

Religious Dimensions in Human Experience  
 RELS 4080/6080 – Fall 2010  
 Thursdays 1:00-3:30 – Aderhold 31

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“Everything can be told. It’s just a matter of starting, one word follows another.”

~Javier Marías, *A Heart So White*

“Religious experience” is a common category – perhaps even a foundational one – in the study of religions. {Consider, for example, William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902): “Whatever its ultimate significance may be this – [that is, the impression that one has been affected by an external power] – is certainly one fundamental form of human experience. Some say that the capacity or incapacity for it is what divides the religious from the merely moralistic character” (2008: 87).} In this course, we will not assume the category of ‘religious experience,’ but rather interrogate various dimensions of *human experience* that we might call ‘religious.’

Our readings, writings and conversations will open space for questions about beginnings (and endings); the role of myth in religions; the practical (im)possibilities of creating new societies; the significance of the stories each of us tells ourself; the extent to which stories constitute the self; the reasoning of self-recreation; and the challenges of attempting to explain the inexplicable.

The readings and discussions in this seminar-style course will come at religion both indirectly (Arendt on revolution, Gould on classification, Pérez on Chicana art) and directly (Doniger on myth, Carrasco on cosmovision, Haley/Malcolm X on conversion), all the while keeping narratives and the narrational quality of religions in mind (myths, sacred stories, fiction, autobiography). Your task is to explore how (and whether) stories, their telling and their tellers consider ‘religion’ or ‘the religious’ to be dimension of human experience. You will go about this task through reading, regular written reflections and class conversations.

### The Texts

Many of the course readings are available on ERes. Follow this link

<<http://reserves.gsu.edu/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=3944>> or search ERes by course number (RELS 4080) or instructor. Our password is **s2rb7cemF**.

These books are available for purchase online or at your local bookstore and on 2-hour reserve at the library’s circulation desk:

Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera*

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*

García Márquez, Gabriel. *Of Love & Other Demons*

Haley, Alex & Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told to Alex Haley*

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

### Requirements

- \* Complete the reading before class and bring a copy of the text(s) to class. NB: Pay attention to the course schedule as occasionally 4080 and 6080 students read different materials.
- \* Prepare a double-spaced reflection (500-600 words) on the session's text(s) around a single observation or question 10 times during the semester. Refer to the "Prompt" handout for more information. Prompts are due by noon the day before class (Wednesdays) via email (.doc / .docx) to the instructor (mbassett@gsu.edu).
- \* At the end of the semester, you will develop one prompt into a slightly longer paper (4080: 1200 words; 6080: 1750 words) that integrates specific and general course themes into a final reflection. Guidelines will be distributed after Week 10. This paper is due to the instructor via email by the end of this class's final exam period. Check the Registrar's Final Exam schedule for the day and time.

### Objectives

- \* Integrate writing into your practice of reading.
- \* Practice critical thinking through reflections that focus on a single observation or common thread.
- \* Develop group discussion skills by being aware of class dynamics, participating in class conversations, prompting others with questions and thoughtfully considering classmates' observations.
- \* Expand initial reactions into more refined, complex and complete thoughts in a longer piece of writing.

### Grade

**4080:** Your final grade is based on ten prompts (50%), class participation (40%), and one final paper (10% each).

**6080:** Your final grade is based on ten prompts (50%), class participation (30%), and one final paper (20%).

In accordance with department policy, I use a +/- scale: A+ 97-100; A 93-96; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D 60-69; F 0-59.

### Late Policy

If you anticipate missing class, please be in contact with the instructor in advance of your absence; *more than one missed class will negatively affect your participation grade*. Prompts are due via email (mbassett@gsu.edu) by noon the day before class (Wednesdays). Late prompts (those turned in after noon the day before class) will be accepted for up to 80% credit. Final papers will be docked one letter-grade increment for each day they are late (1 day: A; 2 days: A-; 3 days: B+; etc.).

### Errata

- \* Please be on time.
- \* Be respectful in your comments and conduct.
- \* Please advise the instructor if you have a documented disability that needs to be accommodated.

- \* Do your best to concentrate on class while you're in class. Limit distractions by turning off your cell phone, etc.
- \* No one may record a class or lecture without written permission from the instructor.
- \* Be advised that the last day to withdraw from a course with the possibility of receiving a 'W' is October 8. If you withdraw by this date but are failing the course, you will receive a 'WF.' All students who withdraw after this date will receive a 'WF.'
- \* Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State University. Upon completing the course, please take the time to fill out the online course evaluation.

