REL2930: Religion and Film  
Fall 2014  
Tuesdays 5-6th Periods and Thursday 6th Period  
FLG 285

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Office Hours: Mondays 11:30 AM to 1:30PM, Thursdays: 2 PM to 4PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion has long appeared in film in diverse, often contradictory forms. Thus, this course cannot offer a complete survey of the ways in which religion has been represented in this medium. Rather, the course will explore some of the key roles religion plays in marking identity through film. In particular, we will examine how religion interacts with everyday life and popular and mass culture to articulate selfhood in multi-religious contexts, such as the United States. As such, topics will include the construction of masculinity and femininity in films about Jesus and Mary, the existential self in (global) modernity, the postmodern self in Science Fiction, and the “religious Other” (in the figure of the Muslim, the Buddhist, the indigene, and the Christian fundamentalist). Since many films dealing with religious matters have been adapted from books, some films will be paired with literary works with the goal of comparing and contrasting the uses of religion in these two media.

OBJECTIVES

1. To teach students to approach critically representations of religion and the sacred in contemporary film.

2. To introduce students to the study of the interaction between religion, media, and popular and mass culture in modern and postmodern contexts.

3. To enhance students’ expository and writing skills.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Three Take-Home Exams. Each of these exams will contain a choice of essay-questions addressing issues raised in the readings, class discussions, and lectures. Since students will have at least a week to complete these assignments, I expect all essays to be well-developed, with good grammar, spelling, and syntax. They should also be analytical substantive and make explicit references to the readings. Students will need to demonstrate that they have engaged the various approaches to religion and film and can articulate concepts, arguments, and methodologies in their own words. Students are strongly encouraged to submit drafts of their essays. Each exam (due on 10/02, 11/04, and 12/18) will address specific sections of the course and will be worth 25% of your final grade.

2. A Review (5-6pp) of a film selected from a list provided at the beginning of the semester. The instructor will also give specific guidelines to write this assignment. Since this kind of assignment is particularly prone to plagiarism and cheating (by downloading papers on-line, for example), I will be especially vigilant. One way to demonstrate that the review is your original work is by making explicit references to the issues and concepts discussed in class and the readings. Students are strongly encouraged to submit drafts of their reviews. The review is due on 11/25 and it will be worth 15% of your grade.
3. **Attendance, Active Participation, and Quizzes:** Arguably, more than any other course, the success of this class depends on active student participation (which is why the schedule is built around film fora). Attendance is, thus, not only mandatory, but students must come to class punctually and participate actively in group discussion. Active and informed participation demands that students read all assigned materials carefully before coming to class. The instructors reserve the right to give quizzes at any time during the course (particularly in case students are not doing the readings). In most circumstances, students will not be allowed to make up missed quizzes. Given time constraints, we will not be able to watch the films in full in class. Rather, we will view key clips to highlight important themes and concepts and, more generally, to get the conversation going. So, students are strongly encouraged to view films on their own time, outside the class. To the extent possible, I will place the films on reserve at the library but you will be able to access the films through services such as Netflix or Hulu. **Attendance, active participation, and quizzes represent 10% of your final grade.**

**RULES AND RESOURCES**

1. **Plagiarism or cheating:** On the issue of plagiarism and cheating, I operate with a zero tolerance policy. I remind you that all UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” Moreover, on all work submitted for credit at the University of Florida, students are bound by the following pledge: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (Please see: [http://www.dso.ufl.edu/scrr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/scrr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else’s material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance).

2. **Incompletes are strongly discouraged** and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete before the end of the semester.

3. **Late papers:** Unless students can present proper, legitimate written documentation (in the form of a medical excuse or a funeral notice, for example) to justify their inability to turn in the assignments on time, I will deduct half a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for every day the paper is late. In case there is a legitimate excuse, the student must arrange with the instructor an alternative due date for the assignment.

4. **Grading Scale:** A: 100-95; A-: 94-90; B+: 89-87; B: 86-84; B-: 83-80; C+: 79-77; C: 76-74; C-: 73-70; D+: 69-67; D: 66-64; D-: 63-60; E: <60.

5. **I expect students to treat each other with civility and respect.** I hope that our debates will be lively and that people will feel free to express their opinions and disagree with each other. However, these opinions and disagreements have to be presented in a manner that is appropriate to an academic setting.

6. Students engaging in any sort of disruptive behavior, including passing notes, reading a newspaper, playing computers games, checking their e-mail, or chatting while lectures and class discussions are taking place, will be asked to leave the classroom. They will be counted as absent for that particular day. **Please turn phones and pagers off during class.**

7. **Please make sure to arrive to class on time.** I dislike being interrupted once class has started.
8. **Students with Disabilities.** Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office (https://www.dso.ufl.edu/). The DSO will provide the necessary documentation to the student, who must then present it to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.

