

McGill University
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

ITAL 477: Italian Cinema & Video

**The Spaghetti Western:
The Politics of Masculinity in Late 20th Century Italy and Beyond**

Prof. Eugenio Bolongaro

Office: 680 Sherbrooke Street West, Room 443

E-mail: eugenio.bolongaro@mcgill.ca

Office Hours: *by appointment*

Course Description

When we consider the contribution made by the Italian cinema to the cinemas of the world, we immediately think of post-World War II neorealism which flourished in Italy in the 1940s and 1950s and from then on has influenced directors across the globe. Also, some key Italian “auteurs” come immediately to mind, such as Fellini and Antonioni, and to a lesser extent De Sica, Visconti, Bertolucci and, more recently, Sorrentino (*The Great Beauty*) Garrone (*Gomorra, Reality*).

However, the Italian cinematic tradition is more complex and encompasses a rich production of genre films which enjoyed great success with popular audiences at home but also abroad. From the “peplum” sagas to “pink neorealism,” from erotic comedies to melodramas, the Italian industry maintained a lively presence on the national and international film market. One of the most interesting genres to emerge in this vein is indeed the Spaghetti Western. A label that was initially used to mock the Italian revival of the American Western, eventually became the universally recognized name of a fascinating phenomenon of the cultural import-export famously described by James Clifford.

In this course, we will examine works that are at the heart of the Spagetti Western corpus. We will begin with the four classic films by Sergio Leone, the most celebrated director of the genre. Then we will consider lesser known works which expose even more clearly the historical tensions and political contradictions which manifest themselves in the Italian appropriation of the Western imaginary. We will end the course considering the links between the Spaghetti Western and internationally acclaimed directors, namely, Akira Kurosawa and Qentin Tarantino, the former a precursor of the genre and the latter his latest contemporary practitioner. In conducting this survey, we will pay special attention to issues of gender and masculinity and their political significance.

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.

Students will also be responsible for:

- (a) three (2) short **quizzes**, held on Wednesday, **February 14**, and Wednesday, **March 27**, which will test basic knowledge of the films screened during the previous weeks;
- (b) an original **video clip** (1-2 minute in length) accompanied by a **commentary** (500-700 words), due on Monday, **March 11, 2023**;
- (c) a **final paper**, 2000-2500 words in length, which must include a visual component (e.g., stills from the films discussed). The final paper is due on Friday, **April 12, 2024**. 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, or wishing to complete a visual project rather than a final paper, must obtain the instructor's permission by Monday, March 25th at the latest. Permission may be obtained by e-mail, or during an in person or on-line meeting.*

Assignments must be handed in electronically (via myCourses).

There is no final examination for this course.

Evaluation

Attendance, participation and progress:	10%
Quizzes (2 x 10%):	20%
Video Clip & Commentary:	30%
Final paper (2000-2500 wds):	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) book to be purchased from the McGill bookstore:
Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema*
- (b) films (to be watched individually by students):
Sergio Leone:
Once Upon a Time in the West,
1968 *A Fistful of Dollars*, 1964
For a Few Dollars More, 1965
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, 1966
Sergio Corbucci, *Django*, 1966
Giulio Questi, *Se sei vivo spara* [If you live, shoot!], 1967
Akira Kurosawa, *Yojimbo*, 1961
Quentin Tarantino: *Django Unchained*, 2012
- (c) a few articles and book chapters which will be made available to students on line.

Please note: McGill does not own all the compulsory films, and it is the responsibility of students to ensure that they have adequate access to the films they need (via the web, etc.). A copy of all

the films will be placed in a Dropbox folder which can be accessed by the students registered in the class.

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.