

Seeing and Believing: Women, Religion and Film

Fall, 2013 Rel 136

Tuesday, 6:30 – 9:30 pm; Hall of Science 204

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call or email if you'd like to make an appt to speak with me – I invite all students to seek me out in my office at least once during the semester!

**Regular office hours: Monday: 10:30 – 11:30 am; Tuesday: 4:00 – 5:00 pm;
Wednesday: 2:45 – 3:45 pm**

Course Description: “A film invites interrogation” (Makarushka:1998). In this course we will: 1) explore how films appropriate religious imagery and beliefs in the service of the cultural production of images of women’s lives; and 2) investigate the ways in which the creation and viewing of film may share similarities with the construction and practice of religion; 3) grow as intellectually astute viewers and consumers of film. Along the way we will delve into the following themes as they intersect with the diverse reality of women’s experience: the representation of Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic women in society; Christian Fundamentalism and millennialism; Jewish Orthodoxy in a pluralistic society; religious authority, gender, sexuality and love; and more. We will approach our films as “texts” that invite a critical reading, and develop skills to enable our increased thoughtful, deliberate, intelligent viewing. Class time will be equally divided between the viewing of our films and time for lecture and lively discussion/debate. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with Blackboard, as we will be using this online resource in our course.

Course Objectives:

- 1) We will develop self- awareness regarding the ways we approach/absorb films, especially commercial films, and build skills to distinguish extra and intra-filmic strategies that encourage various interpretive schemes on the part of audiences. We will learn a variety of critical methods to “interrogate” as well as appreciate film.
- 2) We will improve our critical thinking, speaking, research and writing skills.
- 3) We will develop an introductory understanding of some of the complex relationships between portrayals and questions of religion, and constructions of gender, race and class.

Course Books:

William L. Blizek, Ed. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Religion and Film*. 2009.

London: Bloomsbury. Please purchase this in the Moravian College Bookstore

Additional articles, book chapters and essays will be assigned and likely posted in Blackboard or available at Reeve’s on reserve. You will also need to use the library data bases to read required articles.

You will be responsible for viewing two popular films on your own – A History of Violence, and Zero Dark Thirty. Each of these films will be available through Blackboard.

Course Films: Each week we will focus on a different film. Some films we will view all or part in class; others you will be responsible for viewing on your own. You are responsible for having intelligently and carefully viewed all the films in the course, including any that you miss because of an excused absence. Speak with me about how best to gain access to any film you may miss.

Requirements:

- 1) Our work together depends upon everyone's prompt and engaged participation in every class. The only excused absences will be for serious illness, religious observance or a family emergency (each unexcused absence will lower your grade by .25 grade levels; in other words, two unexcused absences will lower your grade from an A to an A-). I ask you to inform me AHEAD of class time if you need to miss as a result of one of these reasons stated above (please call me at my office, at x7104). In order to participate fully and with intelligence in our class discussions, students also will have thoughtfully and deliberately read all the required readings before class meets; and will complete their assigned writing for the day and submitted it into the assignment drop box. ***Bring to class whatever text we are reading for the day! Also, bring a hard copy of your written work so that you can use this in our class exercises/discussion.*** All students are expected to contribute to our class discussions with intelligence, responding to one another thoughtfully, raising good questions and new ideas, etc. Push yourself (even if this makes you uncomfortable) to grow as a liberal arts learner who can speak articulately in public, and come meet with me individually if you need help in this area. Each class session will begin with a short quiz based on the readings/film you have been asked to prepare for that day. The weekly written work, plus class participation in these areas represent 1/3 of the overall grade.

Important note on required time you should allot for this course. The minimum expectation of the college is that students should expect to spend a minimum 2 outside hours in study and preparation for every 1 hour in class. You should plan now on including in your schedule at least six outside hours every week for reading/viewing, thinking (don't forget to allow yourself time to think!), written/journal work, research and writing. Take time to discuss our films and readings with others! These hours will increase in the weeks you have papers due.

