



AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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Renison University College

Affiliated with the University of Waterloo

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Renison University College Land Acknowledgement

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

Winter 2022

Course Code:

RS/Fine Arts 377

Course Title:

Religion in Science Fiction Films and TV

Times/Location:

Monday, 6:30-9:30; Renison 2106

Instructor:

Instructor:

On campus only for classes in Winter 2022.

Office:

—rarely, if ever, checked. By videoconference

Office Phone:

appointment, and weekly open videoconferencing

Office Hours:

with the instructor and TA. Times will vary to accommodate different student schedules, so watch Learn for times.

Email:

(Email is the best way to reach me and during the week I can generally respond within 24 hours.

Please note that I do not read university email on weekends or holidays.)

Course Description

This course considers two of the great storytelling modes of human history: the 'What if...?' of science fiction and the 'This is...' of religious belief and practice. If the former asks, for example, what would happen if we encountered extraterrestrial life or were able to travel in time or created artificial lifeforms different from ourselves, the second encourages (and occasionally forces) us to ask what that would mean for our varied and variegated faiths, our ambitious and often ambiguous confidence in what William James called "the unseen order." More than that, this course provides a set of conceptual tools for exploring how what have been called 'religious questions' are illustrated, highlighted, and often challenged through science fiction film and television.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical knowledge of a variety of concepts and theories pertaining to 'human nature,' which includes notions of social functioning and personal fulfillment;
- Critically apply the course material to a variety of the primary source materials used throughout; and
- Developing their own critical skills to recognize ways in which the religious imagination is inflected and influenced by popular culture—and vice versa—and to communicate those to others.

Required Text

There is no required textbook for this class. Instead, you should think of the films and television episodes that we watch as the primary sources for the course, and any assigned readings as secondary sources.

Movies and television episodes are listed in the course schedule and in the relevant module on Learn. If we are on campus, then we will be watching these together and you will be required only to show up to class.

If we are online for whatever portion of the course, it is the student's responsibility to access the required material for that week's work. Please see the list of films under the Course Documents tab in Learn, for examples of where they can be accessed. Whether you rent them for the assignment, access them through a streaming service to which you already subscribe, or purchase them through Amazon or Apple is entirely up to you. But, once again, you should consider them the required texts for this course.

Readings Available on Learn

Information on required readings will be posted on the course site in Learn under the appropriate module, and included either as a .pdf file or a link to the reading. When directions pointing students to readings in either format are posted, it is the student's responsibility to access them and to be prepared for discussion on the days indicated. Since there are relatively few readings, I have listed them here as well:

Week 1 (required for Week 2)

Cowan, Douglas E. "Science Fiction and the Imitation of the Sacred."
Journal of Contemporary Religion 34, no. 2 (2019).

Week 2 (required for Week 3)

Cowan, Douglas E. "Intellects Vast and Cool and Unsympathetic, Part 1." *Journal of Religion and Film* 11, no.1 (2000).
----- "Intellects Vast and Cool and Unsympathetic, Part 2." *Journal of Religion and Film* 11, no.2 (2000).

Week 7 (required for Week 8)

Cowan, Douglas E., and Jeffrey K. Hadden, "God, Guns, and Grist for the Media's Mill." *Nova Religio: The Journal of New and Emergent Religions* 8, no.2 (2004).

Week 8 (required for Week 9)

Cowan, Douglas E. "Seeing the Saviour in the Stars." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009).
Deacy, Christopher. "Reflections on the Uncritical Appropriation of Cinematic Christ-Figures." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 13 (2006).
Kozlovic, Anton Karl. "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-Figure." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8 (2004).

Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
In-class Quizzes*	Feb 14/Apr 4	40%
Film Analysis Paper #1	Feb 14	15%
Film Analysis Paper #2	Mar 21	20%
Film Analysis Paper #3	Apr 6	25%
Total		100%

Class Participation

I expect each student to attend and participate in all class sessions. While class attendance does not count toward your grade, per se, there is no way to expect that a student can do well in the course if he or she is unwilling to attend. This is particularly important for a class that meets only once per week. Put simply, you should not miss class—ever.

*If we are required to remain remote for longer than the Winter break, then the assessment structure will change, and discussion forum participation will replace the end of term quiz. In that case, the discussion portion of the course and the midterm quiz will each be worth 20%.

Film Viewing

I am great believer in the value of watching films (or television) collectively. As a group, we see different things—and we see things differently—than when we view films alone. Even if you have already seen some of the films we will be viewing this semester (perhaps more than once), you are still

required to be here for the class screening, which only accounts for part of each evening's work. Even the act of watching a familiar film in the context of a class on religion and film will change your experience of that film.

Film and television are both cultural texts and social experiences, and you should consider all the listed films as the primary required texts for the course. Should you miss a screening, it is your responsibility to make it up. Please note that I do not lend out my personal DVDs under any circumstances.

