



COURSE INFORMATION:

COURSE #: PHL 393: Seminar: Faith and Film
HOURS: 3
MEETING TIMES: M, 9p-12a

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

ME: Philip Tallon (Ph.D., University of St. Andrews)
OFFICIAL EMAIL: philip.tallon@asbury.edu
FASTER EMAIL: philip.tallon@gmail.com
CELL PHONE: 859.684.5708
OFFICE: Asbury College Reasoner 117
OFFICE HOURS: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

[From Course Catalogue:] Seminar—Selects a significant issue, theme, problem, or thinker for intensive and rigorous study. Conducted in seminar style; a major paper is required.

[From me:] Christian theology has always understood the importance of being mindful of the culture at large. Karl Barth said that preaching must be done with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Pop culture is now our newspaper. It is arguable that it has become our Bible as well. Phyllis A. Tickle, writes that "more theology is conveyed in, and probably retained from, one hour of popular television than from all the sermons that are also delivered on any given weekend in America's synagogues, churches, and mosques." There is some exaggeration in this statement, to be sure. But the truth is probably within throwing distance. Hollywood and the rest of the world of entertainment powerfully shapes our thinking. Music, television, viral internet memes, social networking, and movies have dominate the forms of 21st-century expression and thought. Therefore, in order to understand how the Bible relates to our lives, we must understand the cultural environment in which we live and breathe. This class is a study of the way that one specific aspect of popular culture (movies) mediates/ expresses/alters/informs our understanding of the world: for good or ill.

In this course we will watch, discuss, and analyze a variety of films from different time periods, directors, genres, and countries of origin. Along the way, we will learn how to "read" a film by studying its style, structure, genre, themes, and cultural significance. These methodological skills will help us to understand the ways that films convey content. In this course we will seek to listen carefully to what movies have to say and to put these themes in conversation with the central ideas of Christianity.

Objectives: Upon completion of this course students will be able:

1. To discuss a film's artistic merits with rigor and clarity.
2. To talk about how a film relates to the larger body of work of its writer/director, as well as how its genre affects its significance.
3. To analyze the role that films play in the larger culture.
4. To describe the range of purposes which works of art (including films) may serve.
3. To express the importance of film as a medium that can enrich the Christian's understanding of the world.
4. To discern and discuss the central philosophical and theological themes (positive and negative) present in film.

READING:

Required Reading

- Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, ISBN: 978-0801031878, 2nd ed. Baker Academic.
- Thomas S. Hibbs, *Arts of Darkness: American Noir and the Quest for Redemption*, ISBN: 978-1890626716, Spence.
- David Thomson, *The Moment of Psycho: How Alfred Hitchcock Taught America to Love Murder*, ISBN: 978-0465020706, Basic Books.
- David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, ISBN: 978-0520246225, University of California.
- Reading Packet [Selected Readings from] :
 1. *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic*, Nicholas Wolterstorff
 2. *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama*, David Mamet
 3. *Film Theory and Criticism*, Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen
 4. *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, Noel Carroll and Jinhee Choi
 5. *Reframing Theology and Film*, Robert K. Johnston

Helpful Additional Resources (arranged in no particular order)

- *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century*, Craig Detweiler
- *Philosophy Goes to the Movies*, Christopher Falzon

GRADING:

Requirements

During this course students will be expected to:

1. Watch each movie and complete each reading assignment carefully before class and come prepared to make thoughtful contributions to class discussion.
2. Regularly attend class sessions. Students that miss more than 1 class without written excuse can expect a half-grade reduction. Students that miss more than 2 classes, a whole grade reduction. Students who miss more than 2 class periods without written excuse will not pass the class. Otherwise, the attendance policy is the same as listed in the College Catalog.
3. Complete the required assignments (a paper, 2 in-class presentations, and a number of short reflection papers).

Handy Grading Chart:

Paper (50 points):

Grade:

Presentations (20 points each):

Grade:

Grade:

Participation (10 points):

Course grading scale:

A = 94 to 100 points, A- = 90 to 93, B+ = 87 to 89, B = 84 to 86, B- = 80 to 83, C+ = 77 to 79, C = 74 to 76, C- = 70 to 73, D = 60 to 69, F = 59 and below.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS: Paper

Papers should clock in around 4000 words. An 'A' paper will be substantial in terms of defining relevant terms and providing sufficient coverage of the ideas in play, but should also be direct and to the point. Quotation from the course reading material is expected, and should also be properly cited (also please use double-spaced, Times 12pt font).

