

# **Creating Jesus: The Historical Jesus in Scholarship, Film, and Fiction**

**NT6/713**

Instructor: Harry O. Maier  
Spring Term 2019

Office number: 604-822-9461  
email: [hmaier@vst.edu](mailto:hmaier@vst.edu)  
Office Hours: Wednesday 1-2 PM

## **Purpose**

This course will take up the figure of Jesus from three different angles: historical scholarship, film, and fiction. In each case we will consider the role of culture and context in accounts of the historical Jesus. The interest is as much in the historians, directors, and authors of Jesus as it is in the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. From a historical perspective, reconstruction of the past is always a product of the questions, interests, and location of historians. In film and fiction this is most obvious. Less, obvious, however, is how the twentieth and twenty-first century questers for the historical Jesus have been similarly embarking upon a quest from their own location, and have, in varying degrees, "unearthed" a Jesus meaningful to their own socially embedded identities.

The course, then, will take up representative studies about Jesus, films, and fictional narratives, to consider the role of culture and identity in both the reading of Jesus and the production of material about him in contemporary culture. We will examine how Jesus is as much created as "discovered" through various media and how we, in the guise of culture, find ourselves in a continuing process of production that has accompanied the faithful for two millennia in their quest for a life of and from Jesus.

## **Competence Objectives**

1. Knowledge of the history and methods of the quests for the historical Jesus from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onward
2. Ability to identify the social and historical contexts of the Jesus quests and to compare and analyse them
3. Basic knowledge of the Jesus as a figure in cinema
4. Ability to analyse the representation of Jesus of Jesus in film with tools of cinematographical investigation
5. Awareness of the figure of Jesus in in representative 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century fiction
6. Ability to identify the social and historical contexts of the representations of Jesus in film and fiction and to compare and analyse them
7. Integrative competence in relating historical Jesus quests to film and fiction

8. Growth in exegetical and historical skills in interpreting the “texts” of historical scholarship, cinema, and fiction

## **Format**

One 3 hour class weekly with student presentations

## **Content**

The content will be divided into 3 units. Unit one will introduce students to historical Jesus scholarship, its history and its methods. Unit two will take up Jesus as a character in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century film. Unit three will introduce Jesus as a figure in representative 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century English literature.

In each section students either individually or in groups will make a class presentation on an example of historical Jesus scholarship from a bibliography handed-out in class, a film, and piece of literature. They will use the skills and knowledge introduced in the lectures to guide their presentations.

## **Evaluation**

1. 80% class attendance; class participation. This means that absence for more than two sessions will constitute a Not Approved for the course.
2. Students who miss a class are required to write a 2-3 single-spaced précis of the lecture due by the start of the following class. Students late for and needing to leave a class early are required to write a précis of the part of the class missed.
3. 3 class presentations either individually or in groups that present unit material according to directions outlined in class handouts. In brief students will introduce a historical Jesus study, a film, and a work of fiction to the class.
4. One 2500 word paper with 10-15 bibliographical citations outside of the assigned textbooks that discusses a film or novel in the light of historical Jesus scholarship and modern culture that builds on the class presentations. **Paper due 18 April.**

*Asynchronous Distance Students:*

In addition to the above, a 2-3 single-spaced précis of the lecture due by the start of the following class.

## Rewrites

Students who wish to graduate in May 2018 must submit rewrites of Not Approved papers by **3 May**. Rewrites of Not Approved papers for other students are due **14 June**.

## Certificate Students

Students taking the course for a certificate in theological studies are required to do the course readings and to write a 8-10 page double-spaced reflection on an aspect of the content of the course material.

## Bibliography

An extensive bibliography will be distributed the first day of class from which students will be able to select their items for study and presentation.

## Required Texts

Magdalena Maczynska, *The Gospel According to the Novelist: Religious Scripture and Contemporary Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic; Reprint edition, 2017. ISBN 978-1350028449

Mark Allen Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Louisville: John Knox Westminster, 2013. ISBN 9780664234478 (note all assignments will be based on the second edition)

Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 2004. ISBN 978-0374529567

Jeffrey L. Stanley and Brian Walsh, *Jesus, the Gospels, and Cinematic Imagination: A Handbook to Jesus on DVD*. Louisville: John Knox Westminster, 2007. ISBN 978-0664230319.

## Recommended Text

Margaret E. Ramey, *The Quest for the Fictional Jesus: Gospel Rewrites, Gospel (Re)Interpretation, and Christological Portraits within Jesus Novels*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock/Pickwick, 2013. ISBN 978-1-61097-738-8