HUMANITIES 3826 3.0M “RELIGION AND FILM”
FALL 2016
Instructor: Prof. Jamie S. Scott

Course Description

This course examines the role and representation of the religious in popular film. It introduces students to the vocabularies of Religious Studies and Film Studies, and critically explores the relationship between religion and film as aspects of contemporary culture. Drawing mainly on mass-distributed films from Europe and North America, the course analyzes the ways in which contemporary cinema narrativizes Aboriginal, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious myths, histories, rituals, institutions, ethics, and doctrines. Issues addressed include: To what extent do particular films reflect the personal beliefs of particular film directors? How are religious leaders, institutions and histories portrayed in contemporary cinema, and to what purpose? How do popular films embody religious symbols, rituals and values, and to what end? How does contemporary cinema represent the teachings and traditions of different religions, in both personal and societal terms? How does the cinema help shape our attitudes towards religious “others”? Topics for discussion include: the creator and the created; free will and destiny; sin and salvation; evil and responsibility; selfhood and society; reality and illusion; transcendence and the afterlife. Some prior knowledge of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Maori traditions will be helpful.

Time and Place
Wednesday, 14:30-18:30PM; TEL 0007

Required Viewing and Reading
See the course outline

Assignments
1) In-class quizzes, 5 questions each, best 5 of 6: 25%
3) Mid-term in-class examination, Wednesday 5 October, 2016: 25%
   The mid-term in-class examination will cover all the material assigned in weeks 2 and 3 of the course, as well as class discussions. These materials and class discussions are the only resources you may draw upon. The examination will take the form of a critical essay.
4) Final take-home examination, Wednesday 30 November, 2016: 50%
   Assigned in class on Wednesday, 30 November, 2016, the final take-home examination will comprise two comparative critical essays. There will be a choice of questions. They will cover all the material assigned in weeks 2 and 6 to 11 of the course, as well as class discussions. These materials and class discussions are the only resources you may draw upon. Each essay should be 2000-2500 words and no more. It must use either MLA or APA scholarly style and format. It must be typed, double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12-point font. To avoid the risk of plagiarism, be sure to acknowledge sources wherever appropriate and to do so accurately. The essays must be submitted electronically as an e-mail attachment to
jscott@yorku.ca and in hard copy in the student assignment drop-box, Department of Humanities, Vanier College, on or before 12:00PM, Wednesday, 7 December, 2016. Failure to adhere to these instructions will result in loss of marks.
Course Enrolment and Withdrawal Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last date to enrol without permission of the course director</th>
<th>21 September, 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last date to enrol with permission of the course director</td>
<td>5 October, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last date to drop courses without receiving a grade</td>
<td>11 November, 2016</td>
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Grades and Grading Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade (grade point)</th>
<th>Percent Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+ (9)</td>
<td>90 - 100</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
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<tr>
<td>A (8)</td>
<td>80 - 89</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+ (7)</td>
<td>79 - 75</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>B (6)</td>
<td>74 - 70</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+ (5)</td>
<td>69 - 65</td>
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<tr>
<td>C (4)</td>
<td>60 - 64</td>
<td>Fairly Competent</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+ (3)</td>
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<td>Passing</td>
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<tr>
<td>D (2)</td>
<td>50 - 54</td>
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<tr>
<td>E (1)</td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>Marginally Failing</td>
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<tr>
<td>F (0)</td>
<td>0 - 39</td>
<td>Failing</td>
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Religious Observance Days
If any of the dates for exams or in-class assignments pose a conflict with a religious observance date, please contact the Course Director during the first three weeks of class to make an accommodation.

Late and Missed Work
Should you have to miss a class or an examination on account of illness or a pressing personal matter, please be sure to inform your tutorial leader. You must submit a detailed doctor’s note or valid equivalent proof of cause.

Disability
Students with physical, learning or psychiatric disabilities who require reasonable accommodations should discuss their needs with the Course Director early in the term so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Students are encouraged to access the services of Counselling and Disability Services.

Laptops and Other Electronics in Class
The use of technology for learning and research is encouraged, but laptop computers and personal electronics during class may easily become a greater distraction than benefit.
The use of any personal electronics during class, including laptop and notebook computers is therefore not permitted in class. Please leave your laptops, notebooks, mp3 players, ipods, cell phones etc. in your bags and TURNED OFF during class.

This policy will be monitored carefully. Failure to observe this courtesy will result in a request to leave the class, as will any other form of distracting conduct.

