

Religion and Film

RLG232H1H

Spring 2009

Instructor

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Office Hours: Tuesdays noon – 2pm

Office Location: JHB

Course Description

In this course we will look thematically and comparatively at the capacity of religion and of film to pattern society. Related to this we will examine the contexts in which religion *in* film, religion *through* film and religion *as* film might be studied by scholars of religion. We will be extending classical and contemporary topics and theories pertaining to religious studies into the sphere of religion and film and will be exploring film as a media for religious expression. We will also be examining the history of religion in the American film industry.

Please note: the content of the films often include explicit language and scenes of a violent and sexual nature. The directors and producers of the films have included such footage as a reflection of their own artistic expression. In respect to their artistic vision I will not be censoring the films viewed in this course.

Required Texts

Course Pack –

A River Runs Through It – available at the Women's Bookstore (73 Harbord Street)

It is recommended that you consult Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (6th edition; New York: Longman, 2004) for appropriate writing style.

Policy on Late Assignments and Missed Tests

All assignments are due at the beginning of class (any assignment handed in after the class has commenced will have 10% deducted from the mark). All late assignments will be penalised an additional 2% per calendar day (including weekends). We live in a technological age and, unless a student was born yesterday¹, he or she is aware that technology has the potential to fail and that the likelihood of such an event doubles the night before a paper is due. With this in mind, students are encouraged to backup assignments regularly; computer failure and other technological mishaps do **not** qualify for an extension.

¹ Note: students born yesterday are not permitted to take RLG232H1-S-LEC5101.

Students who miss a test or assignment due to illness or other acute adversity beyond their control must submit a formal letter of petition to the course instructors in advance of assignments or within one week for missed tests. This letter should be accompanied by:

- a completed University of Toronto Student Medical Certificate (<http://www.utoronto.ca/health/forms/medcert.pdf>) in cases of illness, and comparable supporting documentation in other cases.
- student's phone number, U of T number and utoronto.ca email address (to which the instructor will send an email outlining the appropriate make-up assignment or penalty)

Students are expected to manage their time. A student who has adequately prepared for assignments over the entire tenure of course will not feel compelled to ask for an extension.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is one of the cornerstones of the University of Toronto. It is critically important both to maintain our community which honours the values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility and to protect you, the students within this community, and the value of the degree towards which you are all working so diligently. According to Section B of the University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html>) which all students are expected to know and respect, it is an offence for students to:

- To use someone else's ideas or words in their own work without acknowledging that those ideas/words are not their own with a citation and quotation marks, i.e. to commit plagiarism
- To include false, misleading or concocted citations in their work.
- To obtain unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- To provide unauthorized assistance to another student. This includes showing another student completed work.
- To submit their own work for credit in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- To falsify or alter any documentation required by the University. This includes, but is not limited to, doctor's notes.
- To use or possess an unauthorized aid in any test or exam.

There are other offences covered under the Code, but these are by far the most common. Please respect these rules and the values which they protect.

As a student, you are responsible for ensuring the integrity of your work and for understanding what constitutes an academic offence. If you are not sure if your actions or methods are acceptable, always ask your instructor. **Ignorance of the rules does not excuse cheating or plagiarism.**

Turnitin.com

Within this course, students may be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Expectations, Policies, and Common Courtesy

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all lectures and films. Should you miss a lecture you are responsible to find out what you missed from one of your colleagues in the class; the course instructor will not provide notes or an overview. Absence from more than one class can adversely affect a student's grade.

Punctuality: Please arrive on time and plan to remain for the entire class. Unless you become ill, do not begin packing up your books because this is distracting to everyone. If you know in advance that you cannot stay for the entire class, please sit next to the door and exit quietly.

Courtesy in Class: Other than to respond to or ask a question, please do not converse during lectures and films (even quiet whispering is distracting and disrespectful of your fellow students and your instructor). Please turn off (or silence) all cell phones and pagers before the class begins. Students who plan to spend the lecture time checking email, facebook or chatting on MSN are invited to sit at the back of the classroom or leave. Should laptop use become a distraction we will, as a class, consider setting up laptop-free zones.

Email and Blackboard Communication: Students are expected to write courteously and clearly (no text-messaging abbreviations or slang). Always use your utoronto.ca email address (the server regularly rejects hotmail accounts as spam) and always include an appropriate summary of the email topic along with the course code (RLG232) in the subject line. The course instructor and teaching assistant do not spend their days waiting to receive and reply to emails from students; once we have received an email from a student we will gauge the urgency of the email and reply appropriately.

Course Requirements and Assessment

1 - 10% for class attendance, participation and general engagement.

2 - 30% for critical reflection assignments - (5 x 6%).

You will be required to complete a CRA for each in class movie that we watch (questions will be distributed at each film screening). They will be collected and discussed at the beginning of each class. **No late submissions will be accepted.** I will randomly select six of the CRAs to mark, of these your best five will be counted towards your grade for the course.

