FSCP 81000/MALS 78500/BAM 70500
THE BIOGRAPHICAL FILM: EDITING A LIFE
CUNY Graduate Center, Room 3416
Thursdays, 4:15 to 7:15pm

Premise of the Course
This course will survey a range of examples of one of the most common film genres of the last century: the biographical film. In our meetings, we will pay special attention to how the preparation and execution of film biographies resemble and depart from that of their print equivalents.

Required Texts for the Course

Recommended Texts for the Course

All these books, both required and recommended, have been designated in the GC’s online bookstore and should be available on reserve for the course at the Mina Rees Library.

All the films required for viewing are available on reserve at the library as well, in DVD form. They may be viewed at the library or taken out for 3 hours at a time. You may want to coordinate your viewing plans with other members of the class.

Finally, some readings and viewings will be assigned on our Blackboard site. These are designated as “BB” in the syllabus.
Preliminary Schedule of Meetings

29 August—Introduction: Genre as Writing, Genre as Filming

5 September—NO CLASS (“Monday” at CUNY)

12 September—Epic as Adaptation
   Pre-Class Viewing: Napoleon (Dir: Abel Gance, 1927) [VIDEO 299]

19 September—Debunking and the Dream Factories
   Pre-Class Viewing: The Private Life of Henry VIII (Dir: Alexander Korda, 1933), in Alexander Korda’s Private Lives [DVD 1126]
   Pre-Class Reading: Custen, Introduction, chs. 1-2
   [Note: Personalized areas of inquiry should be determined by our 19 September meeting.]

26 September—Neo-Realism and the Texture of Life
   Pre-Class Viewing: The Flowers of St. Francis [Francesco, giullare di Dio] (Dir: Roberto Rossellini, 1950) [DVD 1137]
   Pre-Class Reading: Custen, chs. 3-4

3 October—Instant Adaptation in the Mass Culture Sweet Spot
   Pre-Class Viewing: I’ll Cry Tomorrow (Dir: Daniel Mann, 1955) [DVD 1132]
   Required Pre-Class Reading: Custen, chs. 5-6
   Recommended Pre-Class Reading: Lillian Roth, I’ll Cry Tomorrow [PN 2287 .R76 A3 1955]

10 October—The Epic Slice
   Pre-Class Viewing: Lawrence of Arabia (Dir: David Lean, 1962) [DVD 12]
   Pre-Class Reading: Bingham, Book I

17 October—Literal, Figural, and Cinematic Icons
   Pre-Class Viewing: Andrei Rublev (Dir: Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966) [DVD 1138]
   Pre-Class Reading: Cheshire (complete)
   [Note: Annotated bibliographies for personalized areas of inquiry should be distributed to the class at our 17 October meeting.]

24 October—The Long Game
   Pre-Class Viewing: Malcolm X (Dir: Spike Lee, 1992) [DVD 114]
   Pre-Class Reading: Baldwin (complete)

31 October—A Time for Masks
   Pre-Class Viewing: I’m Not There (Dir: Todd Haynes, 2007) [DVD 991]
   Pre-Class Reading: Haynes, “Superstar”
7 November—Biography as Collaboration
   Pre-Class Viewing: Elizabeth (Dir: Shekhar Kapur, 1998) [DVD 1129];
   Elizabeth: The Golden Age (Dir: Shekhar Kapur, 2007) [DVD 1133]
   Pre-Class Reading: Bingham, Book II

   [Note: Topics for final presentations and papers should be determined by our 7 November meeting.]

14 November—The Second Oldest Well-Known Life?
   Pre-Class Viewing: Cleopatra (1912) [BB] and one of the following three films:
   Cleopatra (Dir: Cecil B. DeMille, 1934), in The Cecil B. DeMille Collection [DVD 1127];
   Cleopatra (Dir: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963) [DVD 1128]; or Cleopatra (Dir; Franc Roddam, 1999) [DVD 1134].
   Consult with instructor before choosing which option.
   Recommended Pre-Class Reading: Schiff

21 November—The Best-Known US Life?
   Pre-Class Viewing: one of the following three films: Abraham Lincoln (Dir: D. W. Griffith, 1930) [DVD 1130];
   Young Mr. Lincoln (Dir: John Ford, 1939) [DVD 1136]; or Lincoln (Dir: Stephen Spielberg, 2012) [DVD 1135].
   Consult with instructor before choosing which option.
   Recommended Pre-Class Reading: Goodwin

28 November—NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Holiday)

5 December—Student Presentations I

12 December—Student Presentations II

19 December—Final Papers due in my English Program mailbox, Room 4406, by 12:00 noon

Requirements for This Course
There are four requirements for this course:
   (1) active, lively, open participation in class discussions;
   (2) an annotated bibliography of your chosen topic, to be distributed to the class on 17 October
   (3) a 15-to-20-minute presentation of original scholarship within that topic 5 December or 12 December;
   and (4) a c. 5000-word essay that builds on that presentation and should represent the first, creative stage of work toward a publishable scholarly essay, to be handed in 19 December.

Those taking the course for 2 credits will be responsible for (1) and (2).
Those taking the course for 3 credits will be responsible for (1), (2), and (3).
Those taking the course for 4 credits will be responsible for (1) through (4).