

University of Calgary
Faculty of Arts
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2011 – Block Week

Religious Studies 399.09 L10: Religion in Popular Culture – Women and Religion in Film

Date & Time: May 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 from 9:00 am to 5 pm daily.

Instructor: Carmen Webb

Office: SS 1330

Office Hours: I will not be holding regular office hours because of the format of the course. Nevertheless, I am very willing to arrange an appointment before or after class or during breaks if you wish to speak with me personally during the duration of the course.

Email: cewebb@ucalgary.ca

Texts:

- *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, edited by John Lyden. Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2011. Print (Get the paperback version! It is \$150.00 less than the hardcover!)
- All other readings are as listed below under **Readings**.

Pre-session reading is necessary for this course.

Course Overview:

This course will examine the portrayal of women in cinematic film with regard to religious themes/subject matter. This course will engage two primary subthemes: they are the interrelated concepts of sacrifice and survival. We will be employing critical analytical skills to consider the ways in which these subthemes play out in how women are portrayed and symbolized in these films and how such portrayals are expressions of the cultural discourses present in the environment of the films' creators. Careful attention to the films will demonstrate that women, in relation to religion, are often presented in service of a number of symbolic roles that are often quite contradictory. We will attune ourselves to the ways in which film participates in framing "reality(s)" and how this invokes a dialectic relationship with the viewer's notions of "reality/realities". By the end of the course, we will have developed a stronger ability to critically "read" films and the ways in which they participate in the entrenchment of cultural norms as well as providing opportunity to challenges such norms. It is hoped that this course will also help you read other cultural media that actively and often simultaneously participate in the construction, maintenance, and destruction of cultural categories that frame our world(s).

Note: The majority of the films used in this course involve scenes of violence, sometimes very graphic. Many of them also include nudity and strong language and have very intense themes. Many of the films would be rated “18A” or “R” in Alberta. Be prepared for this type of material! The first four films are very intense and you will be viewing them over a condensed period of time, which may have an emotional effect on you that you should be prepared for.

Films That Will Be Viewed In This Course:

- *Water* (2005), directed by Deepa Mehta
- *The Magdalene Sisters* (2003), directed by Peter Mullan
- *The Stoning of Soraya M* (2008), directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh
- *Kadosh* (1999), directed by Amos Gitai
- *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008), directed by Nina Paley

Student Responsibilities::

This course will run for five consecutive weekdays from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. As such, it requires a deep level of commitment in terms of both time and energy from all the participants. Attendance each day, all day, is compulsory except in truly exceptional circumstances. Be aware that block week courses can be very rewarding but are also very taxing and good time management is essential. Note that NO extensions are available in this course. Make sure you have no other obligations to attend to during this period of time.

Pre-session study is required. You will need a good working knowledge of these theories in order to make the most of the course so, hopefully, having an exam on these readings on the first day of class will encourage you to do your pre-session reading. You will find the list of readings and information the exam below.

N.B. All components of the course must be completed in order to be eligible to pass the course. Should you complete a component but not pass it, you will still be eligible to pass the course if the weighted total of all of your components results in a final grade of greater than 50%. Failure to complete any of the components by their due dates and times will result in a grade of F on the course as a whole.

Forms of Evaluation

Exam – 15%: On the first day of class there will be an exam based on the readings assigned from the *Religion and Film* textbook. The exam will be in the form of short answer questions that will test your knowledge of the various concepts and theories engaged in these readings. Note that under the “Readings” tab on the Blackboard site for this course you will find questions related to each of the chapters assigned for pre-session study. The contents of the exam on the

first day of class will draw directly from these questions. If you do the readings and answer the questions and then study them, you should do well on the exam.

Oral Presentations – Film - 15%: Each student will present an oral analysis of one of the films shown in class. The number of presentations per day will be equal to one quarter of the total number of students enrolled in the course. Presentations will take place in the mornings of day two through five of the course and will directly relate to the film viewed the day before. On the first day of the course students will sign up for their presentation day.

Each presentation should be no more than five minutes and no less than three minutes. It should NOT be a synopsis or summary of the film. It should be an analysis of some aspect of the film in relation to the theory(s) of one of the chapters in the *Religion and Film* textbook. You may also draw on previous class discussions and lectures and the concepts of sacrifice and survival as they relate to the particular film under review, but be sure to engage and clearly indicate which of the textbook approaches you are using and how. The analysis should demonstrate insight and thoughtful analysis. Students are expected to come well prepared and not to “wing it”. You are welcome to use Power point to augment your presentation if you like but this is not necessary or expected. Presenters should also be prepared to field questions from the class in response to their presentations.

