

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

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## Gangsterfilm

(\_film, \_sjanger) Også kalt mafiafilm. Kriminalfilm der hovedpersonene er gangstere – f.eks. i USA på 1920- eller 30-tallet, en periode som i økende grad var preget av økonomisk nedgang, stor arbeidsløshet, organisert kriminalitet osv. Mafiafilmer kan foregå i alle land og til alle tider etter ca. år 1900.

På 1920-tallet var det i USA forbudt å selge alkohol (forbudstiden, som varte til 1933), og dette bidro mye til at amerikansk mafia fikk et økonomisk fotfeste. Mange av gangsterne hadde italiensk opprinnelse, blant andre Al Capone, Frank Costello, Lucky Luciano og Vito Genovese. Mafiaen drev (og driver fortsatt) organisert kriminalitet med alkoholsalg, prostitusjon, utpressing, narkotika, gambling m.m. Mafiagruppene er kjent for sin indre lojalitet og ytre hensynsløshet.

Gangsteren er en typisk “moderne mann i storbyen” som vil lykkes for enhver pris (Robert Warshaw gjengitt fra Bessières 2011 s. 472). Det vanlige forløpet i en gangsterfilm er at en mann kjemper seg ut av anonymitet til suksess hinsides loven og så faller brutalt ned og dør (Bessières 2011 s. 472).

Lederen i en gangsterbande er alltid svært autoritær, og tåler ikke motstand. Forholdet mellom medlemmene i banden er i prinsippet preget av lojalitet og tillit, men det er ikke alltid realiteten. Store penger frister til å ta snarveier og dermed skaffe seg fiender, bryte lojalitetsbånd og sette livet på spill. Familiebånd er sterke, så illojalitet innen familien blir oppfattet som et forræderi som krever ekstrem straff. Kvinnene får vanligvis bare makt ved å opptre i kulissene og manipulere derfra.

Robert Warshaws essay “The Gangster as Tragic Hero” (1970) “shows how ambivalence about the American values of individualism and success are embodied in the violent conclusion of the gangster film: “No convention of the gangster film is more strongly established than this: it is dangerous to be alone. And yet the very condition of success makes it impossible not to be alone, for success is always the establishment of an individual pre-eminence that must be imposed on others, in whom it automatically arouses hatred; the successful man is an outlaw. The gangster’s whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, the final bullet thrusts him back, makes him after all, a failure” (p. 133). This represents a general failure precisely of the quest for success: “In the

deeper layers of the modern consciousness, *all* means are unlawful, every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, leaving one alone and guilty and defenseless among enemies: one is *punished* for success” (p. 133).” (Tony Hilfer i <https://www.albany.edu/scj/jcipc/vol10is1/hilfer.pdf>; lesedato 20.03.19)

“Hvis William Shakespeare hadde levd i vår tid, ville han vært filmregissør, mente forfatteren Raymond Chandler. Mye taler for at han i så fall ville lagd gangster-filmer. I likhet med herskerne i Shakespeares dramaer, må gangstersjefene takle renkespill og stormannsgalskap, intriger og maktsyke, hissig konkurrenter og utro tjenere. Gangsterfilmen oppsto parallelt med framveksten av organisert kriminalitet i USA, og begge deler er fortsatt i full sving. Filmer med bandeledere i sentrum preger markedet i mange land, fra USA, England og Frankrike i vest til Kina, India og Japan i øst. På sitt beste er disse filmene storslåtte dramaer med dyptloddende psykologiske portretter ned til minste birolle.” (Fredrik Wandrup i *Dagbladet* 15. mai 2013 s. 56)

“Genres come and go, but gangster movies never go away. From the black and white era to the 3D, these morally bankrupt murderous mobsters with their own codes of honour have held a fascination for audiences. The guns, the suits, the power struggles, the bonds, the betrayals and, most of all, the unfettered violence have made gangsters and the cinema perfect partners in crime. Class directors like Howard Hawks, Francis Ford Coppola and Scorsese have elevated the genre way above its exploitative roots” (<http://www.gamesradar.com/30-best-gangster-movies/>; lesedato 06.03.15).