### Course Schedule

*\*\* This syllabus provides a general plan for the course, and the instructor reserves the right to make changes as necessary.*

#### Unit 1: Creation Myths & (Re)creating Myths

- 8/26      Beginnings: Course Introductions  
 \*Introductions  
 \*Course & Syllabus Overview  
 \*Morris, Errol. "The Anosognosic's Dilemma: Something's Wrong but You'll Never Know What It Is (Parts 1-5)" in *The New York Times*, June 20-24, 2010.  
 Available at: <<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/the-anosognosics-dilemma-1/>>.
- 9/2        Primoridality, Mythology & Scholarship  
 \*Doniger, Wendy. "Introduction," and "Other Scholars' Myths: The Hunter and the Sage," in *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes*, 1-24.  
 \*Long, Charles H. "Introduction," in *Alpha: Myths of Creation*, 1-33.  
 \*Selected myths:  
     Genesis 1:1 – 2:25 <[www.devotions.net/bible/00old.htm](http://www.devotions.net/bible/00old.htm)>  
     Gospel according to John 1:1-51 <[www.devotions.net/bible/00new.htm](http://www.devotions.net/bible/00new.htm)>  
     Enuma Elish < <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/enuma.htm>>  
     "Children of Heaven & Earth" (Maori)  
     <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/pac/grey/grey03.htm>>
- 9/9        Multiple Creations  
 \*Mexica-Aztec Creation Myths  
     -- Durán, Diego. Excerpt from *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 12-19.  
     -- Sahagún, Bernardino de. Excerpts from *The General History of the Things of New Spain*, Book 3: 1-5 and Book 7: 3-9.  
 \*Carrasco, David. "History and Cosmvision in Mesoamerican Religions," in *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 24-57.  
 \*Aguilar-Moreno, Manuel. "Religion, Cosmology & Mythology," in *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*, 138-157.
- 9/16      Mythmaking  
 \*Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*, 1990 (1967). 3-101.  
 \*Hernández, Idelfonso Maya. *Nahua Amoxtli*\* (Available:  
     [http://kellysmcdonough.blogspot.com/2009\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://kellysmcdonough.blogspot.com/2009_07_01_archive.html))  
 \**The Nican Mopohua*, (1649).

- 9/23 Revolution: A New Beginning with Dr. Mike Evans (Political Science, GSU)  
 \*Arendt, Hannah. "On the Meaning of Revolution," in *On Revolution*, 1965. 1-52.  
 \*Nash, Gary. Excerpts from *The Unknown American Revolution*, 2006. 207-216, 264-268, 288-290, 366-369, 387-402, and 450-455).  
 \*\*Prompt Due\*\*

## Unit 2 Personhood, Self & Agency

- 9/30 On Knowing  
 \*Gould, Stephen Jay. "The Iconography of an Expectation," in *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*, 1989. 23-52.  
 \*West, Cornel. "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" in *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 1982. 47-65.  
 \*6080: Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 2003. 389-411.
- 10/7 A Philosophy of Self with Dr. Eddy Namhias (Philosophy, GSU)  
 \*\*"Who Am I?" WNYC RadioLab podcast.  
 Available here: <http://www.wnyc.org/shows/radiolab/episodes/2005/02/04>  
 \*Dennett, Daniel C. "The Reality of Selves," in *Consciousness Explained*, 1991. 412-430.  
 \*Sacks, Oliver. "The Lost Mariner," "A Matter of Identity," and "Murder," in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, 1985. 23-42, 108-115, and 161-165.  
 \*\*Prompt Due\*\*
- 10/14 Reimagining Self  
 \*Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Introduction" and "Crossing Borders" in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 1999. 1-110.  
 \*4080: Pérez, Laura E. "Body, Dress," in *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, 2007. 50-90.  
 \*6080: Pérez, Laura E. "Spirit, Glyphs," "Body, Dress," and "Face, Heart," in *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, 2007. 17-49, 50-90, and 257-296.
- 10/21 Conversion  
 \*Haley, Alex. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told to Alex Haley*, 1999.  
 \*James, William. *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), 186-197.

## Unit 3 The Unimaginable & Inexplicable

- 10/28 The Unimaginable in History – Guest lecturer, Prof. Charles H. Long  
 \*Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "Power in the Story," and "An Unthinkable History," in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1995. 1-30 and 70-107.  
 \*Long, Charles H. "Primitive/Civilized: The Locus of a Problem," and "Conquest and Cultural Contact in the New World," in *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, 1999. 89-124.  
 \*\*Prompt Due\*\*

