

THE ALUMNAE OF NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
Continuing Education Program
Winter 2021

A. Millennium Movies: Cinema and Culture from 1999 to 9/11

Nick Davis, *Associate Professor of English and Gender & Sexuality Studies*

Tuesdays, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Jan. 12 *American Beauty* (USA, 1999, dir. Sam Mendes, 122 min.)

The final Best Picture winner of the 20th century was an atypical choice—not a period piece or sweeping epic, but a quasi-satiric drama, blending familiar archetypes of U.S. suburbia with contemporary fixations: homophobia, neo-Nazism, and new, voyeur-friendly technologies. With a flamboyant style that asks us to “look closer” at every image, this polarizing blockbuster joined other American movies from its year (including *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Election*, *Office Space*, and *Magnolia*) in depicting middle- and upper-class white men in millennial free fall, straining comically and not-so-comically to recover forms of power and contentment that seemed to slip through their fingers.

Jan. 19 *All About My Mother* (Spain, 1999, dir. Pedro Almodóvar, 105 min.)

While U.S. movies centered men in varying stages of mid-life crisis, Spain’s most famous director celebrated women as paragons of resilience, individually and collectively. Like many other 1999 movies, from *Being John Malkovich* to *The Talented Mr. Ripley* to *Boys Don’t Cry*, but more buoyantly than most, *All About My Mother* upends notions of individual identity—including through its calico approach to structure and style. Moreover, well before “transgender” became a household term, Almodóvar’s movie was one of many Y2K films suggesting that in the 21st century, strict male/female binaries might become relics of the past.

Jan. 26 *Fight Club* (USA, 1999, dir. David Fincher, 139 min.)

David Fincher’s opus about capitalism and schizophrenia, petty mischief and domestic terrorism, was the first studio flop to become a blazing success on the brand-new DVD format. This is no coincidence: *Fight Club*, like its sibling *The Matrix*, pushes the celluloid-based motion picture to new extremes of digital enhancement. Meanwhile, the growth of its cult following mirrored actions in the movie, spreading semi-secretly among lone viewers and avid undergrounds. As with *The Matrix*, the movie’s reception evolved in dangerous directions. Do alt-right adherents today distort the messages of these innovative trailblazers, or are they speaking these films’ language?

Feb. 2 *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (USA, 1999, dir. Jim Jarmusch, 116 min.)

Just as Tony Soprano arrived in U.S. living rooms, *Ghost Dog* also reimagined the mobster genre, via a homeless African American bird enthusiast who lives according to centuries-old Japanese codes and moonlights as a contract killer. *Ghost Dog*’s odd blend of the gritty, the abstract, and the whimsical typifies much Black cinema at the turn of the millennium, often abandoning present-day realism to recover lost histories of Black life or to imagine mythic alternatives. A series of clips will demonstrate how these reimagined pasts and futures of Blackness looked, as far away as Senegal and as locally as Chicago.

Feb. 9 Children of Heaven (Iran, 1997, dir. Majid Majidi, 89 min.)

While so many movies in and beyond Hollywood exploited new technologies and unsettled narrative forms, a great deal of Iranian cinema went back to neo-realist basics and elevated the poetry of

everyday life, minimally embellished. The child-driven, Oscar-nominated crowd-pleaser Children of Heaven, released in the U.S. two years after its debut in Iran, exemplifies that thread in the country's rich and diverse cinematic tapestry, seldom available to Americans before the turn of the millennium. Despite sensationalist depictions of Iran in U.S. media, its movies became a cause célèbre for an art form that seemed to be changing irrevocably.

Feb. 16 Amélie (France, 2001, dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 122 min.)

As "foreign film" markets withered in America, Amélie raised hopes that non-English movies could still become global hits. Nonetheless, this sprightly, inventive romance stoked controversy: was this gleaming, suspiciously all-white vision of France recognizable to anyone who lived there—any more so than the phantasmagoric Paris of Moulin Rouge? Was its cheerfully fabricated setting coincidental to its mode of production, as digital fakery now saturated every genre, even in the country that pioneered cinematic realism? Amélie was one of many movies that inspired scholars to ask if "film" remained a coherent term, as our lives became more digitally animated.

Feb. 23 Y tu mamá también (Mexico, 2001, dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 106 min.)

