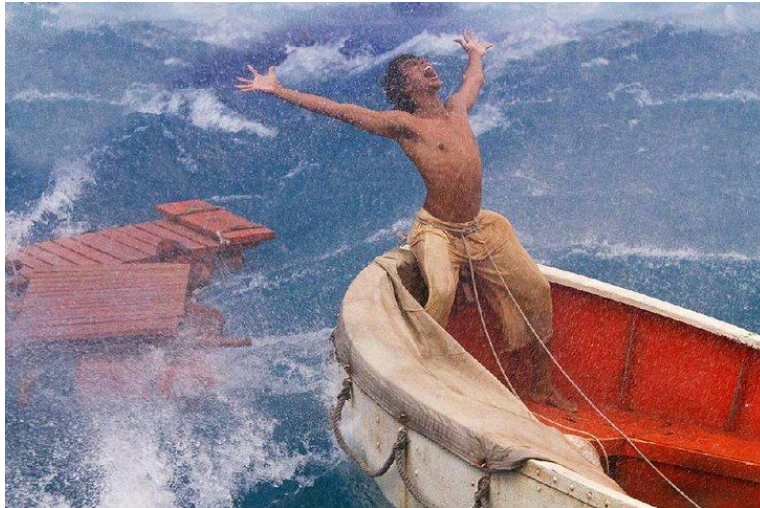


**Religion and Film**  
**REL 3938-06GG**  
Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> periods (3-6PM), Anderson 0034



Instructor: Susan Shaffer, Department of Religion

Contact: [shaffer3@ufl.edu](mailto:shaffer3@ufl.edu); 352-392-1625 (department office) *\*\*please contact me by email*

Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00-1:00 (AND 119), and by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course explores religion and its relationship with visual storytelling culture. We will discuss and interrogate the ways in which film interacts with ideas of the sacred, ritual, and myth in order to think critically, creatively, and personally about religious, ethical, and cultural issues. Our agenda is to analyze, explore, and challenge various religious, pop-cultural, ideological, and moral messages as presented in various types of film, from art house cinema to blockbuster movies, and genres ranging from horror to comedy. The course will highlight works that teach about and comment upon "world religions;" works that address complex moral controversies; and works that comment upon, whether dramatically or comedically, the human predicament and how both religious and secular cultures addresses that predicament in various ways.

**PREREQUISITES:** None

**TEXTS:**

Required

John C. Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (FAR)

Ed Sikov, *Film Studies: An Introduction* (FS)

Gregory J. Watkins, ed., *Teaching Religion and Film* (TRF)

Recommended

Joylun Mitchell and S. Brent Plate, eds., *The Religion and Film Reader*

\**Netflix* subscription, offering a minimum of 1 film by mail plus online streaming

## COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Acquire knowledge and skills for recognizing and analyzing the intersections of the study of religion and the medium of film.
- Develop familiarity with a variety of theoretical frameworks for understanding both religion and film.
- Acquire tools to produce meaningful analysis of religion and culture through the practice of film criticism and interreligious dialogue.

## ASSIGNMENTS and GRADES

- Final grades are based on Participation/Discussion Posts [attendance, evidence of having read assignments, classroom participation, quality of weekly discussion posts], 25%; Film Analysis Essays [2000-2500 words; guidelines will be discussed in class], 25%; Midterm Exam, 25%; Final Exam, 25%.

Participation/Discussion Posts: Most weeks (due dates are designated in the course schedule of this document) students will respond, via Sakai, to a discussion question regarding assigned readings and viewings. Posts should be 100-200 words in length and should display careful reading of and reflection upon course materials and classroom discussions. **Posts will be due by 5:00 PM on the Sunday before the corresponding class** so that they may be reviewed before and discussed during class. Students are expected to read at least several other posts before class in order to contribute to classroom discussion and meaningful dialogue about the films we will be exploring together.

\*\*\*Our subject matter often goads deeply seated convictions. Posts are a platform for both your scholarly plume and your *informed* opinions; as such, **respect for your interlocutors is of utmost importance**. Disrespectful or mean-spirited comments will not be tolerated in written posts or in classroom discussion.

Attendance: Attendance is very important for this class. *More than one absence will be considered excessive*. As you will see when you get into the readings, our focus and method for learning and viewing is deeply experiential; as with the “religious,” a great part of our “cinemous” experience relies on communal events (i.e., class viewings and discussions) – on *communitas*. In other words, consider the classroom a sanctuary and each viewing as a religious rite: be there, be on time, be prepared. (Sorry, only grape juice for communion.)

- Assignments submitted late will not be accepted. Exceptions to this rule may be made in extraordinary circumstances about which I am immediately informed and may result in a grade penalty.
- Writing composition (grammar, punctuation, clarity, etc.) factors significantly into the grading of all written work. Plagiarism on any level results in an automatic zero for the assignment; blatant and intentional plagiarism is considered cheating and will result in an “F” for the course.