Obviously, if we are remote, then you will be watching the films or TV episodes on your own. In that case, I will be scheduling an optional discussion period, either with myself, Zack, or both of us, to answer questions and engage in general discussion of the film or TV episodes.

In-Class Quizzes: (2x20%=40%)

Twice during the semester, the second half the class will be given over to an in-class quiz. Half the quiz will be short answer definitions of concepts we have covered to that point, the other half using those concepts and theoretical material from class lectures in a discussion of a clip taken from one of from primary sources we have viewed. You will have 90 minutes for the quiz, and detailed instructions will be provided in class lectures.

These in-class quizzes will begin promptly at 6:30 pm on February 14 and April 4. If you are not in place at those times, you will not be permitted to write. There are no exceptions to this.

*See above for potential Covid-related changes to this.

Film Analyses: (x3=60%)

This exercise explores the relationship between form and content, between structure and meaning, between how a film is made and what you think it means—particularly in terms of how it comments on religion and uses elements of film theory discussed in class.

Based on your own notes, conceptual material from class lectures and discussions, and any (properly sourced) outside reading you choose to do, you will write an analysis of the film in which you: (a) identify at least three key scenes related to themes that you consider significant; (b) discuss the relationship between these scenes, and how they confirm or confront religious understandings as we have discussed them; and (c) based on this evidence, tell me what you think the "meaning" of the film is—and, most importantly, tell me why.

Your film analysis must be typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins and using a 12-point font (this syllabus, for example, is Verdana 12). My best advice here is: Take pride in your work and show that pride to me. Please note that front matter and bibliographic material do not contribute to the word count.

#	Due	Title	Min. length	Wgt
1	Feb 14	<i>Contact</i>	1500 words	15%
2	Mar 21	"Treachery, Faith, and the Great River" (+ comparison)	1800 words	20%
2	Apr 6	Choice from list provided	2500 words	25%

Detailed instructions on how to complete these assignments will be covered in class.

Course Outline

This is a general outline of the course that assumes we will be in class for the entire semester. Should Covid-19 require a pivot to remote learning, you will be directed to the appropriate modules in Learn. Please note that the instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus as necessary to meet the pedagogical goals of the course and in light of potential Covid-19 restrictions.

Wk	Date	Topic
1	Jan 10	Introduction to the RS/Fine 377 <i>Babylon 5</i> , "Parliament of Dreams" • Required reading for Week 2 posted in Week 1
2	Jan 17	From Myths to Mistakes: Thinking about Religion <i>Star Trek (TOS)</i> , "Who Mourns for Adonais?" <i>Star Trek (V)</i> , "Sacred Ground" • Required reading for Week 3 posted in Week 2
3	Jan 24	A Very Different Kind of Matrix <i>The War of the Worlds</i>
4	Jan 31	Film, Religion, and the Authorized Version Problem How to write about film and religion...
5	Feb 7	Speaking of extraterrestrials... <i>Contact</i>
6	Feb 14	In-class Quiz #1 <i>Star Trek (V)</i> , "Barge of the Dead" Film Analysis #1 due
Feb 19-27 Family Day/Reading Week		
7	Feb 28	Varieties of Alien Religious Experience, Part 1 <i>Star Trek (DS9)</i> , "In the Hands of the Prophets"

Wk	Date	Topic
		<i>Star Trek (DS9)</i> , "Treachery, Faith, and the Great River" Choice for Film Analysis #3 due • Required reading for Week 8 posted in Week 7
8	Mar 7	Varieties of Alien Religious Experience, Part 2 <i>Star Trek (V)</i> , "False Profits" <i>Star Trek (TNG)</i> , "Devil's Due" • Required reading for Week 9 posted in Week 8
9	Mar 14	Varieties of Alien Experience, Part 3 <i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>
10	Mar 21	What does it mean to be 'human'? <i>Blade Runner</i> Film Analysis #2 due
11	Mar 28	What happens when human is not enough? <i>BSG</i> , "The Hand of God" <i>BSG</i> , "Flesh and Bone"
11	Apr 4	In-class Quiz #2 Film Analysis #3 due April 6

General Notes and Tips on doing well:

- All assignments will be submitted through a Dropbox on LEARN. Assignments must be submitted in Word, not pdf. Any assignment not submitted in Word will be returned to the student unread.
- For any of these assignments, do not write only what you think I want to hear. The intention of all assignments is to encourage you to think critically about the course content and concepts, the primary examples we consider, and the course readings.
- All assignments will be graded on the depth of thought presented and how well those thoughts are articulated. That is, having good ideas is important, but being able to express them clearly and convincingly is equally important. For further guidance, you should consult the grading rubric which is included under Course Documents in Learn.
- Think and write in terms of asking questions and solving problems. Do not simply synopsise the material. If you want to critique it, that's fine, but you have to make an argument for your critique. You can't simply say whether you liked something or not. Sometimes it helps to write as though you are trying to convince someone who does not agree with you.
- Use concrete examples to support the argument you are making or your solution to the problem you present.
- Start early and rewrite or rework your project often. You can always submit a draft either to me or to Zack, as long as they come in several

days ahead of the due date. Remember, the single most common reason for students doing poorly on any assignment—bar none—is leaving them until the last moment. Speaking of that...