- 2) Students will write three 5 page, double-spaced papers over the course of the semester. Each of these papers will focus on the content of a particular week's assignment (film plus required readings), and in some way take further the analysis we have begun in our class discussion. Be creative and use these papers to further your own integrative thinking about our readings and film! No additional outside resources are required for these short papers (but if you wish to

consult additional reviews/resources, you may. In that case, correct citation and works cited page will be necessary). In these short papers you will use your own best critical thinking to address: 1) the required readings in connection with a given film, 2) the class discussion following our viewing, and 3) your own developing response and awareness. Do NOT use these papers to “retell the narrative.” Students who take the opportunity to come and see me early in the semester to talk about their short papers invariably improve their writing – make sure you do this! Make note of the due dates for your papers in the schedule of classes below. These papers combined will represent 1/3 of the overall grade. See the guidelines in Blackboard Assignments for further suggestions on writing superb short papers.

- 3) Each student will choose one course film for the purpose of more in-depth research and analysis. You will consult at least five additional resources beyond those in the required readings (at least three resources will be academic, analytical explorations; other resources may be popular in nature), think through all the issues carefully, and write an 8-10 page paper, to be submitted in class at our final exam in hard copy. The only acceptable excuses for requesting an extension on this paper are the same listed for excused absence above. Your paper will include proper footnotes and bibliography (check MLA style if you’re not sure how to go about this; Reeve’s library databases have helpful links); and will in some way focus on the intersection of gender, film and religion in the film you have chosen – other than that you are free to explore and dig in whatever direction you wish.
 - **On Oct. 29**, come to class with 1 brief paragraph about the film you hope to research and five questions/themes for exploration in your research. Plan to briefly present this initial thinking orally to the entire class following our workshop. Be prepared to give reasons for the importance of the questions/themes you wish to explore.
 - **On Nov. 12**, hand in a 1 paragraph description of the thesis you are interrogating in your paper, and your annotated bibliography. Please consult the Cornell University website on how to put together an annotated bibliography (<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>), and please note that this means **you will need to have completed your research in advance of this date**. The research librarians have generously arranged for a research workshop based on this course requirement at our library, set for Oct. 29 at the beginning of class. On the last day of class we will celebrate with a “research roundtable” at which every student will have a few minutes to professionally present the results of his/her research to the rest of the class (and perhaps we’ll also have a potluck dinner or dessert together). Your paper and oral presentation represent 1/3 of your total grade.

Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307

Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

Schedule of Classes

First Unit: History of Interaction between Religion and Film, and Depictions of Women's Experience

Aug. 27 *The Jazz Singer*, Warner Bros. Pictures and the Vitaphone Corporation; directed by Alan Crosland. Originally released as motion picture in 1927.

Introduction to course

In the next few days, *skim: The Bloomsbury Companion*, Introduction, Chapters Two (Using Religion to Interpret Movies) and Three (Using Movies to Critique Religion) *skimming these chapters (they are very easy and entertaining reading) will provide some helpful grounding for our study this semester.*

Sept. 3 *Dead Man Walking*, Gabriel Axel, 1987

Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapters 10 (Women, Religion and Film), 12 (Catholic Movies) and 25 (The Saviour Figure)

Also read:

Adele Reinhartz, “*Dead Man Walking* and the Riddle of Divine Justice (Leviticus),” *Scripture on the Silver Screen*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); (final day for any course schedule changes)

See BB Journal assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Sept. 2, midnight

Sept. 10 *The Pianist*, Roman Polanski, 2002

Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapters 6 (Movies: The Retelling of Religious Stories), 5 (Theology and Film), 15 (Judaism and Jewishness in Film), 21 (Holocaust Movies)

See BB Journal and Blog assignments for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Sept. 9, midnight. Also by Sept. 9, make sure you access and write in our Group blog!

