

PHIL 6050.001/RELS 6671.001  
GEORGES BATAILLE  
Wed., 3:30-6:05  
MACY 204A

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Office Hours: Wed., 2:30-3:15, and by appointment, Macy 202A

*Bataille is one of the most important writers of our century.*  
—Michel Foucault

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on the work of French cultural critic and novelist, Georges Bataille (1897-1962). As a dissident surrealist and Marxist, a committed anti-Fascist, a critic of Hegel and Sartre, and a one-time Catholic seminarian who became an atheistic champion of Nietzsche, Bataille engaged almost every major intellectual and political movement of the twentieth century. He placed enormous value on religion, eroticism and art as functionally equivalent sites for disrupting the alienation of human beings from each other, their own bodies and material reality generally. He offered a unique diagnosis of the catastrophic violence that characterized his age—and, tragically, continues to characterize our own. He profoundly influenced Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Lacan. To become familiar with Bataille, then, is to gain insight into the major theoretical projects and political problems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

**Note:** The novels we will read in this course contain strong sexual content. The novels and some of the theoretical texts include descriptions and images of graphic violence. If you find such content objectionable, you should not be in this class.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

- Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. Vol. I. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- Bataille, Georges. *Blue of Noon*. Trans. Harry Matthews. New York: Marion Boyars, 1957.
- Bataille, Georges. *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights, 1986.
- Bataille, Georges. *Inner Experience*. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt. Albany: SUNY Press, 1988.
- Bataille, Georges. *Story of the Eye*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987.
- Bataille, Georges. *Theory of Religion*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1992.
- Bataille, Georges. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. Ed. and Trans. Allan Stoekl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Additional readings will be made available on electronic reserve.

**Please bring all relevant readings to class.**

## RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Bataille, Georges. *The Tears of Eros*. Trans. Peter Connor. San Francisco: City Lights, 1989.  
Kendall, Stuart. *Georges Bataille*. London: Reaktion Books, 2007.  
Noys, Benjamin. *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000.  
Richardson, Michael. *Georges Bataille*. New York: Routledge, 1994.  
Surya, Michel. *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*. Trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. New York: Verso, 2002.

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY

***To succeed in this course, you must be proactive.*** This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if problems arise. If you do not understand the material or my expectations, if life is impinging on you in some way, or if my teaching style is not working for you, please let me know. I will do what I can to help, but I am completely unable to remedy the situation if I do not know there is a problem.

***I want every student to succeed in this class.*** In selecting readings, crafting assignments, setting a schedule, I have tried to create a framework that will help you do your best work. In presenting material, articulating expectations, and responding to assignments, I strive to be clear. I will not, however, hunt you down, or pester you, to make sure you are doing the required work.

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

You are expected to (1) attend, and be on time for, all class meetings; (2) read carefully all assigned readings prior to the class session for which they are assigned; (3) participate actively and productively in class discussions; (4) be familiar with the syllabus; (5) take responsibility for fulfilling all course requirements; and (6) check your NinerMail account regularly for communications from the instructor.

You are **NOT** expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructor, the course materials or other students; you are expected to manage any disagreement respectfully and productively.

## CLASS PREPARATION

Because this course focuses on close, critical analysis of difficult texts, you will need to devote sufficient time to preparing for class both to contribute to class discussion and to do well on assignments. You must read carefully prior to class taking note of the ideas and questions you want to bring to our collective conversation. At a minimum, you must be able to articulate the author's main points, summarize the evidence marshaled to support those points, characterize the chief rhetorical strategies employed and identify any notable short-comings in the analysis. You should also make sure that you have mastered any unfamiliar vocabulary and have investigated the relevant historical, cultural and intellectual background.

You should come to class having identified a few passages that struck you as particularly interesting, troubling, puzzling or generative. You should be prepared to discuss your reasons for selecting these passages and to guide your classmates through a consideration of the passage in relation both to the readings as a whole and the themes and questions of the course. ***All members of the seminar—students and instructor alike—are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.***

We will not have time to discuss fully all of the assigned reading during class time. Our collective consideration should give you practice at engaging these texts, enhancing your ability to explore them more carefully and thoughtfully on your own. Our class meetings are an opportunity to deepen your understanding of, ask questions of, and develop ideas about the readings, as well as enhance your strategies and skills for analyzing them. Your written work provides further opportunities to demonstrate, develop and deepen this engagement.

