

Religion(s) and Storytelling

REL 324 • Fall 2008
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12:20
214 HL

Instructor: Eglute Trinkauske
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Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate ones 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell. It is the power to relate ones domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that ones existence 'matters.' Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for humane existence.

Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory*, 291.

I don't know if it happened this way or not, but I know this story is true.
Native American Storyteller, in Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, 19.

Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story.
Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, 119.

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Course Content and Objectives

This course will examine how stories and storytelling combine entertainment and instruction to create, reflect, transform, and sustain different religious contexts and the beings that inhabit them. We will use stories from various religions and cultures as opportunities to learn about diverse ways of experiencing, imagining, and understanding existence in the world. Through specific examples from Native American, South Asian, and European-American storytelling traditions, students will encounter Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and indigenous religious traditions. We will also focus upon the act of storytelling, and study how different modes of human communication and relationship affect religious experience. Concepts for inquiry will include truth, belief, religion, and culture. As we encounter the contents of stories and the role of storytellers we will also think about creation, healing, gender roles, resistance, empowerment, and socialization.

Required Books

The following books are available for purchase at Syracuse University Bookstore:

- Rushdie, Salman. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin, 1977.
- Keith H. Basso. *Wisdom Sits in Places*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996

- Hejaiej, Monia. *Behind Closed Doors: Women's Oral Narratives in Tunis*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Narayan, Kirin. *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.
- Zipes, Jack. *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Additional Required Reading

Procedure for access: *if you are on an off-campus computer, you may be asked to enter your student ID# and last name at some point in this process*

1. Go to <http://library.syr.edu/> .
2. Click on "Find Reserves" on main menu (center/right).
3. Fill in either Instructor: Trinkauske, Eglute or Course: REL 324: Religion and Storytelling, and then click on "Search."
4. A list of reserve readings will appear; scanned articles are available to view on-screen or to download and print.

The following materials are available through Bird Library electronic reserve.

- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller," in Hannah Arendt, ed. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968: 83-109.
reserve listing : [Storyteller \(16pgs\)](#)
- Arnold, Philip P. "Sacred Landscapes of New York State and the Problem of Religion in America," in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree*. Philip P. Arnold and Ann Grodzins Gold, eds. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001: 167-186.
reserve listing: [Sacred landscapes of New York state and the problem of religion in America \(12pgs\)](#)
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. "Mother Ten's Stories," in *Religions of India in Practice*. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995: 434-448.
reserve listing : [Mother's ten stories \(9 pages\)](#) (sic)
- Gold, Ann Grodzins and Raheja, Gloria Goodwin. "Purdah is as Purdah's Kept," in *Listen to the Heron's Words*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 164-181.
reserve listing : [Purdah is as purdah's kept: a storyteller's story \(10 pages\)](#)

Course Requirements

The basic requirements for the course are: careful reading of and thinking about the course materials, assessed through participation in class discussions (40%), the execution of writing assignments (40%), and one independent story project (20%).

Attendance and Participation = 40% of final grade

- **Daily preparation and participation:** Students are expected to attend every class period and to be prepared to discuss each day's reading assignment. Students should prepare for class by completing the assigned reading and formulating at least one question or comment to share with the class. This part of the attendance and participation grade will drop for excessive unexcused absences (more than two) and inattentiveness (e.g., sleeping in class, doing other homework, reading the D.O., leaving the room during class, or using a cell phone or text messenger). It will be raised through consistent attention and thoughtful contributions to

class discussions. If you must be absent from a class, it is your responsibility to inquire about what was missed.

- **Discussion leaders:** Students will take pre-arranged, rotating turns as discussion leaders. These leaders will summarize and respond to the day's assigned readings, make connections to or comparisons with previous readings or presentations, and address questions to the larger class in order to generate a discussion among as many students as possible. Discussion leaders are also encouraged to utilize creative teaching strategies (or storytelling!). 2-3 students will be discussion leaders for each student-led class period, and should coordinate ideas with one another ahead of time; thus, there will be an advance sign-up sheet distributed in class.
- **Show and/or tell:** Each student will prepare at least one mini-presentation to the class on a topic that arises from our current reading or discussion and is also of personal interest to the presenter. This could be an informal mini-lecture on some information that needs further explanation, telling a story that coincides with current course materials, showing photos, artistic images, or poetry relevant to our discussions, or sharing a personal experience. When something comes up that you would like to think about more and then share with the rest of us, let me know and you will be scheduled for about ten minutes in an upcoming class.

