

Religion and representations

1. Far less academic research has focused on images of religion in popular culture
2. It is argued, though, that the ideological messages that we receive about religion are produced by the cultural industry
3. And what this does is transform spiritual, philosophical and ethical messages into products for us to consume
4. Most media rely on generalisations and stereotypes and religious ideology is no different

Propaganda

1. When thinking about religious ideology in the media and popular culture, academics often highlight the notion of propaganda
2. The question arises, to what extent does the mere presence of a religious character or theme influence an audience's attitude toward that religion
3. We can also think about the stereotypes that are shown in popular culture in relation to religion
4. And whether the view of particular religious groups may be reinforced, weakened or challenged through representations

Stereotypes and representations

1. So it is argued that all members of a particular group are often portrayed as homogenous
2. So that a Hindu character will not be a realistic representation of Hinduism
3. But a watered down digestible version which conforms to stereotypes of that group
4. So that complexities of belief systems tend not to be shown in popular culture

Orientalism

1. I draw on this theory to represent the other more generally and we can think about this as being mixed up with representations of particular religions and religious characters
2. What is Orientalism – it is about European representations of the Orient
3. Which becomes a place of romance, exotic beings and remarkable experiences
4. It puts the [east/west into a binary relationship](#) which is one of power
5. And whilst it has been suggested that the Occident is able to develop distinct, non-western traditions of modernity, it could be argued that religious representations are often influenced by Orientalist ideologies
6. Where some superstitions or religions are presented as strange or indeed evil

Broadcasters want to play it safe

1. Broadcasters tend to portray religious characters in a manner that does not challenge common stereotypes
2. So they use overgeneralisations which tend to remain

Disney and evil

1. Philosophers have been concerned with the theme of evil
2. And it could be argued that this could be interpreted in different ways in relation to religion
3. For example, Disney's presentation of good and evil could be similar to western religious traditions
4. The notion of self-discovery on the other hand, and a move away from evil characteristics towards good could be related to religions like Buddhism which are more a way of life
5. There are characters that represent evil and ones that represent good
6. So you often get stereotypes = such as Muslim characters often being portrayed as evil

Lion King

1. Mufasa is represented as good and Scar as evil
2. Scar is representative of evil – and develops a plot to become king
3. Mufasa comes to save his son and ends up dying in the attempt

Monomyth

1. Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) has written much about religion
2. And the notion of monomyth might be useful in relation to analysing popular culture
3. This is where he refers to the theory that all mythic narratives are variations of a single great story
4. (Obviously this goes against postmodernism where there are no overarching themes or stories)
5. The theory is based on the idea that there is a common pattern in most great myths
6. And he talks about elementary ideas as the prime matter of a **monomyth**
7. And folk ideas as the local forms the myth takes to remain up to date
8. Suggesting that there is an eternal source which underlies everything in this world
9. That these point towards transcendence towards an eternal source

Hero's journey

1. The central pattern he studied most is the 'hero's journey'

2. The hero's journey was the story of the man or woman who, through great suffering, teaches an experience of the eternal source and returns with gifts powerful enough to set their society free

Criticisms

1. But this tends to oversimplify cultures and ideas
2. The notion of a monomyth ignores postmodern condition

Purpose

1. That said, we could use the notion of monomyth to analyse popular cultural texts – such as comparing films such as Harry Potter, Star Wars or The Matrix
2. As well as comparing documentaries such about religious traditions
3. So actually we could draw on this idea in relation to narratives that come through and compare different media texts to see if monomyth exists
4. Or at the least allusions to an eternal source!

Religion and the Simpsons

1. Religion is a key theme in the Simpsons
2. With humour satirising Christianity and religion generally
3. The Simpson family are often seen attending church – and religion is seen as part of American life
4. Although Flanders is portrayed as ultra-conservative and has little tolerance for other faiths and sexualities

Deities

1. God has appeared several times in The Simpsons but with five fingered hand compared to other characters four fingers
2. Often watching over and sometimes interacting with other characters
3. Vishnu sits in the centre of the earth, controlling the world with levers in one episode
4. There are also references to Ganesh – often between Homer and Apu
5. In some episodes both Flanders and Mr Burns have been shown as the Devil
6. Springfield also has a small Jewish community - including Krusty the Clown
1. In 2008 we have an episode where Homer proclaims Jesus, Allah, Buddha I love you all

Monomyth

1. We could apply the notion of the monomyth to The Simpsons

2. That even though there is humour and satire that The Simpsons points to an eternal source
3. So the notion of the monomyth – or grand narrative could be used to analyse the Simpsons

Ethics and Religious interpretations of popular culture

1. One theme that could be explored in popular culture is the notion of good versus evil.
2. Most of us have some idea of what kinds of things are good and what kinds of things are evil
3. But over the centuries there have been many definitions that highlight notions of good and evil
4. Ethics is the attempt to arrive at a view of human nature and the religious person often wishes to behave according to a moral code
5. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with ideas such as Right, Good and Duty

Moral absolutism

1. The idea that moral standards are always the same, everywhere for everyone

Deontological ethics

1. This is the kind often associated with moral absolutism
2. It is from the Greek Deon meaning obligation and holds that certain actions are good or evil in themselves - Regardless of their consequences
3. You have an obligation to do or not to do certain things
4. Most often, the obligation is prohibitive – you must not do X
5. Because it's easier to list things that one should not do rather than things one should do
6. Such as never to lie
7. It requires us to abide by a certain number of clear, strict, well-defined rules to be a good, moral person.
8. E.g. Batman sticks to a firm moral code

Consequentialism

1. This looks at the consequences of an action to determine whether that action is good or evil
2. It is not only concerned with the things you do, it is concerned with the things that everyone does
3. Deontology prescribes a certain personal code of conduct that you should follow regardless of what happens around you and regardless of what other people do
4. Consequentialism, since it cares about the effects of your actions, is concerned with the way your actions impact other people and the way their actions impact you
5. Critics –have accused this view of the ends justifying the means.

6. Consequentialism is focused on ends, deontology is focused on means
7. Consequentialism can be described as 'the ends justify the means' and deontology can be described as the means justify the ends

Utilitarianism

1. Belief that the happiness of Humanity as a whole is the greatest good.
2. The greatest good for the greatest number

Religion and Music

1. Jimi Hendrix once stated that 'music is my religion'
2. Music plays a significant role in our culture
3. But it was jazz that was the first genre of music to move away from the relationship between music and religion
4. Before this, music was based largely on relation or associated with religious institutions
5. So you have the Eastern mantras and chants and western classical songs and liturgies
6. Jazz produced a new way of thinking by action as a religion to jazz musicians
7. Other genres followed – such as blues and hip hop and others
8. So it probably depends on the actual artist