DUE on Friday, Sept. 13, midnight: Use the drop box attached to the assignment for today in our Blackboard site to submit your first paper for this course. See the guidelines posted there.

Thursday, September 12, 2013– It is expected that all students will attend the fall convocation.

Second Unit: Religious Practitioners in Films; Women Filmmakers

Sept. 17: *Whale Rider*, Niki Caro, 2002

Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapters 17 (Indigenous Religions and Film), 18 (Religion, Spirituality and Film), 9 (Religion, Film and Cultural Studies)

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Sept. 16, midnight; This week your entry for our group blog is due by midnight, Sept. 19.

Sept. 24: *Me and the Mosque*, Zarga Nawaz, 2005

Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapters 16 (Muslim in the Movies)

Also read: Margaret Miles, "Chapter Four: Representation of Islam in American Culture," *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Beacon Press, 1996) (in BB)

Also read: [In mosques and shrines: women's agency in public sacred space](#) By:

Mazumdar, Shampa; Mazumdar, Sanjoy. *Source: Journal of Ritual Studies*, 16 no 2

2002, p 165-179. Language: English Publication Type: Article (AN: ATLA0001332124)

Database: ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials

Also read: the material in BB under title, "Zarqa Nawaz".

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Sept. 23, midnight

2nd Assignment: Find two news reports from this fall that illustrate the continuing dynamic of "Islamophobia" in U.S. culture and politics – read them carefully, bring them to class and be prepared to talk about them. (this will be collected at the end of class).

Oct. 1 *Water*, Deepa Mehta Films, Twentieth Century Fox, 2006.

Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapter 14 (Hinduism and Film), 26 (Karma and Film)

Also read the three short articles in BB: *Deepa Mehta's Film Water: The Power or the Dialectical Image* By: Mukherjee, Tutun; Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Etudes Cinematographiques, 2008 Fall; 17 (2): 35-47. (available in Blackboard documents)

Also read: Widowed in India. By: Petrakis, John. *Christian Century*, 6/13/2006, Vol. 123 Issue 12, p41-41, 1p. (available through Ebscohost, Academic Elite; also scanned into BB); and the review by Priva Verma

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Sept. 30, midnight

Oct. 8 Women, Religion, The Military, War, Film

View on your own: *Zero Dark Thirty*

In class we will view: *The Invisible War*

Read: Selection from Robert Eberwein, ed., *The War Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006). (available on Blackboard documents)

Also read: The Huffington Post article, "CIA Disputes Zero-Dark Thirty", August 13, 2013: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/22/cia-disputes-zero-dark-thirty-cia-director-disputes-accuracy_n_2352281.html

Also read: Beyond Torture: Deepa Kumar, 'Zero Dark Thirty' and the Promotion of Extrajudicial Killing: Rebranding the War on Terror for the age of Obama, *Common Dreams*, Jan. 15, 2013: <https://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/01/15-4>.

Find an article from 2012 regarding the issue of sexual violence experienced by women in the military. Print it out and bring it with you to class (this is part of your participation grade)

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Oct. 7, midnight

DUE Oct. 11, Friday in the drop box in Blackboard by midnight: your second 4-5 page short paper on one of the films from Unit Two. See the guidelines posted in Blackboard.

Third Unit: Academic Approaches to the study of Religion and Film; Interpretive Strategies and Possibilities

No class Oct. 12-16: Fall recess

Oct. 22 *A History of Violence*, David Cronenberg, New Line Productions, 2005.

Important Note: This is another film that you are asked to view on your own – please do so IN ADVANCE of our class tonight! The film has been streamed into our BB shell.

Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapter 22 (Redemption and Film) and re-read Chapter 5 (Theology and Film)

Also read: Chris Hedges, "Days of Siege," *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (in BB documents)

Marc Luedke, "Images of Humanity in the Old Testament and the Contemporary Cinema," *Anvil*, 16 no 1 1999, p 31-40. (In Blackboard documents)

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Oct. 25, noon; you have extra days for your journal this week so that you can incorporate into your study your experience of hearing Hedges. Then, by Oct. 28, make sure that you have an entry in the group blog due that day. Instructions included in the blog.

