

**Religion and  Films:  
Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course  
(Religious Studies 3812, F2018)**

Slot: 32 (Wednesdays 7:00-9:30 pm)  
Classroom: A1049

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Porter  
Office: A5009  
Phone: 864-2469  
Email: [jporter@mun.ca](mailto:jporter@mun.ca)

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 12:30-2, Wed. 6-7pm

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Brightspace/D2L RELS 3812 course page available at

<https://online.mun.ca/d2l/home>

And

<http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~jporter/Disney.html>

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**Course Description:**

This course provides an in-depth examination of the religious themes and issues arising from and within the Disney franchise, including Disney's Animated feature films, other Disney cartoons and television shows, and Disney's live-action films released under the Disney brand. The course will explore the impact of Walt Disney's philosophies on the Disney franchise, as well as the impact those who succeeded Disney in leadership of the Walt Disney Company. Theoretical models drawn from the field of Religion and Popular Culture will provide the lens through which the religious themes present within Disney films, the reaction of the religious right to Disney via a study of the Disney Boycott, and ideological controversies surrounding Disney will be explored.

**Textbooks:**

There are no required textbooks for this course – all required readings have been posted to our D2L/Brightspace page.

**Method of evaluation:**

Assignment 1 (A/V or written) Due October 3 <sup>rd</sup>	25%
Assignment 2 (A/V or written) Due November 14 <sup>th</sup>	25%
Final Take-home Exam Due: Dec. 5 <sup>th</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> day of exam period)	50%

**Assignments (25% each):** There are two types of assignments you may choose for this class: written assignments, and Audio/Visual (fan video) assignments. You may mix and match the type of assignment you choose to do (2 written, 2 video, or a combo of each). The first assignment is due **October 3<sup>rd</sup>**, the second is due **November 14<sup>th</sup>**.

***All assignments should be submitted via the Dropbox on our D2L/Brightspace page.***

### **Option One – Video assignments:**

If you choose the video option, must submit your video in one of the following four formats: .wmv, .mov, .mp4, m4v.

If you use Windows Movie Maker, please double check that your file has been exported as one of these formats (.wlmv files are NOT readable by anyone but you – don't send them to me).

You must also write a one-paragraph description of your video argument, clearly listing the videos and music used, and the argument your video is intending to make, and submit that along with the video.

The challenge of these assignments is to go back to the primary source material – the films – and find evidence of the argument you are trying to make. Often times, people accuse or praise Disney for ideological messages/themes without citing evidence from the primary sources. These video assignments give you the opportunity to “quote” the primary sources to support your argument.

You must choose a music track to make the “verbal” argument – anything from Aretha Franklin's “Respect” to Dead Kennedys “Stars And Stripes Of Corruption.”

Find info on the practical aspects of making a video assignment by checking out the links here - <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~jporter/Disney.html>

**Video assignment 1 (25%)** – create a clear, strong video argument regarding one or more of the following themes: racism, sexism, gender, consumerism, corporate power. Is Disney racist? Is it multi-cultural? Is Disney sexist? Is it pro-woman? Do men get a bad rap? Do women get a bad rap? Is Disney all about product placement? Is it subverting childhood innocence? Is it empowering, or disempowering, children's imaginations? Etc. You may use any Disney films to make your argument, not just the ones discussed in this

section of the course. You may focus on a single film, or follow the theme across multiple films. Don't forget to hand in a one-paragraph description of the argument your video is attempting to make. **Due: October 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

**Video Assignment 2 (25%)** – create a clear, strong video argument regarding the place and treatment of Christianity, Indigenous religions, or World religions in Disney films – you may select a single Christian theme (salvation, sacrifice, forgiveness, redemption, heaven, hell, angels, demons, Christ figures, etc.), or you may select the broader question of whether Disney is pro-Christian, anti-Christian, non-Christian, etc. in its overarching religious framework. You might choose to address the question of whether nature is enchanted and sacralized in Disney films, or whether or not Disney has an “ecological agenda.” You might focus on the authenticity of Disney’s depictions of World Religions, or explore how Disney links World Religions to western ideological concerns. You may use any Disney films to make your argument, not just the ones discussed in this section of the course. Don't forget to hand in a one-paragraph description of the argument your video is attempting to make. **Due: Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>.**

### **Video Assignment Grading Criteria**

Your videos will be graded on the following things:

