

English 492/592: Topics: Film, The Western, 3 semester hours

Black Hills State University



Fall 2010, Tuesdays 4:00- 7:00 p.m., Meier 204

Instructor: Dr. David Cremean

Office: Meier 317

Office Hours: Thursday 1:00-1:50 p.m.
MWF 2:00-2:50 p.m.

Office Phone: 642-6713 (see office hours above—best to call only during those times to reach me)

Email: david.cremean@bhsu.edu (Remember, replies can be delayed; unless gone, I check my email at least once a day, but depending on my schedule, at different times.)

Course Description (for both 492 and 592): “Includes current topics, advanced topics and special topics. A course devoted to a particular issue in a specified field. Course content is not wholly included in the regular curriculum. Guest artists or experts may serve as instructors. Enrollments are usually of 10 or fewer students with significant one-on-one student/teacher involvement.” (Catalogue).

Course Prerequisites: None in catalogue. **Completion of ENGL 101 and 201 strongly recommended.**

Description of Instructional Methods: This semester we will utilize a wide range of classroom experiences, ranging from lectures to discussions to essays to presentations. Our main method, integral to all the others, will involve simultaneously viewing and analyzing films together. Academic viewing of film is very different from regular viewing: at times the instructor or others will talk “over” the film about something, at others the instructor will pause the film for comments, re-viewing something, etc.

Course Requirements:

Required Textbooks (available from the University Bookstore):

Hansen, Ron. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. 0061120197.

LeMay, Allan. *The Searchers*. 9780843961720.

Mitchell, Lee Clark. *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*. 9780226532356.

Pippin, Robert B. *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth*. 9780300145779.

Tompkins, Jane. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. 9780195082685.

Supplementary Materials/Library Resources: You will receive a number of varied materials from me during the semester, ranging from assignments to information concerned with writing.

Class Attendance Policy: Since this class meets 1 day a week, the attendance policy is based on that fact—and on the fact that this class is highly participatory and thus demands regular attendance for the student to be successful parts of it. Up to one absence—one full week of class—results in no grade consequences. Two absences mean you can earn no higher than a B in the course. For three absences, you can earn no higher than a C in the class. For four absences, you cannot earn higher than a D. Five or more absences mean you cannot pass the class.

Other than extenuating circumstances approved by the instructor (and at my discretion), only absences due to school-sponsored activities will be exceptions to this policy, and then only to the degree that other absences do not raise them above any of the grade reduction markers cited above (in other words, it is wisest not to skip classes beyond the school-sanctioned ones). You are free to choose to attend or not attend any classes; just remember that this policy is in place. The absence allowances are in place to cover normal illness and the like.

It is also expected that you be on time for class to begin. I will note lates; three lates will equal one absence. If you are more than 10 minutes and up to 50 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for one-third of a class (it equals one-third of an absence); if you are more than 50 minutes late for class, it will count as two-thirds of an absence; at 90 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for a full class.

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy: Cheating of any type, from copying or consulting “cheat” notes while taking a quiz or test (if applicable) to representing someone else’s work as your own (plagiarism, which can occur in several ways), is a serious ethical violation. If any cases of it happen in this class, penalty decisions are at my discretion. Depending on the severity of the plagiarism, ultimate penalties can include anything from a stern warning up to a zero for an assignment or failure for the course—or even expulsion from the university (by university powers that be) if you are guilty of “the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic material” (BHSU Student Code 65). Please, however, feel free to use ideas we kick around in class (but if quoting a reading or other source, be sure to document it according to the current MLA standards).

Make-Up Policy: I rarely grant incompletes, and by policy of the College of Arts and Sciences can only grant them in cases where students have completed 75 % of the required class work. All incompletes are at my discretion.

With the exception of the final, regular class meeting (the meeting for our final), at which time any applicable work is absolutely due (except of course in cases of approved incompletes), you will have one full week to make up any missed assignments or turn in late work. Ten percent (a letter grade) is deducted for late essays unless you obtain special clearance from me. The one week overdue deadline also holds for any late essays. Any exceptions to this policy—such as an extension without penalty or extra time beyond the week—are solely at my discretion.

