

HONS 175 Approaches to Religion: When Home is a Stranger
Fall 2014

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Course Description:

Students in this course will approach religion as “movement in time and place,” enacted in and through the body, the home, the homeland and the cosmos. Through the media of literature and film, we will examine the narratives of individuals and/or groups that negotiate self, religion and culture through the experiences of displacement as the stranger, “the outsider.” How does one create “a home” in an alien place? How does one traverse a cultural and religious terrain that is “foreign?” Our examination will focus on the body and sensuality; on the home as religious dwelling; on cultural and religious transportation and transformation, and on the cosmos as the ultimate homeland.

This course also satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Learning Outcomes: 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

Students will demonstrate successful mastery of the General Education Learning Outcomes #1 and # 2 by writing a well-organized, analytical, 2-3-page paper that identifies and interprets representations of Voodoo as expressed in and by a popular Hollywood film and by their primary source, Karen McCarthy Brown’s *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*.

*“...teaching-and learning-means moving back and forth between the familiar and the strange, and the familiarization of the other generates a limited but transformative empathy, which is one mark of the educated person, the humane neighbor, and the effective citizen.” ~Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling**

Required Texts:

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, James Agee and Walker Evans

Shadows on the Rock, Willa Cather

Babette’s Feast, Isak Dinesen

Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn, Karen McCarthy Brown

Selected electronic readings OAKS

Course Requirements:

Two Exams (100 points each)

Five 2-3 page papers on **** (asterisked)** readings (100 points)

One take-home essay exam (100 points)

The signature assignment that will assess the General Education Student Learning Outcomes listed above is included as one of the five 2-3 page papers and will be worth 20 points.

Grading:

Each set of 100 points will be worth 25% of the final grade.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale:

	A	100-92	A-	91-89	
B+	88-86	B	85-82	B-	81-79
C+	78-76	C	75-72	C-	71-69
D+	68-66	D	65-62	D-	61-59
F	-58				

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments**

“Most religions live from a narrative that shapes their relationship with the divine other, God or the gods, and with the human other, the stranger.” ~[Timothy Radcliffe](#), OP

08/20 Course description and Syllabus

08/25-27 The study of religion/course methodology

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, xii – 13

Robert Orsi, *Theorizing Closer to Home*, Harvard Divinity Bulletin (OAKS)

The Theory

“Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”

~Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*

09/01 Thomas Tweed, *Confluences: Toward a Theory of Religion*, 54-79 (OAKS)

The Home

“The house of one family, George and Annie Mae Gudger and their children, is a lamp. It is a boat. It is a sacrament.” ~Kimberley Patton, Harvard Divinity School

“I’m out here a thousand miles from my home, walkin’ a road other men have gone down. I’m seein’ your world of people and things, your paupers and peasants and princes and kings.” ~Bob Dylan, Song to Woody, 1962

09/03 Film: *James Agee’s Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

Kimberley Patton, *The Whole Home is Lifted*, (OAKS)

09/08 *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 23-65

09/10 *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 66-106

**** 09/10 Reflection Paper #1 on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men***

09/15 *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 138-179

09/15 Complimentary showing of film, *The Visitor* 6:00-8:00

09/17 Discussion of film, *The Visitor*

09/22 First Exam

**** 09/24 Reflection Paper #2 and Personal Altar/Triptych (Instructions to follow).**

The Homeland

“On the back of a cartoon coaster, in the blue TV screen light, I drew a map of Canada. O Canada! With your face sketched on it twice. Oh, you’re in my blood like holy wine. You taste so bitter and so sweet.” ~Joni Mitchell, Case of You, 1970

“He spoke of it with great effort, and within that mystery, behind it, in everything he said about Quebec, was the Church.” ~D.Y. Bechard

09/29 D.Y. Bechard, *Disobedient Ancestors*, Harvard Divinity Bulletin (OAKS)
Shadows on the Rock, Book One

10/01 Film: *American Masters: Willa Cather*
Shadows on the Rock, Book Two and Three

10/06 *Shadows on the Rock*, Books Four to Six

10/08 Paper Presentation, Doire, *Crossing and Dwelling: La Survivance of French-Canadian Woonsocket, RI*

“[...the religious] orient themselves by constructing, adorning and inhabiting domestic space. Religion, in this sense, is housework. It is homemaking.” ~Thomas Tweed