Eksempler:

Francis Ford Coppola: *The Godfather* (1972)

Brian De Palma: *Scarface* (1983)

Sergio Leone: *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984)

Joel og Ethan Coen: *Miller's Crossing* (1990)

Guy Ritchie: *Snatch* (2000)

Ulrik Imtiaz Rolfsen: *Izzat* (2005) – Norges første gangsterfilm

Terence Winter, Martin Scorsese et al.: *Boardwalk Empire* (2010 og senere) – TV-serie

“The world of the gangster is made up of a pyramidal hierarchy. Only one man can be the top dog. We follow a single man as he makes his way up the various ranks of the structure. As in *PUBLIC ENEMY* (William Wellman, 1931), he may start out as a petty thief who sells his loot to a fence a few steps higher up in the system. He

quickly graduates to stealing liquor supplies, and finally to the rank of boss. Unlike Scarface and Little Caesar, who make it all the way, Cagney is undone by his own temper and arrogance before he becomes much more than small time. However, he is intrepid enough to attempt to revenge another gang's decimation of his own hierarchy, and is killed as a warning to others who might attempt to meddle with the strong. These men are rebels and renegades, but only within the confines of the existing order. They do not wish to establish a different kind of structure, but to fight their way to the top of an existing one. This pyramid is a microcosm of the capitalist structure. We have a very ambivalent response to the competition necessary to survive in our own competitive society. We know that we must defeat other people to succeed ourselves. And because we have reached any worthwhile position through aggression, we are left vulnerable to any competitor who covets our position. We are left with the choice of fighting with all comers, and we know we cannot do that successfully forever, or else failing." (Judith Hess i <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC01folder/GenreFilms.html>; lesedato 05.12.14)

"A gangster film would never suggest that a different sort of social and political structure might allow for more humane possibilities. In fact, the gangster film implicitly upholds capitalism by making the gangster an essentially tragic figure. The insolubility of his problem is not traced to its social cause; rather the problem is presented as growing out of the gangster's character. His tragic flaw is ambition; his stature is determined by the degree to which he rises in the hierarchy. We are lead to believe that he makes choices, not that he is victimized by the world in which he finds himself. The gangster film retains its appeal because our economic structure does not change – we must commit aggressive acts to survive within the confines of our capitalistic structure. And, as [Robert] Warshow implies, when we see a gangster film – be it LITTLE CAESAR (Mervyn Le Roy, 1930) or THE GODFATHER (Francis Ford Coppola, 1971) – we are moved not to struggle out of our class or to question our hierarchical social structure, but to subside and survive." (Judith Hess i <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC01folder/GenreFilms.html>; lesedato 05.12.14)

I *Godfather*-trilogien (1972, 1974 og 1990) "the Corleone family is classical to the core. Vito Corleone is the undisputed pater familias and treated as God – for the head of the family is the source of affection and stability in the otherwise cold and chaotic *civitas terrena* [jordisk rike] that the Corleones find themselves in. Like the traditional cult of the father bound up in the practice of filial piety, "Pop" or "Papa" is the cornerstone on which the Corleones act and think [...] The first act of *The Godfather* centers around Vito Corleone as the aging but wise patriarch of his family and his family's criminal empire. It establishes the Corleone family and the values that they operate by. The revenge sought against Sollozzo (and McClusky by contingent relationship) is for the attempted assassination of the patriarch of the family. Sonny and Michael won't rest until Sollozzo is put to his grave for having stepped over a line in attempting to kill the head of the Corleone family which was a boundary of transgression that Sollozzo – and those under his thumb like

McClusky – must be punished for. But what prompted the hit against the Godfather in the first place was Sonny's uncontrollable outburst at the meeting with Sollozzo. [...] Vito Corleone runs his family, and empire, through an unflinching loyalty and devotion to him. It is the ultimate form of filial piety. The piety of the sons is measured through their dedication to their father. Religion also surrounds the landscape of *The Godfather*, adding the pious element to devotion to the filial head. While the only scene in a house of worship proper in the first film is the baptism scene, brilliantly set to highlight the simultaneous hypocrisy and fidelity of Michael's own split faith – his nominal Catholicism and actual filial piety – the reality of filial piety and the intimacy tied to devotion to one's family fills the air throughout the film.” (Paul Krause i <https://voegelinview.com/family-love-and-tragedy-in-the-godfather/>; lesedato 07.09.21)