After years of artistic dormancy, Mexican cinema roared back to life post-2000, promising at last to portray the "real Mexico." One game-changing title was Alfonso Cuarón's Y tu mamá también, a giddy, erotic road movie that juxtaposes idealized, adolescent views of the nation against grimmer realities. Y tu mamá también itself, touted as Cuarón's homecoming after unhappy years in Hollywood, is an ambivalent symbol of the new globalization, an "authentic" Mexican film reliant on U.S. funds and thoroughly tailored to transnational corporate demands... while somehow still emerging as a frisky, subversive artifact hailed around the world for its independent vision.

Mar. 2 In the Mood for Love (Hong Kong, 2000, dir. Wong Kar-wai, 98 min.)

As movies ceded more cultural standing to TV and other media, and the world evolved in unbeautiful directions, Wong Kar-wai's In the Mood for Love made a sumptuous case for swoony, old-fashioned cinematic pleasures. As reliant as Y tu mamá también on transnational funding and global marketing, In the Mood for Love proved that even the most aesthetically lush, export-ready cinemas can still furnish socially and politically trenchant stories, rooted in specific times and places. Meanwhile, Wong emerged as a leading figure in the East Asian cinema that, like those of Iran and Mexico, seemed poised to reignite the medium.

Mar. 9 11'09"01 (Miscellaneous, 2002, eleven directors, 135 min.)

Premiering on the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, 11'09"01 anthologized eleven shorts from eleven countries, each one eleven minutes and nine seconds in length, approaching the event however the directors saw fit. The chapters from Iran, Burkina Faso, and Japan model divergent aesthetics that

guarantee we will “see” 9/11 differently in each. Each poses challenges to our cinematic, historical, and moral literacy, but none in the same way. While some suggest hard limits in our comprehension, beyond or within our own cultures, other films suggest that perceptual leaps and new understandings are still possible.

B. Musical Adventures

Stephen Alltop, *Senior Lecturer, the Henry and Leigh Bienen School of Music*

Tuesdays, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m

Jan. 12 The Making of Orfeo Remote

An in-depth look at the extraordinary complete opera film created by the Bienen School of Music during COVID-19, updating Monteverdi’s timeless fable in music to the present day.

Jan. 19 Evolution of Music in COVID-19

In overcoming significant challenges to the performing arts brought about by the pandemic, musicians have created beautiful performances and shown towering imagination to share the art they love.

Jan. 26 Great Singers of the Past

Henry Fogel, long-time host of The Collectors’ Corner on WFMT and past Executive Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra joins Stephen Alltop for a discussion of legendary voices and singers, complete with rare recordings.

Feb. 2 Music and Travel

The travel experiences of musicians have profoundly influenced their lives and the music they have written. Around the world, in 80 compositions!

Feb. 9 Music and Mythology

The interaction between music and mythology is multi-faceted: from the importance of music in so many mythological stories to the many operas and pieces drawn from humanity’s immortal tales.

Feb. 16 Important Composers You Need to Know: William Grant Still, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Louis Moreau Gottschalk

A focus on the fascinating lives and highly engaging music of three true originals whose works deserve to be better known: William Grant Still, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

Feb. 23 Music and Transportation

Modes of transportation have often been sources of inspiration for many musical works. Boats, cars, trains, planes, sleighs, and other conveyances make appearances in music from Elgar to Honegger, Carissimi to Copland. You’ll be moved by this presentation!

Mar. 2 Music and Incarceration

This discussion will bring light not only to music deriving from or depicting, imprisonment, but also the vital outreach work being done by musicians in prisons throughout the United States.

Mar. 9 Music and Food & Drink

“If music be the food of love...” Gustatorial delights come alive in a variety of delectable compositions. Noting the many musical celebrations of various fermented libations and other treats should bring our series of musical adventures to a satisfying conclusion.

C. The History of Heaven

David Shyovitz, *Associate Professor, History*

Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Heaven (if it exists) is presumably eternal and timeless--and yet the concept of Heaven has been anything but. Beliefs about the afterlife, the apocalypse, the resurrection and final judgment, etc., have all changed and developed dramatically over the course of nearly 3000 years. This course will survey the history of ideas and practices related to Heaven, beginning in the Ancient Near East and extending to the present. The approach in the course will be roughly chronological, but each week will also focus on one or more themes that have recurred in the tradition of heavenly theology.

