

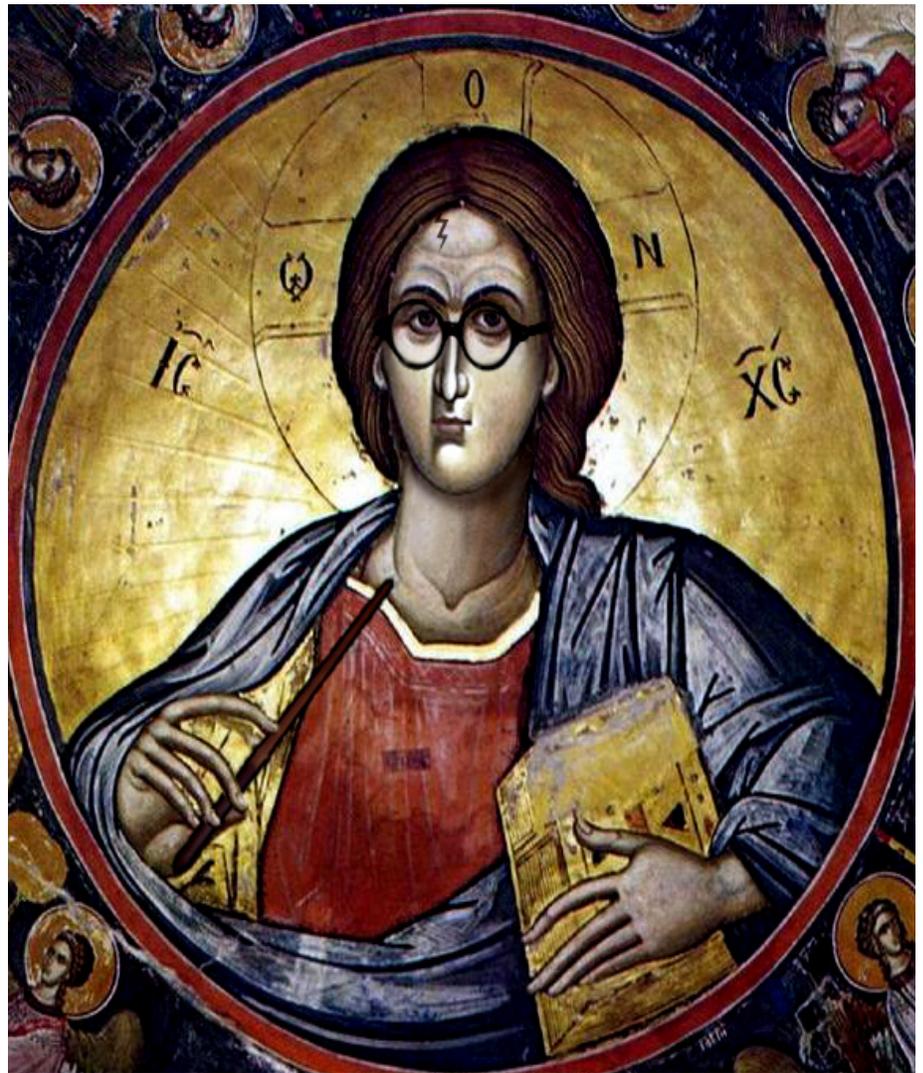
Harry Potter & Religion

REL 266S

Spring 2018

MW 10:05-
11:20 AM

Duke
University



Course Description

In this course, we explore the intersection and history of religion, magic, and science.

What exactly is magical thinking? What are magical practices? How do such activities relate to religious thought and practices? By reading, discussing, and writing about a variety of scholarly approaches to such questions (e.g., historical, sociological, anthropological, theological), we will have the opportunity to grapple with them in a critical, constructive, and collaborative fashion. In addition, this course explores the response of many

Christians to the *Harry Potter* book series. Some theologically conservative Protestants have claimed that the Potter books contain satanic messages, promote witchcraft, and celebrate practices of the occult. By contrast, many supporters of the books insist they positively convey Christian messages.

We will critically scrutinize the claims that the books contain satanic, neo-Pagan, or Christian subtexts. We will examine the history of thought between what is “magic” and “religion.” And we will challenge the

boundaries between what is understood as scientific procedure and ritualistic performances for magic and witchcraft.

What's in this syllabus

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Required texts

Richard Abanes, *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace Behind the Magick* (Traverse City: Horizon Books, 2001).
Connie Neal, *What's a Christian To Do with Harry Potter?* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001).