## ATTENDANCE

As a graduate student, school should be your first priority. This means you should attend and be on time for all class meetings. Because life does not always accommodate our priorities, you will be given one excused absence for the semester. ***Every absence after that, for whatever reason, will result in a full letter deduction from your final grade for the course. Any two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as an absence.*** If you are absent from class, you are responsible for getting any announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The exception to this policy is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must provide me with written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the class(es) you will miss for this reason no later than **Friday, January 20.**

## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Consistent with the University's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, body size, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. You are expected to be respectful of these differences in your conduct in class and on campus.

As future members of the academy, you should write in a way that recognizes diversity. In other words, you should strive, at the very least, to use gender-inclusive language and also to be mindful of metaphors that may have problematic racial, ethnic, class, sexual or (dis)ability connotations.

## **ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability that qualifies you for accommodations, please provide a letter from Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services ([www.ds.uncc.edu](http://www.ds.uncc.edu)).

## **E-MAIL COMMUNICATION**

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using your NinerMail (University e-mail) account. You are responsible for checking this account regularly and responding promptly to any e-mail requests.

## **CLASS DECORUM**

(1) Be on time for class. If you must arrive late or leave early, please do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Cell phones must be turned off prior to class. If your cell phone rings, or I observe you text-messaging during class, I will ask you to leave class and it will be counted as an absence. (3) Computers may be used during class only to take notes or read electronic-reserve readings. If I observe you using your computer for any other purpose, it will result in a full-letter deduction in your grade for the course ***and will jeopardize use of computers during class by all students in the course.***

## SCHEDULE

### 1.11 Introduction to Bataille's life and work, and the course

For reference, please consult the following:

*Inner Experience*, xxv-xxviii

"Autobiographical Note," in *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, 113-17 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997) (electronic reserve)

"Editor's Introduction: Unlimited Assemblage," in *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, xi-xliv (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) (electronic reserve)

Kent L. Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 9-19 (electronic reserve)

### 1.18 *Accursed Share*, volume I, 9-41

"The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess*

### 1.25 *Accursed Share*, volume I, 45-110

"Attraction and Repulsion I and II" in *College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 103-36 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) (electronic reserve)

"The College of Sociology," in *Visions of Excess*

### 2.1 *Theory of Religion*

"Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," in *Visions of Excess*

"War and the Philosophy of the Sacred," in *Absence of Myth*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson, 113-22 (New York: Verso, 1994) (electronic reserve)

### 2.8 *Accursed Share*, volume I, 115-90

"The Psychological Structure of Fascism," in *Visions of Excess*

"The Structure and Function of the Army," in *College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 137-44 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) (electronic reserve)

**\*\*\*Essay due by 9AM, February 9.**

### 2.15 *Blue of Noon*

### 2.22 *Erotism*, 7-146

"Preface," "Eroticism and the Reflection of the Universe in the Mind," "The Problem of Incest," "The Object of Desire," and "Epilogue," in *The Accursed Share*, volume II, trans. Robert Hurley, 13-37, 137-47, 187-91 (New York: Zone Books, 1993) (electronic reserve)

- 2.29 "The Passage from Animal to Man and the Birth of Art," "A Meeting in Lascaux," and "Lecture, January 18, 1955," in *Cradle of Humanity*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall, 57-104 (New York: Zone Books, 2005) (electronic reserve)  
"From the Stone Age to Jacques Prévert" and "Happiness, Eroticism and Literature," in *Absence of Myth*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson, 137-54, 186-208 (New York: Verso, 1994) (electronic reserve)

**\*\*\*Essay due by 9AM, March 1.**

### 3.7 SPRING BREAK (No class)

- 3.14 *Inner Experience*, xxxi-61  
*Madame Edwarda in My Mother/Madame Edwarda/The Dead Man*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse, 148-59 (New York: Marion Boyars, 1995) (electronic reserve)  
*Erotism*, 265-71

**\*\*\*Book Review due by 9AM, March 15**

- 3.21 *Inner Experience*, 65-165

- 3.28 *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1988), 11-48 (electronic reserve)  
"Method of Meditation," in *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall, 77-99 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) (electronic reserve)  
"Practice of Joy before Death," in *Visions of Excess*  
"Joy in the Face of Death," in *College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, 322-32 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) (electronic reserve)