Course Goals:

Student Learning Outcomes: As a result of taking this course, students will become:

1. More informed, developed, and reflective critical viewers, thinkers, and writers as measured by their performance on their response essays and their two major assigned essays;
2. Closer, more comprehending and critical readers, as measured by their performance on the essays and how they utilize materials from the films, readings, and their research;
3. More highly skilled in producing upper level “academic” essays at or approaching graduate school levels, as measured by performance on the essays;
4. Capable of complete, accurate, and necessary documentation of appropriate sources for all borrowings as measured by their two major essays and the bibliography for their oral/creative presentation;
5. More audience-aware and selective individuals as revealed by their individual oral presentations on a relevant topic.
6. Better enabled to recognize and discuss how Westerns in particular and films in general at their best at once constitute art forms and reveal/dialogue about critical and cultural issues including masculinism, feminism, and political elements as demonstrated in all essays and presentations.

7. Increasingly able to consider concepts and issues of fidelity and adaptation, original screenplays, and referentiality/remakes and the relationship between written and visual literatures, as evidenced ultimately in the second major essay, though also in all writings throughout the semester.

Evaluation Procedures:

Assessments:

- A. Response Essays (10 x 1 single-spaced page each = 50 % (5 % per response)
- B. Essay # 1 (8-10 pages) = 20 %
- C. Essay # 2 (8-10 pages) = 20 %
- D. Oral/Creative Presentation and Bibliography = 10 %
- E. **592 students only:** Essay # 3, 8-10 pages on a Western film and outside of class films/readings = 20% (so grade based on percentage of 120 points)
- F. Note # 1: See Attendance Override Standards above under “Class Attendance Policy.”
- G. Note # 2: You will receive separate assignments giving specific instructions for each essay.

Performance Standards/Grading Policy:

A. Scale—I work with an 10-point break, 100 point system, as follows:

- A--90.0-100 = Excellent work for college level (rare)
- B--80.0-89.9 = Good work for college level
- C--70.0-79.9 = Competent work for college level
- D--60.0-69.9 = Below Competent work for college level
- F--59.9 and below = Failing work for college level

B. Essay/Exam Grades

A++ = 100

A+ = 99

A = 95

A- = 91

B+ = 89

B = 85

B- = 81

C+ = 79

C = 75

C- = 71

D+ = 69

D = 65

D- = 61

F = 55

0 = Plagiarized or unsubmitted

**Note: I do not allow for any extra credit assignments, so please do not ask.

Americans With Disabilities Statement:

