

Religion and *Disney*:
Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course
(Religious Studies 3812, F2016)

Slot: 32 (Wednesdays 7:00-9:30 pm)
Classroom: A3017

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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 1:30-3:30, Wed. 6-7pm

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

and

the D2L RELS 3812 course page available through my.mun.ca and
<https://online.mun.ca/d2l/home>

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.

Textbooks:

There are two textbooks for this course (available through Memorial University's bookstore.)

Brode, Douglas. *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.

Pinsky, Mark. *The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust*. Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

In addition to these books, there are additional weekly readings that have been posted to our D2L page – check you're my.mun.ca webpage to access your D2L course page.

Method of evaluation:

Assignment 1 (A/V or written)	Due October 5 th	20%
Assignment 2 (A/V or written)	Due October 26 th	20%
Assignment 3 (A/V or written)	Due Nov. 16 ^{th*}	20%
Final Take-home Exam	Due: Dec. 7 th (1 st day of exam period)	40%

Assignments (20% 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 (3 written, 3 video, or a combo of each). The first assignment is due **October 5th**, the second is due **October 26th**, and the third is due **November 16th**. *For the November 16th assignment, a one-week extension is automatically granted for those wishing to take advantage of this option.

Written assignments, video assignments and the written descriptions of video assignments should be submitted via the Dropbox on our D2L 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 (.wmp 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.

Video assignment 1 (20%) – 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. Don't forget to hand in a one-paragraph description of the argument your video is attempting to make. **Due: October 5th.**

Video Assignment 2 (20%) – create a clear, strong video argument regarding the place and treatment of Christianity 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 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: Oct. 26th.**

Video Assignment 3 (20%) – create a clear, strong video argument regarding the animistic, nature-spirituality emphasis in Disney. Is nature enchanted in Disney films? What is the proper relationship of humans to nature? Are humans a part of nature, or separate from it? Does Disney have an “ecological agenda?” Etc. 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. 16th.** A one-week extension to Nov. 23rd is automatically granted on this assignment.

Option Two – Written assignments

Written Assignment 1: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section One of our course (Sept. 7th – Sept. 28th, 2016), 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. 5th.**

Written Assignment 2: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section Two of our course (Oct. 5th - Oct. 26th, 2016), 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) 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 Christianity and Disney. Is Disney anti-Christian? Pro-Christian? Or something else? **Due: October 26th.**

Written Assignment 3: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section Three of our course (Nov. 2nd – Nov. 16th, 2016), 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) 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 nature spirituality and Disney. Is Disney advocating a form of nature spirituality? Is it exploiting the world's religions for profit? Does it misrepresent world religions, trivialize them, or embrace them? **Due: November 16th.** A one-week extension until Nov. 23rd is automatically granted on this assignment.

Take-home Exam (40%): 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 7th, 1st day of exam period, at 10 AM sharp!!!** *Take-home exams should be submitted via the Dropbox on our D2L 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)
- 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) 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.

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."

Course Outline and Assigned Readings:

SECTION ONE: INTRO, THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS, SCHOLARLY CRITICISMS AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS

September 7th - Introduction to the course content: Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.

Read: No readings.

September 14th – An Animated History of Disney

Read: No Readings.

September 21st - 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 28th - 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.

See over...

Grimm Brother's fairy tales: Little Snow White, Cinderella, Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty), The Singing, Soaring Lark (Beauty and the Beast) The Little Mermaid

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

SECTION TWO: CHRISTIANITY AND DISNEY

October 5th - 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.)

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

NOTE: Assignment #1 Due October 5th!
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October 12th – Wednesday lectures follow Monday schedule – no class tonight

October 19th - 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 26th - 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 January 3, 2008.

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

NOTE: Assignment #2 Due October 26th!

SECTION THREE: OTHER RELIGIONS AND DISNEY

November 2nd - 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 9th - 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 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 16th - 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 January 3, 2008.

Watch: *Mulan* (in class)

<p>NOTE: Assignment #3 Due Nov. 16th! However, a one-week extension is automatically granted for this assignment if you wish to take advantage of that.</p>

SECTION FOUR: LIVE-ACTION RELIGION

November 23rd - 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 pic (in class)

November 30th – 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)

NOTE:

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

DUE DEC. 7TH (first day of exams)

To be submitted to the dropbox on our D2L Course Page



Hero, Leader, God – Alexander Kosolapov