

FM 324: *How the West Was Lost*: Revisionist and Post-Western Films

Seminar Leader: Matthias Hurst

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening), Tuesday, 15.45 – 19.00

Course Description

The Western Film genre, “the American film par excellence” (André Bazin), though dealing with historical topics such as the nineteenth-century expansion of colonization and capitalist forms of exchange, also alluded in the 1960s and 1970s to changes then taking place in American society. Questions of race and gender underwent critical scrutiny in revisionist versions of the Western film, while ideological concepts like the “frontier” and “manifest destiny” were challenged from the perspective of a postwar critique of American foreign policy. Notions of civilization and progress too became surrounded with unease and skepticism. Environmental questions attained a new importance, with some films imagining “a dystopian present so bad that any future at all is unimaginable.” (David Lusted). The revisionist and dystopian Western films also influenced another subgenre, the so called Post-Western, which set out to explore the “psycho-geographical space” (Neil Campbell) of the American West, exploring nation’s modern self-image under the influence of a new globalized culture. We read revisionist Western and Post-Western films in relation to the latest ruptures in US-American culture and society. Among the films discussed are *Lonely Are The Brave* (1962, David Miller), *Little Big Man* (1970, Arthur Penn), *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973, Sam Peckinpah), *Heaven’s Gate* (1980, Michael Cimino), *Unforgiven* (1992, Clint Eastwood), *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005, Tommy Lee Jones), *No Country for Old Men* (2007, Joel and Ethan Coen), *The Homesman* (2014, Tommy Lee Jones), *The Rider* (2017, Chloé Zhao), and *The Sisters Brothers* (2018, Jacques Audiard).

Advanced Module: Artists, Genres, Movements

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history, film theory, and film analysis. Readiness to do independent research and to present in class.

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 laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

I expect everybody to do their own work and to write their own papers, including correct MLA citation. **Plagiarism or the use of AI are no options**; they are an absolute no-no. Anybody who cheats will fail that particular assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, fail the class.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

More than two absences will 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, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings! When you are in class, you need to be there (and not leashed to or distracted by electronic devices). Please turn your phones off before class.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment / Assignments

Individual presentations in class, based on individual research and the film screenings, starting in week 5 or week 6.

Mid-term essay (1500 words), due in week 7, Friday, October 17, 2025, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

The topic of the mid-term essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed in the first seven weeks of the course.

Final essay (3000-3500 words), due in week 15, Thursday, December 18, 2025, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, December 8, 2025, midnight.

The topic of the 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

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation:	25 %
Presentation:	25 %
Midterm Essay:	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

* Tentative schedule depending on availability of films, presentations, and intensity of class discussions

WEEK 1

Introduction: *How The West Was Won* – American History and the Western Genre

No film screening in Week 1!

WEEK 2

Methods and Modes of Film Analysis and Interpretation

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

WEEK 3

Cowboy Existentialism – *Lonely Are The Brave* (1962, David Miller)

The Shooting (1966, Monte Hellman)

Dead Man (1995, Jim Jarmusch)

WEEK 4

“There is an endless supply of White Man. But there always has been a limited number of Human Beings.” – *Little Big Man* (1970, Arthur Penn)

Soldier Blue (1970, Ralph Nelson)

Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson (1976, Robert Altman)

WEEK 5

De-Mystification and Re-Mystification – *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971, Robert Altman)

The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean (1972, John Huston)

WEEK 6

The Times They Are A-Changin': *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973, Sam Peckinpah)

The Wild Bunch (1969, Sam Peckinpah)

WEEK 7

Regeneration Through Violence: *Unforgiven* (1992, Clint Eastwood)

Heaven's Gate (1980, Michael Cimino)

Fall Break: Monday, October 20 – Friday, October 26, 2025

WEEK 8

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005, Tommy Lee Jones)

WEEK 9

Don't Come Knocking (2005, Wim Wenders)

WEEK 10

No Country for Old Men (2007, Joel and Ethan Coen)

WEEK 11

Meek's Cutoff (2010, Kelly Reichardt)

WEEK 12

The Homesman (2014, Tommy Lee Jones)

Slow West (2015, John Maclean)

WEEK 13

The Rider (2017, Chloé Zhao)

WEEK 14

The Sisters Brothers (2018, Jacques Audiard)

WEEK 15

December 15 – December 19, 2025: Completion week

Literature:

Allen, Richard, and Murray Smith (eds.). *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: British Film Institute, 2004.

- Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema." In: Philip Rosen (ed.). *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 299-318.
- Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Western." In: A. Bazin. *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, pp. 149-157.
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- Brown, Larry A. *How Films Tell Stories. The Narratology of Cinema*. Nashville: Creative Arts Press, 2016.
- Buscombe, Edward. "The Western". In: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.). *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 286-294.
- Campbell, Neil. *Post-Westerns. Cinema, Region, West*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013.
- Carmichael, Deborah A. (ed.). *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns. Ecocriticism in an American Film Genre*. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006.
- Carter, Matthew. *Myth of the Western. New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
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- Edgerton, Gary R., and Michael T. Marsden (eds.). *Westerns. The Essential Journal of Popular Film & Television Collection*. London/New York: Routledge, 2012.
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- Gibbs, John. *Mise-en-Scène. Film Style and Interpretation*. London/New York:

- Wallflower Press 2003.
- Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*. Third Edition. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Hill, John, and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.). *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Hine, Robert V., and John Mack Faragher. *The American West. A New Interpretive History*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Hughes, Howard. *Stagecoach to Tombstone. The Filmgoers' Guide to the Great Westerns*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008.
- Kitses, Jim, and Gregg Rickman (eds.). *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1998.
- Kitses, Jim. "Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western." (1969) In: Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman (eds.). *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1998, pp. 57-68.
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- Wright, Will. *Sixguns and Society. A Structural Study of the Western*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1977.

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay: Friday, October 17, 2025 (Week 7), noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

The topic of the mid-term essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed in the first seven weeks of the course.

Final essay: Thursday, December 18, 2025 (Week 15), midnight

* Please note: Graduating students – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, December 8, 2025, midnight.