“[T]he defeat of the Corleone family is seen through its breaking apart and absorption into the homogenous bland of mainstream American life. In this sense Michael truly becomes legitimate as the weight of progress and self-centered individualism takes over. What was noble from the Old World that the Corleone family initially embodied is destroyed in its absorption by the New World – it is not without coincidence that the Corleone family has moved into the new frontier of the New World: The American West which promises prosperity and liberation from the old ways. In the final bit of irony in the transformation of the Corleone family the family business dissolves into a corporate conglomerate ruled by a single man alone in the world. Michael is miserable, haunted, and alone. [...] But it also shows the limit of filial piety, the lust for power, and how easy love can be corrupted.” (Paul Krause i <https://voegelinview.com/family-love-and-tragedy-in-the-godfather/>; lesedato 07.09.21)

Gangsterfilmer “played out the familiar oppositions that had come to structure much of traditional American (western) mythology: country (small town) versus city, individualism versus community, self-interest versus social responsibility, corruption versus virtue, desire versus gratification, leisure versus work, sexual expression versus moral rectitude (p. 26).” (Jonathan Munby sitert fra <https://www.albany.edu/scj/jcipc/vol10is1/hilfer.pdf>; lesedato 20.03.19)

Jack Shadoians bok *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster/Crime Film* (1979) er “the most substantial consideration of a film genre that is a distinctive part of American popular art. [...] The author is especially provocative in writing about audience identification with the gangster/criminals portrayed in the gloom of the theater. Without overworking the analogy, he traces the connection between our being “spellbound in darkness” by the underworld and those unconscious human urges to throw off societal restrictions, desires that are released in dreams but are seen to be dead-end fantasies in the harsh light of next morning's realities and practical imperatives. The films are both liberating dreams and sobering truths. They reflect both American optimism and despair.” (<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/dreams-and-dead-ends>; lesedato 14.05.13).

“They say that behind every great man is a great woman, mistress, and probably a gang of mobsters too. Remember that America was built on dreams, courage, passion, sweat, tears, blood, and *a little bit* of illegal activity. And all that also happens to be the necessary ingredients of a good gangster. That’s why gangster films top America’s favorite all-time movie genres. In a way, they represent the struggle between the authorities and families of organized crime, which helped define what the American Capitalist culture is today. Whether you’re rooting for Tony Montana (Al Pacino) in *Scarface* or Tom Powers (James Cagney) in *The Public Enemy* we all want the same thing – for them to eliminate all their rivals and get away with the loot and the girl. Why? Because that’s the American Way, that’s why.” (Peter Richmond i [http://uk.askmen.com/entertainment/mrtech\\_60/85\\_tech\\_gadgets.html](http://uk.askmen.com/entertainment/mrtech_60/85_tech_gadgets.html); lesedato 05.03.15)

I 2009 ga Luca Becchetti sammen med andre forfattere ut boka *The Vatican Secret Archives*. Professor Trond Berg Eriksen kobler avsløringene i denne boka til gangsterhistorier: “Fortellingene, som ofte er kriminalromaner, åpner seg gjennom koder til nye koder, i lag på lag av hemmeligheter, som i siste hånd bare blottlegger betrakterens eget mytologiske blindpunkt, den sekulæres umodifiserte overtro. Enda bedre enn hemmeligheter, er skitne hemmeligheter. Derfor sier det seg selv at de skitneste hemmelighetene er de aller beste. Et høydepunkt i Vatikanets skitne hemmeligheter er avslutningen av trilogien *Gudfaren* hvor Francis Ford Coppola – etter Mario Puzos roman – sender Al Pacino, som er den uovervinnelige mafia-bossen fra New York, på sitt største og siste tap i kampen mot Vatikanets perfide megaskurker som skjuler seg bak fromhetens karnevalsmasker. Den sentimentale, amerikanske profitøren blir knust i møtet med den onde selv.” (*Morgenbladet* 26. mars–8. april 2010 s. 51)