- More than *one* absence will negatively affect one's participation grade and likely result in a lower final grade for the course. "Excused" absences are a rarity. However, they *may occasionally* be permitted due to unavoidable or religious circumstances if I am immediately notified of them.
- Grading Scale: A = 93-100; A- = 90-92; B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82; C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72; D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62; E = below 59

*The general rule of thumb for my grading scale follows that of a late mentor: "A's" are reserved for excellent work, both in substance and presentation. "B's" will be reserved for very good work, substance and presentation. "C's" are for good solid work, "D's" for poor college work, and "F's" are unacceptable." –BLL*

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

### **HONOR CODE:**

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. For more information about the definition of these terms and other aspects of the Honesty Guidelines, see <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html>. Any student demonstrated to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in any assignment for this course will fail the course. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action and the sanctions listed in paragraph XI of the Student Conduct Code.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES:**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

**COUNSELING RESOURCES** are available on campus for students:

- a. University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575
- b. Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171
- c. Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161
- d. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601

**SOFTWARE USE:** All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### **Act 1: Introduction to Religion and Film and Film as Religion**

#### **Week One, August 27: Introduction**

Introductions and Syllabus Overview

Viewing: *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), Dir. Guillermo del Toro

#### **Week Two, September 3: Analyzing Film and Religion**

Readings: *Film as Religion* (FAR): Intro-Chapter 2, Methods, Approaches, and Definitions (pp. 1-55)

*Film Studies: An Introduction* (FS): Intro-Chapter 1, Mise-en-scene (pp. 1-23)

Viewing: *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Dir. Jonathan Demme

#### **Week Three, September 10: Religious Studies, Film, and Sensory Criticism**

Readings: FAR Chapters 3-4, Myths, Rituals, Morals (pp. 56-107)

FS: Chapter 2, "Mise-en-scene: camera Movement" (pp. 24-36)

Viewing: Seeing and Hearing Film: An Class Exercise in Sensory Criticism, Various selections

#### **Week Four, September 17: Bringing it Together**

Readings: *Teaching Religion and Film* (TRF): Intro-Chapter 2, Ways to view religion in film (pp. 3-54)

FS: Chapter 3, "Mise-en-scene: Cinematography" (pp. 37-55)

Viewing: Various Selections

### **Act 2: Filming Religious Traditions**

#### **Week Five, September 24 – Judaism: Religion, Film, and Exposing the Horror of Genocide**

Readings: TRF: Chapters 3 and 17, "Teaching Biblical Tourism: How Sword-and-Sandal Films Clouded

My Vision" and "Searching for Peace in Films about Genocide" (pp. 57-76 and 283-294)

FAR: Chapter 5, "The Religion-Film Dialogue as Interreligious Dialogue" (pp. 108-136)

FS: Chapter 4, "Editing: From Shot to Shot" (pp. 55-73)

Viewing: *The Pianist* (2002), Dir. Roman Polanski or *Sarah's Key* (2010), Dir. Gilles Paquet-Brenner

#### **Week Six, October 1 – Islam: Dangerous Stereotyping: Dehumanization vs. Interreligious Dialogue**

Readings: TRF: Chapter 7, "Film and the Introduction to Islam Course," Amir Hussain (pp. 141-153)

Ramji, "From Navy Seals to The Siege," *The Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 9 No 2, Oct

2005 <http://unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol9No2/RamjiIslam.htm>

FS: Chapters 8-9, "Filmmakers" and "Performance"

Viewings: *Story of Survival*. This documentary exposes and highlights what we have been learning about the religion and film dialogue by discussing Roman Polanski's and Wladyslaw Szpilman's survival and experience of the Holocaust in conjunction with the making of *The Pianist*.)

*Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2006), Dirs. Jeremy Earp and Sut Jhally.

This documentary features Dr. Jack Shaheen (scholar, author, media critic, and former CBS news consultant on Middle East Affairs) and surveys ways in which Arabs have been cinematically vilified in western media and throughout the history of film. More can be read about Shaheen, the book, and the documentary at <http://www.reelbadarabs.com/index.html>.

*Children of Heaven* (1997), Dir. Majid Majidi . \*Students will watch this outside of class.

### **Week Seven, October 8 -- Buddhism: Following the Selfless Path**

Readings: TRF: Chapter 5, "Buddhism, Film, and Religious Knowing," Francisca Cho (pp.117-127)

*The Religion and Film Reader* (RFR): Chapters 62-63, "Imagining Nothing and Imaging Otherness in Buddhist Film," Francisca Cho and "Devotional Cinema," by Nathaniel Dorsky (pp. 398-415)

Michael L. Gillespie, "Picturing the Way in Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East*" <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/gillespi.htm>

FS: Chapter 6 "Narrative: From Scene to Scene" (pp. 89-102)

Viewing: *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East: A Zen Fable* (1989), Dir. Yong-Kyun Bae

### **Week Eight, October 15 – Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Fires of Desire**

Readings: TRF: Chapters 4, 9 and 10, "Designing a Course on Religion and Cinema in India,"

Gayatri Chatterjee; "Women, Theology, and Film," Gaye Williams Ortiz; and "Seeing is Believing, but Touching's the Truth: Religion, Film, and the Anthropology of the Senses," Richard M. Carp (pp. 77-115 and 177-188)