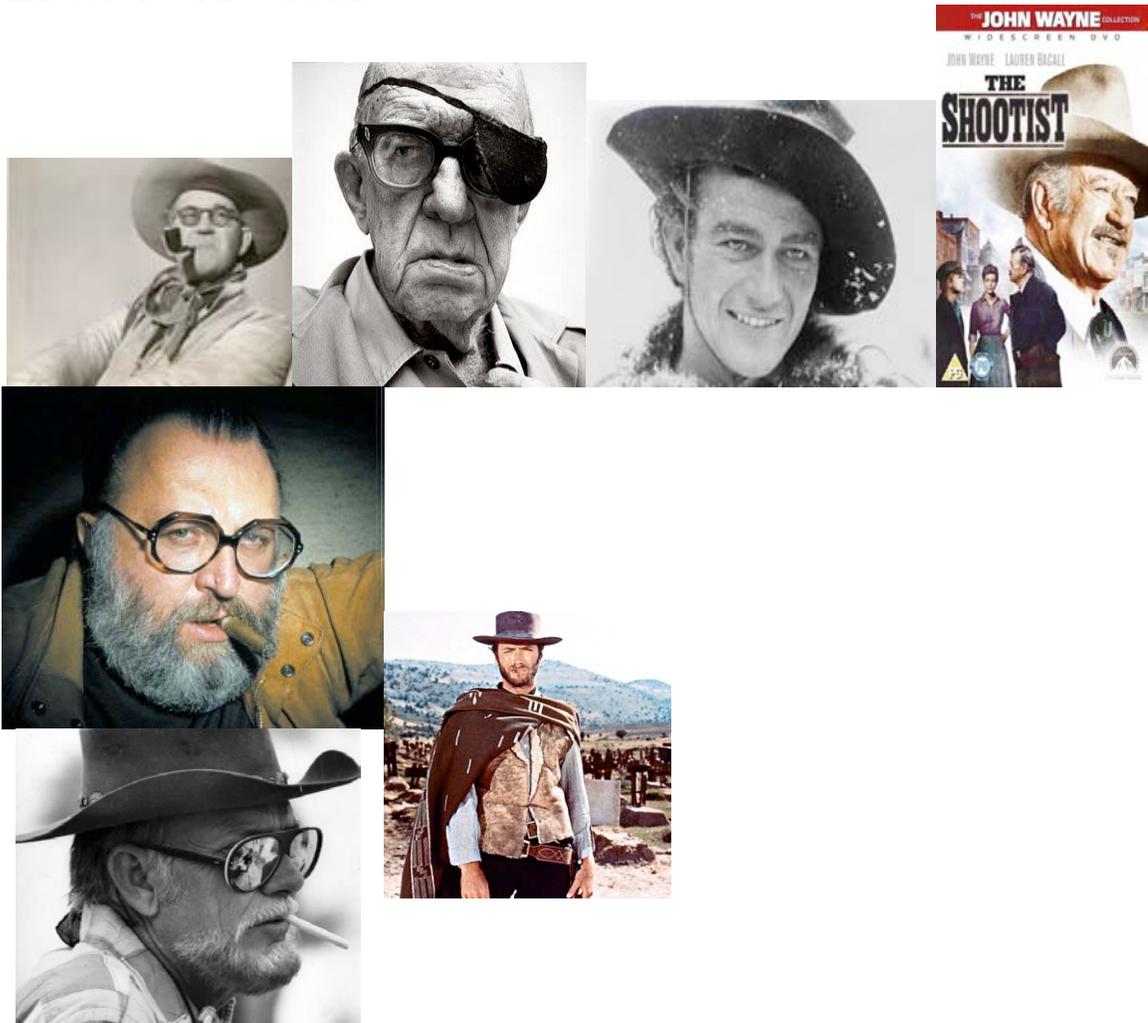
“Reasonable accommodations, as arranged through the Disabilities Services Coordinator, will be provided students with documented disabilities. Contact the BHSU Disabilities Services Coordinator, Mike McNeil, at 605-642-6099, (Jacket Legacy Room in the Student Union) or via email at mikemcneil@bhsu.edu for more information. Additional information can also be found at

<http://www.bhsu.edu/StudentLife/Learning/DisabilityServices/tabid/162/Default.aspx>.”

Freedom in Learning:

“Under Board of Regents and University policy student academic performance may be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Students who believe that an academic evaluation reflects prejudiced or capricious consideration of student opinions

or conduct unrelated to academic standards should contact the chair of the department in which the course is being taught to initiate a review of the evaluation.”



“He worked for Walsh and Wyler with the chariot and sword. When he road out in the desert he was quoting Hawks and Ford.

He came to see the masters, and he left with what he saw. What he stole from Kurosawa he bequeathed to Peckinpah.”

--Jackson Browne, “Sergio Leone”



Tentative Schedule—English 492/592: Film, The Western

1. All assignments are due the day they are listed, not the following class.
2. If we have any cancellations for any reasons, be sure to keep up with the assignment for each day missed as well as the one due the day we return to classes.