- Is there a clear, strong argument in the video?
- Does the video make this argument apparent without relying on the written description?
- It is wise to choose a single issue, and present a strongly emphasized perspective on that issue in your video (for example, to argue that Disney is clearly sexist, or that Disney is clearly feminist). Attempts to conflate multiple issues in your video, or to show mixed messages in Disney films, are much more difficult to pull off successfully.
- Are the scenes well-chosen to support the argument? (Does your video use a wide variety of scenes to make its argument, or does it re-use the same scenes over and over again, indicating that you could not find enough evidence in the film(s) themselves to adequately support your claim?)
- Is the music well-chosen to support the argument? (Choose your audio wisely, selecting a song with clearly appropriate lyrics for the message you wish to convey—songs with lyrics that only tangentially support your argument will distract from the video; music without lyrics is much harder to pull off successfully—it can be done, but the music must be strongly nuanced if you make this choice.)
- Is your video and audio quality good? (Don't use video that has been so compressed it gets pixelated or corrupted. Make sure your audio is not distorted.)
- Is the video editing well done? Do scenes fit together cleanly, matching the lyrics precisely? Is the audio properly synced with the video scenes? Do

- transitions between scenes work well, or are they distracting? Is the video footage properly lighted, the audio consistently loud/quiet, etc.
- Does the one-paragraph write-up adequately explain the “point”/argument of the video? Does it cite academic sources to support its argument? Does it list the films used in the video, and the artist/title of the song used in the video?
  - Is the video on-topic? Does it deal with issues/themes appropriate to the specific assignment?
  - What else does the video have going for it? Is the video powerful, convincing, artistic, amazing, creative, touching, thought-provoking, etc?

## Option Two – Written assignments

**Written Assignment 1:** Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section One of our course (Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> – Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018), plus the films covered during this section of the course, and taking into account the class discussions during this section of the course. Identify 1) what you consider to be the key point or points of dispute in the assigned readings; 2) which arguments you find most convincing, and 3) discuss your reasons for interpreting the issues in the way that you do. What evidence can you present to support your reading of the given issues? What religious dimensions do you see in the film or films, and does your analysis match or depart from those in the readings? What does your reading of the films and assigned readings reveal about an overall “Disney worldview,” what implications does it have for our understanding religion (and race, sex, and consumerism) in Disney? Your analysis of the films and readings must build upon the class discussions, not simply reiterate the points raised in class. **Due: Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

**Written Assignment 2:** Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for **EITHER** the assigned readings for our course from Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup> – Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>, **OR** the assigned readings for our course from Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> – Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>), plus the films covered during these sections of the course, and taking into account the class discussions during these sections of the course. Identify 1) what you consider to be the key point or points of dispute in the assigned readings; 2) what overarching themes occur in the films/sets of readings, and what themes/issues seem specific to a single film, and 3) discuss what the similarities/differences between films might mean for our understanding of Christianity and Disney, or Indigenous/World religions and Disney. Is Disney anti-Christian? Pro-Christian? Animistic? Is it exploiting the world’s religions for profit? Does it misrepresent world religions, trivialize them, or embrace them? Or something else? **Due: Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>.**

## Written Assignment Grading Criteria

Your written assignments will be graded on the following things:

- Do you accurately identify key issues in the assigned material;
- Does your discussion of these issues reveal understanding of the complexities of the issues;
- Do you persuasively argue for a particular interpretation of relevant issues;
- Does your analysis of the films and readings build upon the class material and assigned readings, but also go beyond these sources to show clear and insightful analysis of your own on the relevant issues (in other words, does your assignment do more than just reiterate the stuff you've read, does it reveal that you have thought about what you have read, expanded upon it, and written persuasively about the issues you explore.
- Is your writing effective? (Grammar, spelling, citations, and so on.)

**Take-home Exam (50%):** This course will have a final take-home exam. This exam will be essay-style, with multiple questions, and with some choice of questions. The exam is designed to encourage you to show your understanding of the details and implications of the material we have been studying. You may draw upon outside sources to answer the questions on the exam; however, you are not required to do so. This exam is will be handed out on the last day of class, and will be due on the first day of the exam period. **Due: December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> day of exam period, at 10 AM sharp!!! *Take-home exams should be submitted via the Dropbox on our D2L/Brightspace page.***

## Policies

Late assignments will accepted in accordance with Memorial University's policies and procedures.

- A student is, at times, prevented from completing a part of the evaluation by illness or medical conditions of less than five calendar days' duration. In such cases, a student may apply for an alternate evaluation by declaring to the relevant instructor that he or she has experienced such an illness or medical condition. This declaration should be made via telephone or in writing through the student's @mun.ca e-mail account. This declaration should be made in advance of the original date on which an in-class part of the evaluation is to be held or a take-home part of the evaluation is due, wherever possible, but no later than 48 hours after the original date of the part of the evaluation. If the declaration is made by telephone, written confirmation must then be received by the relevant instructor within seven calendar days of the original date of the part of the evaluation.