Jan. 14 “So You Think You Can Tell Heaven from Hell”: Death and the Afterlife in Greece and the Ancient Near East

The earliest biblical sources never describe a celestial realm of eternal reward, but they do introduce a vocabulary of terms that would eventually be associated with postmortem existence, including the Garden of Eden, the realm of Sheol, the Resurrection of the Dead, and so on. This session will trace the ways in which these concepts drew upon, and were subsequently understood in light of, ideas pervasive in the Ancient Near East and in Ancient Greek mythology and philosophy.

Jan. 21 “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door”: Eschatology in early Christian, Jewish, and Islamic Sources

By late antiquity, “heavenly” reward was a ubiquitous element of monotheistic theologies— Jesus promised his adherents access to the “Kingdom of Heaven,” rabbis ruminated upon the nature of “World to Come” (*olam ha-ba*), and the Quran described the Garden (*Jannah*) awaiting believers. But the meanings of these promises remained ambiguous—and exclusionary, since each religious community took for granted that members of the others would be denied access to whatever heaven they believed awaited them. This session will trace the divergent ways in which these faiths adopted, and adapted, ancient beliefs and stories, and situate their developing theological beliefs in a cross-cultural historical context.

Jan. 28 “You Make Me Feel Like I’ve been Locked Out of Heaven”: Bodies, Souls, and the Stakes of Sensuality

How could religious thinkers promise their followers an eternal heavenly reward (or hellish punishment) with a straight face, given that the physical human body so obviously decays and disappears shortly after death? How were human “souls” conceived of by late antique and medieval theologians, and by the everyday religious adherents whose beliefs they attempted to shape? Is eternal reward or punishment a physical sensation, a disembodied mental state, or something else entirely? In this session, we will explore competing ideas about where human beings’ essential identity is truly located, using late antique and medieval historical sources as well as currents in classical philosophy (“philosophy of mind” and “philosophy of death”) and in modern science (neurology and cognitive science).

Feb. 4 “Would You Know My Name if I Saw You in Heaven?” Ritual and Family Life in the Shadow of the End of Days

Will the righteous reunite with their deceased family members when they arrive in Heaven? Will spouses need to reconsecrate (and/or reconsummate) their marriages after they are resurrected from the dead? Developing notions of Heaven and Hell were not confined only to the realm of theological doctrine—eschatological beliefs had tangible, devotional implications, as pious individuals prepared for death (from old age, illness, violence, etc.), and as their surviving family members coped with bereavement. This session will survey the rituals, prayers, and mourning practices that sprang up over the course of the middle ages, and analyze their implications for how we understand pre-modern familial relations and communal institutions.

Feb. 11 “Stairway to Heaven” / “Highway to Hell”: Visions of Paradise in Renaissance Literature and Art

Heaven was a mainstay of written theological texts, but most pre-modern believers encountered the afterlife through other sensory media—oral sermons, works of visual art, folktales and literature, plays and other dramatic performances, and so on. Using Renaissance Italy as a case study, this session will survey the artwork and performative sources that bridged between pre-modern intellectuals and the non-elites who internalized and often transformed their teachings. Specific attention will be paid to Dante, whose tripartite poetic “tour” of Heaven and Hell exercised an indelible impact on subsequent generations of authors and readers.

Feb. 18 “Heaven Must be Missing an Angel”—The Fall of Satan and the Early Modern Angelic Imaginary

Human beings were not thought to be the only inhabitants of Heaven and Hell—medieval and early modern authors and artists presumed that myriad angels, demons, and other spiritual beings would live cheek-by-jowl in the next world alongside deceased humans. But what exactly is an angel, or a demon? This session will focus on the figure of Satan, and the vicissitudes of his status within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Particular attention will be paid to the development of the “fallen angel” motif that informed pre-modern theology, culminating in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Feb. 25 “The Good Place”: Swedenborg, Science, and the Modern Invention of Heaven

Modern depictions of Heaven draw upon a diverse array of earlier precedents, but perhaps the most important (and least appreciated) theorist of Heaven is Emanuel Swedenborg (d. 1772), a Swedish scientist and mystic who formulated an influential approach to Heaven precisely at the moment when an

increasingly scientific worldview was calling the very existence of postmortem existence into question. This session will situate modern debates about heavenly reward in the broader (so-called) “conflict of

science and religion.” As we shall see, the very boundaries between religion and science were far less absolute than we might tend to assume.

