

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 performative 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). (2) Virginia Burrus, Mark Jordan, Karmen MacKendrick, *Seducing Augustine: Bodies, Desires, Confessions* (NY: Fordham UP, 2010) (Amazon \$35 new). (3) Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000) (Amazon \$20 new); (4) J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (NY: Penguin, 1980) (Amazon \$10 new).

Schedule of Readings

9/1 Introduction: Theories of Performativity

--Hans Rudolf Velten, "Performance and Performativity," in *Traveling Concepts for the Study of Culture*, ed. Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 249-266 (ebook in SU library)

--Excerpts from J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962); Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" (1971); Judith Butler, "Performative acts and gender construction" (1988); and Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction to *Performativity and Performance*" (1993), in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 175-207 (Blackboard)

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

--Karmen MacKendrick, "Carthage Didn't Burn Hot Enough: St. Augustine's Divine Seduction," in *Toward a Theology of Eros* (NY: Fordham UP, 2006), pp. 205-17

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

9/29 Confession and Conversion

--*Confessions*, Bks 7 – 9

--M. Burcht Pranger, "The Unfathomability of Sincerity: On the Seriousness of Augustine's Confessions," in *Actas do Congresso Internacional As Confissoes de santo Agostinho 1600 Anos Depois: Presenca e Actualidade*, 193–242. Lisbon: Universidade Catolica Editora, 2002. (Blackboard) (another tough text: give it time)

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

10/6 The Temporality of Confession

--*Confessions*, Bks 10 & 11

--M. Burcht Pranger, "Time and Narrative in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Journal of Religion* 81 (2001): 377–93

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

10/13 Confession, Script, Scripture

--*Confessions*, Bks 12 & 13

--Danuta Shanzer. "Latent Narrative Patterns, Allegorical Choices, and Literary Unity in Augustine's Confessions." *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 40–56

-- Michael C. McCarthy, "Augustine's Mixed Feelings: Vergil's Aeneid and the Psalms of David in the Confessions," *Harvard Theological Review* 102 (2009): 453-79

--Jeffrey S. Lehman, "'As I read, I Was Set on Fire': On the Psalms in Augustine's Confessions," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 16 (2013): 160-84

--Revisit Pranger, "The Unfathomability of Sincerity," on arrogation of voice

10/20 Confession, Prayer, Liturgy, Theurgy

--Burrus, Jordan, MacKendrick, *Seducing Augustine*, Conclusions

--John Peter Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (NY: Routledge, 2005), pp. 49-60, 87-109 (Blackboard)

--Sarah Iles Johnston, "Animating statues: a case study in ritual," *Arethusa* 41 (2008), 445-477 (Blackboard)

--Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy and the Platonist's Luminous Body," in April DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John Turner, eds., *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammad, Manichean and Other Ancient Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp 537-557 (Blackboard)

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

--Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2014), pp TBA.

--Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2008), ch. 4 (Blackboard)

--William Robert on Angela of Foligno and confession

11/3 Confession and Torture

--J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (NY: Penguin, 1980)

--Elaine Scarry, "The Structure of Torture," *The Body in Pain* (NY: Oxford UP, 1985), pp. 27-59 (Blackboard)

--Page du Bois, *Torture and Truth* (NY: Routledge, 1991), pp. 35-68 (Blackboard)

--Virginia Burrus, "Torture, Truth, and the Witnessing Body: Reading Christian Martyrdom with Page duBois," *Biblical Interpretations*, forthcoming (short, less than 5000 words of text) (Blackboard)

11/10 Confession on Trial

--Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000)

11/17 Confessions and the History of Autobiography

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

--J. M. Coetzee, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky (1985)," in *Doubling the Point* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), pp. 251-293

--Patrick Riley, "Changing the Subject: Autobiography and Conversion" and "The Inversion of Conversion: Rousseau's Autobiographies," in *Character and Conversion in Autobiography* (Charlottesville: U Va Press, 2004), pp. 9-23, 88-137, **AND/OR** Marcus Moseley, *Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), selected pages (with reference to Rousseau)

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

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