SCAR 2YY3 – The Bible and Film
Winter 2023

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Office Hours: By appointment in-person or via Zoom
Lecture: Mondays 7pm-10pm, ABB 102

Contents

Course Description

What do robots, machines, cyborgs, and A.I. have to do with the Bible? In this course we will explore the use of Bible stories, images, and themes in a variety of classic and contemporary science fiction films. Our focus will be on the depiction and transformation of several narratives from the book of Genesis, beginning with the accounts of creation, the Garden of Eden, and the tower of Babel. Many sci-fi films draw on these Bible stories to explore perennial questions related to human nature, free will, (im)mortality, knowledge, and transcendence. We will also examine portrayals of salvation and the apocalyptic imagery of a new Eden. In particular, we will consider the ways that sci-fi films explore these themes in their portrayals of the interactions between humans and technologies.

Course Objectives

- To analyze and engage with biblical narratives and themes
- To examine how biblical themes are used to reinforce or challenge cultural norms through the medium of film and digital media
- To cultivate the art of film appreciation from a variety of perspectives

Required Materials and Texts

- All journal articles and book chapters will be available on the Avenue to Learn course website or through the McMaster library
- All films are accessible through the library's streaming service, Criterion on Demand. Episodes of HBO's television series, *Westworld,* are available for rent on YouTube and Amazon Prime.
- Students should also have access to an English translation of the Christian Bible. [An on-line version of the Christian Bible can be found here.](#)

Class Format

This course is offered in person on Monday evenings, 7-10pm.

Course Evaluation – Overview

- Participation and engagement (15%)
- Film Responses (3 x 15% = 45%)
- Final Essay Proposal (5%)
- Final Essay (35%)

Course Evaluation – Details

Participation and engagement (15%)

- Attendance at film screenings, lectures and tutorials is required. All students should be prepared to attend class from 7-10pm on Monday evenings and to participate in small

and large group discussions. Participation will be self-assessed and reviewed by the instructor.

Film responses (15% each = 45%)
- Students will write three short critical reflections responding to the films we've viewed in the course. Response papers should be three typed pages (approximately 800-900 words) and should engage one main theme.
- **Due Dates**: February 3, March 3, March 31

Final essay proposal (5%)
- Each student will write a brief (1-2 paragraphs) proposal articulating a main question or topic as the focus for the final essay.
- **Due Date**: March 17

Final essay (35%)
- Students will write a final essay on a topic of their choice related to the course themes. Essays should be 7-8 pages (approximately 2000-2500 words) in standard essay format (double-spacing, 12-point font). Further details will be available on Avenue.
- **Due Date**: TBD

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (January 9): Introduction and Approaches to Bible and Film

Week 2 (January 16): Creation Stories – Genesis
   Film: *Frankenstein* (Francis Whale, 1931)
   Readings:
- Genesis 1-3
- George Aichele. "Film Theory and Biblical Studies," in *Close Encounters between Bible and Film: An Interdisciplinary Engagement*, ed. Laura Copier and Caroline Vander Stichele. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016, 11-26.
- John C. Lyden. "Science-Fiction Films," in *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*, 2nd ed. New York: New York University Press, 2019, 197-216.

Week 3 (January 23): Technology and the Tower of Babel
   Film: *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), part I
   Readings:
- Genesis 6-9, 11:1-9
- Anton Kaes. "The Phantasm of the Apocalypse: Metropolis and Weimar Modernity." In *Noir Urbanisms*, ed. Gyan Prakash. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, 17-30.

Week 4 (January 30): Apocalypse
   Film: *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), part II
   Readings:
- Selections from the Book of Revelation

- Ake Bergval. "Apocalyptic Imagery in Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis'." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 40.4 (2012): 246-257.
- Andreas Huyssen. "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis." *New German Critique* 24/25 (Autumn, 1981): 221-237.
Notes:
- Film Response 1 due – February 3

Week 5 (February 6): Modern Messiah figures
Film: The Day the Earth Stood Still (Robert Wise, 1951)
Readings:
- Selections from Matthew
- Anton Karl Kozlovic. "Sacred Subtexts and the Biblical Buttressing of Klaatu as a Christ Figure in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)." In *T&T Clark Handbook of Jesus and Film*, ed. Richard Walsh (London: T&T Clark, 2021): 225-236.

Week 6 (February 13): Knowledge and mortality
Film: *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)
Readings:
- David Dresser. "The New Eve: The Influence of *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* on *Blade Runner*." in *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's* Blade Runner *and Philip K. Dick's* Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, ed. Judith B. Kerman (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997): 53-65.
- Judith Kerman. "Post-Millennium Blade Runner." In *The Blade Runner Experience: The Legacy of a Science Fiction Classic*, ed. Will Brooker (New York: Wallflower Press, 2005): 31-39.

Week 7 (February 20): Reading Week
No class

Week 8 (February 27): Body and machine
Film: *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991)
Readings:
- Robert K. Johnston. "Obviously, It's a Christ-Figure Movie…Or is it?." In *T&T Clark Handbook of Jesus and Film*, ed. Richard Walsh (London: T&T Clark, 2021): 213-224.
- Gill, Sam. "Jesus wept, robots can't: religion into the future." *Body and Religion* 4.1 (2020): 32-44.
Notes:
- Film Response 2 due – March 3

Week 9 (March 6): The mind, Messiahs, and mythmaking
Film: *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, 1999)
Readings:
- Fontana, Paul. "Finding God in *The Matrix*." In *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix*, ed. Glenn Yeffeth (Dallas, TX: Benbella Books, 2003): 159-184.

Week 10 (March 13): Freedom and desire
    Film: *Westworld* (Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, 2016) (episode from Season 1)
    Readings:
- TBD

    Notes:
- Essay Proposal due – March 17

Week 11 (March 20): Gender and the Garden reconsidered
    Film: *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014)
    Readings:
- Cynthia R. Chapman. "Built Women in Men's Paradises: A Critical Analysis of the Garden of Eden Narrative and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 34.3 (2022): 147-171.

Week 12 (March 27): Tomorrow's Eves?
    Film: *her* (Spike Jonze, 2013)
    Readings:
- Collen M. Conway. "Eve as Cyborg: The Eden Myth as a Blueprint for Artificial Women." *Postscripts* 11.2 (2020): 145-174.

    Notes:
- Film Response 3 due – March 31

Week 13 (April 3): Transcendence, immortality, and visions of a new Eden
    Film: *Transcendence* (Wally Pfister, 2014)
    Readings:
- Robert M. Ceraci. "Apocalyptic AI: Religion and the Promise of Artificial Intelligence." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76.1 (2008): 138-166.
- Yvonne Foerster. "Singularities and Superintelligence: Transcending the Human in Contemporary Cinema." *Trans-Humanities* 9.3 (2016): 33-50.

Week 14 (April 10): Final discussion
- Final Essay: Due date TBD

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments
All written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue in .docx or .pdf format.

Grades
Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-89	A
80-84	A-

MARK	GRADE
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments
Please contact the instructor if you plan on handing in an assignment late. Late assignments may be penalized at the discretion of the instructor.

Avenue to Learn
In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement
You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures- guidelines/

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:
- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.

- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection
Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to the [Office of Academic Integrity website](#).

Courses with an On-line Element
Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring
Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations
As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the *Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities* (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2

Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work
McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO) Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording
Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances
The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.