

# Religion and **Disney**:

Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course (Religious Studies 3812 F 2011)

Slot: 18 (Tues/Thurs 10:30-11:45)  
Room: A1045  
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 1-3

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<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 Animated feature films, other Disney films and cartoons, and the Disney theme parks. 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.

## Method of evaluation:

2 Assignments (A/V or written – 15% each)	30%
1 Major Research Paper or Website Project	35%
1 Final Take-home Exam	35%

**Assignments (15% 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 one of each). The first assignment is due Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>, and the second is due November 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Written Assignment 1:** Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section Two of our course (Sept 20-Oct.6), 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: October 13<sup>th</sup>.**

**Written Assignment 2:** Write an 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for any two films covered in Section Three of our course (Oct 18-Dec. 1), plus the films themselves, 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) what overarching themes occur in both 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 religion and Disney. **Due: November 10<sup>th</sup>.**

**Audio/Visual (fan video) assignments** (each worth 15% of your overall grade): You may, if you wish, replace one or both of the written assignments with fan video assignments. These videos will deal with the same issues addressed in the written assignments above: however, themes to be explored will be done through the use of visual scenes from Disney films and through your choice of soundtrack to accompany the video. We will discuss this assignment more fully in class. **Due: October 13<sup>th</sup> and/or November 10<sup>th</sup>.**

**Major Research Paper or Website Project (35%): Please Note: You must get your topics approved before research begins.**

You are asked to write a major research paper or design a research website on a topic relating to religion and Disney. For those choosing the research paper option, papers should be approximately 3000 words in length. For those selecting the website option, website projects should consist of a homepage identifying your topic, subsequent pages with relevant sub-topics presented and analyzed, multi-media as relevant, and a list of sources. For those familiar with Religious Studies 2812 (Religion and Popular Culture), the Website project will mirror the assignment required in that class – however, depth of research and analysis expected should meet the academic expectations for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year course. Topics for both projects might include: analysis of religious themes and/or implications of a specific Disney film not covered in class; analysis of a specific religious theme or themes across a number of Disney films; analysis of religious themes/implications in Disney television entertainment; analysis of religious themes/implications in other Disney entertainment (music; theme park productions; Broadway plays; toys; music, etc.); analysis/critique of scholarly literature on Disney – specific authors, specific themes, specific approaches, etc. Other topics may be approved as relevant. **Due: November 17<sup>th</sup> or earlier – no extensions beyond this date!**

**Take-home Exam (35%):** 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 November 17<sup>th</sup>. **Due: December 1<sup>st</sup> – no extensions beyond this date!**

## PART ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ISSUES THEMES, BACKGROUND MATERIAL

### Sept. 8 - Introduction to the course

Read: No readings.

## **Sept 13-15 - Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.**

Read: No readings.

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

#### **Sept 20-22 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*

#### **Sept. 27-29 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.

Grimm Brother's fairy tales:

Little Snow White

Cinderella

Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)

The Singing, Soaring Lark (Beauty and the Beast)

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

## **Oct. 4-6 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 (on our course page.)

## **Oct. 13 The Disney Boycott and the “Gay Agenda,” con’t.**

**NOTE: Midterm break this week – Tuesday Oct. 11 cancelled.**

**ALSO NOTE: Assignment #1 Due Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>!!**

PART THREE: RELIGION IN DISNEY FILMS

## **Oct. 18-20 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, Virginia: 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.

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*

## **Oct. 25-27 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.

“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*

### **Nov. 1-3 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.

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*

### **Nov. 8-10 Indigenous Religions 2: The religion of Nature? Brother Bear**

Read: Brode, Douglas "My Sweet Lord," and "Gotta Get Back to the Garden," in From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture. Austin: University of Texas, 2004, 103-127; 128-150.

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

Watch: *Brother Bear*

**Note: Assignment #2 Due Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>!!**

### **Nov. 15-17 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.

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

Watch: *Mulan*

**NOTE: Essays/Websites DUE Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>!!**

### **Nov. 22-24 Wicca/Paganism? 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

**Nov. 29-Dec. 1 – Gender, Race, Colonialism and Corporate Power revisited: The Pirates of the Caribbean trilogy**

Read: Porter, Jennifer “The Ambiguous Captain Jack Sparrow: Myth and Religion in Disney’s Pirates of the Caribbean.”

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.

***NOTE: Take-Home exams due Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>!***



*Hero, Leader, God – Alexander Kosolapov*