9. Academic life can be stressful. Be advised that UF has resources to help students cope with this stress, including counseling and mental health services. See http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx. For emergencies and matters of safety, call the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-11.

10. **Course Evaluations.** Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at https://evaluations.ufl.edu. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. I will try to schedule some time in class for you complete these evaluations. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at https://evaluations.ufl.edu.

**REQUIRED READINGS (Students are responsible for all the following readings)**


**Additional Required Articles and Book Chapters (Available through Sakai):**


These additional articles are marked with an asterisk (*) in the schedule.

SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Tues. 08/26: General Introduction to the Course: Defining Religion
No Readings
Thurs. 08/28: Understanding Religion, Film, and Their Interplay.
Lyden, “To Commend or to Critique?” (*)
Easthope, “Introduction,” *Contemporary Film Theory*, 1-23 (*)

I. The Politics of Jesus: Divine and Human Selves


Thurs. 09/04: *The Last Temptation of Christ* Forum II
Readings: Flesher and Torry, “Tormenting Christ,” in *Film & Religion: An Introduction*, pp. 139-157. (*)

Readings: Flesher and Torry, “Violence and Redemption,” in *Film & Religion: An Introduction*, pp. 159-173. (*)
Goodacre, “The Power of *The Passion*” (*)

Thurs. 09/11: *The Passion of the Christ* Forum II
Readings: Crossan, “A Hymn to a Savage God,” *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s The Passion*, 8-27. (*)
Orsi, “‘Mildred, Is it Fun to be a Cripple,’” *Between Heaven and Earth*, 19-47. (*)

II. Disciplined and Unruly Religious Bodies

Tues. 09/16: *Hail Mary* (1985) Forum I

Thurs. 09/18: *Hail Mary* Forum II
Readings: Mulvey, “Marie/Eve,” in *Jean-Luc Godard’s Hail Mary*, 39-53 (*)


Thurs. 09/25: *Philomena* Forum II
Readings: Smith, “‘Philomena:’ Another Hateful and Boring Attack,” (*)
Donahue, “Debunking ‘Philomena’” (*)
Fleming, “Real ‘Philomena’ Answers Attack” (*)

*** First Take-Home Exam Prompt Handed out ***

Tues. 09/30: *The Exorcist* (1973) Forum I
Readings: Stone, “The Sanctification of Fear” (*)

Thurs. 10/02: *The Exorcist* Forum II
III. (Mis)Representing Religion(s)

Flesher and Torry, “Islam and Fanaticism,” in *Film & Religion: An Introduction*, pp. 279-296. (*)

Thurs. 10/09:  *Obsession, Honor Diaries* (2014), and *My Name is Khan* (2010) Forum
Readings: Shaheen, “Real Bad Arabs,” Press Kit. (on-line)
Invited Speaker:  Professor Zoharah Simmons


Thurs. 10/16:  *Little Buddha* Forum II
Readings: Mullen, “Orientalist Commercializations,” on-line, (*)
Flesher and Torry, “American Dharma,” in *Film & Religion: An Introduction*, pp. 241-255. (*)


Thurs. 10/23:  *Spirited Away* Forum II
Readings: Plumb, “Japanese Religion, Mythology, and the Supernatural” (*)

Readings: Morreall, TBA
Saragolou, “Religion and Sense of Humor” (*)

*** Second Take-Home Exam Prompt Handed out ***

Thurs. 10/30:  *Religulous* Forum II
Readings: Jordan, “Religious Satire in Hollywood” (*)

IV. Religion and the Existentialist, Postmodern, and/or Hybrid Selves

Readings: Camus, *The Stranger*, read it all

*** Second Take-Home Exam Due in Class ***


Thurs. 11/20:  *Avatar* Forum II  

V. Religion, Film, and the American Experience

Gordon, “*Star Wars*: A Myth of Our Time,” in *Screening the Sacred*, pp. 73-82 (*)

*** Review Essay Due in Class ***

Thurs. 11/27:  No Class -- Thanksgiving

Tues. 12/02:  *Unforgiven* (1982) Forum I (also clips of *Birth of a Nation* – 1915)  
Readings: Jozajtis, “‘The Eyes of All People are Upon Us,’” in *Representing Religion*, pp. 239-261. (*)  
Marsden, “Western Films: America’s Secularized Religion” (*)

Thurs. 12/04:  *Unforgiven* Forum II  
Reading: Vaux, “Unforgiven” (*)


*** Third Take-Home Exam Handed out – Due at 5PM on December 18th ***