**RS 311: RELIGION AND FILM (Spring 2015)**

Fall 2015

Wednesdays, 1900-2145

Instructor: Robert Mason

Room: SH 314

Email: [robert.maosn@csun.edu](mailto:robert.maosn@csun.edu)

Office: Santa Suzanna Hall rm 419. Office hour Wed. 1600-1650

**Course Description:** This course examines the complex relationship that exists between American religious traditions, cinema and film. What is the relation between the viewer/reader and the film or cultural “text?” As a cultural institution, only in the entertainment business? Is the Batman just a creation of schizophrenia, or does he represent/reproduce a religious mythology?

Students will explore the resources that will be crucial for critical analysis of the way films as cultural media affect and/or reflect the economic, social, political and religious contexts in which they live. Students will become familiar with the relevant postmodern studies—media studies, film theory, film history and film studies along with some of the essential concepts involves such as auteur theory, adaptation theory, the ‘gaze,’ and perspective. In addition, students will explore religious models, such as axial age theory, asceticism, the way texts are scripturalized, as well as the way scripturalization occludes relations of power to analyze the way religion is imbedded in feature films.

Due to the wide range of film genres as well as the large amount of materials within each, the class will focus on the science fiction genre with particular attention to superhero films that are currently sweeping the studios—the most focused sources of study will be Christopher Nolan’s adaptation of the Dark Knight Trilogy.

Student Learning Objectives:

Students who complete this course will be able to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the history of film and its major schools of critical analysis.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with current religious models of cultural and religious analysis as well as grasping an adequate understanding of religious concepts and categories that assist in understanding the relation between religion and film.
3. Demonstrate familiarity with the different aspects/techniques used in film theory and film criticism—such as auteur theory and adaptation theory-- in terms of analyzing the audience “gaze,” as well as other para-textual aspects of film reception.
4. Demonstrate familiarity with the different ways that religion and popular culture interface with each other.
5. Describe and analyze at least three American religious myths as they pertain to current science fiction films.
6. Explain how issues of gender, race, and class as well as cultural political, economic and religious influences contribute to the outlooks of American popular cultures.
7. Critically analyze how their own religion/worldview addresses and interfaces with current American popular cultures.

GE Student Learning Outcomes:

Goal: Students will understand the rich history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literature, religions, and philosophy.

Students will:

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures;
2. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and humanities;
3. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms;
4. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities;
5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;
6. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged.

**Required Texts:**

* Bill Nichols, *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to film studies,* W.W. Norton and Com., 2010. (ISBN: 978-0-39393-491-5)
* Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twentieth Century Batman,*  I.B. Tauris and Com, 2012. (ISBN: 978-1-84885-280-8)
* Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way,* University of Chicago Press, 2000. (ISBN: 0-226-51163-4)

**Recommeded Texts:**

* Julian Darius, *Batman Begins and the Comics,* Sequart.com Books, 2005. (ISBN: 978-1-41164-543-1)
* John Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals,* New York University Press, 2003. ISBN: 978-0-81475-181-7)
* Douglas E. Cowan, *Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television,* Baylor University Press, 2010. (ISBN: 978-1-60258-238-5)

**Preparation:** You are expected to be FULLY prepared for each class. This is an upper-level course that requires a significant amount of reading, writing and participation. You may be called upon at any time during the class period to answer questions regarding the lecture or required readings. Please bring electronic or printed copies of reading assignments to class on the day when we are discussing them.

I will be contacting you with important notices about the class using your CSUN email address. You must check that account regularly.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend every class and arrive on time and so attendance will be taken. If you cannot attend a class session, you **MUST** call or email me prior to the start of class to obtain an “excused absence.” Any unexcused absences will negatively impact your participation grade, as will excessive excused absences.

**Policy on Written Work:** Since this is an upper-level class, written assignments should be well-written, grammatically correct, and turned in on time. It is a good practice, after you have proofread your assignments, to have a friend assist you by reading your assignments also. All assignments should be typewritten and double spaced. Journal assignments and the “Becoming Native” assignment will be submitted online through Moodle. All other assignments must be printed out and handed in at the beginning of class on the due date. **DO NOT** deliver papers to the RS office or slide them under my door.

**Evaluation:**

1. **Classwork (25%)—**Preparation, attendance, discussion, argument, and interpretation are a significant part of your grade. You will also participate in forums on Moodle as part of you participation grade.
2. **Written assignments (25%)**—One to two page critical analyses of the films that we will be studying and/or the concepts that will be presented for the particular class session.
3. **Mid-term and Final essays (50%)**—These essays will be done in class in the usual mid-term/final format.