Course Structure The course is divided into five units: “Introduction,” “Harry Potter and Christianity,” “Magical Practices,” “The History of Thought of Magic and Religion,” and “The History of Thought of Science and Religion.” This course will make use of more than the traditional teacher-centered lecture. In order to produce a student-centered and collaborative ambience, we will make use of online forums, group projects, and in-class discussions. Students will be encouraged to be part of the learning process. Learning in such a collaborative format depends upon preparation and involvement of the students as well as the professor.

Course Objectives

1. Analyze the history and blurred boundaries between religion, science, and magic
2. Recognize and discuss how religions and religious practices shape and are shaped by their cultural contexts
3. Identify and evaluate religious responses to the *Harry Potter* book series
4. Conceive and implement a final research project tracing the movement of an object, practice or belief from the different registers of religion, science, and magic

Course Requirements

This course has four non-negotiable requirements: 1) attendance, 2) reading the assigned texts, 3) participation in seminars, and 4) respect for deadlines. Class attendance is mandatory. Students must read all articles and texts in order to be prepared for class and to be able to accomplish assignments. Participation in discussion is not an option, but an important part of the final grade. All class activities and online forum discussions (Sakai) are required. The instructor will make note of students who make consistent and substantial comments in class, and those who do not. Finally, students must manage their time properly in order to submit assignments upon deadline.

Course Assignments

Participation in Class, Seminars & Exercises	200 pts.
15 Forum posts	300 pts.
Two Response Papers	200 pts.
Final Paper & Presentation	300 pts.

#Participation in class, seminars and exercises (200)

Individual participation includes attendance (which is mandatory), being active in class discussions, and in the work performed in groups. More than three absences will harm your final grade (I will subtract 20 points for each extra absence). You are expected to bring all relevant reading material with you, either digitally or as a

hardcopy. When students are assigned to work in groups, they must be self-motivated and must actively contribute both ideas and written materials to the project.

The exception to this rule pertains to religious holidays. Your absence is excused if you are observing a religious holiday. For students who plan to miss class because of religious observance, please see the following website for instructions and procedures:

<http://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/religious-holidays>

Reading Guide

It is very important that you not only **read the assigned material**, but also that **you critically examine and interrogate it**. You should take note of the issues and questions that you want to bring to the discussion. All members of the class, students and instructors alike, are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.

The following questions should help you do so:

1. What is the major argument of the text? What is the author’s point?
2. To what extent does this information and/or approach allow me to understand or illuminate the relationship between science, technology, and religion?
3. What doesn’t make sense to me? What is not clear? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument?



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Office Hours: MW 11:30-12:30
& by appointment

#Forum posts (300)

To ensure that you complete and are critically evaluating the readings, you will be required to post reading responses to the Sakai Forum. Points will be removed if it is longer or shorter than 200-300 words or if you fail to address any of the following three points:

- 1) Summarize the most important aspects of the readings: What is the major argument of the text(s)?
- 2) Criticize or support the arguments raised by the author(s) with evidence for why you think so;
- 3) Pose at least one question to be asked in class. These questions can be drawn directly from the text or can be the result of thoughts you had by relating this specific text with previous readings you did or experiences you had.

Grading criteria: The course will have a total of 18 forum posts. You have the right to skip three without harming your final grade, which means that to receive the total grade, you will have to post at least 15 weeks. If you post less than 15 times, I will subtract 20 points per post you missed.

#Response Papers (200 points)

Task: Reinforce and apply critically readings, class discussions, classroom exercises, and any other materials that we discussed in class.

Paper 1: Some theologically conservative Protestants have claimed that the *Potter* books contain satanic messages, promote witchcraft, and celebrate practices of the occult. By contrast, many supporters of the books insist they positively convey Christian messages. What argument do you find most persuasive? This is not a theological exercise, that is, do not treat this paper as an opportunity to argue for your own religious beliefs or against another tradition. Rather, using evidence from the readings, support the claim that the *Harry Potter* series contains either satanic or pro-Christian messages. Due Monday, February 2.

Paper 2: What is magic? How does it (or does it not) differ from religion? Using at least three of the readings we have encountered in class, argue for or against a distinction between the two. Due Wednesday March 28.

Length: 750 to 1,000 words (3-4 pages). Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred. Upload a digital copy to Sakai before class begins (Word format – please, do not send PDF).