Tue., Aug. 31—Beginnings: Dime Novels, Western as Novel, Live Productions, Silent Films, Major Issues

raised by Westerns, Westerns as reflecting ideologies and/or Societies, Westerns as genre and/or art, Connections between Westerns as lit and as film (visual lit), Definition(s) of Westerns, Western as spectacle/entertainment

Watch Buffalo Bill excerpts; Watch *The Great Train Robbery* (1903); Watch John Ford's silent

“Bucking Broadway” (1917)



Tue., Sept. 7—**Response Essay # 1, The Silents, due: Based on these films and clips, why do you think**

the Western was so well suited to film and became one of its first, longest lasting, and main

vehicles? What elements of the future Western do you see in these visuals? How do these

films and clips help us better understand why many film makers decried the advent of sound?

Read Ernest Haycox “Stage to Lordsburg”; Read Mitchell Introduction and Chapters 1-3
Adaptation versus Original Screenplay-- Matt Bitz, BHSU graduate and scriptwriter, on
scriptwriting and Remake/Adaptation/Original Screenplay—lecture and

discussion

Watch clip from Walsh's *The Big Trail* (1930)

Watch John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939)



Tue., Sept. 14—**Response Essay # 2, Stagecoach, due: How does the image of John Wayne immediately**

above, as he really for the first time assumes “being John Wayne,” connect to what Mitchell notes about Bierstadt’s paintings and how they establish much of the visual nature for how

the Western will unfold? How does the shot of Wayne change it all at the same time? (See

especially Chapter 3 and plates of Bierstadt’s work.)

Read Pippin Introduction 1-25 (Remember Notes, 157-62; posted if texts not in) and LeMay Chapters 1-20 (and the Fenady Introduction, 1-5, if you have it)

Discuss Mitchell 1-3 and *Stagecoach*



"I'm John Ford. I make Westerns."

Tue., Sept. 21—Read LeMay Chapters 21-40
Watch Ford's *The Searchers* (1956)

Tue., Sept. 28—**Response Essay # 3, *The Searchers*, due: Like *Stagecoach*, this film was made in**

Monument Valley, an area made famous by Ford in particular (and Navajo

owned, by the way). How does the landscape here function similarly to how it does in *Stagecoach*? How does it function differently, particularly given that it's in color?

Read Pippin 102-40 on *The Searchers* (Remember Notes, 172-76) and Tompkins Introduction

and Chapters 1-3

Watch *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)



Tue., Oct. 5—**Response Essay # 4, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, due: This may well be the most**

claustrophobic of all Ford Westerns. How are the cinematography and the settings treated

filmically to achieve this effect? How or why does it (or doesn't it) arguably fit this Western

thematically?

Read Pippin 61-101 on *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Remember Notes, 166-72) and

Tompkins Chapters 4-6

Watch Hawks's *Red River* (1948)



Tue., Oct. 12— Read Tompkins Chapter 7 through the Epilogue

Response Essay # 5, *Red River*, due: As an actor, John Wayne was long underappreciated, for a variety of reasons relating to both his uneven roles and later to his conservative politics. Since then, his acting stock has probably risen, and in particular