An electronic copy (Word format) of the presentation must be emailed to the instructor by the beginning of class on the day of the student’s presentation. The paper should be accompanied by a works cited list and proper referencing with regard to the textbook.

You will be graded with consideration to the quality of both your written and oral presentation.

Film and Presentations Reaction Paper (4 per student) – 5% each, 20% total - Immediately following the lunch break on days two through five, a twenty minute block of time will be set aside during which each student will write a one page response to the presentations given that day. The response should demonstrate critically reflective analysis and response to one of the analyses offered in the student presentations. The page limit of one page means you will have to be succinct and choose one point to reflect deeply on. The paper should demonstrate that the student has actively and intellectually engaged with the film and one of the presentations and has developed a thoughtful intellectual response.

Revised Oral Film Presentation – 50% - Due May 13, 12:00 pm (noon). Each student will submit a revised and expanded version of his/her oral presentation in light of reflection upon what the student has learned in the class as a whole and in relation to the other films studied in the course. Thoughtful reflection upon the student and instructor responses to the oral presentations, as well as consideration of the relation to course readings, videos, films,

discussions, and lecture material should be evident in the paper. You should draw upon the other films in the class to compare and contrast certain themes, characters, etc. with the film you are analyzing. This paper should be 1250 words (5 pages) to 1750 words (7 pages) in length, double spaced, 1 inch margins (see “Formatting Rules” under the Stuff to Know tab in Blackboard. You may also find “Writing a Good Academic Essay” under the same tab useful). All references must be properly cited in MLA format with an accompanying and properly formatted Works Cited page. This paper is to be submitted via an emailed Microsoft Word attachment to the instructor. Papers must be received no later than noon on May 13 (note that the time of submission is the time that the incoming UofC server records as the “received” time of your paper in my email account). Failure to meet the deadline will result in a mark of F for the paper and will be considered non-completion of one of the course components by its due time, thereby rendering the student ineligible to pass the course.

Your paper will be graded with consideration of both its form and content. This means that not only do you have to offer insight and evidence of critical thought but you have to do so in a way that communicates your ideas smoothly, clearly, and effectively with proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.

Tentative Class Schedule (Note the word “tentative!” Our timing may, and probably will, fluctuate on a daily basis depending on length of discussions and other issues).

Day One

- 9:00am to 9:45 am – Class orientation and introductions
- 9:45 am to 10:45 am – Exam
- 10:45am to 11:00 am – Break
- 11:00 am to 12:30pm – Lecture and discussion
- 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm – Lunch Break
- 1:30 pm to 2:15 pm – Lecture and discussion
- 2:15 pm to 2:30 pm – Break
- 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm – Film
- 4:30 pm to 5 pm – Discussion

After Day One

- 9:00 am to 11:00 am – Film Presentations and discussion
- 11:00 am to 11:15 – Break
- 11:15 am to 12:15 pm – Lecture
- 12:15 pm to 1:15 pm – Lunch Break
- 1:15 pm to 1:45 pm - Time to write in class reaction papers
- 1:45 pm to 2:45 pm – Lecture
- 2:45 to 3:00 pm – Break
- 3:00 to 5:00 pm – Film & Discussion

Pre-session Readings:

Prior to the beginning of the course read the following chapters from the *Religion and Film* textbook. These are the readings that you will be tested on during the exam on the first day. To find the questions that will be used to create the exam, look under the “Readings” tab on the Blackboard site for this course.

- 13 – “Feminism” by Gaye Williams Ortiz
- 14 – “Audience Reception” by Clive Marsh
- 15 – “Cultural Theory and Cultural Studies” by Gordon Lynch
- 16 – “Psychoanalysis” by Kent Brintnall
- 18 – “Narrative” by Roy Anker
- 19 – “Redemption” by Christopher Deacy
- 21 – “Heroes and Superheroes” by Robert Jewett and John Lawrence
- 22 – “Horror and the Demonic” by Douglas Cowan
- 24 – “Iconography” by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona
- 25 – “Sacrifice” by Jon Pahl
- 26 – “Ethics” by Jolyon Mitchell

Block Week Readings: Prior to the viewing of each film, read the articles and view the videos below. Note that you will not be tested on this material on the first day. You may choose to read and view this material before the session begins or the night before each film is to be shown. Before the course begins, do quickly look over the material below to determine how much time it is going to take and then consider how you are going to manage your time most effectively. Films will be shown in the order below.

