

Religion and **Disney**:

Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course (Religious Studies 3812 W2014)

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

Room: A1045

Office Hours: Tues 9-11 am and by appointment

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Porter

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

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:

Assignment 1 (A/V or written)	Due Feb 12 th	15%
Assignment 2 (A/V or written)	Due Mar 19 th	15%
Major Research Paper or Website Project	Due Apr 2 nd	35%
Final Take-home Exam	Due: during exam period	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 February 12th, and the second is due March 19th.

Written Assignment 1: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for Section Two of our course (Jan 22 – Feb 5), 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: February 12th .**

Written Assignment 2: Write a 5 page assignment based on the assigned readings for any two films covered in Section Three of our course (Feb 12 – Mar 19), 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: March 19th.**

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: February 12 and March 19th.**

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: April 2nd.**

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. **Due: TBA by Registrar's Office, during exam period.**

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ISSUES THEMES, BACKGROUND MATERIAL

January 8th – Class cancelled due to power outage.

January 15th – Introduction to the course content: Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.

Read: No readings.

PART TWO: SCHOLARLY CRITICISMS AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS

January 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*

January 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*

February 5 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.)

PART THREE: RELIGION IN DISNEY FILMS

February 12 - 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*

NOTE: Assignment #1 Due February 12th

ALSO NOTE: Midterm Break - FEB 17-19TH – The University has announced that Wednesday night classes should be held on Feb. 19th. However, we will only do this if we lose another class to weather related circumstances, as adjustments have already been made to the course outline to accommodate the missed class on January 8th.

February 26 - 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*

March 5 - 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*

March 12 - 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

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*

March 19 - 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*

Note: Assignment #2 Due March 19th!

March 26 - 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

April 2 – Live-Action religion? 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: Major research paper/webpage due!
ALSO NOTE: Take-Home exams to be handed out!



Hero, Leader, God – Alexander Kosolapov