Writing Assignments = 40% of final grade

- **Response Papers (4) = 15% of final grade**
These are short writings (approximately 2 pages) on guided topics intended to synthesize various materials read, provoke class discussions, and improve critical thinking skills. They should be based upon your own thoughts rather than summarizing or quoting from the readings, and thus can be informal and creative, but they must also be grammatically accurate and free from typing errors. Technical requirements: typed (10- or 12-pt.), double-spaced, margins not to exceed 1¼".

Midterm Essay = 10% of final grade

Students will write one 4 page midterm essay to demonstrate their knowledge of the syllabus materials and course themes. Guidelines and topics will be distributed approximately two weeks before the papers are due. These essays must demonstrate careful thinking and accurate writing, so please allow ample time for multiple drafts and proofreading. The use of non-course materials is not permitted. Technical requirements: typed (10- or 12-pt.), double-spaced, margins not to exceed 1¼". **Late papers will receive lower grades.**

Story Projects = 20% of final grade

With instructor approval, students will pursue their own interests related to the course topics. Options include library research on a particular religion, culture, or theme; a transcription and commentary of stories told to you; or a creative performance. All finished projects will require some writing and some class presentation, but the amount of each will vary according to the type of project selected.

Note on Plagiarism

All writing assignments, with the possible exception of your show-and-tell and story project, are based on your own thoughts about the course materials and do not require outside reading. Thus for the final essay and response papers, you are not permitted to use sources other than the course readings, even if you correctly cite them. When paraphrasing or directly quoting course materials, a parenthetical citation including the page number (or author and page number if you are referring to multiple sources) is necessary to avoid plagiarism. Other guidelines will be given for proper citations in the story projects. ***If any student is caught turning in any work that is not her or his own, that student will fail the course and the issue will be turned over to University administration. Please review S.U.'s full academic integrity policy, including what constitutes***

misuse of sources, representations, and materials, at
<https://psdocs.syr.edu/sudocs/vpcai/finalizeddocs3.pdf> .

Daily Schedule and Assignments (topic, readings/assignments due, *class content*)

Be prepared for discussion of the assigned readings each day, unless otherwise noted.
All items are subject to change as necessary.

Stories about Storytelling

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| Tu., Aug. 26 | Introduction |
| Th., Aug. 28 | Stories and the Self, Part One
read: Rushdie, <i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i> (suggested: Chs. 1-4)
<i>student introductions through stories (10 students)</i>
<i>receive guidelines for Response Paper 1</i> |
| Tu., Sep. 2 | Stories and the Self, Part Two
read: <i>Haroun, continued</i> (suggested: Chs. 5-8)
<i>student introductions continue (10 students)</i>
<i>sign-up for discussion leaders</i> |
| Th., Sep. 4 | Stories and the Self, Part Three
read: <i>Haroun, continued</i> (suggested: Chs. 9-12)
<i>student introductions continue</i> |
| Tu., Sep. 9 | Stories about Stories
DUE: RESPONSE PAPER 1
<i>student-led discussion on all of <i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i></i> |
| Th., Sep. 11 | Local Stories: The Haudenosaunee
read online: about Haudenosaunee culture
http://www.icmi.ca/culture.html

and the Great Law of Peace by David Yarrow
http://www.championtrees.org/yarrow/greatlaw.htm

<i>Video in class: Faithkeeper Oren Lyons</i> |
| Tu., Sep. 16 | Local Stories: Onondaga
read online: various Iroquois stories at
http://www.kahonwes.com/iroquois/stories.htm |

