

FM 323: The Number of the Beast: (D)evil on Screen

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening); Tuesday, 17.30 – 20.45
Lecture Hall (P98a)

Course Description

Advanced Course (Module: Artists, Genres, Movements)

In this course we explore the concept of evil and filmic incarnations of evil, rooted in or inspired by Christian mythology of the fallen angel and related demons. Numerous modern commentators have remarked on the decline of traditional ideas and embodiments of evil: the “death of Satan,” the “disappearance of hell,” and the general decline of medieval notions of supernatural malignity in favor of a materialist, secular consciousness. Film history, however, shows the persistence of longstanding iconographies of evil in the visual language of this quintessentially modern medium, especially in the genre of fantastic films – films like, for instance, *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976), *Angel Heart* (1987), *The Devil’s Advocate* (1997), or *The Witch* (2015). We explore the way in which film revives or alters much older images of Christian mythology. At the same time, the language of film often avoids direct embodiment of what it still considers to be an independent, menacing metaphysical force, evoking evil in other and sometimes equally menacing ways. Finally, we ask whether film produces secular ways of portraying or thinking about evil. Can we speak of a modern, non-embodied idea of this deeply disturbing and disruptive quality?

Please note: The films we will watch and discuss feature representations of evil; some of these films contain disturbing stories, graphic images, extreme religious ideas and ideology, outdated racial stereotyping, sexualized nudity, and strong, bloody violence!

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history, film theory, and film analysis. Readiness to do independent research and present in class.

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared, to participate actively in the class discussions and to do all the course assignments on time.

Please note: The films we will watch and discuss in this course feature representations of evil. Some of these films contain disturbing stories, graphic images, extreme religious ideas and ideology, outdated racial stereotyping, sexualized nudity, and strong, bloody violence!

*** Please, do not use cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accessibility

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for longer-term accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the

equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

More than two absences will affect the grade for the course.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence.

Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Please, do not use cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!

Assessment / Assignments

Individual presentations in class, based on individual research and the film screenings, starting in week 5.

Mid-term essay (1500-2000 words), due in week 7, Friday, October 18, 2024, midnight. The topic of the mid-term essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed in the first seven weeks of the course.

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Thursday, December 19, 2024, midnight
* **Please note: Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Thursday, December 12, 2024, midnight

The topic of the final essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed throughout the semester.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation:	25 %
Presentation:	25 %
Midterm Essay:	25 %
Final Essay:	25 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C-.
If two components are graded F, the final grade will be F (i.e. the whole class will be failed).

Schedule

* Tentative schedule depending on availability of films, presentations, and intensity of class discussions

WEEK 1

Introduction: What is Evil? – The Incarnations of Mephistopheles

No Monday evening film screening in week 1

WEEK 2

The Devils Rides Out (1968, Terence Fisher) – Who saves us from evil?

Basics of Film Analysis and Film Interpretation

WEEK 3

Rosemary's Baby (1968, Roman Polanski) – The Advent of the Antichrist ...

WEEK 4

The Devils (1971, Ken Russell) – Demonic possession, religious hysteria, and political persecution

The Blood on Satan's Claw (1971, Piers Haggard)

WEEK 5

The Exorcist (1973, William Friedkin) – The "scariest film of all times"

The Exorcist III (1990, William Peter Blatty)

WEEK 6

The Omen (1976, Richard Donner) – A conspiracy of evil to bring forth and protect a diabolic child

Damien: Omen 2 (1978, Don Taylor)

The First Omen (2014, Arkasha Stevenson)

WEEK 7

Angel Heart (1987, Alan Parker) – *Film noir* meets Evil

Hellraiser (1987, Clive Barker) – "Demons to some, angels to others."

* Mid-term essay (1500-2000 words) due on Friday, October 18, 2024, midnight.

Spring Break: Monday, October 21 – Sunday, October 27, 2024

WEEK 8

The Witches of Eastwick (1987, George Miller) – The Battle of the Sexes

WEEK 9

The Addiction (1995, Abel Ferrara) – "Pecco ergo sum" ("I sin therefore I am")

WEEK 10

Seven (1995, David Fincher) – The Seven Deadly Sins

WEEK 11

The Devil's Advocate (1997, Taylor Hackford) – Evil Before the Law

WEEK 12

The Ninth Gate (1999, Roman Polanski) – The devil writes a book

Antichrist (2009, Lars von Trier) – "Chaos ... reigns"

The House That Jack Built (2018, Lars von Trier)

WEEK 13

The Witch: A New England Folktale (2015, Robert Eggers) – Join the coven: Puritan culture vs. liberating nature?

Suspiria (2018, Luca Guadagnino)

WEEK 14

The Zone of Interest (2023, Jonathan Glazer) – The Banality of Evil

* Final essay for graduating students (3000-3500 words) due on Thursday, December 12, 2024, midnight

WEEK 15 Completion week: Monday, December 16 – Friday, December 20, 2024

* Final essay (3000-3500 words) due on Thursday, December 19, 2024, midnight

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term: Week 7, Friday, October 18, 2024, midnight

Final essay: Week 14, Thursday, December 12, 2024, midnight (graduation students only)
Week 15, Thursday, December 19, 2024, midnight