Those students requiring accommodations for disability must present official documentation explaining this necessity to the course director (from Counselling and Disability Services, Office of the Registrar, etc.).
COURSE OUTLINE

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NOTA BENE

THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO SUBMIT ANY AND ALL WRITTEN WORK HANDED IN BY ANY AND ALL STUDENTS IN FULFILLMENT OF ANY AND ALL COURSE ASSIGNMENTS TO THE SCRUTINY OF TURNITIN, “THE WORLD’S LEADING PLAGIARISM PREVENTION SYSTEM” (SEE HTTP://WWW.TURNITIN.COM/). EVERY STUDENT’S ENROLMENT IN THIS COURSE CONSTITUTES CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT TO THIS STIPULATION.

NOTA BENE II

SOME FILMS AND READINGS CONTAIN EXPLICIT SEXUALITY, VIOLENCE, COURSE LANGUAGE OR BLASPHEMY. IF SUCH ISSUES BOTHER YOU, YOU OUGHT NOT TO BE TAKING THIS COURSE.

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SEPTEMBER

1. Wed 14 Greetings!

INTRODUCTIONS

2. Wed 21 Interdisciplinary Studies in Religion and Film

Required reading:

3. Wed 28 Case Study: Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, final cut 2007 [1982])

Required viewing:
Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, final cut 2007 [1982])
Required reading:
“Blade Runner,” All-Movie Guide [http://allmovie.com/] [see also links]
[see also links]
Susan Doll and Greg Faller. 1986. “Blade Runner and Genre: Film Noir and Science Fiction.” Literature/Film Quarterly XIV.2: 89-100 (instructor’s copy)

OCTOBER

4. Wed 5  QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR THE MID-TERM EXAMINATION (25%)

5. Wed 12  MID-TERM EXAMINATION IN CLASS (25%)

6. Wed 19  Judaism

Required viewing:
The Quarrel (Eli Cohen, 1993)

Required reading:
“The Quarrel” (Eli Cohen, 1993) All-Movie Guide [see also links]
“The Quarrel (1993),” Internet Movie Database [see also links]


IN-CLASS QUIZ OF FIVE QUESTIONS

7. Wed 26  Christianity
Required viewing:
*Jesus of Montréal* (Denys Arcand, 1989)

Required reading:
“Jesus of Montréal,” *All-Movie Guide* [see also links]
“Jesus of Montréal (1989),” *Internet Movie Database* [see also links]


**IN-CLASS QUIZ OF FIVE QUESTIONS**

**NOVEMBER**

8. Wed 2 Islam

Required viewing:
*My Son the Fanatic* (Udayan Prasad, 1997)

Required reading:
“My Son the Fanatic,” *All-Movie Guide* [see also links]
“My Son the Fanatic (1997),” *Internet Movie Database* [see also links]


**IN-CLASS QUIZ OF FIVE QUESTIONS**

**FILM AND WORLD RELIGIONS**

9. Wed 9 Indigenous Spirituality
Required viewing:
*Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002)

Required reading:
“Whale Rider,” *All-Movie Guide* [see also links]
“Whale Rider (2002),” *Internet Movie Database* [see also links]

**IN-CLASS QUIZ OF FIVE QUESTIONS**

10. Wed 16 Hinduism

Required viewing:
*Water* (Deepa Mehta, 2005)

Required reading:
“Water,” *All-Movie Guide* [see also links]
“Water (2005),” *Internet Movie Database* [see also links]

**IN-CLASS QUIZ OF FIVE QUESTIONS**

11. Wed 23 Buddhism

Required viewing:
*Kundun* (Martin Scorsese, 1997)

Required reading:
“*Kundun,*” *All-Movie Guide* [see also links]
“Kundun (1997),” *Internet Movie Database* [see also links]

**IN-CLASS QUIZ OF FIVE QUESTIONS**

12. Wed 30 QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR THE FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAMINATION (50%)  

**FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAMINATION ASSIGNED (50%)**

THE FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAMINATION MUST BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY AS AN E-MAIL ATTACHMENT TO JSCOTT@YORKU.CA AND IN HARD COPY IN THE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT DROP-BOX, DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES, VANIER COLLEGE, ON OR BEFORE 12:00PM, WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER, 2016.

BON VOYAGE!
APPENDIX
FILM VOCABULARY

This course is offered by the Division of Humanities and the Programme in Religious Studies. Students with no background in Film Studies might find useful this outline of basic film terms.


a) Incarnations of the Story

i. Diegesis:
Diegesis describes the narrative elements of a film that are shown or immediately inferred from the content of a film. The term refers to the world of a film’s story. It includes events presumed to have occurred, and actions and spaces not shown on screen. “Diegetic” thus refers to things which exist within the “world” of the film’s narrative; “diegetic sound,” for example, means any voice, musical passage, or sound effect represented as originating from a source within the film’s world. “Non-diegetic” or “extra-diegetic” elements of a film do not “exist” or “take place” in the same plane of reality that the characters inhabit. For example, we usually presume that the characters within an action film do not hear the rousing theme music that accompanies their exploits. That music is non- or extra-diegetic, but still part of the film. A “non-diegetic insert” is a shot or a series of shots cut into a sequence, representing objects as being outside the space of the narrative, and “nondiegetic sound” is such sound as mood music or narrator’s commentary, which is represented as coming from a source outside the space of the narrative.