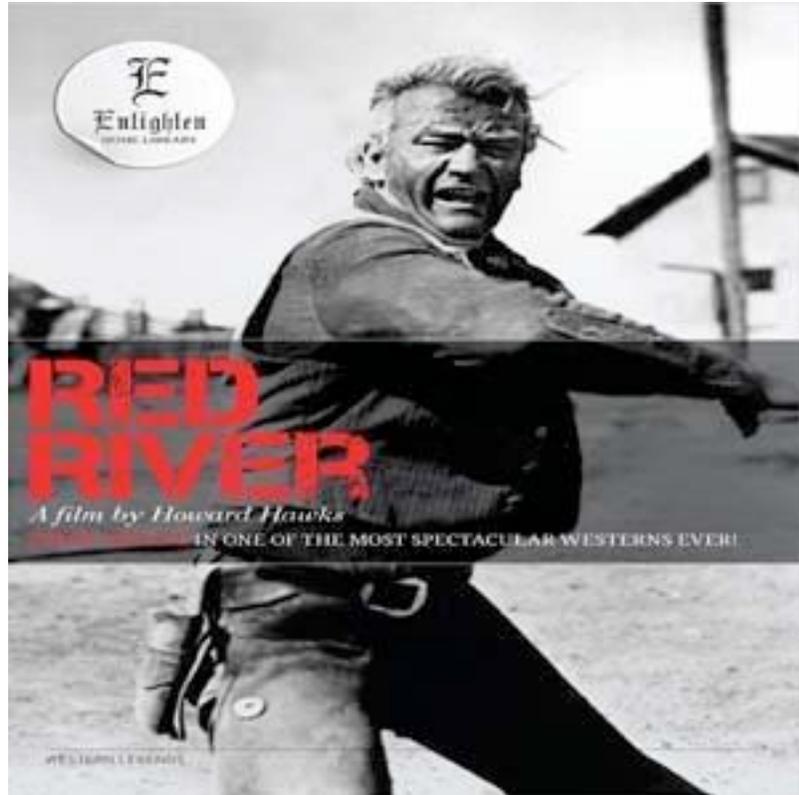
he is praised as a fine “physical actor.” This film is one of his most physical and most famous

roles, as suggested by the shot immediately below. What does he do with his *body* in this

film to create the character he inhabits?

Will Wright and John Cawelti and structuralist approaches to Westerns

Discuss Ford and Wayne



Tue., Oct. 19—Read Pippin 26-60 on *Red River* (Remember Notes, 162-66)
Watch *Lonesome Dove* (1989) Parts 1-2



Tue., Oct. 26—**Major Essay # 1 due (Topics List on L-Drive)**
Watch *Lonesome Dove* (1989) Parts 3-4

Tue., Nov. 2—**Response Essay # 6, *Lonesome Dove* and *Red River*, due: What does *Lonesome Dove***

***lose* by dint of being filmed for television rather than for a motion picture screen?
What does it gain and what does it lose by being so long? What are some important
parallels you see
between it and *Red River*, i.e., what might the miniseries owe to *Red River* and/or
how
does it seem to reference it?**

Oral/Visual Presentations 1-3

Read Pippin Conclusion, 141-55 (Remember Notes, 176-78) and Mitchell Chapters 4-5
Watch Anthony Mann's *The Man from Laramie* (1955)



Tue., Nov. 9—**Response Essay # 7, *The Man from Laramie*, due: Mann is (deservedly) most famous**

for portraying revenge themes in his Westerns. What does he do cinematographically with

landscape and camera work to communicate why Stewart's main character wants revenge?

What do Jimmy Stewart's build, persona (even his "stammer" line delivery), and physical

acting accomplish to make us see him as a candidate for needing revenge (see Mitchell's and

Tompkins's Chapters 6 in particular)?

Oral/Visual Presentations 4-5

Read Mitchell Chapters 6-7

Watch opening from *Once upon a Time in the West* and showdowns in *More* and *GBU*

Watch *Fistful of Dollars*



Tue., Nov. 16— **Response Essay # 8, Sergio Leone, due: Among other traits, Sergio Leone is well known for his shot compositions, often triangular as above from Once upon a Time in the West, and his hyperclose-ups. How does the composition immediately above work, and what all does it communicate (factor in colors, lines, backgrounds, landscape, object/body size, etc.)? How does it contrast to the scenes at the endings of Fistful and The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly? What do his intense close-ups of characters indicate by the eyes and by the facial expressions?**

Oral/Visual Presentations 7-8

Read Mitchell Chapters 8-9

Watch *The Wild Bunch*



Tue., Nov. 23—Response Essay # 9, *The Wild Bunch*, due: Sam Peckinpah, somewhat simplistically, is primarily noted for the violence in his film, which certainly was ahead of its time however tame (?) it may seem today. Certainly, its visual nature, as seen in this film, from its montages to its slow motion shots of violence, are artistic: but how and why? Also, how does he use composition (as above, for example) to show both inequality, separateness, friction, and togetherness at various points in the film?

