Instructor: JC Reilly Class: LCC 3833-LS

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~Women’s Contemporary Spiritual Writing~

Summer 2011

**Course Prerequisite**: English 1102

**Core Area**: C, Humanities

**Course Description:**

The search for the Divine presence within (and without) the world has preoccupied humans for as long as they have existed. From early cave paintings emphasizing bear-cult worship, to planting, moon, and blood rituals, to Stonehenge, the Temple of Solomon, to the Parthenon, to Mecca, to the Crusades, to the paintings of the Sistine chapel, to the witch trials, to the mega churches of today, humans have expressed this search (more or less violently) through prayer, art, music, language, philosophy. Humans have built physical representations of their beliefs, and codified belief systems into religion—but in many cases (particularly in terms of western traditional religions), women have been marginalized—and sometimes completely excluded—from developing, participating in, and leading communal worship (*à la* 1 Timothy 2:12: Suffer not a woman to teach) and discouraged from seeking out/ giving voice to the Feminine Divine. If traditional religions have been co-opted by patriarchy, what does this mean more broadly in terms of culture and in terms of gender studies? How *does* a woman experience of the Divine? Why does it matter?

This is and is not a class about women’s literature; certainly all the texts we are reading *are* written by women, and through their words will we understand how they have come to live with and engage the Divine in their lives. It is and is not a class about religion, for we must see how traditional religion has operated in women’s (and men’s) lives in order to understand how women’s *expression* of the Divine has been impacted upon. It is definitely about feminism and coming understand what contemporary women writers are doing to honor and express the Divine in ways that are meaningful and real for them now.

While the focus of this class will be in the Western tradition (as that is my background), I welcome any interest in women’s spiritual experience in other traditions, particularly as avenues for research, and as points of discussion as appropriate.

**Learning Outcomes:**

* Textual/Visual Analysis: Students will learn to read, analyze, and interpret contemporary women’s spiritual writing.
* Interpretive Frameworks: Students will become familiar with a variety of social, political, and philosophical theories and be able to apply those theories to contemporary women’s spiritual writing, as well as to their own cultural observations.
* Literary/Film/Narrative Art Inquiry: Students will be aware of the traditions and conventions of women’s spiritual writing, and they will be able to analyze those traditions and conventions in specific cultural contexts.

**Required Texts:**

* Blumberg, Illana. *Houses of Study: a Jewish Woman Among Books*. Bison Books, 2009. ISBN 0803224494.
* Curott, Phyllis. *Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman's Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess*. Broadway Books, 1998. ISBN: 0767900553.
* Janzen, Rhoda. *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress*. Holt, 2009. ISBN: 9780805092257.
* Norris, Kathleen. *The Cloister Walk*. Riverhead Trade, 1997. ISBN: 9781573225847.
* Wilson, Willow. *The Butterfly Mosque: a Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010. ISBN: 0802118879. (Unfortunately, this is hardback, and I feel guilty making people buy hardbacks, but it’s not in paper yet.)
* Winner, Lauren F. *Girl Meets God: a Memoir*. Random House, 2003. ISBN: 0812970802
* Assorted articles, poems, essays, etc. (available in T-Square or hand-outs)