10/13 *Dwelling: The Kinetics of Homemaking*, Thomas Tweed, 80-122

10/13 Complimentary showing of film, *Chocolat* 6:00-8:00

****10/15 Reflection Paper #3 on *Shadows on the Rock* or *Chocolat***

The Body

“They were sitting down to a meal, well, so had people done at the wedding of Cana. And grace has chosen to manifest itself there, in the very wine, as fully as anywhere.” ~Isak Dinesen, Babette’s Feast

“All sorrows are less with bread.” ~Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote

10/20 *Babette’s Feast*, Chapters I- VII

“Food is the major marker of the success of parties, the length of journeys, the passage of time and of life.” Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola

10/22 Religion and Food: Ascetic Practices and Fasting (PPT)
Babette’s Feast, Chapters VIII-XII

10/22 -- Complimentary showing of film, *Babette’s Feast* 6:00-8:00

****10/27 Reflection Paper #4 on *Babette’s Feast* and discussion of film**

10/29 Second Exam

11/03 No class meeting- Fall Break

The Cosmos

“That long black cloud is comin’ down. I feel like I’m knockin’ on heaven’s door. Knock, knock, knockin’ on heaven’s door. Knock, knock, knockin’ on heaven’s door.” Bob Dylan, Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door, 1973

11/05 Bob Corbett, *Introduction to Voodoo* (OAKS)
Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 1-78

11/10 Film: *Jump at the Sun* (shown in class)
Zora Neale Hurston from *Tell My Horse* 133-177 (OAKS)

“It is no exaggeration to say that Haitians believe that living and suffering are inseparable. Vodou is the system they have devised to deal with the suffering that is life, a system whose purpose is to minimize pain, avoid disaster, cushion loss, and strengthen survivors and survival instincts.” ~Karen McCarthy Brown, Mama Lola

11/12 Catholicism, Suffering and the Afterlife
Mama Lola, 156-201

11/17 Voodoo, Suffering and the Afterlife
Film: *Divine Horsemen* (shown in class)
Read *Mama Lola*, 220-257

****11/19 Signature Assignment/Reflection Paper #5 on Voodoo**
Mama Lola, 330-381

11/24 No class meeting- AAR Conference

11/26 No class meeting- Thanksgiving Break

12/01 Last Day of Classes

Final Take-Home Exam due by 4:00 on Friday, December 5.

**** This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.**

Additional Course Notes

Attendance Policy: Class attendance and participation in group discussions are mandatory. Four absences will be allowed. Five or more absences may result in a lower final grade but MAY be excused with proper medical documentation. Eight absences will result in your being dropped from the class, which will earn you an F for the course. Please note that a memo from CofC Health Services does NOT *automatically* qualify as an ‘excused absence.’ Final determination of an excused absence always lies with the Instructor.

SNAP: If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodation and the SNAP program, see: <http://www.cofc.edu/~cds/index.htm>.

Honor Code: The Code of Honor found in the Student Handbook will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and WILL be reported to the Honor Board. According to the Student Handbook plagiarism *includes but is not limited to:*

- * The verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author. All significant phrases, clauses, or passages, taken directly from source material must be enclosed in quotation marks and acknowledged either in the text itself or in footnotes/endnotes.
- * Borrowing without acknowledging the source.
- * Paraphrasing the thoughts of another writer without acknowledgement.
- * Allowing any other person or organization to prepare work which one then submits as his/her own.

Classroom Code of Conduct

—Selections taken from the Student Handbook, published by the President’s Advisory Committee in cooperation with the Office of the President.

Your professor expects that you as a student:

1. Will be attentive and courteous during class.
2. Will complete the assigned work according to the course schedule.
3. Do not cut classes, come in late, or leave early. If you ever are late for class, enter in complete silence and do not walk between the class and the professor. Never leave during class unless you absolutely must. Leaving for a short break and then returning is not acceptable. The professor is not a TV set, but is a person addressing the class, and it is rude to leave when someone is addressing you.
- 4. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices.**
Should you need to leave the classroom during an exam, you will be required to leave your cell phone with the Instructor.
5. Visible and noisy signs of restlessness are rude as well as disruptive to others. If you cannot sit still or stay awake, you should not be taking a college class. Do not begin packing your book bag or otherwise indicate that you think it is time for class to come to an end; wait for the professor to dismiss class. If the class period has ended but the professor has not finished and you cannot stay any longer, leave in complete silence.
6. Come to class prepared to work. Your professor expects you to prepare for class by completing reading and homework assignments. If you are unprepared for class, this may prevent you from participating in a class activity. Do not present your lack of preparation as a problem for the professor to solve or excuse.