Grading Criteria (100 Points Each): *25 Points* – Overall presentation of the paper (grammar, spelling, clarity of prose, and citations, as well as sentence and paragraph structure, flow, transitions, and organization); *35 Points:* Engagement with sources and course material (Does the paper use at least two sources from the course to answer the prompt? Does the paper adequately use quotations or summaries of sources in the explanation? Does the paper use the sources to develop and support a larger argument?) *40 Points:* Development of a thesis/argument (Is there a clear thesis statement? Was the thesis supported with evidence from the readings throughout the paper? Does the thesis answer the prompt? Does this paper go beyond merely restating the prompt to creatively engage with the material?)

#Final Paper: “Cultural Metamorphosis” and Visual Presentation (300 points)

Task: Reinforce and apply critically readings, class discussions, classroom exercises, and any other materials that we discussed in class about the historical and cultural relationship between religion, magic, and science. The objective of this assignment is to investigate how religious objects, beliefs, and practices change meaning according to different cultural contexts and historical moments. The major goal is to explore the idea that what is understood as magic, religion, or even science is not eternal truth but changes throughout history.

Description: The final paper is the major academic enterprise of this course. It involves research and quite often reading new material besides the assigned texts for this class. Each group (2-3 people) will choose a religious or scientific object, belief, or practice that changed their meaning or even disappeared throughout history or in different cultural contexts. In history, it is not rare to find a practice or belief that was once considered science and now is dismissed as sheer superstition.

Directions: For this assignment, students must work in groups of 2 or 3. The paper must be written on Google Docs and shared with your partner and with your instructor. In this way, your instructor will be able to follow the activity of the members of the group. However, on its due date, the paper must be sent to your instructor via email in Word format (please, do not send PDF). The students must write the paper in Chicago or APA style.

Length: The paper must contain between 2,00-2,500 words (8-10 pages), with references and footnotes included. Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred. Paper is Due May 1.

Presentation: Groups will briefly and orally present their researches on the presentation days (April 23 and 25). Every member of the group must participate in the presentation. You must use a PowerPoint or any other visual platform to present your findings. Make a clear and coherent presentation. The instructor will give you further instruction about how to organize your visual and oral presentation.

Grading Criteria (300 Points): 150 Points – Strength of analysis and application of key concepts (texts plus classroom activities/discussion, and extra readings); 50 Points: Oral and visual presentation; 70 Points: Organization; clarity; quality of writing; freedom from spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. 30 Points: Enterprise and creativity.



Course Schedule

#	Date	Topic	What to Read	What's Due
1	W 1/10	Introduction	Syllabus	
2	W 1/17	Magic, Science, and Religion	Hitchens, "The Boy Who Lived," <i>New York Times</i> . Malinowski, "The Role of Magic and Religion," 37-46.	
3	M 1/22	Magic for Muggles	Albas, "Modern Magic: The Case of Examinations," 603-613 and Nemeroff, "The Magical World of Muggles," 135-152.	Forum Post 1 (due 11:59PM 1/21)
4	W 1/24	Harry Potter in Popular Literature	McKenna, "Harry Potter and the Modern Age" 355-364, and Abanes, <i>chp. 12</i> , "Beyond Fantasy," 229-246.	FP 2
Unit 2: Harry Potter and Christianity				
5	M 1/29	Christian Concerns	Neal, <i>chp. 1</i> , "Mad about Harry!" 11-30, Larry Eskridge, "Defining Evangelicalism," http://www2.wheaton.edu/isaie/defining_evangelicalism.html ; and Jacobs, "Harry Potter's Magic." https://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/01/harry-potters-magic	FP 3
6	W 1/31	The Bible in Harry Potter	Abanes, <i>chps. 2 & 4</i> , "Sorcery in a Stone: A Closer Look," 21-46 and "Enter the Chamber: A Closer Look," 57-80.	FP 4
7	M 2/5	Judeo-Christian Ethic	Neal, <i>chps. 3 & 9</i> , "Classic Fantasy or Blatant Witchcraft?" 37-62 and "Harry Potter and the Judeo-Christian Ethic," 165-180.	FP 5
8	W 2/7	Menace of Magick	Abanes, <i>chp. 11</i> , "Beyond Fantasy," 203-228.	FP 6
9	M 2/12	Guest Lecture: David Morgan	Alchemy	Paper 1 Due
Unit 3: History of Magic in America				