**Assignments:**

* **Daily readings**; please bring printouts and texts to each class period. Yes, there is a LOT of reading in this class. Believe me, I’ve trimmed mercilessly from what the original reading list was. But do keep up—the summer semester goes quickly, and there’s a lot to do. Keep in mind, I reserve the right to give quizzes if I feel that students aren’t completing the readings or if class discussion does not demonstrate the kind of textual engagement I expect in a 3000-level class.
* **Five 2-page double-spaced typed journal entries** reflecting on and responding to some aspect of the week’s readings on weeks of your choice, three of which must be completed by midterm. These are *not* summaries; rather they are an exploration of your engagement with the texts, using appropriate quotations, making insightful observations and commentary, and demonstrating that you have carefully read and absorbed the material. I will *randomly* grade three of these for 30 points each, and give 5 points credit for each of the other two. (100 pts. total)
* **A visit to a religious service**/ ceremony/ function NOT of your background, plus 3-4 double-spaced page reflection on the experience, particularly noting women’s participation, and observing your own experience of the Divine in this setting. (A note here: if you were raised Methodist, going to a Presbyterian service is not going to cut it—but attending a Unitarian Universalist or Christian Science service would be ok.) The idea is to choose a service of a belief system that you do not have much familiarity with (and this can include non-Western services as well). You will want to do a little research about the service beforehand so that you don’t commit any cultural gaffes and offend anyone, particularly in terms of dress and behavior. Remember you are a visitor, and you are there to learn, observe, and reflect. You may turn this in any time up until Jul 15th. (100 pts.)
* **Research paper:** Ideally, you will examine some aspect of women’s contemporary spiritual writing that intrigues you, either through researching, examining, and exploring (comparing/ contrasting, etc.) themes you find emerging in our course readings, or choosing a primary text/ author outside of course readings to focus your research on. If you choose to use a primary text outside of our course books, feel free to choose a different genre—it could be poetry, it could be fiction, etc. (It could even be works by feminist theologians—I’m happy to work with you about whatever you’re interested in.) I will expect a formal and detailed paper proposal, including guiding questions, a thesis statement, and at least 5 briefly annotated sources by June 21st, so that I can offer comments and suggestions. The 8 page double-spaced paper will be due the last day of class, July 28th. (Proposal 25 pts.; paper 100 pts.)
* **Presentation:** You will make a brief presentation about your paper and your findings to the class during the last 2 weeks of class. (25 pts.)
* **Leading class:** You will be responsible for choosing key passages from the day’s texts that you wish to explore, guiding discussion, and offering questions and comments where appropriate, etc. You may also choose to come up with discussion points that you would like the other students to think about, and submit those questions via T-square, e-mail, handouts, etc. (50 pts.)
* **Attendance & Participation:** Attendance requires that you show up on time, free of distractions from the outside world (i.e. cell phone and iPod and computer turned off), and ready to participate and engage ACTIVELY in the day’s discussion/ activities. If you sit there like a bump on the log, that’s not going to count as attendance and participation. If you do nothing in class, you may as well not come. Please don’t come late—more than 10 minutes late will cost you half-an-absence; 20 minutes or more late will be considered a full absence. You may miss 4 classes for **any** reason before your overall course grade will be decreased by 5% per each additional absence. You don’t have tell me why you’re missing class; I’ll assume you have your reasons. Also, missing class does not absolve you from turning in assignments; it is your responsibility to get them to me when they are due, whether or not you are in class. It is also your responsibility for signing the attendance sheet that I will pass around; if you don’t sign it, it’s an absence. Period. I will deal with any emergency situations as they may arise on an individual basis; I do not guarantee leniency in any situation. If an unforeseen situation does arise, and you cannot contact me beforehand, make sure you contact me as quickly as possible after the fact so we can set up a time to discuss what must be done. Do not let weeks pass by! (50 pts.)
* **Incidentals:** This covers anything else—quizzes, online discussion board postings (if some material requires more depth), in-class writings, etc. (50 pts.)

**Late Work & Extra Credit:** I do not like late work, and I will dock points for it. If you know, for some reason, that you cannot turn in a major assignment on time, please let me know at least 48 hours beforehand. I also generally do not give extra credit assignments, particularly in lieu of work that should have been turned in on time. However, if I hear about an interesting lecture on our topic (or other thing that might be beneficial to our study of the subject), I may consider offering a small amount of points for a journal or reflection on the experience. Feel free to ask me if you hear something that might be appropriate for the class as well.

**Grading Scale:**

A=450-500 pts. B=400-449.999 pts. C=350-399.999 pts. D=300-349.999 pts. F=0-299.999 pts.