ii. Narrative:
Narrative denotes a story in any form of human expression where no single individual is telling the story. The term refers to the process through which the plot conveys or witholds story information. It can be more or less restricted to character knowledge and more or less informative in presenting the mental perceptions and thoughts of the characters.

iii. Narrative Film:
Narrative films can include a large corpus of fiction and nonfiction films including documentaries and dramas, though the genre predominantly has to do with fiction. Narrative films primarily concentrate on story lines and can include character development, but usually the drama and fiction are emphasized.
iv. Story:
In a narrative film, story describes all the events that we see and hear, plus all those that we infer or assume to have occurred, arranged by the screen writer or by a parallel historical sequence through which the film’s themes are developed. Story includes presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, spatial locations, character involvement, and settings. Story is different from plot, which is the film’s actual presentation of certain events in the narrative. The story is general, whereas the plot is specific and includes both internal and external relations to the work (see “Plot”).

v. Plot:
Plot denotes the events in an individual narrative and how they are arranged. Arguably, plot differs from story, which is the viewer’s imaginary construction of all events in the narrative (see “Story”). Plot refers more concretely to the scenes that are presented in the film, in the precise order in which they are presented. In a narrative film, plot means all the events that are directly presented to us in their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations.

b) Basic Elements of a Film

i. Frame:
Essentially, frames are still images that are collected in quick succession, developed, and projected, giving the illusion of motion. Each individual, still image on motion picture film is referred to as a frame.

ii. Shot:
In the process of photographing a scene, a shot refers to one constant take by the camera. It is most often filmed at one time with a solo camera.

iii. Sequence:
Sequence refers to segments of a film narrative that are edited together and unified by a common setting, time, event or story-line.

iv. Sound Track:
The sound track is that portion of the sound film medium in which are recorded the dialogue, music, narration and sound effects. The sound head and film gate on a film projector are physically separated from one another. This gap is covered during the recording of a sound-film by keeping the soundtrack recording a few frames head of the photographic image. The sound passes over the projector head at the same time the photographic image passes before the projector’s light aperture/lens (the film gate).
c) **Basic Manipulations of the Basic Elements**

i. **Cutting/Editing:**
Cutting or editing refers to the process of changing from one shot to another accomplished through the camera or by the splicing of shots together by the cutter or editor. Editing is now the preferred term, and includes the decisions, controls, sensibilities, vision and integrative capabilities of the individual cutting or editing artist.

ii. **Invisible Cutting/Editing:**
Invisible cutting or editing refers to cutting or editing procedures that are so well-formed that the viewer is not aware that a splice has taken place. This process is particularly important in action sequences because the audience is psychologically intent on the moving images that a cut in the film—an unobtrusive cut—is not noticed. On the other hand, some film-makers use quick cuts and jump cuts from one scene to the next without transition so as to unnerve the audience and evoke emotional responses in them.

iii. **Shot/Reverse Shot:**
Shot and reverse shot denote the technique of cutting developed by the Hollywood studios in which the camera switches between two conversants or interacting individuals. See also “Invisible Cutting/Editing.”

iv. **Montage:**
In the production and editing of film, montage has come to refer to a seemingly unrelated series of frames combined where one scene quickly dissolves into the next, shifting categories, effects and settings in such a manner as to convey a quick passage of time or an abstract unity through thematic devices such as meter, rhythm, tonality, and intellectuality. Continuity, if it exists, is not captured in a frame by frame juxtaposition, but rather through an abstraction. See also “Mise-en-Scene.”

v. **Mise-en-Scene:**
In essence a reply to advocates of montage, the proponents of mise-en-scene understand, accentuate and celebrate the importance of the individual frame of film and what it contains. A psychological unity exists in a film from one frame to the next. There should not be a disruptive emphasis on the complete unity of each frame in and of itself without giving credence to the totality. It is similar to the concept of continuity within the frame and its relation to the next, and to the concept of discontinuity involved in complex montages, where many images are presented on a single frame. See also “Montage.”

vi. **Synchronization:**
Synchronization has to do with correctly aligning the photographic and audio portions of a film so that the image and sound is heard and seen simultaneously.

vii. **Framing:**
Framing has to do with properly surrounding the subject of a shot by the edges of the actual boundaries of the film. All that is seen in the viewfinder of a camera does not always translate directly into the proper centering of the subject. Framing is a technical
nuance learned in the process of photography. It involves camera angle, distance, and arrangement of objects and people in front of the camera—the “Mise-en-Scene.” Important in framing is the way that the edges of the screen make a sharp distinction between what is seen and what is not seen, what is included and what is excluded, in a particular frame.

