

RS 4800-006 (CRN 87451)
Readings in RS: Religion and Film

Middle Tennessee State University

Thursdays 2:40pm – 5:40pm
Fall 2013

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Course Description

This course looks 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

John C. Lyden (2003). *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals*. New York: New York University Press.

Yann Martel. *Life of Pi*.

Journal of Religion and Film (<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/>) – the Journal of Religion and Film (JRF) is a peer-reviewed, online journal. Several of the required readings for this course are from the JRF and you are encouraged to peruse the journal for supplementary readings. You will find a link to the JRF on D2L.

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

All other required readings (see syllabus) will be posted on Direct 2 Learn (<https://elearn.mtsu.edu/>). Please bring these readings with you to class. Please notify me immediately if there are any problems with the pdf files. If you object to printing these readings because of environmental or economic concerns, take extensive notes (with quotes and page numbers) to bring with you to class. If you experience difficulty with D2L please contact the MTSU Helpdesk at 615-898-5345 or help@mtsu.edu

Expectations, Policies, and Common Courtesy

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all classes. Should you miss a class you are responsible to find out what you missed from one of your colleagues in the class; Prof. King 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 (even quiet whispering is distracting and disrespectful of your fellow students and your professor). Please turn off (or silence) all cell phones before the class begins. Students who plan to spend the lecture time checking email, facebook or texting 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. Students are encouraged to limit their use of technology in the classroom and to take notes 'the old fashioned way' with a pen and paper. Studies have shown that overall the use of computers and other fancy technological gadgets distracts students and alienates them from their learning environment.

Email, D2L and Other Online Communication: Students are expected to write courteously and clearly (no text-messaging abbreviations or slang). Always use your mtsu.edu email address and always include an appropriate summary of the email topic along with the course code in the subject line. Once I have received an email from a student I will gauge the urgency of the email and reply appropriately. In general, I keep regular business hours and you can expect a reply within two business days.

Discussing Grades: You are welcome to discuss your grades with Prof. King a minimum of 24 hours after you have received work back. Please note that I put a great deal of effort into grading fairly and consistently. Mistakes in calculation do happen, but generally speaking, I take pride in grading well. This means that you must consider very carefully any urge you have to seek to change a grade. Do not think that "it never hurts to ask," as in this case, your request is, in fact, an affront to my academic integrity. If, however, you feel that a genuine mistake has been made or you wish an explanation for the grade you have received, you are always welcome to make an appointment or drop in to office hours.

Policy on Late Work: All assignments are due at the beginning of class (any assignment handed in after the class has commenced will have 10 percent deducted from their mark). All late assignments will be penalized an additional 2 percent per day (including weekends). If you have a problem with the due date, please see Prof. King in advance (two weeks). Makeup exams/tests will only be scheduled for students who have a university-approved absence (such as team related travel or illness). In case of university-related travel, you must notify me at the beginning of the semester so that we can schedule a make-up exam time. If there is an emergency, I will be understanding. Students who miss an assignment due to illness or other acute adversity beyond their control must submit a formal letter of petition to the Prof. King in advance of assignments or within one week for missed tests. In the case of illness, you must present me with a doctor's note. In the case of a death in your family, documentation (such as an obituary) must be presented.

We live in a technological age and, unless a student was born yesterday,¹ 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 Students born yesterday are not permitted to enroll in RS 4800-006 (CRN 87451).

MTSU's Academic Misconduct Policy

Academic Misconduct: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or facilitating any such act.

Plagiarism. The adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, statements, images, or works of another person as one's own without proper acknowledgment. By placing one's name on work submitted for credit, the student certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. On written assignments, if verbatim statements are included, the statements must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from regular text as indented extracts.

A student can avoid being charged with plagiarism by acknowledging sources used. Sources must be acknowledged whenever:

- a) one quotes another person's actual words or replicates all or part of another's product;
- b) one uses another person's ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories, even if they are completely paraphrased in one's own words;
- c) one borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative materials – unless the information is common knowledge.

Unauthorized collaboration with others on papers or projects can inadvertently lead to a charge of plagiarism. If in doubt, consult your instructor in advance. In addition, it is considered to be plagiarism when you submit as your own any academic exercise (for example, written work) prepared totally or in part by another.

Plagiarism also includes submitting work in which portions were substantially produced by someone acting as a tutor or editor.

Cheating. Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in an academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours. Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise.

Fabrication. The intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive. Examples include, citing information not taken from the source indicated; listing sources in a reference not used in the academic exercise; inventing data or source information for research or other academic exercise.

Facilitation. Helping or attempting to help another to violate a provision of the institutional code of academic misconduct.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- a) Letting another individual copy your homework, test answer, etc.
- b) Giving your assignment, paper, homework, etc. to another student for any reason without permission of the instructor.
- c) Giving test questions to another individual that has not yet taken the exam.

Any student suspected of committing academic misconduct will be required to meet with me to discuss the situation. Your name will also be forwarded to the Assistant Dean of Judicial Affairs and Mediation Services for possible disciplinary action. If you are found responsible of committing an act of academic misconduct, you will receive an automatic "F" for this course.