**Students with Disabilities:**

Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation for any sort of disability, please make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities should also contact Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) to discuss reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor call (404) 894-2564 (voice) or (404) 894-1664 (voice/ TDD) or visit Suite 210 in the Smithgall Student Services Building. For more information visit the following website: http://www.adapts.gatech.edu.

**Academic Honesty:**

All work you turn in for this class must be your own work, with all outside reference sources properly cited and acknowledged. All major written assignments for this course will be turned in through the anti- plagiarism program Turn It In (http://www.turnitin.com).

The “Student Conduct Code of the Rules and Regulations” (Georgia Institute of Technology General Catalog, Section XIX) states, “Academic misconduct is an act that does or could improperly distort student grades or other student academic records” and offers the following descriptive list:

1. Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, laboratory report, examination, or other assignment included in an academic course;
2. Substitution for, or unauthorized collaboration with, a student in the commission of academic requirements;
3. Submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or person, without adequate credit notations indicating authorship (plagiarism);
4. False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;
5. Alteration or insertion of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit;
6. Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of the student;

The Code continues, “While these acts constitute assured instances of academic misconduct, other acts of academic misconduct may be defined by the professor.” Consult the Honor Code online at http://www.honor.gatech.edu or in the General Catalog to remember your primary commitment to academic honesty. Students who engage in academic dishonesty may receive a zero on the assignment or fail the course. In addition, the instance will be reported to the Dean of Students who may take further action.

**Final Note:**

By remaining in this class, you agree to take responsibility for your own learning. Should you have any questions, or if you remain unclear on any aspect of the syllabus, assignments, the class itself, or any information discussed in the class, it is your responsibility to get answers by raising the issue in a timely manner during class, during office hours, or via e-mail. Not knowing does not excuse you. If you miss class, be sure that you find out what you’ve missed from another student; if handouts were given, be sure that you ask for copies. I will also not hound you about turning in work you are missing. You will know what is due, and when it’s due, and it’s your job to make sure you turn you work in on time. Further, remaining in the class means you agree to abide by all of the policies/ procedures laid out on this syllabus. If there are any problems that arise regarding class policies, I will refer you to the syllabus.

**Schedule**

I reserve the right to amend assignments (including adding T-square readings as appropriate) and due-dates per the needs of the class. Work is due on the date listed. Please turn in journals and service visit reflections as you complete them, to keep me from losing my mind. Make sure you write down what days you’re discussion leaders on this sheet so you’ll remember!

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| **Date** | **Discuss** | **To Turn In** | **Keep in Mind** |
| 5/17 | Course Overview |  |  |
| 5/19 | T-square readings |  | 5/20 Last day to drop w/o W |
| 5/24 | T-square readings |  |  |
| 5/26 | T-square readings |  |  |
| 5/31 | T-square readings; Houses of Study |  |  |
| 6/2 | Houses of Study |  |  |
| 6/7 | Houses of Study |  |  |
| 6/9 | T-square readings; Girl Meets God |  |  |
| 6/14 | Girl Meets God |  |  |
| 6/16 | Girl Meets God |  | 6/17 Last day to drop w/ a W |
| 6/21 | T-square readings; The Cloister Walk | Last day to turn in Journals 1-3  Paper proposal |  |
| 6/23 | The Cloister Walk |  |  |
| 6/28 | The Cloister Walk |  |  |
| 6/30 | Menonnite in a Little Black Dress |  |  |
| 7/5 | Menonnite in a Little Black Dress |  |  |
| 7/7 | T-square readings |  |  |
| 7/12 | T-square readings; Butterfly Mosque |  |  |
| 7/14 | Butterfly Mosque | Last day to turn in Service Visit Reflection |  |
| 7/19 | Butterfly Mosque | Paper presentations |  |
| 7/21 | T-square readings; Book of Shadows | Paper presentations |  |
| 7/26 | Book of Shadows | Paper presentations  Last day to turn in Journals 4 & 5 |  |
| 7/28 | Book of Shadows | Research Paper  Paper presentations |  |