Religion and Disney: Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course (Religious Studies 3812 F 2012)

Slot: 32 (Wednesdays 7:00-9:30 pm)  Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Porter
Room: SN 3060  Office: A5009
Office Hours: Wednesdays 6-7 pm; Thurs 11-2  Email: jporter@mun.ca

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. 3rd, and the second is due November 7th.

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 3rd.
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: Nov. 7th.

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. A short description of the issues the video is intended to address is also required. We will discuss this assignment more fully in class. Due: October 3rd and/or Nov. 7th.

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 3rd 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 21st 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 the last day of class, and will be due on the date assigned to us by the Registrar’s Office for our final exam.
PART ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ISSUES THEMES, BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Sept. 5 Introduction to the course
Read: No readings.

Sept 12 - Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.
Read: No readings.

PART TWO: SCHOLARLY CRITICISMS AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS

Sept 19 Scholarly criticisms of Disney: religion/race/gender/colonialism/corporate power


Watch: Mickey Mouse Monopoly

Sept. 26 Scholarly criticisms of Disney: fairytales/myth


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. 3 The Disney boycott and the “Gay Agenda”


NOTE: Assignment #1 Due Oct. 3rd!!

Oct. 10 - Wednesday follows Monday Schedule this day only, so no class for us this week.

PART THREE: RELIGION IN DISNEY FILMS

Oct. 17 Implicit Christianity in Disney: race, sex, religion, and Christian myth: The Lion King (1994)


Watch: The Lion King


Watch: The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Oct. 31 – Class cancelled.

Nov. 7 Indigenous Religions 1: Pocahonatas (1995)


Watch: Pocahontas

Note: Assignment #2 Due Nov. 7!!

Nov. 14 Indigenous Religions 2: The religion of Nature? Brother Bear


Watch: Brother Bear

Nov. 21 World Religions: Gender, violence, and Ancestors: Mulan (1998)


Watch: Mulan NOTE: Essays/Websites DUE Nov. 21st!!
Nov. 28 Wicca/Paganism? Bedknobs and Broomsticks / Mary Poppins / Three Lives of Thomasina


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

NOTE: Take-Home exams to be handed out!