For more on MTSU's academic integrity policy, see the MTSU Academic Integrity Brochure Handout on D2L and the Judicial Affairs website (www.mtsu.edu/~judaff). All information above is copied from the MTSU Academic Integrity Brochure.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

ADA accommodation requests (temporary or permanent) are determined only by Disabled Students Services. Students are responsible for contacting the Disabled Students Services Office at 615.898.2783 to obtain ADA accommodations and for providing the instructor with the accommodation letter from Disabled Student Services.

Course Requirements and Assessment

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

2 - 30% for Critical Reflection Assignments - (FIVE 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 D2L Discussions.

Every other weekend students will watch **at least** one of the weekend movies. They will be expected to post to a D2L 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.

4 – 20% for Major Essay – *From the Big Screen to the Small Screen* **(DUE Wednesday, December 4th, 2013!)**

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 or is available online (More details will be provided later in the semester).

The paper should be 8-10 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced. It will be due during the final week of classes—late penalty is 10% for being late, plus 2% for each additional day (including weekends). You will submit this paper online through D2L.

5 - 25% for final exam (during MTSU exam period)

The final exam will be a take-home exam based upon readings and lectures. More details will be provided closer to the date of the exam.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade Points Out of 100

A = 93 pts. or above	D+ = 62.9 pts. to 58 pts.
B+ = 92.9 pts. to 88 pts.	D = 57.9 pts. to 54 pts.
B = 87.9 pts. to 83 pts.	D- = 53.9 pts. to 50 pts.
B- = 82.9 pts. to 78 pts.	F = 49.9 pts. or below
C+ = 77.9 pts. to 73 pts.	
C = 72.9 pts. to 68 pts.	
C- = 67.9 pts. to 63 pts.	

Schedule and Readings

August 29 – Introduction: Religion in Film, Religion as Film, Religion through Film

- Lyden Chs. 1- 2
- Gordon Lynch (2007) “What is this ‘Religion’ in the Study of Religion and Popular Culture?” pp. 125-42 in Gordon Lynch (ed.), *Researching Religion and Popular Culture*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Film: Batman: The Dark Knight

September 5 - Myth and Meaning: Existing Theories about Religion and Film

- Lyden Ch. 3
- George Aichele (2005) “Artificial Bodies: Blade Runner and the Death of Man,” pp.137-148 in Eric S. Christianson, Peter Francis and William R. Telford (eds.), *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film*. SCM Press.
- Film: Blade Runner

Weekend Film #1: Metropolis; The Matrix; Truly, Madly, Deeply; O Brother Where Art Thou; Fight Club

September 12 - the Jewish Experience in Hollywood and the Subversive Shaping of the American Dream

- Lyden Ch.4
- 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)
- Documentary Film: Hollywoodism: Jews, Movies and the American Dream

September 19 – Religion and Science

- Lyden Ch.11
- 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 #2: Crimes and Misdemeanours; Shindler’s List; Dirty Dancing; The Birth of A Nation; What the Bleep; The War of the Worlds; Aliens

September 26 - The Christ Archetype

- 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

October 3 – Christian Narrative: Atonement, Transcendence and Trinitarians

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

Weekend Film #3: Sling Blade, Life of Brian, Platoon, Crash, Jesus Christ Vampire Slayer

October 10 – The Apocalypse: Representations of the End of Days

- Lyden Ch. 12
- Ch. 1 in Amy Johnson Frykholm pp. 13-37 in *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*
- Clark Greiner, "The Rapture: A Challenging Vision of Horror," *JRF* (Vol. 1, No. 1 April 1997)
- Film: The Rapture

October 17 – After the End: The Post-colonial, Eco-Apocalypse

- Lyden Ch. 5
- Read the Avatar section in *JRF* Vol. 14, No. 1 April 2010.
- Film: Avatar

Weekend Film #4: Seeking a Friend for the End of the World; Terminator II; Left Behind; Twelve Monkeys; The Apostle

October 24 – Islam and The "Other": Orientalism in Film

- 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
- 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
- Film: Osama

October 31 – Race, Gender and Culture

- Lyden Ch. 8
- Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward Feminist Ethnography of Cinema" in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*
- Film: Fire

Weekend Film #5: Earth; Monsoon Wedding; Malcolm X; Lawrence of Arabia; Daughters of Dust

November 7 – Representation, Formation and the Divine: The Book is "Always" Better than the Movie

- Yann Martell, *Life of Pi*.
- Film: Life of Pi

November 14 – Fieldtrip (we will select and attend a movie at a local movie theatre together as a class)

- Janet Staiger, "The Perversity of Spectators: Expanding the History of the Classical Hollywood Cinema." Pages 28-43 in *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*
- Robert C. Allen, "From exhibition to reception: reflections on the audience in film history," *Screen* 31 (1990): 347-56
- Film: TBD

November 21 – Theologies of Youth: Children's Films and Fantasy

- Lyden Ch. 10, Conclusion
- Film: E.T. The Extraterrestrial

Weekend Film #6: Chronicles of Narnia; Harry Potter; Grapes of Wrath; Lord of the Rings; Gone with the Wind