Th., Sep. 18 Sacred Land and Religion in America
read on reserve: Arnold, Philip P. "Sacred Landscapes of New York State and the Problem of Religion in America," in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree*. Philip P. Arnold and Ann Grodzins Gold, eds. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001: 167-186. [reserve listing: [Sacred landscapes of New York state and the problem of religion in America \(12pgs\)](#)]

Student-led discussion of local stories

Tu., Sep. 23 Language and Story
Of Stalking with Stories and Places
read: *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Chs. 1-2)
DUE: RESPONSE PAPER 2

Th., Sep. 25 Of landscapes, language, and wisdom
Finish: *Wisdom Sits in Places* (finish)
*Student-led discussion of *Wisdom Sits in Places**

Tu., Sep. 30 NO CLASS: Eid Ul-Fitr.

Anthropologists on Storytellers

Th., Oct. 2 Muslim Women's Tales from Tunisia
read: Hejaiej, *Behind Closed Doors*, 3-22 and 97-148 (Ghaya)
introduction to Islam

Tu., Oct. 7 "The Story of the Cares of My Heart"
**read: *Behind Closed Doors*, 23-51
and 195-230, 245-250, 291-297, 309-325** (Sa' diyya)
*student-led discussion on *Behind Closed Doors**

Th., Oct. 9 Stories and Consolation
read: *Behind Closed Doors*, 52-60 and 337-369 (Kheira)
*video: *Under One Sky: Arab Women in America Talk About the Hijab**

Tu., Oct 14 Women's Worlds and Women's Words
read: *Behind Closed Doors*, 61-86 and 251-290, 298-300 (Sa' diyya)
*student-led discussion on *Behind Closed Doors**
DUE: RESPONSE PAPER 3

- Th., Oct. 16 The Stories of India
read: Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels*, 1-36
introduction to contemporary India and Hinduism
- Tu., Oct. 21 Stories of a Hindu Guru
read: *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels*, 37-87
*student-led discussion on *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels**
- Th., Oct 30 Indian Street Theatre: I (with Swamiji running in the background)
read: *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels*, 88-131
video: "My village is Theatre, my name is Habib"
MIDTERM ESSAY DUE
- Tu., Nov. 4 Women's Tales in India
read on reserve: Gold, Ann Grodzins. "Mother Ten's Stories," in *Religions of India in Practice*. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995: 434-448. [reserve listing: [Mother's ten stories \(9 pages\)](#) (sic)] **and Gold, Ann Grodzins and Raheja, Gloria Goodwin. "Purdah is as Purdah's Kept," in *Listen to the Heron's Words*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 164-181.** [reserve listing: [Purdah is as purdah's kept: a storyteller's story \(10 pages\)](#)]

Modern Western Stories

- Th., Nov. 6 Nahman of Bratslav: A Biography [[reserve listing: Nahman of Bratslav: A Biography \(17 pages\)](#)] **and** The Bratslav Theory of the Sacred Tale [reserve listing: [Bratslav Theory of the Sacred Tale](#) (11 pages)]
Introduction to Hasidism
- Tu., Nov. 11 The Tales of Nahman of Bratslav. "The Loss of the Princess," "The King and the Emperor," "The Cripple," "The King Who had no Children," "The King and the Wise Man" [reserve listing: [Tales of Nahman of Bratslav](#)]
DUE: RESPONSE PAPER 4
- Th., Nov. 13 Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry
Read: Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, 1-38
introduction to the concepts of culture, culture studies, culture industry
- Tu., Nov. 18 Lost and Found
***Happily Ever After*, 39-87**
 Student-led discussion of *Happily Ever After*:

- Th., Nov. 20 Fairy Tales and Film
Happily Ever After, 89-128
Student-led discussion of Happily Ever After:
DUE: Story Project Outlines/Proposals
- Tu., Nov. 25 May All Your Dreams Come True
Happily Ever After, 129-142
Student Story Project presentations
- Tu., Dec. 2 Student Story Project Presentations
- Th., Dec. 4 Student Story Project Presentations
THE END
DUE: WRITTEN ASPECT OF STORY PROJECTS