10	W 2/14	Puritan Magic	David D. Hall, "A World of Wonders."	
11	M 2/19	Black Magic	Yvonne Chireau, "Our Religion and Superstition Was All Mixed Up," 11-34.	FP 7
12	W 2/21	Performing Magic	Nadis, "The Magician," 113-137.	FP 8
13	M 2/26	Magic and Technology	Bruxvoort, "Magic, Science, and the Ethics of Technology," 108-131.	FP 9
14	W 2/28	Magic and Pop Culture	Kripal, "Mystics and Mutants: The Paranormal in Pop Culture."	FP 10
Unit 4: History of Thought on Magic, Science & Religion				
15	M 3/5	Believing Magic	Vyse, <i>Believing in Magic</i> , p.3-29.	
16	W 3/7	Primitive Religion	Edward Tylor, <i>Primitive Culture</i> , on occult sciences, pp. 112-159.	FP 11
Spring Break				
17	M 3/19	Functional Religion	Emile Durkheim, <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> , pp.21-44 and Brojevic, "Quenching the Quill," pp. 133-148.	FP 12
18	W 3/21	Religion, Magic, Science	Randall Styers, <i>Making Magic</i> , 1-25.	FP 13
19	M 3/26	Science & Religion	Robert Geraci, "Science," pp. 65-92.	FP 14
20	W 3/28	Science & Religion	Stephen J. Gould – "Non-Overlapping Magisteria," pp.16-22 www.stephenjyngould.org/library/gould_noma.html	Paper 2
21	M 4/2	Workshop on the final project: Come to class with ideas for your final projects		
Unit 5: Magic as Religion Today				
22	W 4/4	Case Study	Todd Ochoa, "Prendas-Ngongas-Enquisos: Turbulence and the Influence of the Dead in Cuban-Kongo Material Culture," 387-411.	FP 15
23	M 4/9	Case Study	Sabina Magliocco, "Beyond Experience: Religion & Identity" in <i>Witching Culture</i> , 185-237.	FP 16
24	W 4/11	Case Study	Moore, "Divination – a new perspective."	FP 17
25	M 4/16	Case Study	Urban, "The Occult Roots of Scientology?"	FP 18
26	W 4/18	Harry Potter Forever	Kidd, "Harry Potter and the Functions of Popular Culture"	FP 19
27	M 4/23	Project Presentations		
28	W 4/25	Project Presentations – Papers Due May 1		

Additional Readings

- Jelena Borojevic, "Quenching the Quill: How Fan Art Builds Meaning, Creates Bonds and Triggers Imagination," in *Wizards vs. Muggles: essays on identity and the Harry Potter universe*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2016): 133-148.
- Benjamin J. Bruxvoort, "Magic, Science, and the Ethics of Technology," in *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, 108-131.
- Yvonne P. Chireau, "Our Religion and Superstition Was All Mixed Up," *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- Emile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of religious life* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
- Larry Eskridge, "Defining Evangelicalism," http://www2.wheaton.edu/isae/defining_evangelicalism.html.
- Robert Geraci, "Science," *Religion and Culture* (Santa Barbara: Fortress Press, 2012): 65-92.

- Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria," *Natural History* vol. 106 (March 1997): 16-22.
- David D. Hall, "A World of Wonders: The Mentality of the Supernatural in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*; Boston 63 (Jan 1, 1984): 239.
- Alan Jacobs, "Harry Potter's Magic," *First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/01/harry-potters-magic>.
- Jeffrey J Kripal, "Mystics and Mutants: The Paranormal in Pop Culture," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 58, no. 17, (2011).
- Ariel Levy, "The Drug of Choice for the Age of Kale," *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2016.
- Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Role of Magic and Religion," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by Seligman and Johnson, (Macmillan Publishing, Co., Inc., 1931).
- Tony McKenna, "Harry Potter and the Modern Age," *Critique* 39, no. 3 (2011): 355-364.
- Omar K. Moore, "Divination – a new perspective." *American Anthropologist* v. 59, no.1 (1957): 69-74.
- Fred Nadis, *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, And Religion In America*, (Rutgers University Press, 2006).
- Carol Nemeroff, "The Magical World of Muggles" 135-152. In *The Psychology of Harry Potter: an unauthorized examination of the boy who lived* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2007).
- Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): p. 112-159.
- Hugh Urban, "The Occult Roots of Scientology?" *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2012): 91-116.
- Stuart A. Vyse, *Believing in Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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