“*Gudfaren. Sopranos. Mafia-spillene*. Det finnes spor av mafiaen i hele populærkulturen. Vi fascineres av dresskledde sicilianere og andre skurker, og glemmer at de er drapsmenn. Forfatter Geir Follevåg har skrevet boken *Mafiakoden* om paradokset. [...] - Hva er det vi liker så godt? - Det er mange ting. Det enkleste og mest åpenbare er det rent estetiske. På et mer avansert nivå er det for eksempel mulig å skimte en positiv frihetstrang i mafiaens motstand mot staten. Vi kan kanskje kjenne oss igjen, til en viss grad, i skepsisen mot staten også her i Norge. [...] - Hva mener mafiaen selv om måten de fremstilles på? Kan fiksjonen påvirke dem til å bli mer karikerte? - Det er nok en slags vekselvirkning der. Mario Puzo (forfatter av *Gudfaren*, journ. anm.) hentet inspirasjon fra den virkelige mafiaen, men samtidig digger de mafiafilmene nå, og prøver å etterlikne dem. Det blir et høna eller egget-problem.” (*Morgenbladet* 12.–18. oktober 2012 s. 42) Geir Follevågs bok “tar for seg paradokset hvor vi på den ene siden forherliger mafiaen og deres framstilling i populærkulturen, samtidig som vi blir moralsk frastøtt av realitetens grusomheter. Hvordan har det blitt slik, og hva har det å si for vår oppfatning av den kriminelle virksomheten? Follevåg bruker mange teoretiske innfallsvinkler, og trekker eksempler fra bl.a. Sopranos, The Wire og Gudfaren-

filmene, for å beskrive det han kaller Mafiakoden.” (*Morgenbladet* 26. oktober–1. november 2012 s. 41)

Hovedpersonen i den amerikanske TV-serien *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) er mafialederen Tony Soprano. Han går regelmessig til terapi hos en psykiater på grunn av sine problemer. “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 anymore. 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.” (forfatter og produsent av serien, David Chase, sitert fra Lüdeke 2011 s. 177) Det er også andre markante skiller fra tradisjonelle “gangster-epos”: “The model for [...] gangster pictures [...] has always been *The Rise and Fall of...* Our show doesn’t have a rise and fall – it’s like *The Going Along of Tony Soprano*.” (Chase sitert fra Lüdeke 2011 s. 179)

Tony Soprano befinner seg i samme situasjon som sine egne ofre – dominert av en makt utenfor seg selv som gjør han hjelpeløs og full av angst (Maurice 2009 s. 132). Tony, med blant annet sin kroppslige overvekt, har blitt oppfattet som “a corrupt embodiment of the American dream” (Lüdeke 2011 s. 191).

Den italienske forfatteren Roberto Saviano skrev om mafiaen i boka *Gomorra* (2006, på norsk 2008) og boka ble filmatisert av Matteo Garrone i 2008. “Filmen skildrer et nådeløst, korrupt, kynisk og kriminelt samfunn som har gjennomsyret Napoli. Den viser flere nivåer i et økosystem hvor unge gutter rekrutteres i det ene sekundet og kastet som brukt dopapir i det neste. Alt blottet for skrupler eller et gram av moralsk ettertanke. Narkotikahandel, utpressing, korrupsjon og våpenhandel er bare faktorer i næringskjeden. Mafiaen i Napoli har eksistert så lenge at den har røtter ned i de minste kroker. Mennesker blir født inn i et system med en natur hvor den mest samvittighetsløse er den perfekte soldat, og gjør han ikke nytten står det alltid noen nye klar til å ta over. [...] Garrone har fjernet mye av den journalistiske dokumentasjonen fra Savianos bok (som gjør at forfatteren i dag voktes av livvakter døgnet rundt) til fordel for et tettere drama. Det er den konstante frykten rollefigurene lever under som driver handlingen ubønnhørlig framover til sin naturlige og brutale konklusjon. Garrone holder frem et råtnende stykke Europa for oss, han viser oss med enkle grep den logikken som styrer den italienske mafiaen og hvordan den gjennomsyrer italiensk samfunnsliv. [...] Den sosialrealistiske fortellerteknikken gjør hele filmen. Det er så stilsikkert og overbevisende at det er fort gjort å glemme at man ikke ser på en dokumentar. [...] Denne filmen om den italienske camorraen inneholder flere blodige draps-skildringer som gjør at den får 15-årsgrense.” (<http://www.bergenkino.no/incoming/article935999.ece>; lesedato 24.02.15)

