

**Take Home Final Exam
English 4860: The Gangster Film
Spring 2011
Dr. Lavery**

Answer any **TWO** of the questions below. Respond with two fully developed, articulate, well written, grammatically correct typed/word processed essays of at least 750 words each. Please e-mail me your exam (david.lavery@gmail.com) no later than 11 pm., May 4th.

Think of all these questions as open-ended "leading" questions. They do not have prefabricated "correct" answers. In reading and evaluating them, I will be judging how well you set about attempting to answer them as much as I will their equivalence to some idealized model. Try to make any case you set out to make convincing and imaginative. Write well, cite examples from the text, and convince me you have learned something, and you will be rewarded with a good grade.

1	<p>In <i>Hollywood Genres</i>, Thomas Schatz offers the following scheme for understanding the life history of a genre. All genres, according to Schatz exhibit</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">an experimental stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established, a classic stage, in which the conventions reach their "equilibrium" and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of refinement, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form, and finally a baroque (or "mannerist," or "self-reflexive") stage, when the form and its establishments are accented to the point where they "themselves become the "substance" or "content" of the work.</p> <p>You have watched gangster films (and television) from 1930 to the present. In an essay, map the development/evolution of the genre using Schatz's terminology. (You may use gangster films not discussed in class.)</p>
2	<p>In <i>The World in a Frame</i>, Leo Braudy makes the following claim:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Genre films essentially ask the audience, "Do you still want to believe this?" Popularity is the audience answering, "Yes." Change in genre occurs when the audience says, "That's too infantile a form of what we believe. Show us something more complicated." And genres turn to self-parody to say, "Well, at least if we make fun of it for being infantile, it will show how far we've come." Films and television have in this way speeded up cultural history.</p> <p>In an essay, explain what gangster films tell us about cultural history. Do we still "believe" in them? (You may use gangster films not discussed in class.)</p>
3	<p>You will recall that Robert Warshow (see the Warshow Power Point)</p>

	<p>discovered at least the following genetic/generic traits in his examination of the gangster film formula. Write an essay in which you demonstrate the truth or falsity, presence/absence of a given trait in the gangster films (in-class and out) you are familiar with. Please keep in mind that Warshow was writing in 1954. YOU MAY CHOOSE TO WRITE TWO ESSAYS FROM THIS QUESTION IN ORDER TO COMPLETE YOUR FINAL EXAM.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A "story of enterprise and success ending in precipitate failure" b. A romantic tragedy about a man "whose defeat springs with almost mechanical inevitability from the outrageous presumption of his demands: the gangster is bound to go on until he is killed." c. A tale of the city. d. The gangster is "without culture, without manners, without leisure." e. The gangster is "lonely and melancholy." f. The gangster is "expansive and noisy," not introspective. g. The gangster is violent in both his attractions and repulsions; he may lose control at any time. h. The gangster is never satisfied; complacency is fatal to him. i. The gangster is always trying to get ahead; always wanting to own something more, conquer some new territory. j. "Everyone wants to kill him and eventually someone will." k. The gangster does not seem to need love in any traditional sense. l. The gangster associates with prostitutes and "loose" women because of their "passive availability" and their "costliness." m. The gangster's possessions are central to his being; he owns things in a gaudy, exhibitionistic way. n. The gangster's death reveals his whole life to have been a mistake.
4	Trace the evolving role of women in the gangster genre.
5	Offer an account of the cinematic (cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, use of music, etc) evolution of the gangster genre.
6	Pick three gangster characters who epitomize the genre and offer thumbnail sketches of each, explaining the nature and significance of each.
7	Genre hybridization occurs when a given genre is "spliced" together, in whole or in part, with one or more other genres. Offer your analysis of gangster film hybridization.
8	<p>In his interview with Peter Bogdanovich, <i>Sopranos</i> creator David Chase explains his creation's central premise:</p> <p>The kernel of the joke, of the essential joke, was that life in America had gotten so savage, selfish—basically selfish—that even a mob guy couldn't take it any more. That was the essential joke, and he's in therapy because what he sees upsets him so much, what he sees every day . . . he and his guys were the ones who invented selfishness—they invented "me first"; they invented 'it's all about me'—and now he can't take it because the rest of the country has surpassed him.</p>

	Identify evidence of this joke in the episodes of <i>The Sopranos</i> we watched (or that you have seen on your own).
9	Compare/contrast <i>The Sopranos</i> as a television series to its cinematic ancestors and contemporaries
10	You are a Martian anthropologist who finds in the buried remains of a Tennessee university, in a professor's office, the syllabus (and the DVDs) for a course on something called "The Gangster Film." You have been asked to produce a report defining for your superiors what this thing called "Gangster Film" is, based solely on the evidence at your disposal. Write that report.

"*The Pilot*" (The Sopranos)