Paper Topic:

Students will be required to write about a philosophically significant movie (to be approved by the instructor) by critiquing the themes of the movie, as well looking at the significance of the film's genre, the influence of its creators, and by analyzing its aesthetic and cultural dimensions.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS: Presentations

Genre Studies Presentation: This will be a short (approx. 10-minute) presentation on a 1-minute scene from a film in a certain genre (e.g. comedy, film noir, etc.)

One Minute Film-Making Presentation: Students will present on 1 minute of a film, talking about how this tiny section exemplifies the significance of the larger film through its style.

NECESSARY ACADEMIC INFORMATION: Attendance and Academic Fraud Policy

Attendance policy reflects the standards in the college handbook.

Academic Fraud means deliberate deception in an academic context. This includes *plagiarism* (deliberately taking another's ideas and representing them as one's own) and *multiple submission* (deliberately submitting for assessment a piece of coursework already so submitted in another course, whether by the submitter or by another person).

When you take notes from a secondary source you should take care to distinguish clearly between your own commentary and the text that you copy, which should always be in inverted commas ("") with the precise bibliographical reference provided. If you are paraphrasing the ideas from a published source you should also declare this in a reference.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Mon, 9pm-12am + 1 Fri/Sat (Feb. 25 and 26)
Wed, Schedule Film Screenings.

Module 1-6:

1. What is Film?

Class 1: Jan 17th

BEFORE CLASS READ: Johnston: Ch. 1, 2

IN CLASS - VIEW: *Black Ice, Un Chien Andalou, La Jatee.*

IN CLASS - READ: "What Does Hollywood Have to Do With Wheaton?" Grenz

- a. What is Film? (Defining the term. Expanding the concept.)
- b. What is Faith? (Introduction to basic Christian theology.)
- c. Why Study Film and Faith? (*Models for interaction. Why does this deserve to be taken seriously? History of Hollywood. How have you been raised to think about movies?*)

Class 2: Jan 24th

READ: Bordwell, Part 1, Reading Packet: Bordwell, Eisenstein, Bazin

IN CLASS - VIEW: *The Cutting Edge*

a: Film Grammar:

- Shot
- Edit
- Sound
- Scene
- Story

2. The Purpose(s) of Film.

Class 3: Jan 31st

a. The Purpose(s) of Film

READ: Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, Mamet, ch. 1, Johnston, ch. 3, 5

VIEW: *Sullivan's Travels*

IN CLASS VIEW: *The Man Who Planted Trees, Spider*

3. How to Read a Film: Introduction, Auteur Criticism

Class 4: Feb 7th

READ: Johnston, ch. 8, Sarris on Auteur Theory Handout [from *Film Theory and Criticism*]
VIEW: *The Royal Tenenbaums*
IN-CLASS VIEW: *Memento*

- a. 4 Ways of Reading a Film
- b. Auteur Criticism (Three Case Studies: Anderson, Spielberg, Nolan)

4. How to Read a Film: Genre Criticism

Class 5: Feb 14th

READ: Noel Carroll, "Emotion and Genre", Bordwell, "Genre" [from *Film Art*], Hibbs, Intro, ch. 1, 2.
VIEW: *Double Indemnity*

- a. Genre Criticism (Case Study: Film Noir)

Class 6: Feb 21st

READ: Hibbs, ch. 3, 4, 5.
VIEW: *Blade Runner*

- a. Genre Criticism (Case Study: Film Noir, cont.)
- b. Genre Criticism: Comedy
- c. Presentations: Comedy

5. How to Read a Film: Cultural Criticism

Class 7: Feb 25th

READ: Tallon, "Psycho", Thomson, *The Moment of Psycho*
VIEW: *Psycho*

- a. Genre Criticism: Horror
- b. Cultural Criticism: Psycho and the Rise of the Modern Movie

6. How to Read a Film: Thematic Criticism

Class 8: Feb 26th

VIEW: *Lars and the Real Girl*

- a. Thematic Criticism: *Lars and the Real Girl*

Class 9: Feb 28th

- Reality: VIEW: *Pan's Labyrinth*
- or.
- Morality: VIEW: *Cache, King of Kong*

Class 10: Mar 7th

READ: Hibbs, ch. 10
VIEW: *Children of Men*,

- a. Thematic Criticism: Faith, Hope and Love in Children of Men
- b. Presentations

Class 11: TBD (Off campus field trip.)