Den britiske regissøren Sam Mendes' film *Road to Perdition* (2002) er basert på en tegneserieroman av amerikaneren Max Allan Collins. Filmen "is like a Greek tragedy, dealing out remorseless fates for all the characters. [...] It has been compared to "The Godfather," but "The Godfather" was about characters with free will, and here the characters seem to be performing actions already long since inscribed in the books of their lives. [...] a limbo of darkness, shadow, night, fearful faces half-seen, cold and snow. His characters stand in downpours, the rain running off the brims of their fedoras and soaking the shoulders of their thick wool overcoats. Their feet must always be cold. The photography creates a visceral chill. The story involves three sets of fathers and sons – two biological, the third emotional – and shows how the lives they lead make ordinary love between them impossible. [...] The movie's plot asks whether it is possible for fathers to spare their sons from the costs of their sins." (Roger Ebert i <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/road-to-perdition-2002>; lesedato 06.03.15)

De brasilianske regissørene Fernando Meirelles og Kátia Lunds film *City of God* (2002) er en gangsterfilm, selv om gangsterne er barn som lever i slummen i Brasil. "*City of God* is narrated by Rocket, a boy growing up in one of Rio's *favelas*, slum towns that exist outside the laws and popular image of Rio. [...] *City of God* is based on real events and figures; adapted from a largely biographical novel by Paulo Lins, the film uses mainly amateur actors, location shooting, and handheld camera work to convey a sense of realism. [...] it is a landscape with violent and incomprehensible qualities. In chase sequences, for example, camera angles are repeatedly reversed, confusing direction and space. The constantly moving handheld camera is combined with rapid editing to create a sense of disorientation. The dangers of the space are emphasized by seemingly unmotivated camera movements and unattached point of view shots. Shots through gaps and from under objects are reminiscent of war footage and position subjects as if sniper targets, particularly in the later segments of the film. By this time, the area has become a war zone: "you got used to living in Vietnam," narrates Rocket." (Carlsten 2005)

I *City of God* blir det brasilianske politiet "shown to be corrupt; in every scene in which they appear, the police take bribes from, steal from, or kill the men of the City of God. [...] The City of God is filled with violent characters; in fact, it is fair to say that the characters are defined by their relationship to violence. [...] Each has his own agenda and pretext for violence, be it revenge, protection, or a desire for respect. [...] The film in fact suggests that violence defies not only representation, but also explanation. Motives are suggested – evilness, vengeance, territorialism, animal instinct, initiation, and self-definition – but none seem adequate to explain the omnipresence of violence in the *favela*." (Carlsten 2005)

"The newspaper is thrilled with Rocket's photographs, which bring the spectacle of the *favela* into the lives of other Brazilians. The cost of this (partial and problematic) 'arrival', however, is that Rocket now feels he cannot return to the City of God. Rocket assumes that his photographs are a death sentence, but in fact

the gangsters are willing participants in the spectacle. L'il Ze recognizes the power of the media in creating his image as "Boss", and demands more photographs. Each side of the equation exploits the other, while Rocket, the maker and seller of images, exploits both. Ironically, though, Rocket's success comes from returning to the City of God. His ability to produce and frame its images for outsiders means that Rocket is dependent upon violence for his livelihood." (Carlsten 2005)