d) Basic Elements of Camera Setup

i. Camera Angle:
The camera angle refers to the point of view associated with the focal point of the camera when it is positioned for shooting. Included in the angle is the perspective given by the camera to the depth of focus, height and width of the particular object and action being photographed. The angle also refers to whether the shot is taken from behind, in front, from the side or from the top or bottom of the particular view. Terms appropriated for these various angles include eye-level angle, high-angle, low-angle, side-view angle and the “Dutch” angle.

ii. Distance:
Distance refers to the amount of relational space between the audience and the character on the screen. Though the characters are two-dimensional and the audience is distinctly separate from the screen by dead space—virtual reality in the theatre has not yet been developed—the camera’s perspective, in effect, attempts to provide the amount of space desired subject to the director’s discretion. This space often results in the interaction and psychological connection between the characters and the audience. The connection is achieved through the dynamics and varying degrees between long shots, medium shots and close-ups.

iii. Establishing/Master Shot:
The establishing or master shot occurs at the beginning of a film, episode or scene within a film. It is a wide-angle and/or long shot—a “full-shot”—taken for the purpose of identifying the location or setting. The establishing or master shot gives the audience the opportunity to establish, or at least to surmise, an orientation. The establishing or master shot also helps to set up distinctions between the general locale and its specific details from subsequent shots within the broader context of a sequence.

iv. Perspective:
Perspective has to do with spatial relationships. As in painting, photography, theatrical performances, et cetera, so in film perspective refers to the accurate depiction of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. In experimental forms of film, of course, accurate depiction is redefined. Height and breadth come naturally to the surface, but the added dimension of depth must be constructed through cameras, lenses, sets, and designs during composition.
e) Basic Camera Movements

i. Camera Movement:
The camera rarely remains static. Camera movement includes conventional uses of the camera to obtain camera angles and various perspectives while filming. It include the camera ploys of panning, tilting, tracking, and zooming. When movement occurs, however, the camera comes to a rest to shoot, providing for smooth transitions from scene to scene. Usually, camera movements are coordinated with the action in a scene, so that the camera does not go in the opposite direction to the action. But experimental methods are sometimes used, inverting or confusing this relationship.

ii. Dolly:
Cameras and other equipment, such as microphones and lights, are often carried around the set on movable platforms. These platforms are called dollies and are independently moved by the dolly grip, so that the cameraman, and audio and lighting technicians, can keep their concerns focused. Dollies are often run on tracks for special dolly pans, chinese dollies, or merely for structural smoothness. Dollies are used for camera work for of the time, and they can include booms for the cameras. This technology allows for the lowering, raising, and pivoting of the camera. All these shots can be achieved simultaneously with an horizontal movement of the camera upon the dolly track.

iii. Dolly Shot:
A camera perspective, on a moving or stationary subject, obtained while the camera is in motion on either a dolly or a camera truck, is called a dolly shot. When the camera is so mounted and moves toward a closer proximity of the subject, it is a “dolly-in”; likewise, when the camera is so mounted and moves away from the subject, it is a “dolly-out.”

iv. Tracking Shot:
Tracking shots are shots taken from a dolly that moves on tracks, particularly shots in which the camera follows the movement of a subject.

v. Crane:
A crane is a large camera dolly that can raise the camera as much as twenty feet above the ground. The crane has the capacity to move forward and backward and is usually operated by electronic controls. Motions are generally silent and the crane allows shots to be made over a wide ranging area, providing great access to cover shots.

vi. Pan:
From the Greek “pan,” meaning “all,” this movement of the camera is achieved by moving the camera while turning it on an horizontal access. At least four functions are served by this technique: an all-encompassing view of the scene; a device for leading the audience to a particular person or place; following a person or vehicle across a distant scene; or giving the audience the visual images and perspective as seen by a character when turning her/his head.
vii. Tilt:
A tilt is a turn of the camera up or down on the vertical axis.

viii. Zoom Shot:
A zoom shot is a shot taken with a zoom lens in which the focal length of the lens changes from wide angle to long focus or the reverse, so that the camera seems to move in to (i.e. “zoom in”) or away from (i.e. “zoom out”) the subject while the camera actually remains stationary. This technique is now accomplished through specialized lenses as well as camera movement. Zoom effects can also be achieved and enhanced by the use of an optical printer. Motions toward or away from the filmed image in the processing of the product can yield a similar effect.

**APPENDIX II**

**RECOMMENDED INTRODUCTIONS TO RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**


These introductions also contain reliable bibliographies for further research.

For help getting started on research into particular religious themes, symbols, doctrines, figures, institutions, rituals, myths, values etc. go to: