: **Censorship and the evolution of the gangster genre Set film: *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953)**

Topics considered: consequences of the Hays Code for representations of violence; modifications of the delineation of ethnicity: evolution of established gangster stars (Cagney) and new figures (Bogart); literary sources of gangster scripts - Hammett, Chandler, Cain; characterisation of 'the mob'; problems of genre definition - gangster and/or noir?; output and influence of German emigres in postwar Hollywood (Lang, Siodmak, Dymitryk); political subtext of 50s output (HUAC, the Cold War and McCarthyism)

Other relevant films: *Angels with Dirty Faces* (Michael Curtiz, 1938); *White Heat* (Raoul Walsh, 1949); *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1945) and other Bogart films

WEEK 3: **New Hollywood gangsters I Set films: *The Godfather I and II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972 and 1974)**

Topics considered: re-emergence of the specifics of ethnicity; the role of Coppola as auteur: an Italo-American addressing issues of cinematic (and personal) Italo-American identity; script origins: Puzo's 'hunk of trash'; critical and commercial reception of the film; strategies of critique of the Mafia (role of Keaton - inside and outside the Mafia, Michael's transformation in *Godfather II*); European stylistic influences on Coppola (Visconti, neorealism) the place of the Mafia films in the trajectory of Coppola's career, and its implications, artistic and financial

Other relevant films: *The Godfather II* (1974); *The Conversation* (1973), *Apocalypse Now* (1979)

WEEK 4: **New Hollywood gangsters II Set film: *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990)**

Topics considered: re-emergence of the specifics of ethnicity; the role of Scorsese as auteur: an Italo-American addressing issues of cinematic (and personal) Italo-American identity; strategies of critique of the Mafia (the role of Henry - inside and outside the Mafia); European stylistic influences on Scorsese (Visconti, neorealism); the place of the Mafia films in the trajectory of Scorsese's career, and its implications artistic and financial: comparison/contrast with *Mean Streets*

Other relevant films: *Mean Streets* (1973), *The Age of Innocence* (1993) *Casino* (1995), *The Gangs of New York* (2003)

WEEK 5: **Mafia Stars Set film: *Scarface* (Brian De Palma, 1984)**

Topics considered: casting in the films of Coppola and Scorsese; the emergence of Pacino and De Niro, and their relationship to the directors; the careers of Pacino and De Niro, and the extent to which ethnicity continues to feature in their cinematic roles; questions of star status in the non-studio

context; intertextual relationship with Hawks's 1932 film: issue of 'revivals' of earlier television/cinematic topics in De Palma's work; brief consideration of the roles of Brando, Caan, Pesci and Cazale in relation to questions of ensemble casting

Other relevant films: *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) *The Deerhunter* (Michael Cimino, 1979); *The Untouchables* (Brian De Palma, 1987); *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975), *Heat* (Michael Mann, 1995); *Analyze This* (Harold Ramis, 1999); *Analyze That* (Harold Ramis, 2002)

WEEK 6: Mafia Women I Set Film: *Gloria* (John Cassavetes, 1980)

Topics considered: Given the centrality of masculine identity in the social role of the Mafia, and the domination of Coppola and Scorsese, De Niro and Pacino, in its cinematic realisation, Cassavetes's film has been selected in order to undertake an analysis of the depiction of women in Mafia films, at the same time cross-referencing the role of Keaton in Coppola's work and Stone in *Casino*. The durability of the Hollywood dimension of the genre and the popularity of its stars will be considered in concluding this section of the course; in the light of the perspectives adopted towards the selected films, the question of the extent to which Hollywood cinema is 'married to the mob' (through its stars, and particular depiction of masculine identity) will be addressed

WEEK 7 is Reading Week

WEEK 8: Representations of the Mafia in the cinema Francesco Rosi Set Film: *Salvatore Giuliano*

Topics considered: the status of Rosi as a major European auteur; the stylistic quality of his work will be analysed with reference to this film and other works of the director in the same period; the political content of the film and the political nature of Rosi's filmmaking will be explicated, with reference to other political filmmakers of this era

Other relevant films: *Hands over the City* (1963) *Lucky Luciano* (1974), *Excellent Cadavers* (1976); clips from films of Bertolucci, Pasolini, Pontecorvo

Week 9: Mafia Women II Set Film: *Angela* (Robert Torre, 2004)

This session will cross-reference the work of Cassavetes, undertaken in week 6, and will consider the role of women as marginalised both within the narrative of the social structures represented in the films, and more broadly as the focus of the cinematic product. As the sole female filmmaker on the course, Torre's place within a range of 'masculine' dominated works (directors, stars, audience) will be considered

Week 10: Documentary-style Mafia filmmaking Set Film: *The Hundred Steps* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2001)

Topics considered: the efficacy of 'real-life' Mafia films; the import of inserting the rider 'based on a true story' to this film of Giordana and to *The Bodyguards* (Ricky Tognazzi, 1994); the films will be given their political and social contextualisation in the light of the key events in Sicily in the 1980/90s (the assassinations of prominent political and legal figures, role of the judges, the maxitrials, the emergence of anti-Mafia protests in Sicily) Other contemporary Hollywood examples of 'real life' Mafia films such as *Donnie Brasco* (Mike Newell, 1995) will be considered as will the relevant soaps - Italian (*The Octopus*) and American (*The Sopranos*).