Water

- Watch the two parts (approximately 23 minutes running time) of this interview with Deepa Mehta from *Aljezeera English* on Youtube: “One on One – Deepa Mehta – March 6 – Part 1” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpyFmmwxcUM&feature=fvwrel> “One on One – Deepa Mehta – March 6 – Part 2” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxFyr8BcYPE&feature=fvwrel>
- Read the following article
Chaudhuri, Shohini. "Snake charmers and child brides: Deepa Mehta's *Water*, 'exotic' representation, and the cross-cultural spectatorship of South Asian migrant cinema." *South Asian Popular Culture* 7.1 (2009): 7-20.
The following permalink may take you to the article via the UofC’s library website but these links are notoriously unstable so you may have to search through the library website for the article using the bibliographical material I have cited above.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f3h&AN=37344900&site=ehost-live>

The Magdalene Sisters

- Watch the documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate* (approximately 50 minutes running time) available at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1732953937770017672#>
- Watch the interview “The Magdalene Sisters: Director Peter Mullan Interview” (approximately 6 minutes running time) <http://www.movieweb.com/movie/the-magdalene-sisters/director-peter-mullan-interview>
Note that there are short blanks in this video where the interviewer seems to ask questions or there is editing done. Do not assume the interview is finished until it is absolutely clear that it is.

Stoning of Soraya M.

- Watch the video “‘The Stoning of Soraya M’ Takes Over Current” (approximately 23 minutes running time) on Youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_HcQGYCDkY&feature=fvwrel
- Read “Iranian Law and Women’s Rights” available at <http://www.bepress.com/mwjhr/vol4/iss1/art9/> (you’ll have to sign in as a guest to get the article but it is free). Here is the full bibliographical info in case the hyperlink does not work and then you can just search for it via Google:
Kar, Mehrangiz. “Iranian Law and Women’s Rights.” *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 4.1 (2007): article 9. *Berkeley Electronic Press*. Web. 28 March 2011.

Kadosh

- Read the following interview:
Sklar, Robert. “Israel Without Mythology: An Interview with Amos Gitai.” *Cineaste* 35.4 (2010): 24-25.
The following permalink may take you to the article via the UofC’s library website but these links are notoriously unstable so you may have to search for the article through the library website using the bibliographical material I have cited above.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=afh&AN=53400329&site=ehost-live>
- Read the following article:
Dehan, Nicole and Zipi Levi. "Spiritual Abuse: An Additional Dimension of Abuse Experienced by Abused Haredi (Ultraorthodox) Jewish Wives." *Violence Against Women* 15.11 (2009): 1294-1310.
(You can find it by searching the Sage Journals Online research database on the UofC library’s homepage)

Sita Sings the Blues

- Watch the interview “Nina Paley Interview” (approximately 5 minutes running time) on Youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWxI1spHsRw>

- Read the article
Tripathi, Sahli. "Gods, Princes, and Demons." *New Statesman* 137.4898 (2008): 38-40. The following permalink may take you to the article via the UofC's library website but these links are notoriously unstable so you may have to search for the article through the library website using the bibliographical material I have cited above.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=32128383&site=ehost-live>
- Read the article:
Hess, Linda. "Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man's Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67.1 (1999):1-32. The following permalink may take you to the article via the UofC's library website but these links are notoriously unstable so you may have to search through the library website for the article using the bibliographical material I have cited above.
<http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000984892&site=ehost-live>

Grading:

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. Following the final examination, a letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

Mark (%)	96-100	90-95	89-85	80-84	75-79	70-74	65-69	60-64	55-59	53-54	50-52	<49
Grade	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
GPA	4.0	4.0	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.3	1.0	0

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

Academic Accommodation:

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 403-220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation.

Intellectual Honesty:

Students should be familiar with University regulations regarding academic integrity (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>). I take plagiarism and cheating VERY seriously and will vigorously pursue all incidents. Be sure you know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it! If you are not sure, ask me!

+Safewalk Program:

"You don't have to walk alone...." Call 403-220-5333 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!

Withdrawing from courses:

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the 2010/2011 university calendar (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-schedule.html>).

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>.

I look forward to spending the first week of May with you!

- Carmen