HON 405.H1
The Philosophy, Theology, and Art of Terrence Malick
Fall 2012

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Office Hours: 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. (Mon./Wed.)
1:30 – 3:30 p.m. (Tues./Thurs.)
(I will be available at other times by appointment)

Graduate Assistant: Adam Frazier (apf11a@acu.edu)

Course Description:
This course will explore the artistic work of Terrence Malick, an American director known for his beautifully conceived and philosophically dense films. His most recent film, The Tree of Life, garnered serious attention from film critics for its stunningly beautiful cinematography, convention-bending story telling, and ambitious philosophical questioning. Along with this film, we will also view The Thin Red Line and Days of Heaven, two other award-winning films directed by Malick. Our analysis of these films will include not only appreciation and critique of Malick's film making but also exploration of the philosophical, theological, and biblical motifs that Malick weaves throughout his work. By studying the work of this modern-day American master, we will hopefully deepen our own reflections on faith and the human condition.

Texts:
Our primary “texts” will be the films themselves, but we will also supplement these with online reviews of the films, primary readings (from the biblical text or modern philosophers) where appropriate, and scholarly critiques of Malick's work found in a recent edited volume (which is on reserve in the library): The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America (ed. Hannah Patterson; New York: Wallflower, 2007).

Assignments:
Bibliography of Reviews. Each student must find a substantive review of The Tree of Life, add it to the shared class bibliography, and write a short annotation that summarizes the main contribution of the review. (20 points)

Article Summaries. During two class periods, we will discuss several articles analyzing Days of Heaven and Thin Red Line. For each of those classes, each student will select an article, read it, write a one-page summary, and present the article to the class during our discussion. (40 points each)

Final Project. Each student will write a 8-10 page position paper that traces a particular artistic, philosophical, or theological motif through at least two of the films we viewed in the course. The essay should engage the class discussions and readings as well as articulating the student's own, creative analysis of Malick's work. (200 points)

Grade Scale:
A = 270-300 pts  B = 240-269 pts  C = 210-239 pts  D = 180-209 pts
Course Schedule:

Week 1 (Sept 13):
Topic: Intro to the colloquium
Activity: Watch Days of Heaven

Week 2 (Sept 20):
Topic: Days of Heaven
Reading:
- “All Things Shining: The Struggle for Wholeness, Redemption and Transcendence in the Films of Terrence Malick” by Ron Mottram
- “Days of Heaven and the Myth of the West” by Joan McGettigan
- “‘Enjoying the Scenery’: Landscape and the Fetishisation of Nature in Badlands and Days of Heaven” by Ben McCann
- “Listening to the Aquarium: The Symbolic Use of Music in Days of Heaven” by Richard Power
- “Sound as Music in the Films of Terrence Malick” by James Wierzbicki

Week 3 (Sept 27):
Topic: The Thin Red Line
Reading:
- “‘Everything a Lie’: The Critical and Commercial Reception of Terrence Malick’s The Thin Red Line” by Martin Flanagan
- “The Greatest Generation Steps Over The Thin Red Line” by John Streamas
- “The Other World of War: Terrence Malick’s Adaptation of The Thin Red Line” by Stacey Peebles
- “Terrence Malick, landscape and ‘What is this war in the heart of nature?’” by Robert Silberman
- “Terrence Malick’s Heideggerian Cinema: War and the Question of Being in The Thin Red Line” by Mark Furstenau and Leslie MacAvoy

Week 4 (Oct 4):
Topic: The Tree of Life
Activity: Watch The Tree of Life

Week 5 (Oct 11):
Topics:
- Discuss The Tree of Life
- Look ahead to final projects
Activities:
- Share online reviews of The Tree of Life
- Share essay topics

Final Project Due: Friday, November 2