Important Note! Our class tonight will take advantage of the opportunity to hear the Moravian College 7th Peace and Justice Scholar in Residence, Chris Hedges, the Pulitzer Prize Winning Journalist. This is a required experience for our class.

Oct. 29 Research Workshop

Due in hard copy at the beginning of class: 1 brief paragraph about the film you hope to research and five questions/themes for exploration in your research. Plan to briefly present this initial thinking orally to the entire class following our workshop. Be prepared to give reasons for the importance of the questions/themes you wish to explore.

Important Note: We will begin Class in the computer alcove in Reeves Library with a one hour research workshop led by our research librarians to build your skills for our class research project. After the workshop we will move downstairs to the Afterwards Cafe for discussion of the workshop and the initial sharing/discussion of our research projects. Please be ready to share which of the films you intend to analyze further for your research paper. Come with a short paragraph (you will hand in a hard copy of this paragraph to the prof) that details the particular questions, issues and themes you intend to explore.

Nov. 5 *Mar Adentro/The Sea Inside*, Alejandro Amenabar, Filmanova, 2005.
Read: *The Bloomsbury Companion*, Chapter 4 (Religion, Ethics and Film); Chapter 8 (Religion and World Cinema) and the resources below that ethically debate the theme of this film.

Also Read: Adam, Eve, and the AMA: some theological reasons to support physician-assisted suicide By: Baroody, Joe. Source: Chaplaincy Today, 22 no 2 Aut-Wint 2006, p 23-32 (available through ATLA)

Physicians, chaplains, and physician-assisted suicide: responses to "Adam, Eve, and the AMA" By: Teague, Paula Jeanne; McCurdy, David B.. Source: Chaplaincy Today, 22 no 2 Aut-Wint 2006, p 33-40 (available through ATLA)

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Nov. 4, midnight.

Due at beginning of class: your annotated bibliography for your research paper, in hard copy, plus one paragraph about the film you have chosen and the theme/argument/question you are researching with respect to your film.

Nov. 12 Research Consultations: Students will sign up to meet with me for a 10 minute consultation about your research and writing progress toward your research paper.

Bring to this consultation: Your one paragraph thesis/explanation regarding the film you are researching, plus your annotated bibliography. Please consult the OWL Purdue website and follow the instructions therein regarding how to create an annotated bibliography: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>

Due on Friday, Nov. 15, midnight, in the Blackboard dropbox: your 4-5 page short paper on one of the films from Unit Three. See the Blackboard Assignment link for the paper guidelines.

Nov. 19 *Standing on My Sister's Shoulders*, Joan Sadoff, 2002

Read: Making Movies to Change the World. By: Moring, Mark. Christianity Today, Feb2009, Vol. 53 Issue 2, p40-42, 3p; (available through Ebscohost)

For the Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism. By: Dick, Jeff T.. Library Journal, 3/1/2010, Vol. 135 Issue 4, p51-51, 1/8p (available through Ebscohost)

See BB Written assignment for written work: Use the Drop Box by Monday, Nov. 18, midnight; you will also participate in our group blog this week, by Nov. 23, noon.

Thanksgiving Recess: Nov. 23, noon – Dec. 2, 7:30 am

Dec. 3 In class: workshop on final draft of your research paper and presentation of research findings. *All Students will bring their 10-page rough draft to class for this peer workshop. Students who neglect to have their rough draft or who have an unexcused absence will forfeit half a letter grade (from A to A-); thus: do not procrastinate!*

Research Papers: Due in hard copy at the professor's door by Friday, Dec. 6, 5 pm.

Final Exam: Last day of class: research roundtable, at which every student will have about 5 minutes to formally present his/her research to our class – location: TBA. Plan on bringing something to share for our dinner together, as we celebrate our good work at the semester's end!