**Grade Range:**

94-100 = A 77-79 = C+

90-93 = A- 74-76 = C

87-89 = B+ 70-73 = C-

84-86 = B 60-69 = D

80-83 = B- <60 = F

**Electroniquette:** Please turn off electronic devices such as iPods and cell phones before entering the classroom. We are a dynamic community of learners and our class will be enhanced as we interact with each other. You may use your computer/tablet during class *for class purposes only*—note taking/accessing reading assignments. If your computer is distracting then don’t bring it to class. I reserve the right to deny you computer privileges during class.

**Plagiarism/Cheating:** The CSUN Religious Studies Department is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence, honesty, and integrity. Students are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating or helping someone else cheat will be subject to disciplinary action which could result in suspension, expulsion, or other disciplinary actions. For more information about the behavior defined as academic dishonesty, and a more detailed discussion of disciplinary procedures, consult the CSUN catalog. Remember, also, that much of the information posted on the Internet is protected by US copyright laws. Passing off this information as your own is plagiarism as well.

**Accommodation for Disabilities:** If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (DCOD). The DRES office is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110 and can be reached at (818) 677-2684. NCOD is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at (818) 677-2611.

**RS 311 CLASS SCHEDULE**

(Note: Reading assignments and the dates of exams and written assignments are subject to revision as needed. I will announce all revisions in class and do my best to make sure that everyone knows about revisions. If you miss class, you mist nevertheless submit assignments according to any revisions that we make to the schedule. You should either make sure that you do not miss class or find a way to be apprised of any revisions made the schedule or syllabus.)

**Week 1, Aug 26 Introduction: Film and Popular Culture, Popular Culture and Religion**

Read:

* EC: Introduction
* HDK: Introduction
* TBT: Prologue
* Graeme Turner, “The feature film industry” (M)

Assignment:

* Update your photo on Moodle

**Week 2, Sept 2: What is religion?**

Read:

* TBT: Chapters one and two.
* Stephen Prothero: “ Introduction” and “conclusion” (M)
* John Lyden, “The Definition of Religion” (M)
* Graeme Turner, “From 7th art to Social practice” (M)

**Week 3, Sept 16: What is mythology?**

Read:

* TBT: Chapters two and three.
* John Lyden, “Myths about Myth” (M)
* Richard Reynolds, “Deciphering the Myths” (M)
* Graeme Turner, “Film Languages” (M)

**Week 4, Sept 23: Religion and American popular culture**

* TBT: Chapter four.
* John Storey, “What is popular culture?” (M)
* Gordon Lynch, “Taking Steps Towards a Theological Aesthetics of Popular Culture” (M)
* David Chidester, “Popular Religion” (M)
* Graeme Turner, “Film Narrative” (M)
* Film:

**Week 5, Sept 30: Film Theory introduction**

* EC: Chapters
* HDK: Chapters one and two
* TBT: Chapter three
* Robert Stam, “Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation” (M)
* Graeme Turner, “Film Audiences” (M)
* Film:

**Week 6, Oct 7: Post WWII and science fiction films**

* HDK: Chapter three
* TBT: Chapter 6 and epilogue
* Lynn White, “Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” (M)
* Graeme Turner, “Film Culture and Ideology” (M)
* Film: *The Forbidden Planet*

**Week 7, Oct 14: Superheroes and Continuity**

* HDK: Chapter 4
* EC:
* Terrence Wandtke, “Moving Beyond the Standard Arguments” (M)
* Film: *Avatar*

**Week 8, Oct 21: Mid-Term**

**Week 9, Oct 28: *Batman Begins***

Read:

* HDK: Chapter 5
* Richard Reynolds, “The Dark Knight Returns” (M)
* Julian Darius, pp, 3-56 “Act One” (M)
* Film: *Batman Begins*

**Week 10, Nov 4:**

Read:

* Julian Darius, pp. 57-146 “Acts Two and Three” (M)
* Dan Hassler-Forest, “From ‘Flying man to Falling Man: 9/11 Discourse in *Superman Returns* and *Batman Begins*”
* Film:

**Week 11, Nov 11: Veterans’ Day: NO CLASS**

**Week 12, Nov 18: *The Dark Knight***

Read:

* Vincent Gaine, “Genre and Super-Heroism: Batman in the New Millennium” (M)
* Matthew Costello, “Spandex Agonistes: Superhero Comics Confront the War on Terror”
* Film: *The Dark Knight*

**Week 13, Nov 25: Thanksgiving Week: NO CLASS**

**Week 14 Dec 2: *The Dark Knight Rises***

Read:

* Gerry Canavan, “Terror and Mismemory: Resignifying September 11 in World Trade Center and United 93”
* Film: *The Dark Knight Arises*

**Week 15, Dec 9*:***

Read:

* TDKR: Epilogue
* Film:

**Week 16, Dec 16: Final**