Mar. 4 “We’ll Make Heaven a Place on Earth”: Violence, Utopianism, and the Modern Politics of Heaven

Over the course of modernity, beliefs about the Kingdom of Heaven have been increasingly allied with politics. Modern warfare, terrorism, and political advocacy have been invested by Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike with eschatological resonances, as various political leaders and states are figured either as perfectly utopian or as apocalyptically wicked. Why and how has “heavenly” discourse come to assume such a central place in modern, ostensibly secular, politics and society? What would a this-worldly heavenly polity look like, anyway?

Mar. 11 “Heaven is for Real!” The Afterlife in Modern Culture and Consumerism

Religion and commerce have never been strangers to one another—and yet today, the central role played by eschatological beliefs in consumer culture is striking and unprecedented. How have beliefs, symbols, and practices that date back thousands of years been instrumentalized in popular culture (films, television, books, video games, etc.) for material ends? What explains the success of the multitude of shows, films, novels, and so on produced each and every year, which are devoured by devoutly religious and avowedly secular consumers alike? Does the remarkable ubiquity of heavenly discourse for sale to consumers indicate that religious belief has been debased—or that we are living in a theological golden age?

D. Crime and Consequences

Mark Iris, *Lecturer, Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences*

Thursdays, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, growing support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and greater awareness of the societal toll of mass incarceration by both the public and policy-makers, have all combined to amplify pressure for major reforms of the criminal justice system. We will examine what changes have, and have not, been made, looking at prosecutors’ offices, sentencing reforms, police accountability, and other facets of crime and punishment in the U.S.

Jan. 14 Introduction to the U.S. Legal System

We will look at the organization and operations of state and federal trial and appeals courts. What basic principles do these courts share in common? How does a case reach the U.S. Supreme Court? What coping mechanisms have evolved to enable courts to keep pace with increasing workloads? Learn the secret of Iris’ First Theorem!

Jan. 21 Misdemeanor Crimes: The Invisible Face of the Criminal Justice System

Misdemeanor offenses, such as disorderly conduct, have attracted little attention from scholars and policy researchers, in part because the stakes, for an individual, seem minor. But the consequences are often not at all minor, and the number of people impacted each year is massive. Courts further enhance the invisibility of these cases. Learn how a seemingly trivial charge can have a major impact on a person.

Jan. 28 Police Reform

In the wake of the widely publicized death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, widespread protests against police erupted across the U.S. Calls to defund the police, support for “Black Lives Matter,” and criminal indictments of officers in high profile deaths all pointed to a major transformation of how police in the U.S. are held accountable for their actions. Months later, we shall examine what has – and has not – changed as a result.

Feb. 4 Reforming Criminal Justice: Prosecutors

Traditionally, local prosecutors - headed by elected state’s attorneys or district attorneys – have campaigned for office by promising to be tough on crime. How has that changed, and what impact is that having?

Feb.11 Reforming Criminal Justice: Sentencing and Prisons

The United States has the distinction of having an extraordinarily high rate of incarceration for convicted offenders. How did we reach this status? Calls for reforming the criminal justice system, and mitigating the impact of mass incarceration have become more widespread the past few years. What has actually changed, what remains undone?

Feb. 18 Law on the High Seas

Ah, the dead of winter in Chicago – the most pleasant time of year! Would you rather be soaking up the sun on a Caribbean cruise? Many of you have taken cruises, and had a wonderful time. But when things go wrong, passengers (and the crew members who serve them) have to navigate some very rough legal waters.

Feb. 25 Criminal Defense: the Right to Legal Counsel

The Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution affords defendants in criminal cases the right to “assistance of counsel.” What does that mean, how does it work in practice? How do public defenders compare to privately retained representation? What are the gaps in representation for indigent defendants?

Mar. 4 Wrongful Convictions

In recent years, there has been growing realization that the criminal conviction of a person who is actually innocent is more common than previously thought. How do these blatant miscarriages of justice occur? What reforms are evolving to address this problem?

Mar. 11 Chicago Police Reform

The Chicago Police Department is now operating under a U.S. District Court supervised Consent Decree. How did this come about, what exactly is a consent decree? And, most important, what progress is the CPD making to meet the numerous reforms required by this decree?