- A student who is prevented from completing a part of the evaluation by illness of at least five calendar days' duration, bereavement or other acceptable cause, duly authenticated in writing, may apply for an alternate evaluation. This application should be made in advance of the original date on which an in-class part of the evaluation is to be held or a take-home part of the evaluation is due, wherever possible, but no later than 48 hours after the original date of the part of the evaluation. If application is made by telephone, written confirmation must then be received by the head of the appropriate academic unit within seven calendar days of the original date of the part of the evaluation. The following supporting documentation is required:
  - For illness or medical conditions, medical documentation from a health professional is required. Students should provide the health professional with a copy of the Student Medical Certificate ([www.mun.ca/regoff/STUDENT\\_MEDICAL\\_CERTIFICATE.pdf](http://www.mun.ca/regoff/STUDENT_MEDICAL_CERTIFICATE.pdf))
  - For bereavement or other acceptable cause, official documents or letters that support the reason for the request (e.g. death certificate, letter from employer, etc.) are required.

***Assignments that are submitted more than 5 days late without email notification or documentation will receive a 10% deduction per day after the first 5 days.***

### **Accommodation of Students with Special Needs**

I am committed to facilitating and promoting an accessible, inclusive, and mutually respectful learning environment. Students requiring special accommodation are asked to communicate firstly with the Glenn Roy Blundon Centre ([www.mun.ca/blundon](http://www.mun.ca/blundon)) at the earliest opportunity. University policies and procedures pertaining to accommodations for students with disabilities can be found at [www.mun.ca/policy/site/policy.php?id=239](http://www.mun.ca/policy/site/policy.php?id=239).

### **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

Students are directed to familiarize themselves with section 6.12.4 of the University Calendar on academic offenses: "Plagiarism is the act of presenting the ideas or works of another as one's own. This applies to all material such as essays, laboratory assignments, laboratory reports, work term reports, design projects, seminar presentations, statistical data, computer programs, research results, and theses. The properly acknowledged use of sources is an accepted and important part of scholarship. Use of such material without acknowledgment is contrary to accepted norms of academic behaviour. Information regarding acceptable writing practices is available through the Writing Centre at [www.mun.ca/writingcentre](http://www.mun.ca/writingcentre).

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## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO ISSUES, THEMES, AND BACKGROUND MATERIAL**

**September 5<sup>th</sup> - Introduction to the course content: Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.**

Read: No readings.

**September 12<sup>th</sup> – An Animated History of Disney**

Read: Maltin, Leonard. "Introduction," in The Disney Films (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) New York: Hyperion, 1995, 1-24.

## **PART 2: SCHOLARLY CRITICISMS AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS**

**September 19<sup>th</sup> - Scholarly criticisms of Disney: religion/ race/ gender/ colonialism/ corporate power**

Read: Giroux, Henry A. "Children's Culture and Disney's Animated Films," in The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence. Lanham, Maryland: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1999, 83-121.

Brode, Douglas "I had a Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes: In Defense of Disney, Part I," and "Popular Culture and Political Correctness: In Defense of Disney, Part II," in Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005, 1-19; 255-270.

Watch: *Mickey Mouse Monopoly (in class)*

**September 26<sup>th</sup> - Scholarly criticisms of Disney: fairytales/myth**

Read: Zipes, Jack "Breaking the Disney Spell," in Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994, 72-95.

Graham, Susan Lochrie. "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Images of Salvation in the Gospel according to St. Walt." in Culture, Entertainment and the Bible. Ed. George Aichele. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 76-88.

Brode, Douglas "Our Bodies, Our Selves: Disney and Feminism," in Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005, 167-197.

Traditional folk tales: Little Snow White, Cinderella, Little Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty), Beauty and the Beast, The Little Mermaid See over...

Watch: *Snow White/Sleeping Beauty/Cinderella/The Little Mermaid/Beauty and the Beast* – Class pick (*in class*)

### **PART 3: RELIGION AND DISNEY ANIMATED FILMS**

#### **October 3<sup>rd</sup> - The Disney boycott and the “Gay Agenda”**

Read: Pinsky, Mark “The Baptist Boycott: Culture Clash,” in The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, 238-261.

Ferraiuolo, Perucci “Disney and the Bible: A Scriptural Critique of the Magic Kingdom.” Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Horizon Books, 1996, selected excerpts (“Sorcerers, demons and obsession” on our course page.)

Watch: *The Disney Boycott: A Just Cause* (*in class*)

**Please Note: Assignment #1 is Due Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup> – please submit your assignment to the dropbox in our D2L/Brightspace page.**

**Please Note: October 10<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday lectures follow Monday schedule – no class tonight.**

#### **October 17<sup>th</sup> - Implicit Christianity in Disney: race, sex, religion, and Christian myth: *The Lion King* (1994)**

Read: Byrne, Eleanor and Martin McQuillan, “You Can’t Lionize the Lion’: Racing Disney,” in Deconstructing Disney. London/Sterling: Pluto Press, 1999, 94-105.

