

RELS 280 Religion and Film
Maymester 2015
Saint Joan Goes to Hollywood: Religious Subject and Theme in Film

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Course Description: In this course students will examine and explore the pervasive presence of religious themes in film including representations of female saints and sinners, and interpretations of redemption, God, self-sacrifice and the human condition. We will view and discuss films that are obvious in their portrayal of religious subjects, such as *Joan of Arc*, *The Mission*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and films that are not so obvious in their treatment of religious themes (*The Fisher King*). Students will analyze the intersection of religion and the social construction of gender particularly the construction of the saint, or “holy woman” during the Middle Ages as reflected by the contemporary culture out of which the film emerged. Other themes include Latin American Liberation Theology, Mary Magdalene in early Christianity and the medieval legend of Percival, the Green Knight and the quest for the Holy Grail.

Course Objectives: Course objectives echo the learning outcomes established by the RELS department: Students will understand the implications of a text's (or film's) rhetorical strategy and recognize meanings beyond the author's (director's) explicit message. Students will recognize that the power to shape prevailing religious attitudes in film is linked to specific identities and contexts, which may include race, gender, class, national identity, and historical and cultural influences. Students will become aware of his/her own judgment in encounters with diverse religious themes and traditions.

This course also satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Learning Outcomes: 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments. **Mastery of these learning objectives** will be demonstrated by writing a well-organized, analytical, 3-4 page paper that examines how the representations of Joan of Arc are interpreted and valued in the primary text *The Song of Joan of Arc*, the 15th century poem by Christine de Pizan and in *The Messenger*, the 1998 film by Luc Besson.

Required Readings: All readings are on OAKS.

Course Requirements:

Two exams (200 pts.)
Three 2-page reflection papers (100 pts.)
One 3-4 page signature assignment (100 pts.)

Grading:

Each set of 100 points will be worth 25% of the final grade.
Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale:

	A	100-92	A-	91-89			
B+	88-86	B	85-82	B-	81-79		
C+	78-76	C	75-72	C-	71-69		
D+	68-66	D	65-62	D-	61-59	F	-58

Film and Reading Schedule:

Monday 05/18: **Introduction**

Themes: Reading a film as text; general introduction to the study of religion; storytelling

Beeban Kidron, *The Shared Wonder of Film*

Shekhar Kapur, *We Are the Stories We Tell Ourselves*

Readings: Bordwell, David, *The Shot: Mise-en-Scene* from *Film Art: An Introduction*
Kolker, Robert, *Film as Cultural Practice* from *Film, Form and Culture*

“They say it was the will of God that they came out of the jungle and built the mission. They don't understand why God has changed his mind.” ~ Father Gabriel, The Mission

Tuesday 05/19: **Film: The Mission**

Readings: *A Short History of Liberation Theology*
Doctrine of Discovery

Wednesday 05/20: **Lecture and Discussion/ Film: Director's Commentary on The Mission**

*****Paper #1 on ---** *Seeing with Our Own Eyes* by Margaret Miles from *Seeing and Believing*

Themes: Latin American Liberation Theology, Atonement, Redemption,
Moral Choice: Violence or Non-Violence?

“Afterward [Jesus] journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.” ~ Luke 8: 1-3

Thursday 05/21: **Film: The Last Temptation of Christ**

Readings: *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?* By Margaret Miles from *Seeing and Believing*

Friday 05/22: **Lecture and Discussion:** Mary Magdalene: “Apostle to the Apostles”

Readings: *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*

*****Paper #2 on----** *The Rise of the Soul*, by Karen L. King from *Walk in the Ways of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza*

Secrets of Mary Magdalene- 48 minutes

PowerPoint presentation: *Subverting Slander: The Iconography of Mary Magdalene*

King Arthur: Now, stand aside, worthy adversary!

Black Knight: 'Tis but a scratch!

King Arthur: A scratch? Your arm's off!

Black Knight: No, it isn't!