- 11/4      Imagining the New World  
 \*García Márquez, Gabriel. "The Solitude of Latin America," 1982. Available at: [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html)  
 \*Harris, Olivia. "The Coming of the White People: Reflections on the Mythologization of History in Latin America," in *Colonial Spanish America: A Documentary History*, eds. Kenneth Mills and William B. Taylor, 1998. 34-45.  
 \*Taylor, Diana. "Scenes of Cognition: Performance and Conquest," in *Theatre Journal* 56 (2004). 353-372. (Available via JSTOR.)
- 11/11      Dreams & Divination  
 \*Bulkeley, Kelly. "Religions of the Americas" in *Dreaming in the World's Religions: A Comparative History*, 2008. 249-268.  
 \*Bulkeley, Kelly. "Sacred Sleep: Scientific Contributions to the Study of Religiously Significant Dreaming" in *The New Science of Dreaming, Volume 3*, 2007. 71-94.  
 \*Tedlock, Dennis. "Mythic Dreams and Double Voicing," in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, 1999. 104-118.  
 \*6080: Tedlock, Barbara. "Sharing and Interpreting Dreams in Amerindian Nations," in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, 1999. 87-103.
- 11/18      Storytelling  
 \*García Márquez, Gabriel. *Of Love & Other Demons*.
- 11/25      **Thanksgiving Holiday**
- 12/2      Storytelling  
*The Road* (2009) [film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006)]

\*\*Final papers due by the end of the final exam period listed on the registrar's schedule.

## Department of Religious Studies General Syllabus Statement Fall 2010

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- This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.
- The last day to **withdraw** from a course with the possibility of receiving a W is **Friday, October 8**.
- Students are responsible for confirming that they are attending the course section for which they are registered. Failure to do so may result in a WF or F for the course.
- **Involuntary withdrawals:** After Friday, October 8, instructors must give a WF to all those students who are on their rolls but no longer taking the class and must report the last day the student attended or turned in an assignment.
- Students who are involuntarily withdrawn may petition the department chair for reinstatement into their classes.
- By University policy and to respect the confidentiality of all students, **final grades** may not be posted or given out over the phone. To see your grades, check the web ([student.gosolar.gsu.edu](http://student.gosolar.gsu.edu)).
- While the penalty for **academic dishonesty** is a matter of the instructor's discretion in the Department of Religious Studies, the customary penalty for a violation of the academic dishonesty rules is an "F" in the course. See the University Policy on Academic Honesty on the reverse of this sheet.
- **New Policy as of Fall 2006: A student may be awarded a grade of "W" no more than 6 times in their careers at Georgia State. After 6 Ws, a withdrawal is recorded as a WF on the student's record. A WF counts as an F in a GPA.**
- Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State University. Upon completing the course, please take the time to fill out the online course evaluation.
- Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services in Suite 230 of the Student Center. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which an accommodation is sought.

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**Subscribe to our department listserv for current information and events:**

[mailbox.gsu.edu/mailman/listinfo/relmajor](mailto:mailbox.gsu.edu/mailman/listinfo/relmajor)

Messages will go to the address from which you send the message, so you need to resubscribe every time you change e-mail addresses.

**For more information on the religious studies program visit:**

[www.gsu.edu/religion](http://www.gsu.edu/religion)

## Policy on Academic Honesty, from the GSU Catalog

As members of the academic community, students are expected to recognize and uphold standards of intellectual and academic integrity. The university assumes as a basic and minimum standard of conduct in academic matters that students be honest and that they submit for credit only the products of their own efforts. Both the ideals of scholarship and the need for fairness require that all dishonest work be rejected as a basis for academic credit. They also require that students refrain from any and all forms of dishonorable or unethical conduct related to their academic work.

The university's policy on academic honesty is published in the *Faculty Handbook* and *On Campus: The Student Handbook* and is available to all members of the university community. The policy represents a core value of the university, and all members of the university community are responsible for abiding by its tenets. Lack of knowledge of this policy is not an acceptable defense to any charge of academic dishonesty. All members of the academic community—students, faculty, and staff—are expected to report violations of these standards of academic conduct to the appropriate authorities. The procedures for such reporting are on file in the offices of the deans of each college, the office of the dean of students, and the office of the provost.

In an effort to foster an environment of academic integrity and to prevent academic dishonesty, students are expected to discuss with faculty the expectations regarding course assignments and standards of conduct. Students are encouraged to discuss freely with faculty, academic advisers, and other members of the university community any questions pertaining to the provisions of this policy. In addition, students are encouraged to avail themselves of programs in establishing personal standards and ethics offered through the university's Counseling Center.