*City of God* framstiller en fatalistisk verden, men seeren blir tvunget til å ta stilling: "The use of voice-over narration and an episodic narrative structure, rather than encouraging the viewer to simply accept Rocket's perspective, is used to raise questions about the viewer's own relationship to the violence onscreen. [...] In her book *Disappearing Acts*, Diana Taylor discusses the role of the spectator in another militarized Latin American nation, Argentina. Taylor discusses the notion of 'percepticide' and how violent spectacle can make "people pull back in fear, denial, and tacit complicity from the show of force. Therein lay its power." (Taylor, 123) Taylor also explains how being compelled to watch violence, while unable to prevent it, disempowers the viewer. Any sense that the viewer has control over the narrative of *City of God* is undermined by the film's reversals and restrictions; rather than godlike omniscience, the film engenders uncertainty, helplessness and complicity. [...] *City of God* breaks with audience expectations by presenting no viable moral choice. The allegory of the chicken's dilemma – "if you run away they get you and if you stay they get you too" – illustrates the film's fatalism, a fatalism that is not only ascribed to Rocket, but impressed upon the viewer throughout the film. The illusion of escape through sports, education, work, religion or even art is destroyed. [...] Over a montage of gunfire and weaponry, the gang recites the 'Our Father'. Religion is not, in these cases, an escape from but an aid to violence." (Carlsten 2005)

"Much of the bodily violence in the film [*City of God*] is implied. In an interview, Meirelles says that this was a conscious choice: "Every time I had an opportunity to show violence I tried to avoid showing it..." (Gonzalez) The effect can be equated to Brechtian distanciation; rather than empathizing, the audience is asked to evaluate. Rather than trying to show the audience the reality, the audience is asked to imagine it. To further problematize viewer response, events are frequently presented from an opposing or uncertain point of view. The rape of Ned's girlfriend, for instance, is filmed not from Ned's perspective but from that of a bystander or observer looking over his shoulder. This positions the viewer not to identify with the subject, but outside the subject. A typical sequence that employs the use of off-screen space to distance and unsettle the viewer is Shorty's murder of his wife. A long shot frames a view through the bedroom doorway; Shorty wields a shovel and attacks his wife, but the composition excludes the woman and the viewer must imagine the contact of the shovel to her body. In the next scene, the shot composition is the same, but now Shorty is seen digging; the hole (or grave) is still excluded from the composition. A similar technique is used in the sequence that reveals L'il Dice's murders at the motel. The audience has already seen the



victims in an earlier sequence [...]; now, they are not shown. Instead, the viewer sees only L'il Dice, his weapon, and his expression of ecstasy. This strategy creates an unsettling effect. The viewer is constructed as not only complicit, but morally suspect, simultaneously wanting to see more and responding less. If the photographer of the images is committing an act of violence, so is the audience that looks at and demands those images.” (Carlsten 2005)

“There are three scenes, however, which [i *City of God*] significantly reverse this technique, presenting and dwelling upon stylized tableaux of disfigured bodies. The first of these is the original scene of the motel massacre. The scene is silent as the camera slowly pans across rooms of bodies, arranged in stiff, unnatural positions; one woman hangs from a grill as though on a torture rack. In the second of these scenes, the montage that precedes the gang war, the bloody bodies of children slowly dissolve into other bodies, overlapped by distorted dialogue. In the final tableau, at the film’s conclusion, the camera cuts from one dead gang member to another, close-ups showing the blood, brains and shattered bodies. This scene is also silent, slowing down and contrasting sharply with the chaotic and kinetic shootout that precedes it. [...] Violence is the organizing principle of the film, which is full of interruptions, ruptures, and narrative reversals. [...] *City of God* offers a subject position, that of the spectator who controls the gaze and the narrative, but challenges and erodes that position through violence, causing the spectator to question the nature of violence, image-making, and responsibility.” (Carlsten 2005)

“Sjefen for Cosa Nostra, Michele Greco, uttalte at det var filmen “Gudfaren” som var årsaken til at man begynte å føre rettssaker mot mafiaen på Sicilia. Foran tv-kameraene påsto Nicola Schiavone, faren til sjefene Francesco og Walter Schiavone, at camorrafenomenet kun hadde med gatekriminalitet å gjøre, og at camorraen bare eksisterte i hodet på dem som skrev om den.” (Roberto Saviano i *Dagbladet* 24. april 2010 s. 65)

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