King Arthur: Well, what's that then?

King Arthur: I've had worse.

King Arthur: You liar!

Black Knight: Come on, you pansy! ~~ from Monty Python and the Holy Grail

Monday 05/25 **NO CLASS MEETING – MEMORIAL DAY**

Tuesday 05/26 *Secrets of Mary Magdalene*- 48 minutes

Begin Film: *The DaVinci Code*

Reading: *The Legend of Percival* by Chretien de Troyes

Wednesday 05/27 Finish *The DaVinci Code*

First Exam (last 90 minutes of class)

Thursday 05/28:

Film: *The Fisher King*

Discussion Themes: The Legend of Percival and the Holy Grail; coming full circle: atonement and redemption

“Since God had commanded it, it was necessary that I do it. Since God commanded it, even if I had a hundred fathers and mothers, even if I had been a King’s daughter, I would have gone nevertheless.” ~ Joan of Arc

Friday 05/29

Film: *The Messenger*

Readings: Selections from the Trials of Saint Joan

Saint or Patriot? by Marina Warner from *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*

Monday 06/01:

*****Paper #3 on ---** Selections from the Trials of Saint Joan OR on one of *The Messenger* film criticisms by Ronald Maxwell or Marian Horvat.

Film: *Joan of Arc (1948)*

Tuesday 06/02

Lecture and Discussion

Video: Saint Joan

PowerPoint: Women in the Middle Ages and Joan of Arc

Themes: The Medieval holy woman and saint, Joan as heroine.

*****Gen Ed Signature Assignment DUE on ----** *The Song of Joan of Arc* by Christine de Pizan

Themes: The phenomenology of revelation; Joan as cultural icon.

Second Exam Take-Home – send to doirel@cofc.edu by 5:00PM on Thursday, June 4th.

Additional Course Notes

Attendance Policy:

Class attendance and participation in group discussions are mandatory. Two absences may result in a lower final grade but MAY be excused with proper medical documentation. Three absences may result in your being dropped from the class, which will earn you an F for the course. Please note that a memo from CofC Health Services does NOT *automatically* qualify as an 'excused absence.' Final determination of an excused absence always lies with the Instructor.

SNAP: If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodation and the SNAP program, see: <http://www.cofc.edu/~cds/index.htm>.

Honor Code: The Code of Honor found in the Student Handbook will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and WILL be reported to the Honor Board. According to the Student Handbook plagiarism *includes but is not limited to:*

- * The verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author. All significant phrases, clauses, or passages, taken directly from source material must be enclosed in quotation marks and acknowledged either in the text itself or in footnotes/endnotes.
- * Borrowing without acknowledging the source.
- * Paraphrasing the thoughts of another writer without acknowledgement.
- * Allowing any other person or organization to prepare work which one then submits as his/her own.

Classroom Code of Conduct

—Selections taken from the Student Handbook, published by the President's Advisory Committee in cooperation with the Office of the President.

Your professor expects that you as a student:

1. Will be attentive and courteous during class.
2. Will complete the assigned work according to the course schedule.
3. Do not cut classes, come in late, or leave early. If you ever are late for class, enter in complete silence and do not walk between the class and the professor. Never leave during class unless you absolutely must. Leaving for a short break and then returning is not acceptable. The professor is not a TV set, but is a person addressing the class, and it is rude to leave when someone is addressing you.
4. **Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices.**
5. Visible and noisy signs of restlessness are rude as well as disruptive to others. If you cannot sit still or stay awake, you should not be taking a college class. Do not begin packing your book bag or otherwise indicate that you think it is time for class to come to an end; wait for the professor to dismiss class. If the class period has ended but the professor has not finished and you cannot stay any longer, leave in complete silence.
6. Come to class prepared to work. Your professor expects you to prepare for class by completing reading and homework assignments. If you are unprepared for class, this may prevent you from participating in a class activity. Do not present your lack of preparation as a problem for the professor to solve or excuse.