Late Work

Assignments turned in past the due date will be assessed a penalty of 10% per day late, including the day on which you turn it in. If a paper is due on Friday and you turn it in Sunday, that is a 20% penalty. With the exception of drafts, turn in all assignments through the appropriate LEARN Dropbox; do not simply email them to me. I only grant extensions for reasons of medical and family emergency, and documentation is required in both instances. See the University of Waterloo guidelines on Covid-19 to assist you in this. Extensions beyond the end-of-semester require that you complete a Request for Incomplete form, available at the Renison Registrar's Office, and supporting documentation may be required.

Attendance Policy

See policy above on Discussion Participation.

Final Examination Policy

There is NO registrar-scheduled final examination in this course.

Accommodation for Illness or Unforeseen Circumstances:

The instructor follows the practices of the University of Waterloo in accommodating students who have documented reasons for missing quizzes or exams. See

http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/students/accom_illness.html

Academic Integrity:

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour) for more information.

Discipline: Every student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their own actions. [Check the [Office of Academic Integrity \(https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration, should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or Academic Dean. When misconduct has been

found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties are imposed under the University of Waterloo Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties).

Students should also be aware that copyright laws in Canada prohibit reproducing more than 10% of any work without permission from its author, publisher, or other copyright holder. Waterloo's policy on Fair Dealing is available here: <https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-guidelines/fair-dealing-advisory> Violation of Canada's Copyright Act is a punishable academic offence under Policy 71 – Student Discipline.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo): <http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Intellectual Property: Students should be aware that this course contains the intellectual property of the instructor, which can include:

- lecture handouts and presentations (e.g., PowerPoint slides)
- lecture content, both spoken and written (and any audio or video recording thereof)

- questions from various types of assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, tests, final exams)
- work protected by copyright (i.e., any work authored by the instructor)

Making available the intellectual property of instructors without their express written consent (e.g., uploading lecture notes or assignments to an online repository) is considered theft of intellectual property and subject to disciplinary sanctions as described in Policy 71 – Student Discipline. Students who become aware of the availability of what may be their instructor’s intellectual property in online repositories are encouraged to alert the instructor.

Contingency Planning/Inclement Weather

In the event of a short-term campus closure or the cancellation of an in-person class due to snow or inclement weather, online and remote classes will not be affected.

Interruption or Cancellation of In-Person Classes

In the event of a pandemic-related interruption of in-person classes, including a 'pivot' to remote learning, your Instructor will post details in LEARN. Please check the Announcements section of the course homepage in LEARN for updates.

Interruption or Cancellation of In-Person Examinations

In the event of a pandemic-related interruption of in-person exams, your Instructor will post details in LEARN. Please check the Announcements section of the course homepage in LEARN for updates.

Absence Due to Influenza-like Illness or Required Self-Isolation

If you need to be absent due to influenza-like illness or due to mandatory self-isolation, please complete an [Illness Self Declaration](#). The form is available in the Personal Information section of Quest. Accommodations may be made for students who have completed an Illness Self Declaration without the need for a medical note.

Mental Health Support

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health supports if they are needed.

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 ext. 32655
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and Counselling Services

- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- [Empower Me](#): Confidential, multilingual, culturally sensitive, faith inclusive mental health and wellness service.
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-4300 ext. 6880
- [Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online at the Faculty of ARTS [website](#)

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information

A respectful living and learning environment for all

Everyone living, learning, and working at Renison University College is expected to contribute to creating a respectful environment free from harassment and discrimination.

You may contact Melissa Knox, Renison's external anti-harassment and anti-discrimination officer, by email (mnknox@uwaterloo.ca) or by phone or text (226-753-5669). Melissa is an employment and human rights lawyer and part-time Assistant Crown Attorney for the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General. Melissa is experienced in case management, discipline and complaints processes, and works with organizations across Canada to foster safe, respectful, and inclusive work and learning environments through policy development, educational workshops, conflict mediation and dispute resolution, and organizational culture audits.

Harassment is unwanted attention in the form of disrespectful comments, unwanted text messages or images, degrading jokes, rude gestures, unwanted touching, or other behaviours meant to intimidate.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, discrimination means unequal or different treatment causing harm, whether intentional or not, because of race, disability, citizenship, ethnic origin, colour, age, creed, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, or other personal characteristic.