- 4.4 *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 13-48 (electronic reserve)  
*The Accursed Share*, volume III, trans. Robert Hurley, 195-257 (New York: Zone Books, 1993) (electronic reserve)  
"The Sovereign," in *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall, 185-95 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) (electronic reserve)

**\*\*\*Essay due by 9AM, April 5.**

- 4.11 "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*," "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," "The 'Lugubrious Game,'" "The Big Toe," and "Formless," in *Visions of Excess*

**4.18** *Erotism*, 164-93

“The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade,” in *Visions of Excess*

*Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton, (New York: Marion Boyars, 1985), ix-x, 105-29 (electronic reserve)

“Initial Postulate,” in *The Absence of Myth*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson, 91-95 (New York: Verso, 1994) (electronic reserve)

*Tears of Eros*, trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights, 1989), 162-65, 173, 185, 199-207 (electronic reserve)

**4.25** *Story of the Eye*

**\*\*\*Final Paper due by 9AM, Tuesday, May 8.**

**FINAL MEETING: Wednesday, May 9, 2-4:30PM, Location TBA**

Please read and be prepared to discuss Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, trans. Donald F. Bourchard and Sherry Simon, 24-40 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998) (electronic reserve).

## ASSIGNMENTS

You must submit all assignments by e-mail ([kbrintna@uncc.edu](mailto:kbrintna@uncc.edu)). If I am unable to open your attachment, I will notify you by replying to the address from which you have submitted the assignment. If you do not submit a readable version within 24 hours, I will grade the assignment at my discretion. All assignments must be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with one-inch margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs. **No late papers will be accepted.**

### Essays (30%; 10% each)

You must write **three (3)**, 3-4 page essays. **They are due by 9AM on February 9, March 1, and April 5, respectively.** These essays should focus on one or two specific passages from the reading to develop a particular theme, question or idea that you find interesting, troubling, puzzling or generative in Bataille's work. This assignment is designed to help you begin sketching the analysis you will pursue in your final paper. You should use these essays as an opportunity to develop your own voice in relation to Bataille's. You are strongly encouraged to return to the same idea, or small set of related ideas, across the essays, developing and expanding it/them as you engage a broader range of Bataille's work. Taken as a whole, your essays should balance exposition, interpretation, analysis, argument, and critique.

### Book Review (10%)

You must write a 3-4 page review of one of the books listed below. **This review is due by 9AM, March 15.** You should consult a major journal in your field (e.g., the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*) for questions about format, content and style. This assignment is designed to help you begin evaluating relevant secondary literature on Bataille as you prepare to write your final paper.

Biles, Jeremy. *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

Brintnall, Kent L. *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Hollywood, Amy. *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Irwin, Alexander. *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Mitchell, Andrew J. and Jason Kemp Winfree, eds. *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.

Richman, Michèle H. *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Stoekl, Allan. *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Winnubst, Shannon, ed. *Reading Bataille Now*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.



### **Final Paper** (60%)

You must write a 20-25 page paper at the end of the semester. ***This paper is due by 9AM, Tuesday, May 8.*** Although this paper may return to ideas explored in your essays, it must be more than a summation of prior work. Ideally, you should produce a publishable piece of original scholarship that engages Bataille's work in a sophisticated, meaningful, substantial way. With this goal in mind, you will likely need to engage texts—primary and secondary—beyond those considered in class.

***As you prepare assignments, please be mindful that other class members will need access to the same library material. Please be in conversation with your colleagues about what materials you have and what materials you need. Please also be responsible and generous in your use of these materials.***

### **GRADING**

In grading your assignments, I will use the following criteria:

- (1) Is the work satisfactory as an *expository* exercise? Does it summarize accurately the material under consideration? Does it give attention to the most relevant and important ideas? Does it characterize fairly and engage sympathetically ideas with which it disagrees? Does it consider a sufficient range of sources?
- (2) Is the work satisfactory as an *analytical* exercise? Does it have a clear thesis or central claim(s)? Is it expressed and organized in a persuasive manner? Does it evince intellectual engagement beyond summation and exposition? Does it engage questions, themes and ideas relevant to the course? Does it extend consideration of course materials beyond class discussion?
- (3) Is the work satisfactory as a *writing* exercise? Is it free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors? Does it provide accurate and adequate citations? Does it demonstrate some attention to rhetorical stylization?