### Definitions and Examples

The examples and definitions given below are intended to clarify the standards by which academic honesty and academically honorable conduct are to be judged. The list is merely illustrative of the kinds of infractions that may occur, and it is not intended to be exhaustive. Moreover, the definitions and examples suggest conditions under which unacceptable behavior of the indicated types normally occurs; however, there may be unusual cases that fall outside these conditions that also will be judged unacceptable by the academic community.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is presenting another person's work as one's own. Plagiarism includes any para-phrasing or summarizing of the works of another person without acknowledgment, including the submitting of another student's work as one's own. Plagiarism frequently involves a failure to acknowledge in the text, notes, or footnotes the quotation of the paragraphs, sentences, or even a few phrases written or spoken by someone else. The submission of research or completed papers or projects by someone else is plagiarism, as is the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else when that use is specifically forbidden by the faculty member. Failure to indicate the extent and nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. Any work, in whole or in part, taken from the Internet or other computer-based resource without properly referencing the source (for example, the URL) is considered plagiarism. A complete reference is required in order that all parties may locate and view the original source. Finally, there may be forms of plagiarism that are unique to an individual discipline or course, examples of which should be provided in advance by the faculty member. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging academic, scholarly or creative indebtedness, and the consequences of violating this responsibility.

**Cheating on Examinations:** Cheating on examinations involves giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an examination. Examples of unauthorized help include the use of notes, computer-based resources, texts, or "crib sheets" during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member), or sharing information with another student during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member). Other examples include intentionally allowing another student to view one's own examination and collaboration before or after an examination if such collaboration is specifically forbidden by the faculty member.

**Unauthorized Collaboration:** Submission for academic credit of a work product, or a part thereof, represented as its being one's own effort, which has been developed in substantial collaboration with another person or source or with a computer-based resource is a violation of academic honesty. It is also a violation of academic honesty knowingly to provide such assistance. Collaborative work specifically authorized by a faculty member is allowed.

**Falsification:** It is a violation of academic honesty to misrepresent material or fabricate information in an academic exercise, assignment or proceeding (e.g., false or misleading citation of sources, falsification of the results of experiments or computer data, false or misleading information in an academic context in order to gain an unfair advantage).

**Multiple Submissions:** It is a violation of academic honesty to submit substantial portions of the same work for credit more than once without the explicit consent of the faculty member(s) to whom the material is submitted for additional credit. In cases in which there is a natural development of research or knowledge in a sequence of courses, use of prior work may be desirable, even required; however the student is responsible for indicating in writing, as a part of such use, that the current work submitted for credit is cumulative in nature.

## Prompt Guidelines

ReIS 4080/6080 (Fall 2010)

Over the course of the semester, you will prepare ten double-spaced reflections (500–600 words each) on a session's texts. Each prompt will focus on a single observation, common thread or question that demonstrates some connection, curiosity or commonality (or distinction) that integrates, binds together or contrasts the week's readings.

### Topics & Examples

- \* Suggested prompt topics will be emailed to the class by midnight Fridays, and you are welcome to reflect on one of the suggested topics or respond to another aspect of the week's reading(s).
- \* See the example prompt below.

### Formatting

- \* Religiously observe the word limit (500–600 words).
- \* Use a readable font & double-space.
- \* Cite the week's readings parenthetically using the author's last name and page number. For example, (Bassett 16).
- \* Submit prompts as Word (.doc / .docx) attachments.

### Feedback & Grading Criteria

You will receive written feedback as “comments” in your Word documents visible by following Word's View --> Toolbars --> Reviewing menus. The written feedback will provide encouragement and suggestions for how to improve your prompts throughout the semester. Each prompt will also receive a letter grade (A+, A, A-, B+, etc.) based on the criteria below.

#### *Grading Criteria*

- \* Mechanics
  - \* Your prompt conforms to the formatting requirements listed above; and
  - \* it follows the conventions of formal English grammar, spelling and semantics.
- \* Content
  - \* Your prompt addresses all of the week's readings (not just one of them);
  - \* it reflects prewriting (notes taken while reading, an informal outline, etc.);
  - \* it focuses on a single thread or observation (i.e., it is coherent & cohesive);
  - \* it demonstrates undergraduate (or graduate) level contemplation of the theme;
  - \* it acknowledges the readings' relationship to our course's themes; and
  - \* it contains your original and creative thoughts about the readings.

I encourage you to stop by office hours or make an appointment to talk to me about your writing whenever you like.

### Deadlines

- \* Prompts are due by noon the day before class meets via email <mbassett@gsu.edu>.
- \* Seven of your ten reflections must be written *before* Week 10.
- \* Three of your reflections must be focused on the readings for the following dates:
  - \* 9/23, our session with Dr. Mike Evans (Political Science, GSU);
  - \* 10/7, our session with Dr. Eddy Namhias (Philosophy, GSU); and
  - \* 10/28, our session with Prof. Charles H. Long (Religious Studies, Chicago).

**Example Prompt**

From a 6000 level course on material culture & religion