

FM308 How The West Was Won: The Western Film

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst

Advanced Module: Artists, Genres, Movements

Course Times: Tuesday 15.45-17.15; Thursday 15.45-17.15; weekly film screening Tuesday 19.30-22.00

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 - 15.00

Course Description

According to the influential French film critic André Bazin the Western is “the American film par excellence.” Its “profound reality” is “myth” combined with “the ethics of the epic”. “The Civil War is part of nineteenth century history, and the western has turned it into the Trojan War of the most modern of epics. The migration to the West is our Odyssey.” At once creating (in its best examples) a complex vision of the moral and legal foundations of the United States, the genre is also known for its construction of enduring popular, even stereotypical images of the figures, groups, and forces integral to the shaping of America’s geopolitical and social landscape.

As a form of modern mythology in its own right the genre of the Western film merges fact and fiction to reflect the history and the self-image of the American nation, the hopes and aspirations, but also the darker sides of a civilization born out of European roots in the New World (colonial expansion, genocide, exploitation, environmental destruction). The Western films speak about a time and a historical process in which both the individual and the collective struggled to find a way to establish a new social order of freedom, justice, law and progress along the *frontier*, translating national and cultural experience into popular images with a focus on the essentials in human nature and civil development. Concepts and ideologies like the *frontier* (Frederick Jackson Turner) and *manifest destiny* (John L. O’Sullivan) and their significance for the American history and mentality as well as the enduring political psychology based on the belief in “regeneration through violence” (Richard Slotkin) are part of the appeal and the legacy of the Western film genre that is not static, but has developed reflecting social and political change during the 20th century.

In this class we explore and discuss aesthetical, socio-historical, psychological and philosophical aspects of the Western genre and its development with a focus on the classical period between the 1930s and the 1960s (a sequel to this course about the Western genre in its later and postmodern appearances 1969 – 2016 is planned for the following year).

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history, film theory and film analysis.

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

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Absences will significantly 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.

Please see the Student Handbook for college policies on absences due to serious illness or other important cause.

Assessment / Writing Assignments

Two screening reports (1000 words each) in the first half of the semester (week 3; deadline: Thursday, Feb 14, 15.30 – and week 7; deadline: Thursday, March 14, 15.30), short in-class writing assignments, individual presentations, and a final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15 (Deadline for final essay: Wednesday, May 15, midnight). The topic of this 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

All assignments and written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Participation:	25 %
Screening reports:	25 %
Presentation:	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

Week 1:

Introduction: Aspects of the Western Genre (1)

No class on Thursday, January 31!

Week 2:

Introduction: Aspects of the Western Genre (2)
The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean (1972, John Huston)

Week 3:
A Group of Travellers – *Stagecoach* (1939, John Ford)

Week 4:
Taming of the West – *My Darling Clementine* (1946, John Ford)

Week 5:
Father and Son – *Red River* (1948, Howard Hawks)

Week 6:
Native Americans: Tales of Otherness – *Broken Arrow* (1950, Delmer Daves)
A Man Called Horse (1970, Elliot Silverstein)
Dances With Wolves (1990, Kevin Costner)

Week 7:
The Mythical Loner – *Shane* (1952, George Stevens)
Pale Rider (1985, Clint Eastwood)

Week 8:
Law and Order – *High Noon* (1952, Fred Zinnemann)
Rio Bravo (1959, Howard Hawks)

Week 9:
Women of the West – *Johnny Guitar* (1954, Nicholas Ray)
No evening film screening on Tuesday, March 26!

Week 10:
Community and the Outsider, Violence, Racism, and Hate – *The Searchers* (1956, John Ford)
The Outlaw Josey Wells (1976, Clint Eastwood)

Week 11:
“When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” History, Fact, Legend – *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962, John Ford)

Spring Break: April 15 – April 22, 2019

Week 12:
Cheyenne Autumn (1964, John Ford)
Soldier Blue (1970, Ralph Nelson)

Week 13:
The Ageing West – *The Wild Bunch* (1968, Sam Peckinpah)

Week 14:
The European Vision – *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968, Sergio Leone)

Week 15: Completion Week (May 13 – May 17, 2019)

Literature

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Essay Deadlines

Deadline for screening report 1 (1000 words): week 3, Thursday, Feb 14, 15.30
Deadline for screening report 2 (1000 words): week 7, Thursday, March 14, 15.30
Deadline for final essay (3000-3500 words): week 15, Wednesday, May 15, midnight