Ideally, as a graduate student, your work should open up some new dimension of—i.e., teach me something about—the material. At a minimum, it must summarize the materials accurately, clearly and completely and present an analysis (evaluation, critique, application, extension) that engages the course's themes and questions.

As a graduate student, your writing should be ***absolutely free*** of spelling, grammar, stylistic and citation mistakes. Your reader cannot engage your ideas if she or he is distracted by problems in your writing. ***If I find myself spending too much time copy-editing your work, I will deduct a letter grade, return it without comment and give you 24 hours to submit a revised version. If I find spelling errors that could have been caught by spell-check, I will give the paper a U and return it without comment.***

You must follow Turabian's *Manual of Style*, 7th ed., for questions of grammar, style and citation form. Two additional style rules that will apply to assignments for this course:

- (1) Do not use "you" in formal writing.  
Incorrect: "This passage in Bataille makes you feel confused and disoriented."  
Correct: "This passage in Bataille makes the reader feel confused and disoriented."
- (2) Do not use contractions in formal writing.

Your writing should privilege depth over breadth. It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially. There is no expectation, in this class or the world, that you be exhaustive. Instead, you should frame a question well, engage texts attentively, represent others' ideas accurately, explain your own thinking clearly, and write in an engaging, rhetorically sensitive manner.

You should consider issues beyond proofreading and clarity of expression. You should also think about rhetoric, form and style. You should be attentive to how you organize an essay, how you begin and end a paper, how you express yourself (from word choice to examples to metaphors), how use quotations, and how you vary the length and complexity of sentences and paragraphs. While I do not expect you to imitate Bataille's style(s) in any specific way, you should take cues from his attention to form and begin experimenting with different writing strategies in your own work.

***Remember, you will not be in the room when I am reading your work: what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.***

***Finally, you should familiarize yourself with and conform your conduct to the University's Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.***

## GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

Grades are not a judgment on you as a person or an evaluation of your *overall* capacity to perform academic work. They are a way of communicating how one particular assignment reflects analytical skills and writing ability with respect to a specific set of materials and questions. The range of grades used in graduate courses at UNC Charlotte is A (commendable), B (satisfactory), C (marginal), and U (unsatisfactory). Under exceptional circumstances, a grade of I (incomplete) can be assigned at my discretion.

- A** Exceptional work. Evinces exhaustive preparation and thoughtful engagement in every aspect of the assignment. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of material and presentation of ideas. General observations supported by specific, concrete detail. Contains a strong, clear thesis. Contributes something interesting, unique or creative beyond class discussion. Clear, well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. ***At the graduate level, an A indicates you have demonstrated the analytical and writing skills needed to succeed in the academy by comprehending difficult concepts, generating engaging questions and expressing yourself clearly and cleanly.***
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the material under consideration. Conversant with the course's themes and questions. Expresses an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear, well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. ***At the graduate level, a B indicates you must develop and refine your skills to succeed in the academy. Most A-level undergraduate work is B-level graduate work.***
- C** Inadequate work. Contains inaccurate or inadequate explanations of material under consideration. Shows inadequate comprehension of or engagement with the course's themes and questions. Unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis too general and lacks adequate support. Writing unclear, unstructured or with numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. Failure to improve analytic precision or clarity of expression over previous assignments. ***At the graduate level, a C indicates that you have not demonstrated the skills essential to success in the academy. It is the equivalent of a D or F in undergraduate study.***
- U** Unacceptable work. Analysis too general, without support. Significant details presented inaccurately or overlooked; ideas that conflict with the paper's main point not considered. Discussion fails to engage course materials, questions or themes. Significant problems with the clarity or organization of the writing. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Failure to address serious problems identified in prior assignments. ***A U indicates that success in the academy is out of the question with existing skills.***

One final grade of C automatically generates a written warning from the Dean of the Graduate School and may preclude further graduate work; a second C is sufficient grounds for permanent dismissal from the program.

The receipt of a U in any single graduate course while at UNC Charlotte results in immediate academic suspension, which effectively ends your graduate career at this institution.

***If you come to class, participate in discussion, work hard on your assignments and improve over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.***