

Department of English & Writing Studies

Film Studies 2159B
Disney Dream Factory
Winter 2023

Instructor: Professor: Jeff Swim
jswim3@uwo.ca
Office Hours: Tuesdays 9-10am and 1-2pm
or by appointment via Zoom

Course Location: FNB 1250

Course Day/Time: Tuesdays 10:30 am –
12:30

Online Screening: Asynchronous/View
films on your own time using links provided
in the OWL site Resources Folder



Teaching Assistants:

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Office Hours: TBA
Office Hours: TBA

Antirequisites: Film Studies 2196A/B, if taken in 2016-2017.

In-Class etiquette: No form of racism, sexism, religious persecution, gender-based aggression, body shaming, or any other kind of bigotry will be tolerated.

Course Description

Walt Disney claimed that “the first duty of the cartoon is not to picture or duplicate real action or things as they actually happen—but to give a caricature of life and action—to picture on the screen things that have run through the imagination of the audience—to bring to life dream-fantasies and imaginative fancies that we have all thought of during our lives” (qtd. in Wills 38). Our course will think critically about what John Wills calls “Disney Culture”—the overarching and interpenetrating cultural, social, economic, and ideological institution that has risen to global dominance since the young Walt Disney started his animation studio in the early 1920s. As the course title indicates, we will think of Disney as one of America’s “dream factories,” a term that perhaps once would have sounded like an oxymoron but has become an accurate description of what the Disney brand stands for: an industrial manufacturing company that produces “dreams.” As such, we will unpack “Uncle Walt’s” above-cited claim that Disney films “bring to life” the “dream-fantasies” that inhere within the “imagination of the audience.” We will ask how Disney *realizes* these “imaginative fancies,” who was and is the presupposed audience whose imaginations are being targeted (and shaped) by Disney, and what are the material, cultural, and artistic implications of Disney productions. By analyzing some of their most iconic films, we will study the way Disney navigates and influences broader social and cultural issues such as the representation and construction of racial difference, gender norms and relations, sexuality, class division, colonialism, and secularism. To this end, we will study and reflect upon the implication of the cultural narratives, industrial strategies, animation styles and techniques, filmic qualities, and ideological strategies which have come to define Disney.

Learning Outcomes:

Critical thinking and analysis skills: By the end of this course, successful students will be able to critically analyse the techniques and formal structure of Disney films and identify cultural and social themes in Disney's oeuvre.

Academic and scholarly reading comprehension: Students will become familiar with reading strategies that will improve their retention, comprehension, and ability to synthesize sophisticated scholarly writing and research.

Understanding Film Art: Students will become familiar with some key terms, techniques, and formal properties of film and animation.

Research and academic writing: Students will gain experience in independent research in the field of film studies and criticism. Students will also develop, write, and be assessed upon their ability to present their research in the form of a final essay/term paper.

Creative writing/content development: Students will have the opportunity to produce a piece of creative work that demonstrates nuanced engagement with the concepts, themes, and/or topics covered in our course.

Course Materials

Films:

All films unless otherwise indicated are available online through the Audio Cine Films streaming platform, *Weldon Library Databases*

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (subject to availability)

Required Textbooks (available in the University Bookstore):

- Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Polity, 2001) [UD]
- Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Hass, Laura Sells (Ed.), *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1995) [MtM]

Optional Textbook (available in the University Bookstore):

- Mindy Johnson, *Ink and Paint: The Women of Walt Disney's Animation*

* Other required readings will be available on our course webpage on OWL

Methods of Evaluation

Class Attendance and Participation: 10% (ongoing)

Informal Reflection or Creative Project (1000 words): 25% (Due February 17)

Research Paper (approx. 1500 words): 35% (Due April 4)

Final Exam: 30%

*All assignments will be submitted through OWL

Late Penalties: Deducting 3% per day for assignments that are overdue

Brief Description of Assessments:

Class Attendance and Participation: We will be taking attendance each class. Participation will be in the form of contributions to in-class discussions and participation in group activities.

Informal Reflection or Creative Project: You may write a short piece that incorporates and engages key terms, techniques, and topics with reference to up to two films that we have watched thus far. This assignment is intended to give me a chance to evaluate your writing and comprehension of the material while also allowing you to have some fun. It can be written in the form of an eye-catching, “web content” style piece (examples will be provided) or in a more academic style.

Or

In this assignment, you may also put your creative interests and talents to use. I am open to students’ ideas on this option. Some projects to consider are: an imaginative dialogue between two or more characters from the films we have watched, a “cover” of a Disney song, a podcast style commentary on one or more of the films, a video project, an animated or a comic-book style adaptation of an aspect of Disney history or other aspect of “Disney Culture,” or comedy skit (in the style of Screen Junkies’ “Honest Trailers” or Ryan George’s “Pitch Meeting” series). If this option is chosen, students should be sure to plan accordingly and keep their pieces within assignment length parameters. If you chose a comic, for instance, keep it under five pages, if a podcast, keep it between around 10 minutes. If you chose this option, you also must include a paragraph explaining how your piece engages with course material.

Research Paper: You will be required to write a final paper either on a research question provided or based on one of your own interest (as long as it clearly reflects course topics, themes, and materials). These papers can take the form of argumentative or interpretive essays in which you will develop a debateable thesis that is supported by textual or filmic evidence. For this essay, you must engage critically with one or two scholarly sources, which can be from the required course texts or located using the Western Library database.

