REL 389: Jesus and Literature

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Office Hrs.: See Handout
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“Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you King of the Jews? Jesus said, “You have said so” (Matthew 27:11).

Course Description and Introduction:

This course will explore and analyze the ways in which a selection of modern and postmodern literary works, mainly novels, conceptualizes and portrays the central figure in Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth.

The literary figure of Jesus appears in several theological forms—traditional theistic, non-traditional theistic, atheistic, and antheistic. Traditional theistic literary works present Jesus in a way consistent with “accepted” or “normative” Christian theology, Christ the Lord. Non-traditional theistic texts attempt to re-construct Jesus outside the Christian theological tradition, The Man Who Died. Atheistic and antheistic works, The Gospel According to Jesus Christ and The Gospel in Brief, respectively, offer the figure of a non-divine Jesus or, in the case of the former, a divine Jesus in conflict with a tyrannical God.

We will begin with a discussion of Jack Miles’ book Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God. From the discussion we will assemble a range of “subjectivities” for Jesus, e.g. divine, human, divine and human, revolutionary, atheist, etc. As we develop our understanding of these ‘subjectivities,’” we will explore and analyze the ways in which authors have utilized them in the construction of a “literary Jesus.”

In addition to the literary works, students will be required to read a selection of philosphico-theological texts by Slavoj Žižek, Thomas J.J. Altizer, John Milbank, Gilles Deluze, and François Laruelle. Students also will view selection from filmic portrayals of Jesus.

Required Texts:

The Gospel in Brief, L. Tolstoy
The Man Who Died, D.H. Lawrence
The Gospel According to Jesus Christ, J. Saramago
Christ the Lord, A. Rice
American Jesus, M. Millar
Goals:

- Gain a familiarity with interdisciplinary scholarship in religious and literary studies.
- Gain an understanding of the literary and theological importance of traditional and non-traditional understandings of Jesus of Nazareth.
- Enhance critical reading, writing, and thinking skills.

Grading:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Exam I</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Research Exam II</td>
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<td>Research Exam III</td>
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<td>Project</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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*Unexcused absences will result in one (1) point per missed class being deducted from the final grade.

*SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973: Any student in need of special consideration should make an appointment to see me during office hours.

*All assignments must meet the requirements of effective communication set forth in the Handbook.

*This syllabus is augmented by and in compliance with the College catalog.

Schedule:

1.20 Introduction
1.25 Introduction II: Jesus and “Subjectivity.”
1.27 Miles, “Jesus: Messiah, Prophet, Lamb of God, Revolutionary.”
2.1 Discussion and Jesus to Christ documentary.
2.3 The Gospel in Brief, L. Tolstoy.
2.8  Discussion: “Jesus the Revolutionary.”

2.10  Discussion

2.15  *Christ the Lord*, A. Rice.

2.17  Discussion: “Jesus and the Imaginary Divine.”

2.22  Discussion and selection from Gilles Deleuze, TBA.

2.24  Discussion


3.10  Discussion: “Jesus and Mythology.”

3.15  Discussion and selection from John Milbank, TBA.

3.17  Discussion


3.29  Žižek and Altizer readings and video, TBA

3.31  Discussion: “The Self-Annihilation of God.”

4.5  Discussion: “Jesus and/as Monstrosity.”

4.7  Discussion

4.12  *American Jesus*, Millar.


4.28  Discussion: “Jesus as Future Subject.”

5.3  Discussion

5.4  Closing