3 - 15 % for Weekend Movies Blackboard Discussions

Each weekend students will watch **at least** one of the weekend movies. They will be expected to post to a blackboard discussion group by Monday night at **midnight** their impressions of their selected film and how it relates to the previous week's lectures and readings. The films are available on reserve at the Media Commons Audio Visual Library Collection at Robarts for viewing in the library (check the hours) or can be rented from your friendly neighbourhood video-store.

4 – 20% for major Essay – *from the big screen to the small screen*

DUE JUNE 19th in class!

Students will write an essay in which they follow a thematic religious development in at least one season of a television series which has been made available as a box set.

The paper should be 1500-2500 words, 12-point font, double-spaced. It will be due during the final week of class—late penalty is 10% for being late, plus 2% for each additional day (including weekends).

5 - 25 % for final exam (date and time, TBA)

The final exam will be based upon readings and lectures. More details will be provided closer to the date of the test.

Schedule and Readings

May 12 – Introduction: Religion in Film, Religion as Film, Religion through Film

Readings: Lyden, *Film As Religion*, Chs. 1- 2 (CP).

Film: Batman: The Dark Knight

May 14 - Myth and Meaning: Existing Theories about Religion and Film

Readings: Lyden, Ch. 3 (CP); George Aichele, "Artificial Bodies: Blade Runner and the Death of Man" (CP).

Film: Blade Runner

Weekend Film: Metropolis; The Matrix; Truly, Madly, Deeply; O Brother Where Art Thou; Fight Club

May 19 - the Jewish Experience in Hollywood and the Subversive Shaping of the American Dream

Readings: Lyden, Ch.4 (CP); Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, (Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1), pp. 1-21 (Blackboard).

Documentary Film: Hollywoodism: Jews, Movies and the American Dream

May 21 – Religion and Science

Bryan P. Stone, "Religious Faith and Science in Contact," *JRF* (Vol. 2, No. 2 October 1998); Douglas E. Cowan, "Intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic: Science, Religion, and The War of the Worlds" *JRF* (Part I – Vol. 11, No. 1 April 2007 & Part II - Vol. 11, No. 2 October 2007);

Film: Contact

Weekend Film: Crimes and Misdemeanours; Shindler's List; Dirty Dancing; The Birth of A Nation; What the Bleep; The War of the Worlds; Aliens

May 26 - The Christ Archetype

Readings: Matthew McEver, "The Messianic Figure in Film: Christology Beyond the Biblical Epic" *JRF* (Volume 2, No. 2, October 1998); Adele Reinhartz, Jesus in Film: Hollywood Perspectives on the Jewishness of Jesus," *JRF* (Vol. 2, No. 2 October 1998)

Film: The Jesus of Montreal

May 28 – Christian Narrative: Atonement, Transcendence and Trinitarians

Readings: Peter Malone, "Jesus on Our Screens" pp. 57-71 in John May (ed). *New Image of Religious Film* (CP); Robert Jewett, "A Problemic Hope for the Shamed in The Shawshank Redemption" (CP).

Film: The Shawshank Redemption

Weekend Film: Sling Blade, Life of Brian, Platoon, Crash, Jesus Christ Vampire Slayer

June 2 – The Apocalypse: Representations of the End of Days

Readings: Ch. 1 in Amy Johnson Frykholm pp. 13-37 in *Rapture culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (available through UToR); Cark Greiner, "The Rapture: A Challenging Vision of Horror," *JRF* (Vol. 1, No. 1 April 1997).

Film: The Rapture

June 4 – Visualising Religious Discourses in America

Readings: Bruce Lincoln, Chs. 1-3 in *Holy Terrors* (CP).

Documentary Film: Jesus Camp

Weekend Film: Terminator II; The Silence of the Lambs; Left Behind; Twelve Monkeys; The Apostle

June 9 - Islam and The "Other": Orientalism in Film

Readings: Alan Nadel, "A Whole New (Disney) World Order: Aladdin, Atomic Power, and the Muslim Middle East." in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 184-203 (CP); Richard King, "Orientalism and the Study of Religions," in *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, John R. Hinnells, ed. Routledge, 2005, pp. 275-290 (available through UToR).

Film: Osama

June 11 – Race, Gender and Culture

Readings: Lyden, Ch. 5 (CP); Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward Feminist Ethnography of Cinema" in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (CP).

Film: Fire

Weekend Film: Water; Monson Wedding; Malcom X; Lawrence of Arabia; Daughters of Dust

June 16 – Representation and Identity Formation: The Book is "Always" Better than the Movie

Readings: *A River Runs Through It*; Samuel Snyder, "New Streams of Religion: Fly-fishing as Lived, Religion of Nature." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 75, Number 3 (December 2007): 896 – 922 (Blackboard).

Film: A River Runs Through It

June 19 – Theologies of Youth: Children's Films and Fantasy (PAPER IS DUE!!)

Readings: Lyden, Ch. 10

Film: E.T. The Extraterrestrial

Weekend Film: Chronicles of Narnia; Harry Potter; Grapes of Wrath; Lord of the Rings; Gone with the Wind