**FMST 201 / ENGL 220 Introduction to Film Studies**

**Fall 2019**

**Exam Paper Assignment**

Length: Approximately 2400 (7-8 pages, Times New Roman 12-point font)

Due Date: Monday, December 16th at 5pm via email

Your task is to write a close analysis of a film or films using the techniques of film interpretation that we have been developing this semester. Your essay should respond to the prompt and should provide a clear and well-conceived argument about *what* the movie communicates with its audience and *how* that communication happens. It should support that argument with ample evidence from *specific scenes* in the film. It should make reference to dialogue, camera angles, shot composition, editing techniques, and so on.

Since the paper should foreground your skills in film analysis, you should focus your attention on your own analysis. You may use materials that we’ve read for class (e.g. Wood’s essay on *Shadow of a Doubt* or Mulvey’s discussion of gaze theory) but the emphasis is on *your* ideas. If you would like to research additional materials, let me know *in advance* of doing the research. I can steer you in profitable directions. Any materials that you consult for the paper must be listed in a Works Consulted list at the end of the paper (MLA Citation style).

Do *not* consult Course Hero or other websites that provide notes, papers, exams, etc., from other students or other schools. To do so will constitute a violation of the UR Honor Code.

**Prompt:**

In “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” Andrew Sarris discusses the three premises that undergird his definition of a cinematic *auteur*: technical competence, personal style, and interior meaning. In class we have been studying Alfred Hitchcock’s cinema, investigating his style and the central questions or ideas with which his films typically engage (premises two and three).

Your paper should analyze two of Hitchcock’s films, examining how Hitchcock uses aspects of film form (*mise en scène*, lighting editing, composition, and so on) to tell a story that communicates broader ideas about human experiences in and of the world. How does Hitchcock use **stylistic features** (premise two) to tell a story that speaks to **larger ideas about human existence** (premise three)? What does the film *say* to its audience about the world and our place in it? How is that meaning communicated in the visual and narrative techniques?

For example, a paper on *Shadow of a Doubt* might argue that Hitchcock uses high contrast lighting to reveal Young Charlie’s gradual awakening to her uncle’s hidden desires and that he argues are present in everyone. These lightening techniques culminate in the three fade-to-black moments that mark Young Charlie’s growing awareness of life as an adult.

**Keep in mind**: Successful papers won’t simply state the qualities of a Hitchcock film and then describe them in the film(s) you are discussing. They will go beyond a description of those qualities to analyze *how they are used* to make a point about individuals and their experiences. For example, we discussed how Hitchcock uses Young Charlie’s loss of innocence in *Shadow of a Doubt* to comment on midcentury American small-town life. The most successful papers will build to points of significance and substance.

Possible themes, concepts, and features to consider in Hitchcock’s films:

* The power of desire. How does desire operate, and can it be controlled? How does it affect individual’s behavior? Is desire ultimately a positive or a negative force?
* Masculinity and/or femininity: its construction, strength and/or vulnerabilities. What roles are men and women expected to perform? Are masculinity and femininity fixed and determined or fluid and evolving? How do men and women experience gender expectations?
* Identity: how it is constructed and what threatens it. How do individuals experience their identities in Hitchcock’s films? Are identities fixed and determined or fluid and evolving? Are identities easily known? What challenges the character’s sense of self?
* Voyeurism and cinematic spectatorship. What does it mean to gaze upon other people? How does Hitchcock imagine the gaze to affect our relationship with one another?

These topics are deliberately broad. You will need to focus them to create an argument that can be supported successfully.

Films to choose from:

*Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) / *Strangers on a Train* (1951) / *Rear Window* (1954) / *Vertigo* (1958)/ *Psycho* (1960)