FS: Chapter 5, "Sound" (pp. 74-88)

Viewing: *Fire* (1996), Dir. Deepa Mehta

### **Week Nine, October 22 – Christianity: Sacrifice, Salvation, and Christ Figures**

Readings: TRF: Chapter 6, "The Pedagogical Challenges of Finding Christ Figures in Film," Christopher Deacy

Anton Karl Kozlovic, "Superman as Christ-Figure: The American Pop Culture Movie Messiah," *Journal of Religion and Film*, Volume 6, No. 1, April 2002:

<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/superman.htm>

Stucky, Mark D. "The Superhero's Mythic Journey: Death and the Heroic Cycle in *Superman*." *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 10, No. 2, October 2006:

[http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol10No2/Stucky\\_Superman.htm](http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol10No2/Stucky_Superman.htm).

FS: Chapter 7 "From Screenplay to Film"

Viewing: *Superman* (1978), Dir. Richard Donner

**\*\*Midterm Exam Due by 10 PM on Monday, October 28**

### **Week Ten, October 29 – Nature Religion: The Tree of Life and Her Devotees**

Readings: FS: Chapters 10-11, “Genres” and “Special Effects”

“Introducing Religion and Dark Green Religion” in Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 1-12. \*Available on Sakai in Resources.

“Prologue: Avatar as Rorschach” and “Introduction: The Religion and Politics of Avatar” in *Avatar and Nature Spirituality*, in B. Taylor (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Environmental Humanities Series, 2013), 3-11 and 13-22.

**Links to Avatar articles may be found at BronTaylor.com:**

<http://www.brontaylor.com/articles/published-by-date.html>

Recommended Additional Reading: “Epilogue: Truth and Fiction in Avatar’s Cosmogony and Nature Religion” in *Avatar and Nature Spirituality*, in B. Taylor. (use link for Avatar articles)  
“Dark Green Religion” in Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 13-41. \*Available on Sakai in Resources.

Viewing: *Avatar* (2009), Dir. James Cameron

### **Week Eleven, November 5 – Lived Religion: Spirituality Is Where You Find It**

Readings: David Chidester, “The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, & the Potlatch of Rock ‘n’ Roll: Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV/4 (1996): 743-765. \*In Sakai in Resources.

Michael Jindra, “Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon,” *Sociology of Religion* Vol. 55:1 27-55 (1994). \*In Sakai in Resources.

Samuel Snyder, “New streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived, Religion of Nature,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, December 2007, Vol 75, No 4, 896-922. \*In Sakai in Resources.

Review FAR 79-107

Viewing: *A River Runs Through It* (1992), Dir. Robert Redford

## **Act 3: Filming Religious Studies, Values, and Genres**

### **Week Twelve, November 12: The Hero’s Journey**

Readings: FAR: pp. 137-139 and Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 11 \*Special attention to ch. 11.

Fitch, John. “Archetypes on Screen: Odysseus, St. Paul, Christ and the American Cinematic Hero and Anti-Hero.” *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 9, No 1, April 2005:  
<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol9No1/FitchArchetypes.htm>.

Zelenka, Michael, “The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope, and the Force  
In *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* (Volume 14, Issue 2, Article 8, 21-1-2010), 266-269.

MacWilliams, Mark W. "Joseph Campbell," in *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition*, pp. 1377-1380.

Schultes, John S., "Any Gods Out There? Perceptions of Religion from Star Wars and Star Trek" in *Journal of Religion and Film* (Vol. 7 No. 2, October 2003).

<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol7No2/SchultesAnyGods.htm>

FS: Chapter 12, "Putting it Together: A Model 8-10 Page Paper"

Viewing: *Star Wars – Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977), Dir. George Lucas

### **Week Thirteen, November 19: Animal Values and the Value of Animals**

Readings: FAR: Chapters 10, 12, and Conclusion (pp.191-201 and 226-250)

TRF: Chapters 15 and 16, "Touching Evil, Touching Good," Irena S.M. Makarushka and "Teaching Ethics with Film: A Course on the Moral Agency of Women," Ellen Ott Marshall Cary Wolfe, "Subject to Sacrifice: Ideology, Psychoanalysis, and the Discourse of Species in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (with Jonathan Elmer)" in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993)

TBA: One short reading in animal rights, depending on film selected by the class

Viewing: *Either Planet of the Apes* (1968) or *Whale Rider* (2002)

**Week Fourteen, November 26:** \*\*\*No Class: In lieu of our in-class viewing, watch *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001), Dir. Ashutosh Gowariker, on your own. This film may be streamed online through Netflix.

**No reading this week so that you may use this time to work on a draft of your film analysis essay. ...you're welcomed☺**

### **Week Fifteen, December 3: Religion is Funny!**

Course review, including *Lagaan*, and a sampling of religion through comedy.

Reading: TRF: Chapters 12 and 13, "Teaching Film as Religion," John C. Lyden and "Filmmaking and World Making," S. Brent Plate (pp. 209-231)

Viewing: Various Selections

**Take Home Exam Due by 10:00PM on Monday, December 2.**

**Film Essay Due by 10:00PM on Saturday, December 7.**