

McGill University
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

ITAL 307: Topics in Italian Culture

Fascism in Italian Literature and Cinema
from the 1950s to the Present

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Course Description

When Machiavelli inaugurated modern political science, the model of governance that he proposed was distinctly totalitarian. The unification of Italy, which was Machiavelli's ultimate end, was presented as only possible under the leadership of a strong man who, in addition to military and diplomatic skills, was able to obtain and maintain the support of his subjects through manipulation of their self-interest and the promotion of political stability. In this way, Machiavelli laid the foundations for modern totalitarianisms and therefore of Italian Fascism which built on those foundations but distinguished itself by taking full advantage of the technological developments ushered in by the twentieth century. It is precisely its radical modernity that made Italian Fascism the most influential and enduring totalitarian model in the West and even globally.

The genius of Fascism was to understand the key role of culture, which it understood as an identity defining symbolic system, in marshalling and sustaining a wide popular consensus. The Fascist attention to popular culture was especially innovative and led to the deployment of a wide array of popular media to promote the regime and the cult of his leader Mussolini. This cultural strategy was at the heart of the aestheticization of politics and through it the bypassing of liberal democracy institutions which was one of the hallmarks of the Fascist model of government. The legacy of Fascism is alive and well today and it continues to inspire populist movements across the globe.

In this context, this course will examine how post-World War II Italian culture responded (or failed to respond) to the challenge of Fascism. We will focus in particular on especially the representations of the regime in key works by eminent Italian writers and filmmakers who reflect on the momentous impact of Fascism not only on Italian history and society but also on the Italian cultural imaginary. Contemporary populism and historical revisionism have made it evident that it is precisely in the imaginary that the seeds of Fascism have remained dormant and ready to blossom when the discontent with the status quo finds no other alternative. What can we

learn from these works of the creative imagination that can serve as an antidote to the revival of an ideology which is deeply linked with some of the most staggering crimes against humanity ever committed? What are the fault lines of an imaginary, such as the Italian one, which continues to struggle with the reality of Fascism? These are the questions that we will be asking as we examine the material on the syllabus.

Course Work

Attendance is mandatory and participation in class discussion is essential. Students will be asked to discuss every film presented in class. The student's attendance record and performance in class discussion will determine her/his participation mark.

During the term, students will be asked to complete the following assignments:

- (a) two 300/350-word forum entries **due on Wednesday, January 31, and Wednesday, February 21.** Each entry will respond to a specific question, as set out in the Schedule of Activities and in myCourses;
- (b) a mid-term take-home examination on the material covered in class up to that point, the exam questions will be released on myCourses on Friday, March 1 and will be **due on Monday, March 11;**
- (c) a 2,500/3,000-word final paper (MLA Style) **due on Friday, April 12.** A list of suggested topics for the final paper will be handed out after the Winter Reading Break. *Students wishing to discuss a topic of their own choice must obtain the instructor's permission by Wednesday, March 13th at the latest. Permission may be obtained by e-mail, or during an in person or on-line meeting.*

All assignments including **must** be handed in electronically (via MyCourses). *There is no final examination for this course.*

Evaluation

Attendance, participation and progress:	10%
Responses (2 x 10% each):	20%
Midterm take home examination:	30%
Final paper:	40%

Please note that students obtaining a failing grade (D, J or F) will not be entitled to do extra work to improve their mark.

Course Materials

Course materials include:

- (a) books to be purchased from the McGill bookstore: John Foot's *Blood and Power: The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism* (history), Francesco Filippi's *Mussolini Also Did a Lot of Good: The Spread of Historical Amnesia* (history), Alberto Moravia's *The Conformist* (novel), Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini* (novel), Antonio Scurati, *M: Son of the Century* (novel);
- (b) films (to be watched individually by students): *Italian Fascism* (documentary, available in Dropbox), Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (feature, available on Kanopy), Bernardo Bertolucci's *1900* and *The Conformist* (features, available at the McGill library and in Dropbox), and Vittorio De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini* (feature, available at the McGill library and in Dropbox); and
- (c) a few articles which will be made available to students on line.

Use of Cellphones, Computers and Recording Devices

Cellphones must be turned off and stored away during class.

Computers may be used ONLY for discrete note taking. The instructor will ask students using the computer for any other purpose (such as e-mail or web browsing) to leave the classroom. Computers must be turned off during Quizzes.

No recording device of any kind can be used unless specifically authorised by the instructor.

McGill Policy Statements

1. McGill University values *academic integrity*. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).
L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>).
2. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have *the right to submit in English or in French* any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Acknowledgement

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose presence marks this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

L'Université McGill est sur un emplacement qui a longtemps servi de lieu de rencontre et d'échange entre les peuples autochtones, y compris les nations Haudenosaunee et Anishinabeg. Nous reconnaissons et remercions les divers peuples autochtones dont leur présence marque ce territoire sur lequel les peuples du monde entier se réunissent maintenant.