

RS 137 Religion and Film

# Mysticism and Apocalyptic

Professor: Dr. Jed Wyrick

Spring 2005, T 7-9:50 PLMS 205

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Trinity 233

x-6379

Office Hours: M 1-3 TW 1-2

## Course Aims:

- To explore the analysis of film from the perspective of the academic study of religion
- To examine the impact of two religious modes--mysticism and apocalyptic--in cinema
- To gain knowledge about the field of Jewish mysticism, by interacting with primary texts and secondary scholarship
- To understand debates in the academic study of mysticism and the relationship between mystical experiences
- To consider the interrelation of religious views on angels, the Gnostic view of the creator and demiurge, and the idea of the revelation of end times (apocalyptic)
- To discuss the intersection of Jewish esoteric and mystical traditions of the Second Temple Period, Gnosticism, and apocalyptic ideas in Judaism and Christianity
- To gain an awareness of how religious themes such as theodicy (the justification of God), suffering, redemption and sin, immortality, the transience of human knowledge permeate the cinematic medium
- To discuss the differences and commonalities between the genres of film, novel, and tragedy

## Requirements:

Attendance: **100 points** (minus 20 for each missed class)

Class Participation (= intelligent questions, comments in class): **50 points**

Assigned short essays: **400 points**

Tests on Theories of Mysticism, *Satan in Goray*, and *City of God*: **150 points**

Final paper: **300 points**

Total: **1000**

### **Policies:**

Late papers may be penalized up to 1/3 of a grade per day, unless prior permission has been granted. All papers are required; you cannot pass the course without handing in all of them. You are required to keep a back-up copy of each essay you submit, either in a computer disk or in hard-copy, to be printed out and resubmitted upon my request. **Any paper not resubmitted on request will be considered as not having been completed.**

### **Required Books:**

Available at AS Bookstore:

1. Gershom Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken, 1995)
2. David Meltzer, *The Secret Garden: An Anthology in the Kabbalah* (Barrytown Limited, 1998)
3. Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996)
4. E. L. Doctorow, *City of God* (Plume, 2001)

Available at Mr. Kopy (Main St. at 1<sup>st</sup> St., next to the 7-Eleven):

5. RS 137 Reader; Please bring it to class when it contains the readings for that day.

You will also be required to read sections of the Hebrew Bible. A recommended translation is the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh*, available online <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/jpstoc.html> ; other recommended versions of the Old and New Testaments can be found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) .

### **Syllabus:**

January 25: **Introduction**

**Jewish Mysticism and Mystical Experience**

February 1: Mathematics and the Language of Jewish Mysticism

Pi (Darren Aronofsky, 1998)

Sholem, First Lecture: General Characteristics of Jewish Mysticism

Sholem, Fourth Lecture: Abraham Abulafia and the Doctrine of Prophetic Kabbalism

Sefer Yetsirah (in Meltzer, *A Secret Garden*)

The Question of Prophecy (in Meltzer, *A Secret Garden*)

*Sha'erei Zedek* (in Meltzer, *A Secret Garden*)

February 8: The Experience and Dangers of Mysticism

Pari (Dariush Mehrjui, 1995)

William James, "Mysticism," *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 379-429 (in RS 137 Reader)

February 15: The Debate Over the Mystical Experience: Lecture

S. T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in S. T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, pp. 22-75 (in RS 137 Reader)

Philip Almond, "Mysticism and Its Contexts," in Robert Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 211-219 (in RS 137 Reader)

R. L. Franklin, "Experience and Interpretation in Mysticism," in Robert Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 288-304 (in RS 137 Reader)

**\*\*\*Test on Theories of Mysticism\*\*\***

**The World Gone Wrong**

February 22: Human Sacrifice and Divine Retribution

Frailty (Bill Paxton, 2001)

Genesis 22

Numbers 25

Deuteronomy 28-32

Daniel 7-12

1 Enoch 91-108 (in RS 137 Reader)

**March 1: Messianism, Heresy, and Demonic Possession: Lecture and Literary Analysis**

Sholem, Eighth Lecture: Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray*

**\*\*\*Test on *Satan in Goray*\*\*\***

**March 8: Exile and Redemption**

Magnolia (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999)

Sholem, Seventh Lecture: Isaac Luria and His School

**March 15: Spring Break: no class**

**Angels and Theodicy**

**March 22: Gnosticism and Apocalyptic: Lecture**

Sholem, Second Lecture: Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism

Shiur Qoma (in Meltzer, *A Secret Garden*)

1 Enoch 1-71 (in RS 137 Reader)

Harold Bloom, "Angels," in *Omens of the Millennium*, pp. 37-81 (in RS 137 Reader)

**March 29: Suffering, Desire, and Heavenly Detachment**

Wings of Desire (*Der Himmel über Berlin*) (Wim Wenders, 1987)

Sholem, Sixth Lecture: The Zohar II: The Theosophic Doctrine

Book Bahir, Petach Eliyahu and the Doctrine of Ether (in Meltzer, *A Secret Garden*)

**April 5: Tragedy, Heresy, and Jewish Politics**

Daniel (Sidney Lumet, 1983)

**April 12: Tragedy, Suffering, and Sin**

Angels in America, Part I: Millennium Approaches (Mike Nichols, 2003)

**April 19: Tragedy and the Absence of God**

Angels in America, Part II: Perestroika (Mike Nichols, 2003)

Sholem, Seventh Lecture: Isaac Luria and His School

Baraita on the Work of Creation (in Meltzer, *A Secret Garden*)

**Apocalypse and the De(con)struction of the Text**

**April 26: Mysticism, Film, and the Novel: Lecture**

E. L. Doctorow, *The City of God*

**\*\*\*Test on *City of God*\*\*\***

**May 3: The End of the Written Word**

Fahrenheit 451 (François Truffaut, 1966)

Ezekiel 1-3

The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah (in RS 137 Reader)

**May 10: The Apocalypse of Rationalism**

The Name of the Rose (John-Jacques Annaud, 1986)

Plagiarism and cheating are grave violations of the academic integrity policy of the California State University, Chico. This policy (EM 04-36) is posted at [http://www.csuchico.edu/prs/EMs/EM04/em04\\_36.htm](http://www.csuchico.edu/prs/EMs/EM04/em04_36.htm). We view plagiarism and cheating as serious offenses. The policy of the Department of Religious Studies is that anyone found to have blatantly cheated or plagiarized on an assignment will automatically fail the course and be referred to student judicial affairs for further disciplinary action.

If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for coordination of your academic accommodations. DSS is located in Building E. Building E is adjacent to Meriam Library and Bell Memorial Union (BMU). The DSS phone number is 898-5959 V/TTY or FAX 898-4411. Visit the DSS website at <http://www.csuchico.edu/dss/>.

*This syllabus is subject to revision.*