

**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

RelS 399.05 L01 – FALL 2007

Religion and Popular Culture: The Bible and Film

COURSE OUTLINE

August 13, 2007

Logistics	Time:	Thursday, 6:30-9:20 pm
	Location:	SH 268
	Instructor:	Dr. David A. Bergen
	Office Hours:	SS 1304 Tues and Thurs, 1:00 - 2:00 (or by appointment)
	Telephone:	220-5612
	Email:	dabergen@ucalgary.ca
	Website:	http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dabergen/
	Textbooks:	<i>HarperCollins Study Bible</i> PDF and HTML materials posted on the course website

**Course
Description**

Why does Jules, the hitman in *Pulp Fiction*, quote an ominous sounding diatribe by the biblical prophet Ezekiel? Why are humans enamoured with Hollywood actors? What does the Bible have to do with the criminal underworld of *Dead Man Walking*? Through the analysis of Hollywood films and biblical texts students will reflect critically on the biblical rhetoric that is embedded explicitly and/or implicitly in modern cinematography. The course will utilize a variety of methods—basic film theory, textual hermeneutics, possible worlds theory, and cognitive science—to understand the process of recreating meaning when engaging humanly-constructed representations. Of particular importance are themes of interest to the academic study of religion: mythology, scripturality, suspension of disbelief, iconography, and ideology. As the course unfolds, students will explore the propensity of humans to scripturalize by transforming (or divinizing) virtual constructs into cognitive maps that facilitate psychological survival in an environment often confused and hostile.

**Core
Competencies**

This course promotes the following academic competencies:

- awareness of the presence and appropriation of the Bible in Western popular culture.
- awareness of biblical mythology in the cultural memory of the West.
- ability to discern critically how the media of text (i.e., the Bible) and film create possible worlds that can function as analogs of reality.
- ability to identify primary concepts, ideas, and themes and communicate them through assignments and discussions
- improved effective writings skills.
- improved reading competency in biblical and cinematographic texts.
- acquisition of cultural literacy in the area of Bible and Film.

Student Responsibilities

- Attendance of lectures
- Comprehension and engagement of presented materials
- Conceptual control of basic facts, concepts, and issues
- Study of assigned readings
- Timely submission of assignments

Learning Assessment

Five film critiques—ascending grade value:

First critique	5 marks
Second critique	10 marks
Third critique	15 marks
Fourth critique	20 marks
TOTAL	50 marks

Five Comprehension Tests (Sept 27, Oct 11 and 25, Nov 8 and 22)

In-Class Exam (Dec 6)

50%

30%

20%

Total: 100%

** There will be no Registrar scheduled Final Exam in this course*

PLEASE NOTE:

- *Film Critiques:* students will choose four of the six films presented in the course and write a critical two page, double-spaced assessment of the use or role of the Bible in the selected film. These critiques should also reflect relevant discussions, readings, and lectures. Each successive submission will be worth an increasing mark value, the total comprising 50% of the course grade.
- *Comprehension Tests:* the tests are designed to assess the students' basic comprehension of the materials (film, Bible, lectures, and readings) discussed and presented. These tests are not directly cumulative, though an increasing level of understanding is expected as we proceed through the course.
- *In-Class Exam* – This essay exam will test the cumulative knowledge gained by the student.

General Comments

- given the nature of the subject and the approaches adopted, it is vital that students attend the first week of class to gain an understanding of the nature and methodology involved.
- this course takes a critical, academic approach to film and therefore, relegates all extratextual realities (e.g., developments in “Hollywood” or the lifestyles of actors/actresses) as irrelevant.
- tests must be written/submitted on the dates scheduled. No exceptions will be made, except for death, significant illness, or domestic affliction (corroborated by a valid note from a physician or counselor). The instructor must be contacted within twenty-four hours of a missed exam or deadline.
- students anticipating a class absence should find a classmate willing to loan his/her notes; no lecture notes will be available from the instructor.
- recording of lectures is not permitted, except by special permission.
- students must maintain “back up” copies of all submissions; no concessions will be made for “lost” materials.
- students are encouraged to discuss the course materials with the instructor. An appointment can be set up for this purpose, either verbally or through email. When arranging to see the instructor, students are asked to be specific about the issues or topics they wish to discuss.
- students are also encouraged to preview the films prior to the scheduled class presentations. When viewing through the ComMedia services, an appointment must be made to book any film.

Grading Scale

A numerical grade is assigned for each course requirement. Following the final graded component, a letter grade is assigned, using the department-approved table of equivalencies:

A+ 100-96	B+ 84-80	C+ 69-65	D+ 54-53
A 95-90	B 79-75	C 64-60	D 52-50
A- 89-85	B- 74-70	C- 59-55	F under 50

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

Important Dates

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the current University Calendar.

Academic Accommodation

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor **one week** before the scheduled date.

**Course Withdrawal
Lecture Recording**

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the current University Calendar
Recording any part of any lectures in any form must be first approved by the instructor in writing and is for individual private study only. See current Calendar, Tape recording of Lectures.

Safewalk Program

"You don't have to walk alone...." Call 220-5333 and a member of the Safewalk Team will walk you to your car, the LRT, or any destination on campus. Safewalk is available to all students, staff and faculty any time of the day or night. Look for the Campus Security Help Phones located throughout the University. Please don't hesitate to call!

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is not tolerated at the University of Calgary and has serious consequences. Your essays/presentations must be your own work and inadequate referencing may be seen as plagiarism. Please see the relevant sections on Academic Misconduct in the current University Calendar. If you have questions about correct referencing, please consult your instructor.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: gnosis@ucalgary.ca or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Test	Lectures	Readings	Film to be Viewed	Critical Review Due
Sept 13		Introduction to RELS 399 Bible and Film as Possible Worlds			
20		B&F as Possible Worlds, Continued	Bible: Exod 19-24; Lev 17-26	<i>The Truman Show</i>	
27	#1	Test #1 B&F as Heteroglossia	Bible: Genesis 1-4		<i>The Truman Show</i>
Oct 4	#2	B&F as Heteroglossia, Continued	Bible: Lev 17-26	<i>Sling Blade</i>	
11	#3	Test #2 B&F as Appropriation	Bible: Job 1-3, 38-42		<i>Sling Blade</i>
18	#4	B&F as Appropriation, Cont.	Bible: Ezekiel	<i>Pulp Fiction</i>	
25	#5	Test #3 B&F as Cultural Reflection/Formation	Bible: John		<i>Pulp Fiction</i>
Nov 1	#6	B&F as Cultural Reflection/Formation, Continued	Bible: 1 Corinthians	<i>Dead Man Walking</i>	
8	#7	Test #4 B&F as Cognitive Map	Bible: Revelation		<i>Dead Man Walking</i>
15	#8	B&F as Cognitive Map, Continued	Bible: John and Revelation	<i>Jesus of Montreal</i>	
22	#9	Test #5 B&F as Scripture	Bible: John 1-9 "America's Iconic Book"		<i>Jesus of Montreal</i>
29		B&F as Scripture, Continued		<i>Simone</i>	
Dec 6		In-Class Exam			<i>Simone</i>