REL 620 Textual Scripts: 
*Confessions and Confession*

Syracuse University, Fall 2016
Instructor: Virginia Burrus

**Course Description**
This course will approach “Textual Scripts” through the phenomenon of confession / testimony / witness, read through the lens of performance and/or performativity theory as developed by such scholars as J.L. Austin, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Peter Brooks. Augustine’s *Confessions* will provide the primary, but not the only, textual focus. While the approach will be first and foremost literary and philosophical, we will seek to press beyond the written or even the linguistic to encompass performatative acts more broadly. In so doing, we will consider confession in relation to desire, body, subjectivity, freedom, truth, torture, forgiveness, and, of course, religion. How, finally, does the performative relate to the religious? (More than one answer will emerge.) Students will be not only encouraged but required to bring their own work, questions, and disciplinary perspectives to bear on the conversation throughout the seminar.

**Course Requirements**
- Read. Think. (What part or aspect of the reading grabbed your attention most powerfully? What ideas were sparked for your own work? What one question would you most like to pursue together? What one passage would you most like to discuss together? Ask these questions of yourself every week.) Come to class. Talk. Listen. Think. (20% of final grade)
- Work with instructor to plan readings and discussion for one class (12/1 or 12/8) in an area relevant to your own interests. (10% of final grade)
- Submit 24 pages (6000 words) of scholarly prose dealing with texts and topics germane to the seminar. Default option: two papers of 12 pages each (a good conference paper length). Other possibilities (i.e., open to negotiation): 3 8-page papers, 1 8-page paper and 1 16-page paper, 1 24-page paper, etc. Discuss topics and bibliographies with instructor. (70% of final grade)

**Books to Purchase**
1. Augustine, *Confessions* (I like the Loeb volumes with the facing Latin and English, but they’re more expensive; Mark Vessey’s introduction accompanying the Outler translation is particularly good; Boulding, Chadwick, Sheed translations are all also good) (Amazon $5 to $15).
**Schedule of Readings**

9/1  Introduction: Theories of Performativity


9/8  Confession or Excuse? Tales of Theft

--Augustine, *Confessions*, Bks 1 & 2

--Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, Bk 2 (the incident of the ribbon) (Rousseau free on Kindle)

--Paul de Man, “Excuses (*Confessions*),” in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), pp. 278-301 (Blackboard)

--give the Derrida essay for next week an initial skim, with focus on tales of theft in Augustine and Rousseau (Blackboard)

9/15 Confession as Excuse: Testimony, Forgiveness, Event

--Augustine, *Confessions*, Bks 3 & 4

--Jacques Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Inc (2),” in *Without Alibi* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), pp. 71-160 (Blackboard) (It’s a tough text, and important for us, will require time)

9/22 Confessing Desire

--*Confessions*, Bks 5 & 6

--Burrus, Jordan, MacKendrick, Seducing Augustine, Introduction and ch. 1

9/29 Confession and Conversion

--Confessions, Bks 7 – 9


--Burrus, Jordan, MacKendrick, Seducing Augustine, chs. 2 and 3 (optional)

10/6 The Temporality of Confession

--Confessions, Bks 10 & 11


--Burrus, Jordan, MacKendrick, Seducing Augustine, ch. 4

10/13 Confession, Script, Scripture

--Confessions, Bks 12 & 13


--Revisit Pranger, “The Unfathomability of Sincerity,” on arrogation of voice
10/20  Confession, Prayer, Liturgy, Theurgy


10/27  Confession and the History of Subjectivity [guest teacher: William Robert]


--William Robert on Angela of Foligno and confession

11/3  Confession and Torture


11/10 Confession on Trial

**11/17** Confessions and the History of Autobiography

--Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (selections)


**12/1** Beyond Confession(s): Scripture and Performativity

**12/8** Beyond Confession(s): Magic and Performativity