Or

You can research and write upon an area of interest such as a particular period of Disney’s development, technological innovations and their impact, how a piece of technology works and its implications for the art form and industry, or the techniques and impact of a particular style of animation. If you chose this option, it is expected that you will use peer-reviewed sources and examples taken from some of the Disney films we have covered. I will give details, research prompts, and specific details well in advance.

Final Exam: The final exam will be cumulative, but not exhaustive. You will be expected to be prepared to answer questions on and write about any of the films we have covered and any of the major concepts, techniques, terms, and topics discussed in class. The exam will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and long answer (mini essay-style) questions. Additional details about the exam will be provided.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course

drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Mental Health: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Film Screening Note: All films screened in this course are available online via streaming services or links. If you would like to view a film on campus, you may also try to arrange a viewing of the assigned film on dvd at the Film Resource Centre and Film Viewing Lab located in the basement of University College - UC 1126 / 1126A. The hours of operation for the Film Resource Centre are currently **Monday – Thursday 11-4 pm and Friday 11- 3 pm**. During the pandemic, new safety measures and social distancing policies are currently in place and the hours of operation and access policies are subject to change. Please note that space is limited and only two viewing carrels are available. If you have questions or would like to try to book an appointment in advance, please email the Film Resource Centre Librarian Rachel Gunn (rgunn4@uwo.ca, ext. 85730).

Masks—In-class mask policy remains in place. Be mindful of your fellow students and your instructors.

Stay home if you are sick!!

Timetable

Week 1: Jan 10th—Disney’s Early Animation

Course introduction; review of syllabus; introducing Disney; introducing some film and animation terms.

Week 2: Jan. 17th—The Golden Era: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand et. al 1937)

Reading:

- ❖ “Breaking the Disney Spell” by Jack Zipes in *From Mouse to Mermaid* (pp. 21-42)
- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 15-18; 138-140

Week 3: Jan. 24th—The Silver Era: *Peter Pan* (Luske, Jackson, and Geronimi; 1953)

Reading:

- ❖ “The Disney Version: Peter Pan” by David Martínez [OWL]
- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 18-26; 122-129; 150-155

Recommended reading:

- ❖ “‘But He’s So Serious’: Framing of Masculinity Among Western Hemisphere Indigenous Peoples in Disney Animated Films” by Tim Luisi [OWL]

Week 4: Jan 31st—The Bronze Era: *Robin Hood*

Reading:

- ❖ “Animated Conversations in Nottingham: Disney’s Robin Hood (1973)” by Andrew Lynch [OWL]
- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 155-157

Week 5: Feb 7th—Disney’s “Renaissance”: *The Little Mermaid* (Musker & Clements 1989)*

Reading:

- ❖ “‘Where Do The Mermaids Stand?’ Voice and Body” by Laura Sells, in *The Little Mermaid* in *From Mouse to Mermaid* pp. 175-192;
- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 33-38; 141-148

*This screening is subject to access. I may have to substitute this film with another, in which case the readings would also be substituted.

Week 6: Feb 14th—Disney’s “Renaissance” Continues: *Aladdin* (1994)

Reading:

- ❖ “Somatexts at the Disney Shop: constructing the Pentimentos of Animated Women’s Bodies” by Elizabeth Bell, in *From Mouse to Mermaid* pg 107-122.
- ❖ “The Politics of Vision: Disney, Aladdin, and the Gulf War” by Dianne Sachko Macleod [OWL]

***1st Assignment Due Friday, Feb. 17th**

No Class Tuesday Feb 21st for Reading Week (February 18th – 26th)

Week 7: Feb 28th—Disney’s “Renaissance” Ends: *Mulan* (1998)

Reading:

- ❖ “You the Man, Well, Sorta”: Gender Binaries and Liminality in *Mulan* (Gwendolyn Limbach) [OWL]

Week 8: March 7th—“Neo-Disney”: *The Princess and the Frog* (2009)

Reading:

- ❖ “Scripting the Way for the 21st-Century Disney Princess in *The Princess and the Frog*” by Kimberly R. Moffitt [OWL]
- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 39-45; 51-53

Week 9: March 14th—“Neo-Disney” Continues: *Moana* (2016)

Reading:

- ❖ “Disney’s *Moana*, the Colonial Screenplay, and Indigenous Labor Extraction in Hollywood Fantasy Films” by Ida Yoshinaga [OWL]

Week 10: March 21st-Nostalgia, Magic, and Secularity: *Christopher Robin* (2018)

Reading:

- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 94-105
- ❖ “Disney Does Disney: Re-Releasing, Remaking, and Retelling Animated Films for a New Generation” by Rebecca Rowe [OWL]

Week 11: March 28th: “Neo-Disney” and Neo-Colonialism: *Frozen 2* (2019)

Reading:

- ❖ “‘Show yourself’: Indigenous Ethics, Sámi Cosmologies and Decolonial Queer Pedagogies of *Frozen 2*” by Tuija Huuki & Kata Kyrölä [OWL]
- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 73-79

Week 12: April 4th—Disney and Marvel: *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (Cooger 2022)*

Reading:

- ❖ From Wasko *Understanding Disney*—pp. 84-87
- ❖ “Black Panther: *Wakanda Forever* unearthed deep colorism within Latino communities” [OWL]
- ❖ “Afrofuturism and Black Panther” by Myron t. Strong and K. Sean Chaplin [OWL]

Recommended Reading:

From *Penguin Classics Marvel Collection Black Panther* [OWL]

From *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* by Gord Hill [OWL]

***Term Paper Due**

*This screening is subject to access. I may have to substitute this film with another, in which case the readings would also be substituted.