Week 11: Comedy as anti-Mafia strategy Set film: *The Consequences of Love* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2004)

Topics considered: this very recent film, termed a 'black comedy' gives the opportunity to consider the application of the 'humorous' to the 'serious' (the very damning, continuing revelations about the relationship between politicians and the Mafia in recent Italian political life). Types of humour utilised in recent Italian cinema will be identified and analysed: the style of Sorrentino as against the comic efforts of Roberto Benigni in *Johnny Stecchino* (1990), attendant on his established comic persona, and the pastiche style of Roberta Torre in *To Die for Tano* (2001). Issues of popular (Benigni) vs arthouse (Rosi) in articulating attitudes to the Mafia, will be assessed. Brief consideration will be given to comedy Mafia films *Married to the Mob* (Jonathan Demme, 1985) and again to De Niro's recent material (ref. in week 5) and *The Sopranos* (ref. in week 10).

Other relevant films: *Down by Law* (Jim Jarmusch 1992); *Night on Earth* (Jim Jarmusch, 1994); *Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, 1997)

Week 12: from the extensive material the option has considered we will attempt this week to draw some conclusions. The general character of Hollywood and European cinema will be revisited, and the applicability of such terms to the films considered will be raised: to what extent may Coppola and Scorsese be seen as 'Hollywood directors'? Can we identify elements of cross-fertilisation between their work and that of Italian filmmakers? is the concept of 'independence' of the filmmakers any more or less relevant to filmmakers in Hollywood or in Italian national cinema from the financial, commercial and political point of view? In this sense then, can it be argued that to a degree all cinematic products glamourise the Mafia by showcasing it?

PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Biskind, P., *Easy Riders Raging Bulls* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998)
Bondanella, P., *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys and Sopranos* (New York, Continuum, 2004)
Browne, N., (ed) *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
Dickie, J., *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004).
Ginsborg, P., *A History of Contemporary Italy Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990).
King, G., *New Hollywood Cinema* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002)
Longrigg, C., *Mafia Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997)
Marcus, M. *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).
McArthur, C., *Underworld USA* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972)
Munby, J., *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from 'Little Caesar' to 'Touch of Evil'* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
Nowell, Smith, G (ed)., *Companion to Italian Cinema* (London, BFI, 1996).
Stille, A. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic* (London: Vintage, 1996).
Testa, C., *Poet of Civic Courage: the films of Francesco Rosi* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1996).
A further, more extensive bibliography will be provided at the beginning of Semester Two, when this option will be taught.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altman, R., 'Cinema and Genre' in Nowell-Smith, G.(ed), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 276-285.
Baxter, J., *The Gangster Film* (London, Zwemmer, 1975)
Biskind, P., *Easy Riders Raging Bulls* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998)
Bondanella, P., *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys and Sopranos* (New York, Continuum, 2004)
Browne, N., (ed) *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
Camon, A., 'The Godfather and the Mythology of the Mafia' in Browne, pp. 57-75.
Cappello, M., 'Roberta Torre: Filmmaker of the Inconscienza', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 17, 4, November 2000, 317-331.
Cowie, P., *The Godfather Book* (London: Faber, 1997).
Dickie, J., *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004).
Gieri, M., 'Hands over the City: cinema as political indictment and social commitment', in Testa pp. 43-59.
Ginsborg, P., *A History of Contemporary Italy Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990).
Goodridge, M., 'Close Up: Marco Tullio Giordana', *Screen International* Friday March 9, 2001, pp.22-23.
King, G., *New Hollywood Cinema* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002)
Lawton, B., 'Salvatore Giuliano: Francesco Rosi's revolutionary postmodernism' in Testa, pp.8 – 42.
Longrigg, C., *Mafia Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997)
Marangi, M. Review of *Angela*, *Cineforum* 421 January 2003, pp. 41-44.
Marcus, M. *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore and London: John

- Hopkins University Press, 2002).
- McArthur, C., *Underworld USA* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972)
- Munby, J., *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from 'Little Caesar' to 'Touch of Evil'* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- Neale, S., *Genre and Hollywood* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
- Nowell, Smith, G (ed)., *Companion to Italian Cinema* (London, BFI, 1996).
- Ruth, D.E., *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- Robb, P., *Midnight in Sicily* (London: Harvill Press, 1999).
- Schatz, T., *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filming and the Studio System* (Austin, Texas: McGraw-Hill, 1981)
- Small, P., 'I cento passi: renegotiating the Mafia codes' in *New Cinemas* 3.1 2005, 41-53.
- Stille, A. *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic* (London: Vintage, 1996).
- Testa, C., *Poet of Civic Courage: the films of Francesco Rosi* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1996).
- Yaquinto, M., *Pump 'em Full of Lead* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994)