Oral/Visual Presentations 9-10

Watch Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992)

Read Hansen Part One

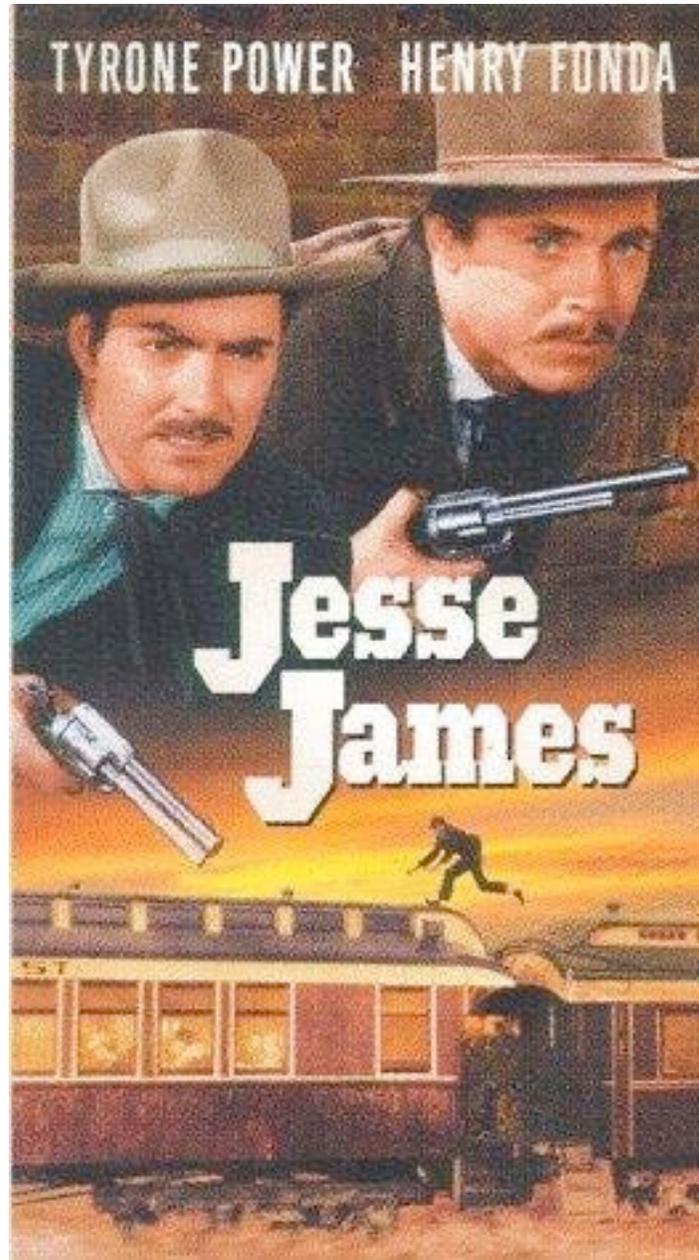
Tue., Nov. 30—**Response Essay # 10, *Unforgiven*, due: As a director (in all of his films, not just his**

Westerns), Clint Easwood is known for his usage of light—and especially darkness. In the still above from *Unforgiven*, what might the outside light (including from the back of the house) indicate, and what might the darker area inhabited by the children indicate? How might this shot resonate with or even reference Ford's similar uses in *The Searchers*, and to what purpose? What might it reveal about Munny's character even as he's avowing that he's a changed man due to his late wife?

Oral/Visual Presentations 6 and 11-13

Read Hansen Part Two

Watch Henry King's *Jesse James* (1939)



Tue., Dec. 7—Read Hansen Part Three

Watch Andrew Dominik's *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007)

Oral/Visual Presentations 14-16



Thursday, Dec. 16—8:00-9:30--Final Exam Class Meeting: Important clips from other Westerns;
Course

Roundup

Major Essay # 2, On Adaptation, due



"What makes a man leave bed and board and turn his back on home?"