Pinsky, Mark “The Lion King,” The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust. Louisville/London: John Knox Press, 2004, 154-159. Over...

Ward, Annalee R. “The Lion King: Moral Educator through Myth, Archetype and Ritual,” in Mouse Morality: the Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002, 10-32.

Watch: *The Lion King* (*in class*)



## **October 24<sup>th</sup> - Explicit Christianity: Taking on their Christian Critics? The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996)**

Read: Pinsky, Mark I. "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," in The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust. Louisville/London: John Knox Press, 2004, 167-174.

Fadner, Donald E. "Disney Gets Religion." Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion meeting in Orlando, November 1998.

Wikipedia. "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." Accessed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Hunchback\\_of\\_Notre\\_Dame](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunchback_of_Notre_Dame) January 3, 2008.

Watch: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame (in class)*

## **October 31<sup>st</sup> - Indigenous Religions 1: Pocahontas (1995)**

Read: "Rowlett, Lori L. "Disney's Pocahontas and Joshua's Rahab in Postcolonial Perspective," in Culture, Entertainment and the Bible. Ed. George Aichele. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 66-75. See over...

Schweizer, Peter and Rochelle Schweizer. "The PC Princess," in Disney: The Mouse Betrayed. Greed, Corruption and Children at Risk. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing Inc, 1998, 152-161 (Note: this reading is CRITICAL of Disney – read carefully).

Pinsky, Mark I. "Pocahontas," in The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust. Louisville/London: John Knox Press, 2004, 167-174.

Wikipedia. "Pocahontas." Accessed at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pocahontas> January 3, 2008.

Watch: *Pocahontas (in class)*

## **November 7<sup>th</sup> - Indigenous Religions 2: The religion of Nature? Brother Bear**

Read: Brode, Douglas "My Sweet Lord," in From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture. Austin: University of Texas, 2004, 103-127; 128-150.  
Taylor, Bron "Connecting through Film and Performance," in Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2010, 132-138

See over...

Pinsky, Mark I. "Bambi," and "Brother Bear," in The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust. Louisville/London: John Knox Press, 2004, 46-51; 220-225.

Watch: *Brother Bear* (in class)

### **November 14<sup>th</sup> - World Religions: Gender, violence, and Ancestors: Mulan (1998)**

Read: Liu Feng and Zuo Rui-fang "Study on Cross-Cultural Interpretations of Mulan." US-China Education Review 4(5) 2007:67-75.

Pinsky, Mark I. "Mulan," in The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust. Louisville/London: John Knox Press, 2004, 179-184.

Wikipedia. "Hua Mulan." Accessed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua\\_Mulan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua_Mulan) January 3, 2008.

Watch: *Mulan* (in class)

**NOTE: Assignment #2 Due Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>!**

### **PART 4: RELIGION AND LIVE-ACTION DISNEY FILMS**

#### **November 21<sup>ST</sup> Live-Action religion? Wicca/Paganism in *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* / *Mary Poppins* / *Three Lives of Thomasina***

Read: "Spinsters in Sensible Shoes: *Mary Poppins* and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*" in From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender and Culture. Ed. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells. Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995, 212-223.

Brode, Douglas "Something Wiccan This Way Comes: Walt's Wonderful World of Witchcraft" in Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005, 199-225.

Watch: *Mary Poppins* / *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* / *The Three Lives of Thomasina* – class pick (in class)

**November 28<sup>th</sup> Live-Action religion? Gender, Race, Colonialism and Corporate Power revisited: The Pirates of the Caribbean franchise**

Read: Porter, Jennifer “The Ambiguous Captain Jack Sparrow: Destabilizing Gender, Politics, and Religion in Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean*,” in *Disney Dialogues*. Douglas Brode, ed. Scarecrow Press, 2015.

Porter, Jennifer “Pirates of the Caribbean: Mermaids on Stranger Tides,” in *Fan Phenomenon: Mermaids*. Matthieu Guitton, ed. Intellect Books, 2016.

John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, “Cheerful Saints and Melodious Lions,” in *The Myth of the American Superhero*. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002, pp 179-198.

Watch: *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (at home, if possible – the video is uploaded to our D2L/Brightspace page) or if the class chooses, we can start early or end late to watch in class.)

**NOTE:**

***Take-Home exams to be handed out on last day of class.***

***DUE DEC. 5<sup>TH</sup> (first day of exams)***

***To be submitted to the dropbox on our D2L Course Page BY 10 AM!***



***Hero, Leader, God – Alexander Kosolapov***