

Religion and Popular Culture

- Representations and stereotypes
 - Orientalism
 - Good versus evil
 - Disney
- Monomyth and representations in popular culture
 - The Simpsons
- Ethics and religion (other interpretations)
- Religion and music



Religion and Representations

- Less academic work analysing religion and popular culture (but there is some)
- Propaganda ‘the manipulation of symbols as a means of influencing attitudes on controversial matters’ (Lasswell 1942:106)

Monomyth

- Joseph Campbell (1904-1987)
- Mythic narratives as variations of one story
 - Common pattern in most great myths
- Folk ideas = local forms the myth takes
- Eternal source that underlies everything
- Hero's journey (in film 7.18 mins) applied to films (9.35 mins)
 - Call to adventure/learning truth/receiving supernatural aid/meeting with supernatural being/atonement/return

Criticisms of Monomyth

- Oversimplifies ideas and cultures
- Ignores postmodern condition
 - No overarching narratives
- But useful concept to explore popular cultural texts

Film and Television

- Religious interpretations
- Polysemic texts
 - E.g. Kung Fu Panda – Confucianism ([Shen](#))(3.17 mins)
 - E.g. Harry Potter – Hinduism, Christianity
 - [The Matrix](#) (2.30 mins) has been written about in relation to religion
 - Islam often portrayed negatively



Religion and The Simpsons

- Religion is a key theme in The Simpsons
- Humour satirising religion and Christianity
 - Homer is not religious
 - Lisa has been a Buddhist
 - [Apu stereotyped Hindu](#) (0.14 mins)
 - Ned Flanders – ultra conservative Christianity
 - [Pope reading the Simpsons](#) (2.31 mins)



Religion and The Simpsons

- Deities

- God (with 5 fingers)
- Vishnu – has sat in centre of earth controlling world with levels
- Ganesh referenced between Homer and Apu
- Small Jewish community (Krusty the Clown)



- Monomyth

- In an episode 2008 Homer proclaims Jesus, Allah, Buddha I love you all
- Could reinforce notion of monomyth



Stereotypes and Representations

- Orientalism
 - East/West in a binary relationship of power
 - Religions presented as 'other' (reading on Voodoo and [Live and Let Die](#)) (1.46 mins)
 - Dualism of west=good and non west=evil in popular culture
 - Exoticisation
- Broadcasters play it safe

Good versus Evil

- Disney's presentation of good versus evil similar to western traditions (and Orientalist ideology)
- Self discovery though – could relate to enlightenment (Buddhism/Confucianism ideas)
- Often get Muslim characters portrayed as evil ([see film clip](#)) (12.18 mins)
- Lion King
 - Mufasa has been likened to the western concept of God
 - Scar has been likened to the western concept of the devil



Ethics and Religion



- Good versus evil
- Ethics
 - Moral code
 - Deals with ideas such as right, good, duty
 - Kant
- Moral absolutism
 - Standards same everywhere for everyone
- Deontological ethics
 - Greek Deon = obligation that certain actions are good or evil
- Consequentialism
 - Ends justifies the means

Batman and deontology

- Batman reasserts moral order
- Good versus evil
- But he also sticks to a firm moral code
- Using violence for justice
- Refusing to kill
- Deontology (rules)



Consequentialism

- Consequences of actions are important
 - Things you and everyone does
 - Impact of your actions and others
 - Focused on ends e.g. detectives breaking rules to get their criminal
- Utilitarianism (Greatest good for the greatest number)
 - Minor characters are killed off
 - In order to kill off the 'evil' bad guy
 - And achieve the ends – peace
 - e.g. [clip from True Lies](#) (2.27 mins), *The Good Place* <https://youtu.be/IDnO4nDA3kM> (1.20 mins)

Religion and Music

- Jimi Hendrix 'music is my religion'
- Eastern music
 - Eastern mantras, chants, western classical songs, liturgies
- Jazz
 - First genre to move away from the religion and music
- Rap (and others)
 - Some artists pose religious questions and issues
 - Others maintain separation between music and religious issues



Summary

- Religion and religious interpretations very apparent in popular cultural texts
- Could use ideas such as
 - Monomyth, orientalism, ethics to analyse films, crime dramas etc.
 - Some films, programmes and magazines actually explore these issues
 - Some use religious symbols e.g. advertising

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